

# CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

## IN SDA SCHOOLS

### *Results of the First NADCC Teacher Poll*

By Paul S. Brantley

**W**hat do we know about teachers in Seventh-day Adventist schools? How do they view their world? What problems do they experience in their work? What persons and resources are available to help them? How adequate do they consider the textbooks and curriculum materials they use in their classrooms? In short, how do they view curriculum and teaching in Adventist schools?

To answer these basic questions the North American Division Curriculum Committee (NADCC) commissioned the 1987 Profile of Teacher Concerns, one of the most comprehensive research studies of teachers in SDA elementary and secondary schools.

The NADCC especially wanted to determine which curriculum concerns of teachers required the most urgent attention. Teacher perceptions provide invaluable aid in determining how well a curriculum works and what areas require modification.

#### **Teacher Profile**

Approximately one-sixth of all teachers employed in North American Division schools during the 1986-1987 school year were randomly selected for the survey by the NADCC.<sup>1</sup> From the tabulated returns, a profile emerged. A major-

ity of teachers (70 percent) have taught exclusively in Adventist schools. This orientation to SDA education is reinforced by the large proportion of teachers who

received their undergraduate degrees from SDA colleges (90 percent of elementary teachers; 80 percent of secondary teachers).

Teachers in the survey had

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worked at their present school for an average of 5 years. More than half (52.6 percent) of the teachers had taught for less than 10 years. The largest group (28.6 percent) had taught from 6-10 years. These statistics suggest that North American Adventist educators are a relatively young and mobile group.

Adventist teachers are well educated. Half of the secondary teachers, and nearly 4 in 10 of the elementary teachers surveyed held advanced degrees. An additional 20 percent are actively pursuing graduate studies. The number of teachers who do not hold degrees was negligible. Nearly half of the teachers have earned an SDA Professional Teaching Certificate.

Where do SDA teachers receive

## How do SDA teachers view their world?

their graduate training? Nearly half (47.9 percent) of those who have completed their studies did so at an Adventist university, and 61.1 percent of teachers currently pursuing advanced work are enrolled in an SDA institution.

### Work-related Problems

Adventist teachers appear to be intense and dedicated. Survey respondents consistently expressed their feelings of personal inadequacy in fulfilling all the cumulative expectations of the workplace. Consequently, they rated "time

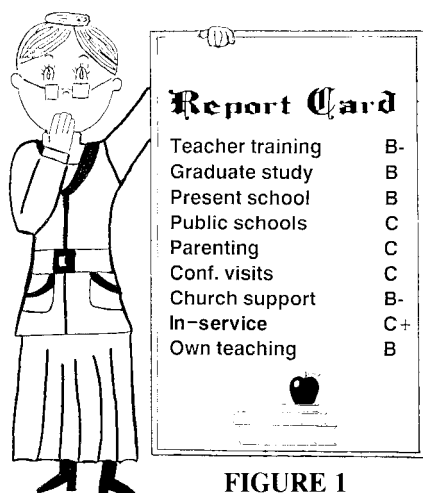


FIGURE 1

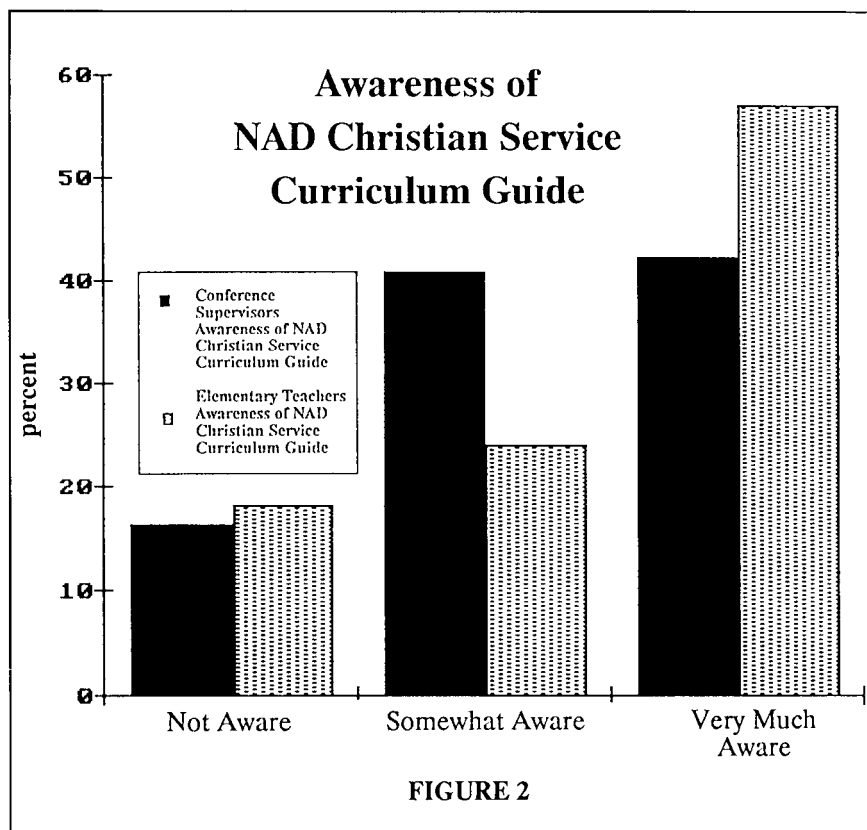


FIGURE 2

management" as the most serious of 15 potential choices, followed by "difficulty in coping with the wide variety of student ability levels." Other items rating high as problem areas during the 1986-1987 school year included keeping physically fit, discipline problems, and inadequate budgets for classroom instruction. When given a list of approximately 30 curriculum con-

cerns, "teacher burnout" was the second most frequently mentioned item.

On the other hand, racial adjustment problems, lack of supplies, lack of conference support, and shortage of space were not cited as major problems by a sizable portion of the teachers.

Teaching is a lonely profession. Both elementary and academy

## Awareness of Exceptional Child Guidelines

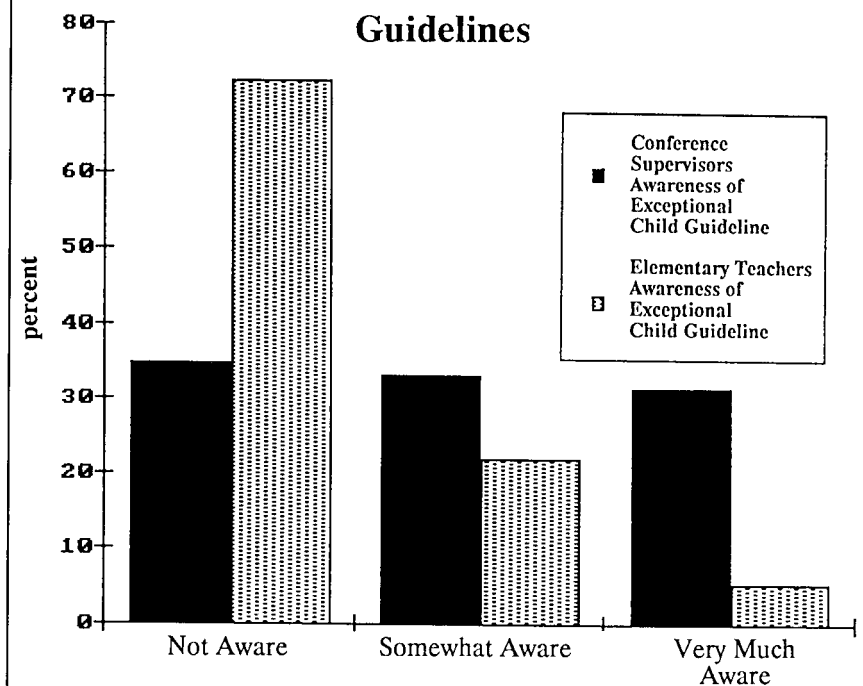


FIGURE 3

teachers rated "teacher isolation and professional stagnation" as a major problem. One teacher wrote:

I need to work with innovative and creative people who inspire me to try new and better ways to achieve my goals. Visiting a local public school and observing a creative English teacher's efforts to help her students become good writers makes me long to teach next door to someone who teaches concepts, not pages from a textbook. I need to be inspired and challenged to constantly seek new and better ways to meet the needs of my students.

When asked how frequently other educators visited their classrooms and provided helpful suggestions, 75.2 percent of the elementary teachers and 76.8 percent of the secondary teachers answered "once or less." When asked who they would prefer to have provide feedback on teaching effectiveness, teachers cited a wide variety of persons—conference personnel, the principal, other

teachers, and college personnel.

A large portion of teachers indicated that they would like to have input on their classroom effectiveness. However, they also expressed concern about the quality of the feedback and the expertise of the person doing the coaching.

Finally, teachers were asked to make out a "report card" rating various aspects of their work. Grades given by the teachers appear in Figure 1.

### Curriculum-related Concerns

Teachers were asked to select, from about 30 or so possibilities, which four curriculum items they felt deserved the most urgent attention. Elementary teachers cited,

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in descending order, (1) spirituality in SDA schools, (2) teacher burnout, (3) critical thinking skills, (4) science/health grades 5-8, (5) making teaching attractive, (6) Bible, grades 7-8, (7) discipline/class management, (8) improving instructional strategies, (9) small schools, and (10) special education/mainstreaming.

Secondary teachers also rated spirituality in SDA schools first, but placed critical thinking skills second, and teacher burnout third. Secondary teachers cited improving instructional strategies and discipline/class management as their next most important priorities. They also felt concern about making teaching attractive, professional development of teachers, better coordination with colleges, Bible teaching, and career education.<sup>2</sup>

### Awareness and Use of Curriculum Materials

The church has invested large sums in developing textbooks and other curriculum materials for North American schools. A growing body of research suggests that teachers are more likely to use cur-

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**TABLE 1**  
**Textbook Evaluation Ratings by Categories of Elementary Teachers**

Subject (Series)	% Rating as Excellent	% Rating Major Problems	Category of Teachers Responding	No.
1. Science 1-4 ( <i>Rockets and Raisins</i> )	74	5	Primary	98
2. Reading 1-8 (Life Series)	73	1	Elementary	337
3. Math (Misc)	71	1	Elementary	190
4. Math (Scott Foresman)	69	0	Elementary	131
5. Handwriting (Misc)	59	5	Elementary	319
6. Bible (Small Schools)	43	11	Multigrade	37
7. Spelling (Misc)	40	11	Elementary	315
8. English (Misc)	38	15	Elementary	325
9. Bible (SDA 5-8)	33	20	Upper Grades	225
10. Science/Health (SDA 5-8)	21	41	Elementary	167
11. Music (Misc)	14	52	Elementary	161
12. Art (Misc)	7	46	Elementary	231

# HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT PARENTS AND BOARD MEMBERS

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and attendance policies (this should be compiled in a student handbook). A telephone number and convenient time for calling should be included, along with a statement welcoming parents' comments and questions.

Periodically, perhaps each month or quarter, the teacher should describe in a newsletter or information sheet what the students are doing ("This nine-week period we will be learning about parts of speech") and list the assignments for each day, week, and month ("250-page book report due on January 3"). This will help involve parents in their children's learning and enable them to determine whether their children are keeping up to date. When combined with the student handbook, this will also help prevent misunderstandings about school policies ("No late homework will be accepted unless the child is sick or arrangements have been made in advance").

Establishing clear policies and enforcing them consistently might have prevented the irate telephone call Mr. Lopez received complaining that homework interfered with a special family event.

## Rules

In working with students, the classroom rules should be as few as possible, and should be mutually decided upon by teacher and students. Discussing rules dealing with classroom management and applying them consistently will greatly reduce stress and tension for both teacher and student.

At the beginning of the school year, the teacher should discuss the rules in the student handbook and ask whether other rules are needed. As soon as rules are mutually agreed upon and established in the classroom, the parents and board should receive a written copy of them, along with times when

parents or other interested persons may call or visit the school to discuss problems.

But what about parents or board members who seem to think that the rules weren't made for them? Once a schedule has been established, the teacher needs to consistently adhere to it. He or she should express appreciation to those who cooperate. When people arrive or call at inappropriate times, the teacher should politely but firmly advise them to call back later.

It may be necessary to remonstrate with certain individuals several times to help them understand

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that instructional time is sacred and must not be interrupted by visits or telephone calls. Especially in one-room schools, teachers cannot provide proper supervision for their students and confer with other people at the same time.

## Mutual Respect

The teacher should show parents and board members the same courtesy he or she desires. When conflicts or disagreements arise teachers need to keep in mind their high calling. They must not treat parents in a patronizing or flippant manner. In order to demonstrate sensitivity to others' concerns and to maintain open lines of communication, the teacher should return telephone calls promptly, and show respect for the callers' schedules and concerns, even if the subject seems trivial.

It is important that the teacher see parents and board members as *partners* in the education of children. Mutual respect will foster an unbeatable educational team.

## Be Flexible, Ask for Time

When teachers confront situations for which they feel unprepared, they can ask for time to study their options. The time can be used to determine why and how the situation occurred and the best way to approach it. Ideally, the teacher should work cooperatively with the board to find a way to resolve problems. If this fails, the conference superintendent of education is only a phone call away.

Teachers need to be flexible in dealing with people problems. Each teacher is different, just as each child and each board member is different. However, open communication and a Christian spirit of cooperation and willingness to compromise can help to solve most problems.

## In Summary

Here are some guidelines to help any school run more smoothly:

- Understand the guidelines for the operation of a school.
- Keep open channels of communication between teacher and home and between teacher and school board.
- Make clear and concise classroom rules, and apply them consistently.
- Be a professional in every sense of the word.
- When unsure of an answer, request help from those who are knowledgeable in the area of concern.
- Avoid intimidating others or being intimidated by them. If you treat parents and board members as intelligent, caring Christians, they will usually respond in kind.
- Accept responsibility for the quality education of students in your classroom. □

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riculum materials if they clearly understand their function and perceive them to be helpful in their work.<sup>3</sup> How aware are teachers of

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the curriculum prepared by the church, and how helpful do they consider such resources?

In order to assess teacher awareness and use of curriculum materials, NADCC sent a list of resources used in the division to each survey participant. Teachers were asked to indicate their degree of awareness and extent of usage of such materials on a scale of 1 to 4.

Figures 2 through 5 point out the problems in the curriculum delivery process as well as the need for more effective teacher orientation.

**When asked how frequently other educators visited their classrooms and provided helpful suggestions, three-quarters of the elementary and secondary teachers answered "once or less."**

Further study should be given to identifying and overcoming obstacles to effective use of curriculum materials.

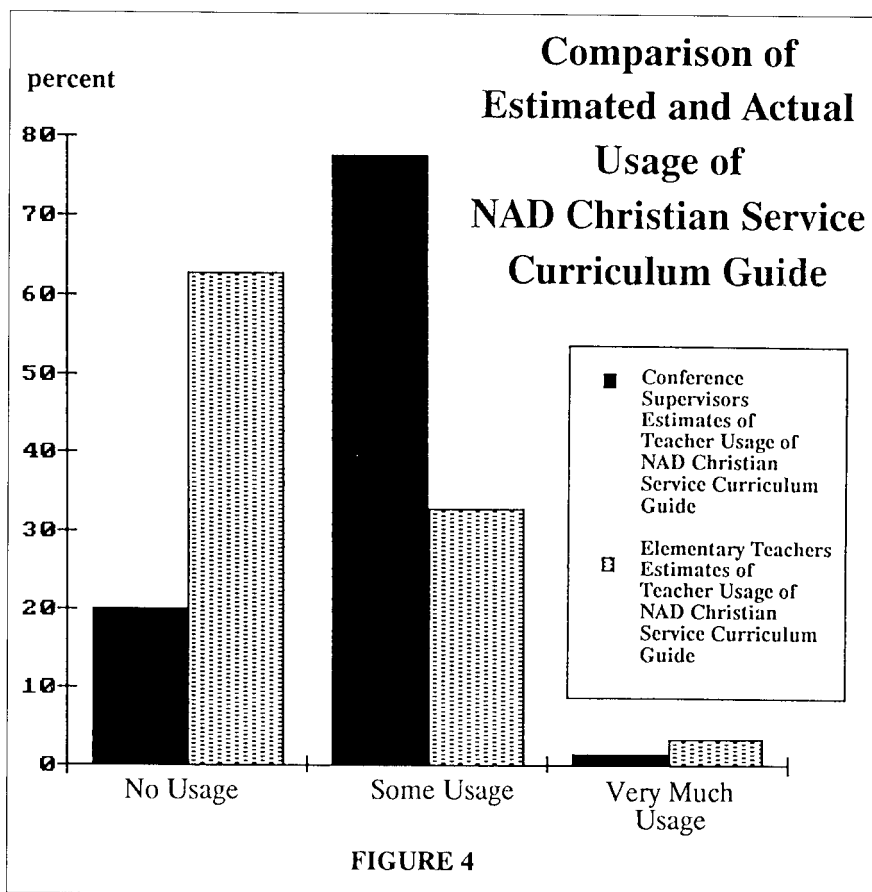
Local conference personnel are the key to orienting and assisting teachers in their awareness and use of curricula resources. Consequently, conference educational superintendents should be clearly informed of curriculum being developed. They also need to allocate sufficient time or seek support to assist teachers in implementing the curriculum in the classroom.

### Teacher Evaluation of Curriculum

Which curriculum materials did teachers rate highest—and lowest? Table 1 summarizes elementary teacher evaluation of textbooks; Table 2 indicates specific problems teachers associated with two science textbooks currently in use. Table 2 also demonstrates dramatically how textbook revision can affect teacher acceptance of curriculum materials. The North American Division has already

**TABLE 2**  
Comparison of Two Science Textbooks and Problems Encountered by Teachers

Problems Cited	SDA Science/ Health 5-8 (Need Revision)	Rockets and Raisins Grades 1-4 (Newly Revised)
1. Inadequate activities	50%	2%
2. Student interest	42	2
3. Testing and record keeping	32	6
4. Appropriateness of content	28	2
5. Difficulty in managing	21	6
6. Readability problems	19	10
7. Affordability problems	7	3
8. Durability problems	7	4
9. Christ-centered problems	4	0



**FIGURE 4**

**TABLE 3**  
Textbook Satisfaction  
Relative Ratings of Academy Teachers

Subject Areas	No. of differ. texts	No. of Resp.	Satisfied No. %	Somewhat Satisfied No. %	Not Satisfied No. %
Business	17	29	26 (90)	3 (10)	0 (0)
Vocational Arts	49	53	34 (64)	13 (24)	6 (11)
Science	37	67	42 (63)	16 (24)	9 (13)
History	25	48	29 (60)	12 (25)	7 (14)
Language	28	44	25 (57)	16 (36)	3 (7)
Reading	9	11	6 (55)	5 (45)	0 (0)
Home Economics	19	24	12 (50)	7 (29)	5 (21)
Mathematics	32	43	20 (46)	20 (46)	3 (7)
Bible	7	35	16 (46)	11 (31)	8 (23)
Computer Science	10	10	4 (40)	6 (60)	0 (0)

begun to use the information supplied by the survey to plan future textbook development.

Predictably, the senior academy curriculum is far less uniform than that of the elementary schools. For example, 49 different textbooks were in use among the 53 vocational arts teachers sampled! In cases where no textbook consensus emerged, the textbooks cited were combined into a single "miscellaneous" category and assessed as a composite whole.

Results of secondary teacher textbook satisfaction ratings appear in Table 3.

### Summary

The findings from the 1987 Profile of Teacher Concerns reveal the following facts:

- Teachers in SDA schools in North America are a relatively young, mobile, and well-educated group. A majority have attended SDA colleges and taught only in Adventist schools.

- SDA teachers are concerned about the spirituality of church schools and feel a sense of isolation and concern about their personal limitations.

- There is a lack of awareness about and use of curriculum guides; teachers are much better informed about and use more widely the textbooks and prepared classroom materials.

- Teachers express strong preferences regarding the effectiveness of curriculum resources.

- Conference educational personnel have essential supporting roles in helping teachers use curriculum materials enabling them to be more effective in the classroom.

The Profile of Teacher Concerns will be repeated periodically to help determine emerging trends and shifting priorities. Information derived from these surveys will enable classroom teachers to participate in curriculum decisions that affect their daily life. □

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Confidential questionnaires were mailed to a representative group of 832 elementary and secondary teachers and conference education personnel. Of these, 719 responded, giving an effective return rate of 86.4 percent.

<sup>2</sup> Conference supervisors concurred in rating spirituality in SDA schools as a top priority. They also rated making teaching attractive, discipline/class management, science/health grades 5-8, improving instructional strategies, board member orientation, and small schools as major concerns.

<sup>3</sup> See for example John Miller and Wayne Sellar, *Curriculum: Perspectives and Practice* (New York: Longman, 1985).

## TOWARD GENDER-INCLUSIVENESS IN SDA EDUCATION

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Egypt<sup>3</sup> and was a significant enough critic of Moses to incur divine wrath.<sup>4</sup> Deborah, a charismatic judge of Israel, summoned Barak to confront the Canaanites and initiated the attack that brought a decisive victory.<sup>5</sup> Huldah the prophet was consulted by the king and high priest when they wanted to know the real significance of the newly discovered scroll of the law.<sup>6</sup> Naomi took charge of her life when she was bereft of her husband and sons, acting with courage and creativity.<sup>7</sup>

In the history of a predominantly patriarchal society, these women provide vivid reminders that God sometimes works "counterculturally," doing the unexpected as a way of encouraging broader understanding. We see another example of God's countercultural activity in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

In the New Testament, women appear prominently as believers and disciples—not merely spectators or "Jesus groupies."<sup>8</sup> Women were theological conversation partners of Jesus—listening, learning, interacting: for example, the Syrophenician woman,<sup>9</sup> the Samaritan woman,<sup>10</sup> Mary of Bethany at home with Martha<sup>11</sup> and at Simon's party in honor of Jesus,<sup>12</sup> and Martha too at the tomb of Lazarus.<sup>13</sup>

Women first announced Christ's resurrection.<sup>14</sup> Priscilla, also known more formally as Prisca, is mentioned four times in the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> Phoebe was a deacon (*not* deaconess, in spite of the common English translation) in the church at Cenchrea.<sup>16</sup> Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira, became Paul's first convert in the city of Philippi.<sup>17</sup>

We should also put women back into denominational history. Besides Ellen White (who for many Adventists seems to have been a unique phenomenon—a sort of genderless prophet), Adventism

