

Profile '01

Results From the Eighth Biennial Survey of Adventist Educators

Curriculum and Instruction in North American Schools

BY PAUL S. BRANTLEY AND ALFREDO RUIZ

Curriculum planned in committees often looks very different than what is taught in classrooms. Begun in 1987 and conducted every two years since, the *Profile* research studies provide Seventh-day Adventist educational leaders with snapshots of curriculum and teaching in church schools in the North American Division (Canada and the United States).

The *Profile* surveys are an important resource for several reasons:

- Because of random sampling, the findings represent *all* North American Division (NAD) educators, not just vocal or highly visible persons;
 - Data on different groups allow for comparisons between categories such as elementary and academy teachers, or K-12 teachers and conference superintendents;
 - Information compiled over a period of years makes it possible to accurately forecast and detect trends;
 - Survey results can guide leaders in curriculum planning.
- Adventist educators take the *Profile* surveys seriously. Every two

This year, the return rate for *Profile '01* was more than 86 percent—very impressive for a mailed survey!

years, one of every six teachers in the NAD is sampled randomly for inclusion in a comprehensive survey, along with the total population of conference educational leaders together with all union and division members of the North American Division Curriculum Committee (NADCC). For the eighth straight time, approximately 80 percent of the educators who received the mailed questionnaire took the time to complete the instrument, often writing in optional notes and comments. This year, the return rate for *Profile '01*

was more than 86 percent—very impressive for a mailed survey!

What We've Learned Thus Far

Now that the survey has completed its eighth cycle, a profile of curriculum and teaching in the North American Division has begun to emerge. Here are some things we've learned from prior surveys (1987-1999):

- Adventist educators in the NAD appreciate being part of a larger system with overarching purposes. (The enthusiastic response to the NAD Teachers Convention in August 2000, held in Dallas, Texas, underscored this finding.)
- Adventist educators are concerned about the spiritual aspects

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of schooling—their own faith as well as that of their students.

- NAD teachers express some confusion about the role of curriculum guides, standardized tests, and recommended textbooks. They do not always understand how the three components relate to one another.

- Both elementary and secondary educators feel inadequately prepared to use new curricula and methods of teaching. Training and follow-up appear to be limited.

- Teachers at every level feel isolated to a much greater extent than do their conference and union educational leaders. Teachers would welcome greater opportunities to network with colleagues.

The Profile '01 Survey

Using union conference directories, a systematic random sample of more than 983 educators was chosen to receive *Profile* surveys in

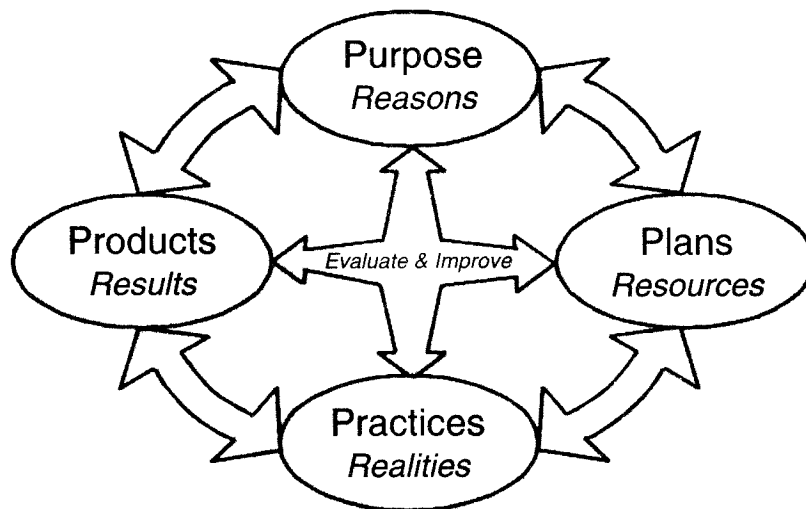


FIGURE ONE
Quality Cycles Model*

March 2001. Of the 917 surveys mailed throughout the North American Division, 789 usable survey forms were returned, for an effective return rate of 86 percent. The survey respondents were comprised of five categories of educators: (1) 469 elementary/junior academy teachers, (2) 157 senior academy teachers, (3) 83 conference supervisors, (4) 16 union directors and associates, along with NAD personnel who are members of the North American Division Committee, and

(5) 64 NAD college/university education professors.

The *Profile* researchers decided to examine each component of the educational system through the eyes of educators in the field. The Quality Cycles model above outlines five key components.

* See Paul S. Brantley, "Can Education Be Adventist and Excellent, Too?" *Journal of Adventist Education* 61:5 (Summer 1999), p. 6.

Each component must be included and must interact with every other component for the educational system to function successfully. The components are (1) Purposes, (2) Plans, (3) Practices, (4) Products, and (5) Evaluation for Continuous Improvement.

Purposes/Reasons

The North American Division recently introduced its *Focus on Adventist Curriculum Trends for the 21st Century* (FACT21), prepared by a commission of Adventist leaders. FACT21 was designed to serve as an overarching curriculum framework for denominational education, K-12. The report included a philosophy statement, a set of goals and essential learnings, a listing of preferred practices, and recommendations for bringing about needed changes in elementary and secondary education throughout the NAD.

Profile '01 assessed the extent to which Adventist educators are aware of FACT21 and how well they support and implement its recommendations. FACT21 first dealt with the purposes of Adventist education, inquiring whether they are addressed in curriculum resources, taught by teachers, and realized in students.

Philosophy and goals. Any system must have clear-cut goals and a shared vision of what it has set out to accomplish. To what extent are NAD educators clear about the purposes of Adventist education? Respondents were asked, "In general, has the Adventist Church articulated a clear philosophy of education to guide practice

Survey recipients were asked how to help more Adventist youth attend church schools, and thereby increase the institutions' enrollment.

in schools and colleges within the division?" Four in 10 respondents replied "Definitely Yes," and another half of the total replied "Yes, somewhat." When asked if a "philosophy statement was located where you can easily refer to it," two-thirds responded "Yes." When the survey inquired whether the educators feel "Adventist schools are putting their educational philosophy into practice," the responses varied by category as shown in Table 1.

School change as a basis for enrollment growth. Survey recipients were asked how to help more Adventist youth attend church schools, and thereby increase the institutions' enrollment. This question was designed to identify

the major ways respondents thought Adventist schools should change. Of seven options, they were asked to select only three. Their suggestions were as follows: *Make schools more excellent* (72 percent), *Better promotion* (59 percent), *Lower the cost* (52 percent), *Improve the climate* (40.2 percent), *Reform our schools to become more Adventist/Christlike* (31 percent), *Use distance education to reach more Adventist students* (21 percent), and *Open more schools to make them available for more Adventist youth* (11 percent). The top choices for all groups were more excellence, better promotion, and lowered costs.

Using technology and distance education in order to reach more students was rated higher by union educational leaders (37 percent) than by any other group (17 to 26 percent). Likewise, lowering the cost was rated higher by union educational leaders (69 percent) than

TABLE 1

"In general, do you feel that Adventist schools are putting their educational philosophy into practice?" (%)

Category (n)	Definitely Yes	Yes, Somewhat	Not Really	Definitely Not
Elementary teachers (469)	16%	69%	12%	1%
Senior academy teachers (157)	13	72	13	3
Conference education personnel (83)	24	76	--	--
Adventist college/university education professors (64)	17	65	18	--
NAD union education leaders (16)	19	81	--	--
TOTAL (789)*	16	70	12	1

*Percentages in table do not include missing values in this total.

by any other group (48 to 58 percent). It is intriguing that less than a third of all respondents (31 percent) chose the “reform our schools and make them more Adventist/Christlike” option.

Although many felt that the church has articulated a clear philosophy (41 percent voted Definitely Yes), and two-thirds indicated that they have easy access to an Adventist philosophy statement (67 percent saying Definitely Yes), educators at all levels were not as enthusiastic in their assessment of how well Adventist schools *implement* an Adventist philosophy of education (16 percent said Definitely Yes; and 71 percent Yes, Somewhat). It would be fascinating to identify the reasons for the lukewarm response, as a means of system self-examination and improvement.

Plans/Resources

Plans and resources help educators work effectively and coherently in accomplishing the purposes of Adventist education. How do teachers rate the resources at their disposal?

Planning resources. Although more than 80 percent of the respondents said they benefitted from the 2000 North American Teachers Convention, they seemed much less aware of other resources. Only 34 percent had used the FACT21 document; 54 percent, the Teacher Bulletin; 36 percent, the Home and School Association Manual; 28 percent, the Potentials Youth Values Assessment; 26 percent, the CIRCLE Web site; and only 13 percent, the Preferred Practice Web sites. These figures suggest the need to better publicize the resources available for teachers. Table 2 combines a summary of the usage and ratings.

Curriculum guides. The good news is that 92 percent of elementary teachers and 88 percent of academy teachers report using these resources—a proportion far higher than a decade ago. Of the users, 23 percent judged them excellent, 70 percent somewhat helpful, and 7 percent said there were major problems. “Excellent” ratings were highest for the following guides: kindergarten (46 percent), English/language arts (28 percent), computer literacy/keyboarding

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TABLE 2
Summary of Usage and Ratings of Resources by Teachers

Percentage of Teachers Using Resource		Ratings by Teacher-Users: Percent Who Marked “Excellent”	
2000 Dallas Teachers Convention	81%	2000 Dallas Teachers Convention	83%
NAD Teacher Bulletin	54	CIRCLE Education Web Site	40
North American Division Web Site	44	FACT21 Document	38
Home and School Association Manual	36	AE21 Curriculum Project	34
FACT21 Document	34	NAD Teacher Bulletin	33
TAGNET Computer Consortium	29	Preferred Practices Web Sites	33
Potentials Youth Values Assessment	28	Potentials Youth Values Assessment	32
CIRCLE Education Web Site	26	North American Division Web Site	32
AE21 Curriculum Project	24	Home and School Association Manual	31
Preferred Practices Web Sites	13	TAGNET Computer Consortium	29

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and science/health (both 27 percent); and lower for music (22 percent), business and computer (20 percent), and art (15 percent).

Other curriculum resources. The new secondary Bible textbook series (*Crossroads*, for grades 9 through 12) was rated “excellent” by 55 percent of all respondents, a tribute to those who spent much time in preparing these important resources. However, the proportion of conference and union leaders who considered these materials “excellent” (64 percent and 75 percent, respectively) was considerably higher than that of teachers (33 percent senior academy).

Technology. Teachers today have much greater access to information technology than in the past. Over the past six years, Adventist educators have been asked to indicate where they were on the “information highway.” The percentage who indicated that they were “Still in the Driveway” has declined. Seven in 10 educators regularly use the Web and nine in 10 use a computer with a printer. In spite of the good news, less than a third of all K-12 teachers use the computer for a wide variety of *teaching* applications.

Practices/Realities

Instructional practices. All of our purposes and plans are for naught if they aren’t put into practice. We asked teachers to what extent they used some of the Preferred Instructional Practices recommended by the Futures Commission. Results are shown in Tables 3 and 4. The “Like to Try” category gives an idea of areas in which teachers are most open to training and assistance. Note the differences between elementary and academy teachers in “Cooperative Learning” and “Integrated Curriculum.”

Implementation of FACT21 Initiatives. The FACT21 document called for a number of innovations in order to ensure more effective educational programs for youth in the new millennium. The survey asked teachers whether these initiatives were being implemented in

FIGURE 2

Percent With Access to the Web

	1995	1997	1999	2001
Elementary	13	41	68	70
Academy	22	69	84	90
Conference	22	72	96	99
NADCC	55	100	97	100

FIGURE 3

Percent of Users “Still in the Driveway”

	1995	1997	1999	2001
Elementary	37	27	23	10
Academy	30	31	16	10
Conference	34	17	15	6
NADCC	22	12	7	6

TABLE 3

**Elementary Teachers' Self-Assessments of Proficiency
in Implementing Preferred Practices**

	Not interested	Not Heard of	Heard About	Like to Try	Started Implementing	Proficient
Portfolios assessment rubrics	9%	6%	18%	25%	36%	6%
Teacher-to-Teacher Networks study groups, beginning-teacher programs, mentoring, peer coaching	4	11	13	47	20	5
Integrated Curriculum connecting the various subjects in the curriculum	2	1	7	25	45	20
Problem-Based Learning	2	24	15	34	19	6
Cooperative Learning	3	1	11	12	46	27

TABLE 4

**Academy Teachers' Self-Assessments of Proficiency
in Implementing Preferred Practices**

	Not interested	Not Heard of	Heard About	Like to Try	Started Implementing	Proficient
Portfolios assessment rubrics	12%	6%	27%	26%	20%	9%
Teacher-to-Teacher Networks study groups, beginning-teacher programs, mentoring, peer coaching	4	7	17	46	20	6
Integrated Curriculum connecting the various subjects in the curriculum	2	3	13	45	29	9
Problem-Based Learning	5	5	17	23	31	19
Cooperative Learning	1	21	21	34	15	8

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their school or conference. They responded as shown in Table 5.

Academy respondents felt all of these initiatives were led by their schools (50 percent to 98 percent), rather than by the conference or union. Elementary teachers felt four of the nine initiatives were spearheaded by their conference, the rest by their school.

Support for teaching practice. In a labor-intensive work such as education, much support and collaboration is needed to ensure that purposes get translated into practice. How much support do elementary and academy teachers feel that they have in their work? On a scale from 1.00 (“no support”) to 10.00 (“great support!”), elementary teachers reported feeling the greatest support from other teachers (8.09), their principals (7.75), the conference office of education (7.60), parents (7.59), school boards (7.54), constituent churches (6.66), the union office of education (6.04), and Adventist college/university faculty (4.19).

Academy teachers’ perceived sources of support pretty well matched those of elementary teachers, although they felt they had more support from Adventist college faculty (5.55) and less support from the conference (6.44), the union (5.87), and supporting constituent churches (5.88).

Product/Results

The most important function of Christian schooling is to help transform students into God’s likeness. Therefore, it behooves Adventist schools to examine the products of our schooling, to assess the characteristics of students who attend and graduate from our

schools. What knowledge, skills, and values do students actually acquire as a result of attending Adventist schools?

What students have learned. Nearly all K-12 schools in the North American Division administer the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* (ITBS). This achievement test measures educational attainments in a variety of subject areas. In *Profile ’01*, educators were asked to give their opinions about the administration of the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*. Although 90 percent of respondents indicated that this test was used in their schools, only 14 percent rated it as excellent, while 73 percent regarded it as somewhat helpful, and 10 percent thought the test had major problems. Furthermore, when teachers were asked if their faculty as a group used the results of the ITBS to improve instruction, less than half of them said “Yes.”

What students know about the Bible. Should Adventist schools assess Bible knowledge in a standardized way just as they measure progress in reading, mathematics, and other subjects? Respondents to *Profile ’01* apparently think not. Figure 4 indicates the proportion of elementary and academy teachers who support a standardized test in Bible.

Very different results were obtained when the teachers were asked if faculty as a group should assess student outcomes related to *character development*. (See Figure 5.)

Both Bible knowledge *and* character development are desired outcomes of Adventist education. Yet many teachers report that there is no systematic assessment of these areas in their schools. It seems essential that we find accurate ways to measure how well Adventist schools are achieving these goals.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

If Adventist education is a *system*, then it needs to engage in a process of continuous improvement in order to reach its goals. This improvement involves both individual teachers and entire schools.

Teacher improvement. Each teacher who received a *Profile ’01* survey was asked: “How many times has someone visited your classroom this year, observed your teaching, and coached you as to your

	Elementary	Academy
Released time for teacher professional development	80%	64%
Teacher workshops on learning styles	45	52
Committee on master planning for technology	43	58
School-wide curriculum improvement projects	40	53
Projects to enhance home-school-church partnerships	32	30
Special multicultural programs	29	22
Annual formal curriculum review	28	55
Special workshops integrating faith and learning	24	22

performance?” Forty-seven percent of elementary teachers said, “More than once”; 24 percent indicated only “Once”; and 29 percent said “Not at all.” When asked who they would like to do the observations, 43 percent said “Someone from the conference office,” 26 percent said “Another teacher,” 15 percent said “The principal,” and 10 percent cited “Someone else.”

When senior academy teachers were asked how many times their teaching had been observed, 26 percent said “More than once”; 37 percent indicated only “Once”; and 37 percent said “Not at all.” Without professional feedback, it may be a problem for teachers to gauge their own effectiveness. When K-12 teachers were asked who they would *like* to do the observations, responses were evenly divided among “The conference,” “The principal,” “Another teacher,” and “Someone else.”

School improvement. School evaluations and curriculum reviews are methods the system has set up to ensure continuous quality. Nearly three-fourths of all respondents said that their school had recently gone through an Adventist school accreditation. When asked how helpful these evaluations had been, nearly half of the NAD educators responded “excellent,” while the other half replied “somewhat helpful.” Only about five percent of the respondents expressed major concerns about the school evaluation process.

By their own admission, few teachers are proficient in implementing many of the initiatives called for by the FACT21 Commission.

There is some evidence that Adventist educators feel positive about adopting a set of Adventist education Standards similar to what many states and provinces have established in the United States and Canada. Between 63 percent and 68 percent of all groups, except the NADCC/union leaders (50 percent), felt that a Standards approach was a good idea.

Study Implications

Adventist education is a *system*. Every system has a purpose. The system’s plans, practices, and products must be evaluated in terms of its purposes. The purpose of Adventist schools is to restore within our students the image of God. But what does that mean?

- **Purposes.** The philosophy of Adventist education must become more than a high-sounding statement. Adventist schools, churches, and homes everywhere should unite around a shared vision of what they want each student to become. When purposes for and practices of Adventist education are *based* upon a truly Christian and Adventist philosophy, the result will be a stronger financial base, better academic excellence, improved climate, and schools that can be better promoted.

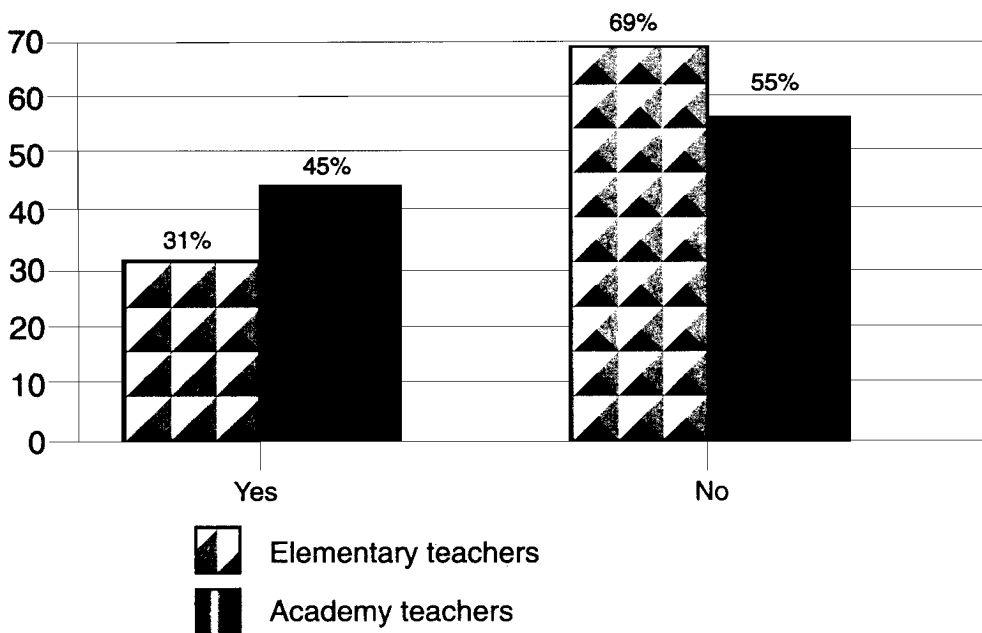
- **Plans.** The plans for the system must take into consideration both the system’s purposes as well as the teachers (practitioners) who carry out the philosophy of Adventist education through their

interaction with students. Plans should address the increasing role of technology and the necessity of ensuring that every Adventist educator is included as a curriculum development partner and is made aware of the many resources that will help in his or her work.

- **Practices.** Many good intentions founder here. For teachers to learn new ways of teaching and thinking, they need plenty of time for both learning and practice. By their own admission, few teachers are proficient in implementing many of the initiatives called for by the FACT21 Commission. Teachers must

FIGURE 4

Should There Be a Standardized Test Like the ITBS to Assess the Area of Bible Knowledge?



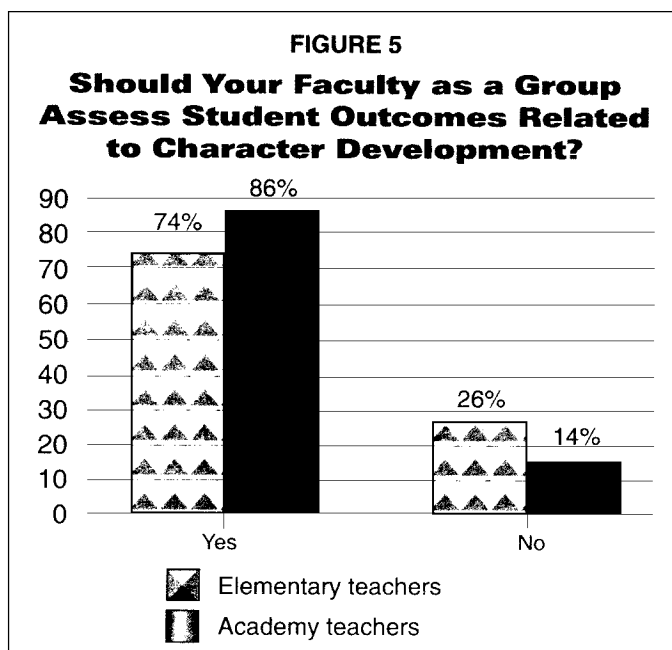
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also be learners, and to do this, they need adequate time and support from every part of the community.

• *Products.* Assessment provides evidence of whether the Adventist educational system is indeed accomplishing its purposes. It is essential, however, that assessment not be sabotaged by political or public relations concerns. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills, or any other similar test, must be examined to see what the results reveal about system effectiveness. Some of the most important outcomes, like character development and Bible knowledge, cannot be tested

by the ITBS. How can our system effectively assess these important areas?

• *Evaluation and continuous improvement.* “Something better,” Ellen White once said, “is the watchword of education” (*Education*, p. 296). Rather than rely on time-worn traditions, Adventist educators—individually and corporately—would do well to rediscover the incredible power of an education grounded in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, and one with clearly defined goals and standards. As a result, it would be said of Adventist schools, as was said of Israel of old, that they are the “head and not the tail.” ☞



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