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Back to the Real Basics



Humberto M. Rasi

Education goes through predictable cycles, sometimes encouraging innovation, other times stressing a more traditional approach. This latter movement has been called Back to Basics. Parents and leaders favoring this view tell teachers to forget experimental theories and instead to emphasize the essential skills and time-tested methods of learning.

Seventh-day Adventist educators also face this tension between the new and the known, between continuity and change. We certainly want to prepare our students for productive lives in the modern world, using the best methods and materials available; but we don't want to abandon the principles of Christian education. In fact, these principles give meaning and transcendence to our educational endeavors.

When was the last time that you set aside your class notes, textbooks, and manuals to reflect on the basic principles of Seventh-day Adventist education? Some time ago, after reading again Ellen White's classic book *Education*, I decided to summarize my understanding of those core concepts, relating them to my own experience as a teacher. It was a valuable, exciting exercise that helped me focus more sharply on my mission. The summary is provided below for your evaluation and reflection.

In Seventh-day Adventist education:

1. We see the Christian formation of children and youth as part of a cooperative process that involves home/parents, school/teachers, and church/religious leaders. Students learn that they belong to a special people with a history, a mission, and a glorious destiny, in which they can play an important role.

2. The Bible constitutes the basis and reference point of school endeavors. The entire curricular and co-curricular program reflects the worldview and the principles revealed in the Scriptures. Teachers and students believe that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Bible writers will guide those who approach it with a teachable attitude.

3. Jesus Christ and His teachings are accorded a position of privilege on campus. Youth are encouraged to accept Him as Creator, Saviour, Lord, and coming King, and to commit their lives to Him. Establishing a friendly relationship with Him brings meaning and hope to their lives.

4. Educators seek to promote each student's balanced development in every dimension of life. Students are led to adopt a simple and healthy life-style. Their ultimate goal is *shalom*—peaceful harmony with God, themselves, others, and nature.

5. The main objective is helping students to develop a solid Christian character, to realize their individual worth as God's children, embrace Christian values, and learn to make principled choices. This goal is best reached in a context of responsible freedom and redemptive discipline.

6. Teachers and students recognize that all truth is God's truth, and every field

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Outstanding Issues

I want to congratulate you on the fine quality of recent issues of THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION. The issue on cooperative learning (April/May 1995) and the one on higher education (February/March 1995) were outstanding—two of the best!

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Interesting, Timely, and Meaningful

I really appreciate the efforts of those who prepare THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION throughout the year. I find the articles interesting, timely, and meaningful. Thank you for your leadership in this area.

MARION I. DEER
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Cooperative Education Issue a Gold Mine

I have again been browsing through the April/May 1995 issue on cooperative learning. It's a gold mine. I never realized that this magazine had so many good things in it. Many of the articles in this issue were very interest-

Letters to the editor should be brief and concise. We reserve the right to edit for sense and space. Send letters to EDITOR, THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.

ing. I especially enjoyed "I Didn't Even Know I Liked You" by Shellie Dale.

I can relate to the author's initial experience with cooperative learning. My first qualms about it were that one student would end up doing all the work (me), or that I, as the student, wouldn't like what the others wanted to do or wouldn't feel that the finished project was as good as I might have done if I were by myself. I have always learned well in the traditional independent, lecture, teacher-directed mode of teaching. As cooperative learning and "groups" became more popular (especially since I joined the education program), I began to dread the words "and now in your groups..." or "This quarter, we will be doing a lot of cooperative learning..." I often thought, "What are they trying to do to me? I was just fine before." I wasn't very willing to give the idea a chance.

But I have seen the benefits. Students really do learn more when they work together. Most of the time, my fears about the finished project are totally wrong—what we come up with is much better than I would have done on my own. As this article pointed out, not only do students function better academically, they also excel socially. I have made a lot of new friends working in groups, some of whom I would probably have never spoken to in a lecture-type class.

An important aspect of the teaching is developing a

"safe" classroom environment where everyone's ideas are listened to and respected.

Cooperative learning allows even the shiest child a chance to open up with his/her peers and to become part of the group. It creates a learning community inside and outside the classroom.

Cooperative learning can be a powerful tool when used correctly. An element of individual accountability must be included, as well as guidelines for working in groups. The goal of the school is to train the students for the real world. There are very few jobs in which individuals work completely alone. If students learn the art of cooperating and working together to get something done, they will be much more powerful when they take their place in the "real world."

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EDITORIAL

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of study can broaden and deepen their understanding of truth as revealed in Jesus, the Bible, and nature. The curriculum favors interdisciplinary and practical learning.

7. Service to fellow human beings, motivated by God's love, is the ideal purpose of life. Priority is given to the qualities of justice, active compassion, generosity, and honest

work. School programs foster activities that alleviate human needs.

8. Students are motivated toward informed, independent, and responsible thought. Instead of letting themselves be molded by the surrounding culture, they learn to approach it with critical discernment from God's perspective, learning to choose the true, the good, and the beautiful.

9. Youth learn by experience to take an active part in God's plan of redemption. Acknowledging their roles as salt and leaven, they seek to bring this world into closer harmony with His ideal.

10. Students discover their talents and vocation, and prepare themselves for a useful life of self-directed learning. The ultimate goal is to help each of them to qualify as citizens of Christ's kingdom, where their education will continue throughout eternity with God.

Is this a fair summary of what we call the philosophy of Adventist education? Are there significant omissions?

Let me invite you to reread the book *Education* with pencil in hand and to draw your personal summary of these principles. By bringing you "back to basics," the exercise quite likely will move you toward more focused, meaningful, and effective Christian teaching.—*Humberto M. Rasi.*