

Curriculum and Instruction in North American Schools

*Results From the Profile '99
Survey of Adventist Educators*

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HE PROFILE STUDIES, WHICH BEGAN MORE than a decade ago, regularly provide the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with snapshots of what happens after curricula are voted in committees and introduced to the field. Profile explores the perceptions of educators who both make and use Adventist curriculum resources. As Adventist education enters the 21st century, these reality checks are more important than ever.

The Profile surveys have served as an important source of information for several reasons: (1) random sampling helps make the findings representative of *all* NAD educators, not just vocal or visible persons; (2) data on different groups allow for illustrative comparisons between teachers and administrators; (3) information received over a period of years makes it possible to forecast and detect trends; and (4) survey results can guide leaders in curriculum planning.

Every two years since 1987, one out of six teachers in the NAD have been systematically random sampled for inclusion in the study. The 1999 sample also included all of the NAD conference superintendents and associates, Adventist teacher educators, and members of the NAD Curriculum Committee. Adventist educators take the Profile

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surveys very seriously. In Profile '99, 708 persons completed the comprehensive questionnaire, giving a return rate of nearly 80 percent, an excellent response for mail survey research.

What We've Learned So Far

After seven cycles of surveys, some consistent findings have emerged. A synopsis of what we've learned from prior surveys 1987-1997 follows:

- Adventist educators appreciate being part of a larger system. All groups feel the need for an overarching philosophy and mission to guide them in their work.
- Adventist educators are quite concerned about the spiritual aspects of schooling—their own faith as well as the faith of their students.
- Adventist educators feel somewhat confused about curriculum guides, the standardized testing program, and some textbooks they use. They do not always understand how those components are interrelated.
- Church educators feel under-prepared to use newer curriculums and methodologies proficiently. Few teachers feel adequately in-serviced, and follow-up assistance is rare.
- Teachers at every level feel isolated to a much greater extent than do their leaders at the conference and union

BY PAUL S. BRANTLEY AND YOUNG HWANGBO

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education. We explored FACT21 from the teachers' perspective. How many teachers had received the report? What did they think of it?

In addition to FACT21, the Profile '99 report examined (1) teacher demographic changes, (2) use of technology, (3) World Wide Web site needs, (4) professional development, and (5) user ratings of recently developed NAD curriculums.

Teacher Demographic Changes

The average number of years at their current school increased for elementary teachers from 4.6 years in 1987 to 6.1 years in 1999. The corresponding figures for academy teachers are 6.4 years and 7.9 years. Most of the gain, however, occurred between 1987 and 1993. Both conference personnel and college personnel averaged approximately 25 years of work experience in the field of education and 8.5 years at their present locations.

In terms of educational attainments, of the 404 elementary teachers who responded, 57 percent had a bachelor's degree, and 40 percent had master's degrees. Out of 145 academy teachers, 46 percent held a bachelor's degree and 52 percent had master's degrees. Nearly all conference personnel who responded

levels. This isolation is particularly acute among new teachers, personnel in small schools, and teachers at the secondary level.

Focus on Adventist Curriculum and Trends for the 21st Century (FACT21)

This time, the Profile '99 researchers polled NAD educators to see if they were aware of FACT21, a report commissioned by the North American Division Office of Education to articulate a bold vision of Adventist

had at least a master's degree. All 29 union and NAD leaders on the North American Division Curriculum Committee had master's degrees, and 38 percent had doctoral degrees. Education levels of respondents have remained relatively stable over the years.

Awareness and Impressions of Major Church Education Initiatives

Currently, the North American Division has established a bold new

vision for the future described in its report *Focus on Adventist Curriculum for the 21st Century* (FACT21). Philosophy and goal statements were developed and sent to the field. The division also identified nine preferred practices, including innovative technology, which are featured in Seventh-day Adventist classrooms. Profile '99 attempted to discover whether respondents were aware of these practices, and whether they felt prepared to implement the innovations called for by the FACT21 report.

Compared to Profile '97, when 41 percent of respondents said they had received a copy of FACT21, two years later, only 38 percent (261 out of 685 educators) had received a copy. In Profile '99, only 97 out of 392 elementary teachers (25 percent) had received a copy of the FACT21 document, contrasted with 39 percent of the academy teachers.

Respondents who were aware of FACT21 viewed it positively. Favorable ratings ranged from a high of 85 percent by conference education leaders, teacher educators, and the North American Division Curriculum Committee (NADCC), to 68 percent of academy teachers and 70 percent of elementary teachers. Few teachers had used components of FACT21, as contrasted with approximately half of leaders.

Potentials: Only 22 percent of elementary teachers, 18 percent of academy teachers, and 26 percent of teacher educators said they were acquainted with *Potentials*, a program for the assessment of values in Seventh-day Adventist schools. All categories of respondents who knew about the resource gave it highly favorable ratings.

Lower levels of awareness and less favorable impressions were expressed regarding an-

other initiative: *Adventist Education for the 21st Century*, an innovative technologically enhanced program for classroom teachers. Profile '99 shows that almost all NAD leaders are acquainted with AE21. More than half of NAD teachers, however, are not. While 83 percent of academy teachers who responded expressed a favorable impression of AE21, only 35 percent of NADCC felt fully favorable about AE21; 62 percent had mixed impressions.

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Adventist Teachers on the Information Highway

Consider these tidbits taken from *New Work Habits for a Radically Changing World*, by Price Pritchett: Today's average consumers wear more computing power on their wrists than existed in the entire world before 1961. Computing power is now 8,000 times less expensive than it was 30 years ago. If we had similar progress in auto technology today, one could buy a Lexus for about \$2!

How much of this potential has reached Seventh-day Adventist schools? Although the world has entered the Information Age, are NAD educators using these applications to enhance their teaching? Survey respondents were asked to tell where they are on the information superhighway. Responses from the five categories (elementary, academy, conference, teacher educators, and NADCC) were then compared.

Profile '99 shows that NAD teachers have advanced somewhat, compared to prior years; a sizable proportion, however, are still "in low gear." Almost all North American Division teachers have access to personal computers. Nearly twice as many elementary and academy teachers are using the World Wide Web as in 1997! The challenge now is to put all this potential to work for classroom teaching.

Table 1

Do you feel that you are adequately able to keep up to date with new developments in your field?

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent responding "Yes"</i>
Elementary teachers	57%
Academy teachers	52
Conference personnel	76
Teacher educators	81
NADCC	84

Teachers at every level feel isolated to a much greater extent than do their leaders at the conference and union levels.

When teachers were asked what a North American Division Web site should feature, they overwhelmingly mentioned "downloadable resources." They wanted quick and easy access to materials they could use in their work. They also wanted to use the Web for professional contacts, browsing, and sharing teacher-made materials.

Adventist Educators and Professional Development

Professional development refers to the practices an organization uses to help its employees become more effective. All categories of respondents were asked, "Do you feel that you are able to adequately keep up to date with new developments in your field?" The percentage indicating "Yes" ranged from 53 percent for academy teachers to 84 percent of union and NAD leaders.

When asked what would help them keep up to date, 138 educators mentioned "more time," 111 mentioned "training," and 91 cited resources. Teachers expressed a greater need for training than did other groups. When asked to

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indicate the topics they would like featured at the national NAD teachers convention scheduled for Dallas, Texas, in August 2000, the four most-cited areas were curriculum, spiritual issues, student issues, and teaching.

College educators appear to be underutilized in professional development efforts for teachers. More than half of those educators in a recent Profile study indicated that they would like to have increased opportunities to assist K-12 teachers.

Adventist Teachers and Preferred Educational Practices

To what extent are Adventist teachers staying abreast of the latest developments in effective education? Respondents were presented with a variety of educational trends and asked to place themselves on a continuum from "not interested" to "using with proficiency."

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Findings. We discovered both good news and bad news. The bad news is that few teachers feel proficient in using many of the good ideas touted in education today. The good news is that they seem willing to learn these new concepts and strategies.

In a prior Profile study, Adventist educational leaders were asked to rate their proficiency in helping teachers learn these new methods. In virtually no category did leaders feel proficient. The findings seem to point out the importance of professional development for both teachers and leaders to help both groups learn more effective ways of delivering good education. The idea of the “learning organization” seems an appropriate paradigm for the Adventist education system, as it seeks to raise the quality of teaching and learning at every level of the organization.

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Assessment of Curriculum Materials

For years, North American Division administrators have worried about the low level of curriculum guide use—a concern not unique to Adventist education. In recent years, revised editions have been made shorter and more teacher-friendly. Profile '99 asked teachers whether they used guides for long-range planning. Slightly more than 60 percent of elementary teachers said, “Yes.” Ninety percent of senior academy teachers felt that curriculum guides were necessary for the Adventist school system. When asked how curriculum guides might be made more helpful, educators responded: (1) Make them more concise and less wordy; and (2) make them easy to use.

Rating Curricula

The *Crossroads* Bible series for grades 9 and 10 received top ratings, with 71 percent of respondents considering it excellent. Of the division's recently introduced materials, 45 percent of respondents gave “excellent” ratings to

the *Discover/Explore* science series, 39 percent to the elementary music program. Senior academy teachers gave *Second Language 9-12* the highest approval rating (67 percent). The ratings confirm the positive outcomes from preparing curriculum guides with teachers in mind.

Recommendations

As a result of the Profile studies, we recommend the following: First, because a knowledge gap exists (especially among teachers and college educators) regarding major curriculum developments taking place within the NAD, we recommend that a reliable way be found to share important news with all NAD educators.

Second, since Profile data indicate slippage between components of the NAD education system, we recommend using a system development model to show the importance of purpose, plan, practice, and product evaluation and to ensure that these components are working together cooperatively to achieve system goals.

Third, every Profile study since 1987 has pointed out the need for collaboration and teacher interchange to promote professionalism and avoid burnout. We recommend that administrators offer incentives (time, small grants, resources, etc.) for teachers to develop

excellent practices and to share them with their peers.

We also suggest that teachers (1) actively attempt to implement "Preferred Practices," (2) creatively use electronic resources to en-

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hance teaching and learning, and (3) pursue a variety of ways to network with their colleagues, including E-mail, Internet chat sessions, and teacher study groups.

Fourth, teachers indicated their desire to become proficient in such "Preferred Practices" as teacher-to-teacher networks, technology, problem-based experiential learning, etc. We recommend that orientation, ongoing coaching, study groups, and mentoring be offered to help teachers become proficient in implementing preferred practices. This support should be focused and well-coordinated.

Fifth, we recommend that teacher comments be read and seriously considered as resources and curriculum guides are revised. Teacher usability ratings can be attained with minimal investment in time and finance.

Sixth, since great advances can be achieved in the technological savvy of Adventist educators in a relatively short time, we recommend that administrators at all levels help teachers become proficient in using computer technology for advanced educational applications. ☞

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