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# Observations About Teacher Education

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By Marion Hartlein

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**W**hen something goes wrong, be it a recession in the economy, a falling behind in scientific achievement or weakness in national security, the government seeks a scapegoat and the public follows its lead. More often than not, education is singled out as the culprit with teacher education receiving a good share of the blame, perhaps rightly so—but often not. The stereotypical weaknesses of teacher education usually cited generally do not mirror the problems and concerns of those who work most closely with teachers and teacher education. Critics' concerns are frequently simplistic and based on inadequate information. Cartoons depicting 20-minute lectures on how to erase the chalkboard, classes in basket weaving, or students who take so many courses in professional education that they have no time for the study of content areas, present problems that exist primarily in the minds of the critics.

Increasing the number of hours in liberal arts courses is one of the

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most common demands. As Denmark points out,

The solution proposed is the requirement of some solid courses in subject matter without taking time to find out that the typical candidate for a secondary school teaching certificate takes only about 19% of his or her baccalaureate program in pedagogy.<sup>1</sup>

Or to quote Silberman, "If American school teachers are poorly

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educated it is the liberal arts professors, not just the educationists who are to blame."<sup>2</sup> Elementary and secondary teachers earn the majority of their college credits in academic departments. Conant found this pattern consistent for teachers prepared at teacher colleges, large universities, and liberal arts colleges.<sup>3</sup>

Teacher education can be improved, but to do so reformers must focus on the areas where improvement will make a difference.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, lists seven recommendations related to teaching. Several of these are directly related to the preservice education of teachers. They deal with several significant issues, several of which will be examined briefly in this article.

## High Standards for Teacher Candidates

Recommendation D, No. 1 focuses on competency. "Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards."<sup>4</sup> Who could disagree with this? However, teacher education programs are experiencing difficulty attracting students who can meet such high standards. Young women are no longer limited to careers in teaching or nursing. Attracting men into a profession with few tangible rewards is even more difficult.

Teaching has never been a highly paid position, but in the past teachers had status in the community. Their work was appreciated, and parents as well as students admired them as role models and as professionals. This is no longer true in many communities. Teacher education institutions lack

the power to elevate the position of teacher in the church or community. If this situation is to be corrected it must be corrected by society.

Nevertheless, future teachers are evaluated before being admitted to education programs. An American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) survey found that 64 percent of all reporting institutions used screening tests for admission to teacher education programs.<sup>5</sup> Remedial work is frequently provided where it is felt that such work will be effective.

States are also addressing the problem of teacher competence. In an attempt to improve the academic ability of teacher education students, 32 states now require some kind of competency testing of teachers.

*A Nation at Risk* also recognized that to be effective, teachers require an *aptitude* for teaching.<sup>6</sup> True, of course, but how is such aptitude to be assessed? The following questions immediately come to mind:

1. *At what point in the student's education is this determination to be made?* If made too soon it may be based on insufficient information. A student's lack of maturity may be interpreted as lack of aptitude. If the evaluation is made too late in the program the student might justifiably complain about spending time and money pursuing a career for which he or she is unsuited.

2. *Who should make this decision?* Certainly it cannot be made by one individual. Even the most sensitive and experienced teacher educator may not evaluate correctly. The decision makers must know the teaching candidates well, have observed them under a variety of situations, and have talked with them extensively about them-

selves, their teaching methods, and their rationale for selecting certain strategies.

### **Needed—A Grasp of the Subject Matter**

Recommendation D, No. 1 also stressed the need for future teachers "to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline."<sup>7</sup> Agreed, the elementary education student needs to be competent in all areas

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he or she will be expected to teach. For secondary education candidates, a major in the area in which the student will teach should constitute a minimum requirement. Some critics would have the prospective teacher concentrate on liberal arts courses while sharply curtailing if not totally eliminating courses in professional education. However, as much as 70-85 percent of a potential teacher's college credits are already taken in the liberal arts areas. If education students who have taken 12-15 semester hours of English cannot write an acceptable sentence, and students with six or more semester hours of history and geography cannot tell within 500 years when the Crusades occurred, courses in professional education can hardly be blamed. Students do need a

background in the subject areas they will teach, but additional hours in such subjects will not necessarily remedy the situation. Better selection of content and more effective liberal arts instruction should help solve the problem.

### Finances

Recommendation D, No. 6 recommends that "Incentives, such as grants and loans, should be made available to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession." Unfortunately, some potential teachers cannot afford a college education. Lacking funds, they may not attend college at all, enroll in a low-priced community college rather than a denominational institution, or choose a career that will pay well enough after graduation to help them liquidate debts accumulated during college. The Seventh-day Adventist system of education needs outstanding and dedicated teachers. The church and its colleges should pursue every option to encourage students to enter the profession, including offering grants and loans to worthy candidates.

### Use of Master Teachers

Recommendation D, No. 7 urges that "Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs." Master teachers must be committed not only to teaching the students in their classrooms but also to assisting young people who will enter the profession. Institutions of higher learning and already-established teachers share the responsibility for preparing new teachers—unfortunately, however, not everyone recognizes this shared responsibility. The college or university must seek out competent, committed classroom teachers who are willing to work with teachers in

training. Having located such individuals, teacher educators must be willing to orient the master teacher candidates to the existing college program and invite their input. Too often the cooperating teachers are asked to supervise students and provide a classroom where they can observe, plus attend meetings where the supervising teachers are *told* what is expected of them. No one could be expected to feel very enthusiastic about a program in which he or she has no input!

Classroom teachers are in the best position to know how effectively teachers in training have been prepared for the classroom, but they are hardly ever asked for advice. If they do make suggestions, these are seldom incorpo-

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rated into the program. For maximum efficiency, the master teacher should be involved in *designing* the teacher education program and in providing feedback on the effectiveness of its techniques.

Using classroom teachers to study the needs of education students in light of the latest research on curriculum and instruction is a good recommendation. One must consider, however, the problems in locating master teachers who are both competent and willing to be involved.

One of the problems identified

by Newport is "the need to identify superior teachers with whom trainees can be placed for field experiences and to convince these teachers to work with trainees for little or no pay."<sup>10</sup> Anyone who has supervised student teachers knows the frustration of placing college students with classroom teachers who not only ignore the most basic laws of learning and teaching procedures but also freely tell the student that the teaching principles he or she learned in college just won't work in the "real world." Teaching in such classrooms is counterproductive for the student teacher.

Some classroom teachers will only accept students who are nearing the end of their preparation, refusing to work with inexperienced freshmen students or to teach demonstration lessons. To address such problems, mutual respect and cooperation between teacher educators and classroom teachers is needed.

Having commented on several recommendations made by the National Commission on Excellence, I will now offer additional suggestions for the improvement of teacher education programs. Keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive list, and that the writer believes there is no *one* right way of accomplishing such a complex task as educating teachers. The recommendations have, however, been developed from experience, observation, and study.

1. *A teacher education program should be designed to prepare teachers to meet the needs of the schools where they are most likely to be hired.* Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities prepare students for church schools primarily and for public and other private schools secondarily. This

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whose incomes make them ineligible for the Guaranteed Student Loan Program. Such government calculations do not, of course, consider the substantial amounts of money church members contribute to tithe, offerings, various church projects, and church school tuition for younger children. Rather than have members contribute less to the local and worldwide support of its work, perhaps the church could help take the burden off families by setting up aid and loan programs for students.

### Helping Parents Plan Ahead

Today's parents must plan ahead to finance their children's college education. Various ways of tax saving and income-shifting can help them prepare for the upcoming costs of higher education. A booklet entitled *Early Planning for College Costs* is available for \$2 by writing to Early Planning for College Costs, P.O. Box 467, Rockville, MD 20850. Families should also consult with tax specialists in setting up one of the various trusts that are available for educational purposes. SDA colleges would do well to contact parents of potential students while they are still in academy—or church school—to suggest ways to prepare for the costs of higher education. Some SDA colleges offer financial planning seminars at academies to help acquaint students with their options for financing a Christian college education.

### Innovative Techniques for Fund Raising

An excellent example of what can be accomplished in raising money for our colleges and universities is the Business Executives' Challenge to Alumni (BECA) program. Under this plan, business executives offer to match funds

contributed by alumni of SDA colleges. The dollars offered through the generosity and foresight of these interested executives have forced institutions to gear up for long-overdue fund-raising campaigns. The response from alumni has been remarkable—at the end of the first five-year phase of the program 27.3 percent of alumni were contributing unrestricted gifts to the annual fund of their alma mater. This success has resulted in raised goals for a second phase of the BECA program that will generate additional funds, substantial amounts of which will doubtless continue to be channeled into financial aid for students.

Throughout the Adventist system of education there is a growing interest in the establishment of endowment funds. In the past most donors to educational institutions have wished to see immediate results from their giving (e.g., a new sign at the entrance to the college or carpeting in the women's dorm), but in recent years more emphasis has been placed on the long-term benefits of establishing endowment programs that can generate income for financial aid to students and other areas of the operating budget. SDA colleges and universities are now giving endowment fund gifts high priority in their fund-raising campaigns. Beginning with year six of the BECA program, executives will match gifts designated for student aid and/or endowment.<sup>2</sup>

Adventist college and university presidents and academic officers will certainly need to consider many aspects of college financing as they fulfill their responsibilities. Financial officers must study a wide range of proposals to make their schools financially viable. Trustees and church officers share the responsibility for all educational matters—including finances.

The future of our higher education system in the Seventh-day Adventist Church rests on the best joint planning and efforts of all these leaders as guided and blessed by God. □

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the past 14 years, where state laws allow, our colleges have been permitted by the federal government to pay student employees 85 percent of the minimum wage. However, many schools pay minimum wage or more to attract students, especially where jobs in the local community offer higher hourly rates.

<sup>2</sup> More information about the BECA program is contained in the pamphlet, "A Challenge to Grow," which is available from Philanthropic Service for Institutions, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20012.

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## Teacher Education

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means that certain content and skills that would not be included in the teacher education program at a state university are an essential part of a Seventh-day Adventist program. These include such courses as Bible, philosophy of Adventist education, a knowledge of Seventh-day Adventist church history and the forces that have shaped the church, health principles, and Seventh-day Adventist life-style. It would also include skills needed for teaching in a boarding school or a multigrade classroom. To implement such training, college education department personnel need to foster a climate in which ongoing dialogue takes place among themselves, teachers in training, elementary and secondary educators in the field, and superintendents of education.

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2. *Instructors in a teacher education program should have taught successfully the subject areas and levels covered by their courses.* Furthermore, teachers of professional education courses should be able to step into an elementary or secondary classroom and demonstrate not only the strategies they are presenting to their students but also the ability to manage the classroom effectively. Showing competence in a classroom will gain the respect of the college student, not only for the college teacher, but also for the principles and methodology he or she is presenting. It is the most effective way to combat the charge that what a student learns in college doesn't apply in the "real world."

3. *In addition to helping students develop a philosophy of education, acquainting them with the basic principles of teaching and with educational research, an effective teacher education program should be skills oriented.* Students should not only discuss

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curriculum development, they should also *demonstrate* competence in curriculum-development skills needed by a beginning teacher. Not only are interpersonal, classroom, management, and instructional skills to be studied, they must also be prac-

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ticed until they have been integrated into the student's teaching style.

In order to master these skills, students must begin to study and practice early in their program. If classroom exposure is limited to observation and unstructured participation until student teaching, mastery for the average student will be impossible. Not only must skills be practiced over a period of several years, but students need to receive feedback from their instructors, classroom teachers, peers and—through the use of videotape—from themselves. Students who are taught to observe themselves and their peers and to discuss their observations make remarkable progress. Setting up and following through on a program of skills development is hard work for the teacher educator but the results make it invaluable.

4. *As implied above, teacher education students need to be observing and participating in the classroom every year beginning with the freshman year.* The teachers surveyed by Chion-Kenney agree that the "traditional senior-year practicum offers too little experience and comes too late in the training."<sup>11</sup> Observation is important but active involvement is even more valuable. Greatest progress seems to occur when experiences are *structured, observed, and evaluated*. Too often when the student is assigned teacher aide

work he or she ends up washing out paste bottles, grading papers, and decorating an endless number of bulletin boards. Actual teaching of classes, especially during methods courses, is essential.

To assure comprehensive training, teacher educators should compile a list of experiences that all education students must have. For example, *every* elementary education student should teach a sequence of first grade reading lessons, not only those students who are assigned to first grade for student teaching. Before student teaching, every elementary and secondary education major should have the opportunity to teach a unit of work, construct and administer tests, and analyze the results of his or her teaching procedures.

Every education student should conduct religious activities for children or young people—worships, chapel talks, weeks of prayer, as well as witnessing and service activities. The list of essential experiences might vary according to the needs of the students and the focus of the program, but such a list should exist. The activities on the list should be distributed over the four-year teacher education program and should be completed successfully.

5. *Whenever possible teacher education students should have some teaching experience off campus while living in the community.*

The opportunity to meet parents and school board members, participate in the church program, attend teachers' meetings and generally "shadow" the supervising teacher is invaluable. This is the real world. For the elementary education student the experience would be especially helpful in a multigrade classroom. The secondary education student would benefit from teaching experience in a boarding academy. Students who have participated in "total immersion" teaching experiences have expressed enthusiasm about the benefits gained.

The above list of recommendations is only a beginning. Areas such as multicultural education, the exceptional child, and planning for individual differences have not even been mentioned. Nor has this article addressed the concept of approved teacher education programs. It does recognize, however, that educating teachers is a complex task that requires skill, commitment, and hard work.

In a Seventh-day Adventist college we must be committed to educating competent teachers; but more than that, we must prepare teachers who will care for the students they teach, who are willing to go the extra mile to help them, who are dedicated to unselfish service. The shaping of values and attitudes is even more difficult than the developing of knowledge and skills. A study of the life and methods of the Master Teacher is the foundation on which we build. Only as teachers model in their lives the principles of education demonstrated by Christ will they succeed. □

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> George Denmark, "Educating a Profession," *Journal of Teacher Education*, XXXVI:5 (September-October, 1985), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 377.

<sup>3</sup> James B. Conant, *The Education of American*

*Teachers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 103-105.

<sup>4</sup> *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April, 1983), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Denmark, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> *A Nation at Risk*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John E. Newport, "Let's Admit We Can't Train Teachers—And Ask for Help," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 65 (October, 1983), p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> Chion-Kenney, Linda, "Teaching—It All Begins in the Elementary School," *Education Week* (September 5, 1984), p. 1-18.

## The Alienation of Adventist Youth

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ing its children and grandchildren of the ultimacy of the cause espoused by the fathers and mothers. As the years and generations pass, the sect tends either to flow back toward mainstream denomination-ism, or to break up into additional groups who believe that they

*Despite the sometimes wanton application of the sacrament of baptism, many Adventist young people have never become sufficiently involved in the life and mission of the church to qualify now as being alienated.*

are now called to carry the banner by instituting further reforms. In this scenario, the children "flow," while the parents dig in and resist change. Without their own organizational base, the youth often flow out altogether.

The identity crisis goes beyond organizational perceptions. Recent theological discussions seem to take a "debate" rather than a

"handshake" approach. Instead of people of varying backgrounds and views sitting down together, and in brotherly kindness seeking, with God's guidance, to arrive at a progressive and mutual understanding of truth, theology in recent years has been argued vehemently and sometimes divisively. These noisy debates have convinced many young people that truth is ultimately unknowable. As a result, few of them become involved in the discussions. Instead, they stop their ears to avoid the confusion.

3. *Refusal to address issues.* Most Adventist young people do not believe that their church is addressing the real issues they face. Some see the denomination as 15 to 20 years behind the times. Others accuse the church of trying to live in the nineteenth century, while the world in which they live is drawing them into the twenty-first century. Those who still bother to ask about movies, wedding rings, rock music, jewelry, dress, and other church standards of behavior complain that they receive decrees rather than discussion and well-reasoned explanations. When arguments are presented to defend church standards, many young people believe them to be relics dusted off by people who have long since repented of any fun they ever had.

But the most prominent and devastating response from youth today is *silence*. Many are not interested enough to challenge the traditions. Their world is filled with dreams of personal (usually financial) success. They have become more conservative, but not more committed to their conservative church.

Today's young church members move about comfortably in the "world," which is not the stranger to them that it was to their Adven-