

Profile 2004: K-12 TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ADVENTIST CURRICULUM

Note: This is the second article to appear in the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION based on the results of the Profile 2004 study of educators in the North American Division (NAD). For those desiring in-depth information including statistical results, links to the full report submitted to the NAD Curriculum Committee as well as the paper presented at the American Educational Research Association can be found at <http://www.andrews.edu/~burton/>. Results of the Profile studies help administrators, teachers, and teacher educators to better understand one another's perceptions of curriculum and instruction issues and concerns. It thus helps to set the agenda for curriculum development in the NAD.

For almost two decades, the North American Division has conducted studies to determine the effectiveness of its curriculum materials. Profile 2004 is the latest in this series. Each of the nine Profile studies has surveyed NAD K-12 teachers about their perceptions and use of curriculum guides prepared under the direction of the North American Division Curriculum Committee (NADCC).

As this survey was conducted electronically, available participants included

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all NAD educators with e-mail addresses. As e-mail addresses often change or may be inaccurate in published or electronic lists, thus making surveys sent to those addresses undeliverable, the research team decided to invite all educators with e-mail addresses to participate in the study, rather than doing a random sample. The researchers included all educators with e-mail addresses in order to obtain a comparable number of completed surveys to those received in previous Profile studies conducted via surveys sent by mail. A total of 2,718 NAD elementary and secondary teachers and administrators had e-mail addresses available via printed

or electronic lists. Of this number, 540 responded, for a gross response rate of 19.9 percent. The total number of respondents was comparable to, although a bit smaller than, previous Profile studies.

The Profile 2004 study included two survey items on the availability of NAD-prepared curriculum guides and their use by classroom teachers. Three additional survey items asked teachers to rate the quality of the curriculum guides. This article reports on teachers' responses to these items.

The survey items relating to teachers' perceptions of the quality of NAD curriculum guides asked if (1) the materials were easy to use, (2) they represented best practices in the field, and (3) they supported the Advent-

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ist philosophy of education. Teachers responded to these items using a traditional Likert scale with five options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. For the analysis reported in this article, the responses for “strongly agree” and “agree” were combined into a single group, as were the responses for “strongly disagree” and “disagree.” This resulted in three groups of respondents: those who agreed with the survey item, those who disagreed, and those who were neutral toward it.

Availability of NAD Curriculum Guides

To determine whether NAD-prepared curriculum guides were available, we asked the K-12 teachers to indicate whether they had a copy of the curricular guides developed for their discipline. A large majority of teachers had a copy of the NAD-prepared curriculum guides, with responses ranging from a low of 70.7 percent of elementary teachers who said they had a copy of the *K-8 Fine Arts Curriculum Guide* to a high of 81.4 percent of academy teachers who had copies of either the *9-12 Language Arts Curriculum Guide* or the *9-12 Modern Languages Curriculum Guide*.

With the exception of the *K-8 Fine Arts Curriculum Guide*, fewer than 10 percent of elementary teachers responding to the survey indicated they

did not have a copy of any particular curriculum guide. Almost one-third of elementary-level respondents said they did not have a copy of the newly released *K-8 Fine Arts Curriculum Guide*. It is possible that some conferences had delayed the distribution of the Fine Arts document until the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year, as some had made a similar decision regarding the *Journey to Excellence* campaign materials (see Figure 1).

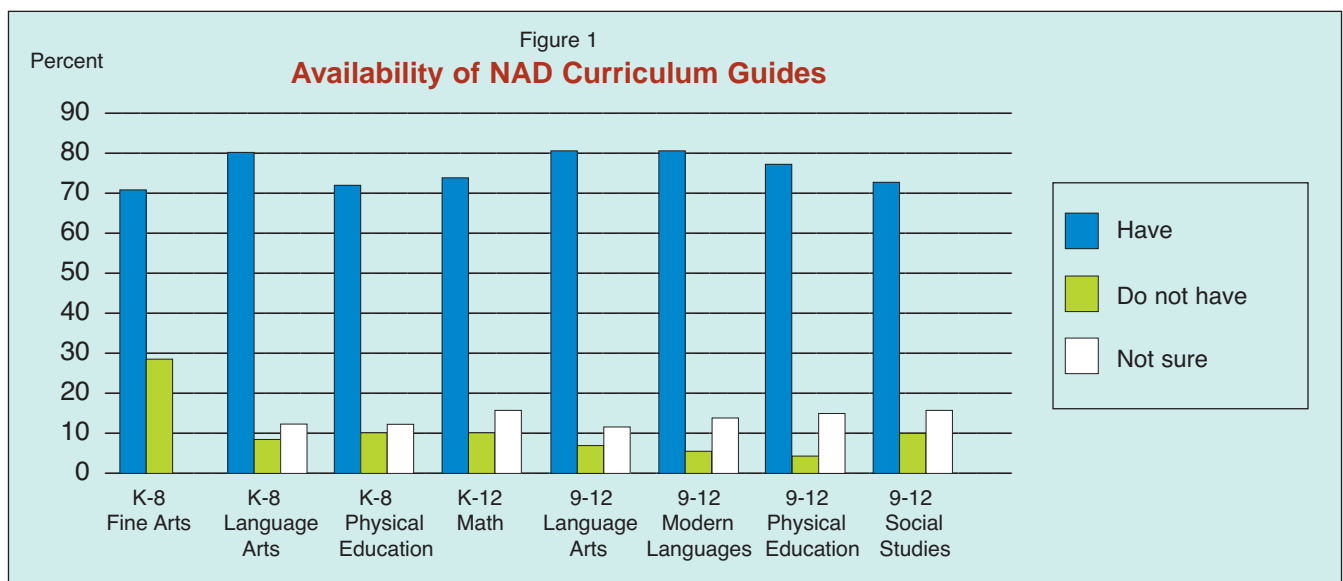
A small percentage of respondents said they were not sure whether they had a copy of the curriculum guide for their subject area. To determine whether teachers who were new to the Adventist system and those with five or fewer years of experience were more likely to be unsure about having copies of these NAD curriculum guides, the researchers did a cross-tabulation analysis. For three curriculum guides (K-12 mathematics, 9-12 social studies, and K-8 language arts), it was true that new teachers were more likely than more seasoned teachers to respond “not sure.” It should be noted, however, that the largest group of new teachers said they did have copies of all curriculum guides.

Perhaps new teachers were not aware of NAD curriculum guides and therefore did not investigate whether these materials were available at their schools. It is possible no one shared information about the NAD curriculum

guides with these new teachers. Also, in some schools, teachers make notes in the curriculum guides and then carry those items with them when they move to a new school. Therefore, some teachers may have had the curriculum guides at a previous school but were unsure whether they were available at the current school. If teachers weren’t sure they had copies of the curriculum guides, it would seem obvious that they were not using them. Maybe this situation could be improved if conference superintendents informed every K-12 teacher on a yearly basis that NAD-approved textbooks and curriculum materials are expected to be used in the classroom, and provided information on how to obtain replacement copies.

Use of NAD Curriculum Guides

Elementary and secondary teachers were asked whether they used the NAD-produced curriculum guides for long-term planning. With the exception of the *K-8 Physical Education Curriculum Guide*, only about 25 percent of all respondents reported using their curriculum guides “regularly” for this purpose. When combining teachers who chose “regularly” or “sometimes” in response to this survey item, the *K-8 Language Arts Curriculum Guide* appeared to be the most-used new curriculum guide. Just over 71 percent of teachers reported using it at least “sometimes.” The *K-12 Mathematics*



Curriculum Guide was used at least “sometimes” by 64.8 percent of respondents, and the *9-12 Language Arts Curriculum Guide* was used “regularly” or “sometimes” by 62.0 percent of respondents.

Only 13.5 percent of elementary physical education teachers indicated that they regularly used the PE curriculum guide for long-term planning. Perhaps one reason for this response is that physical education is not considered a “core curriculum area” by many educators. Thus, elementary teachers may not use this guide regularly because they devote little instructional time to the subject. Also, some NAD elementary schools do not have adequate facilities for the teaching of PE, so they may be less likely to use the curriculum guide. Of the curriculum guides studied in Profile 2004, the K-8 and 9-12 guides for physical education were the least used by teachers, with 45.7 percent of elementary teachers and 54.3 percent of secondary teachers who taught physical education indicating they “never” used these curriculum guides. Perhaps a study should be conducted comparing the structure, content, and implementation patterns of the guides that get the most use with those that get the least. The other curriculum guides listed in Table 2 were used by about half of the responding teachers. No data was reported for the *K-8 Fine Arts Curriculum Guide* due to an error on the survey instrument.

In the Profile '99 study, slightly more than 60 percent of the secondary

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teachers surveyed reported having used their curriculum guides for long-term planning within the previous school year. The results from Profile 2004 seem to indicate a major decline in the regular use of curriculum guides at the secondary level. However, as the two surveys' questions and response options were not identical, it is impossible to be sure of that conclusion. Still, it should be noted that after almost two decades of revising curriculum guides and studying the process through Profile surveys, the largest single group of academy-level teachers still select “never” to indicate how frequently they use curriculum guides for long-term planning. In response to this pattern of non-use, particularly at the secondary level, the Secondary Advisory of the NADCC voted to suspend the production of further curriculum guides until they can give more in-depth study to

this phenomenon and develop a strategy for providing curriculum materials that will positively impact the work of NAD secondary teachers.

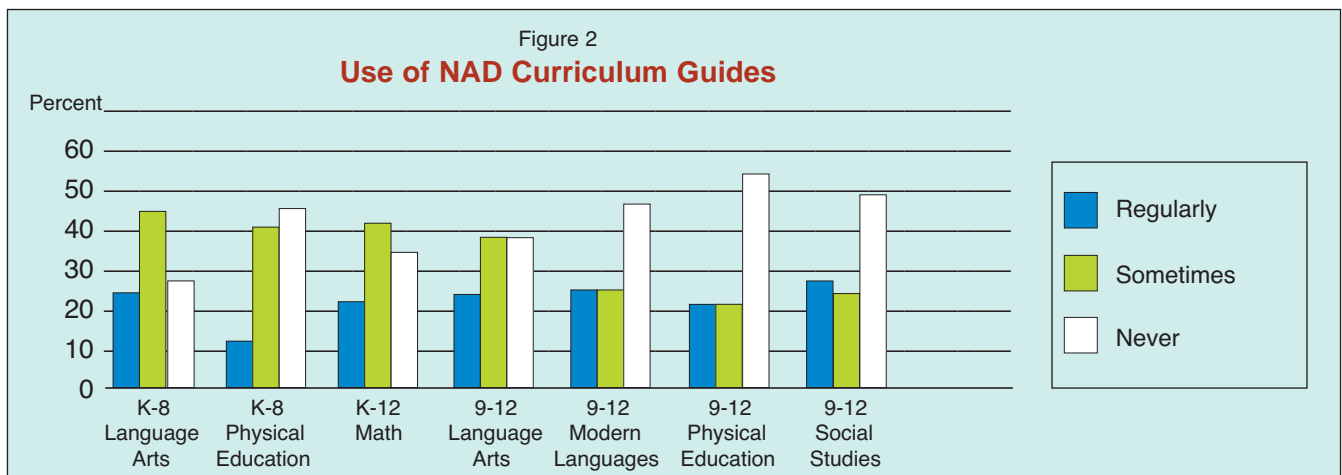
Quality of NAD Curriculum Guides

Three questions were included in the Profile 2004 survey to assess the quality of NAD-produced curriculum guides. Respondents were asked to rate these guides regarding usability, inclusion of best practices in the discipline, and support for the Adventist philosophy of education.

Usability of NAD Curriculum Guides

In an attempt to measure “teacher-friendliness,” the survey instrument asked teachers whether each curriculum guide was “easy to use.” This phrase was selected because in the Profile '99 study, academy teachers said curriculum guides could be improved by making them “easier to use.”

For the eight curriculum guides studied in Profile 2004, the overwhelming response to this item was “neutral.” With the exception of the *9-12 Language Arts Curriculum Guide*, more than half of the respondents selected the neutral response for the “easy to use” item. For the *9-12 Language Arts Curriculum Guide*, almost 44 percent of the respondents selected “neutral.” This ambivalent reaction by such a large number of teachers is consistent with their response to the question about the use of curriculum guides. If only about one-fourth of teachers regularly use the curriculum



guide, then the other 75 percent are probably unfamiliar with the guides and would therefore tend to be neutral in assessing their ease of use (see Figure 3).

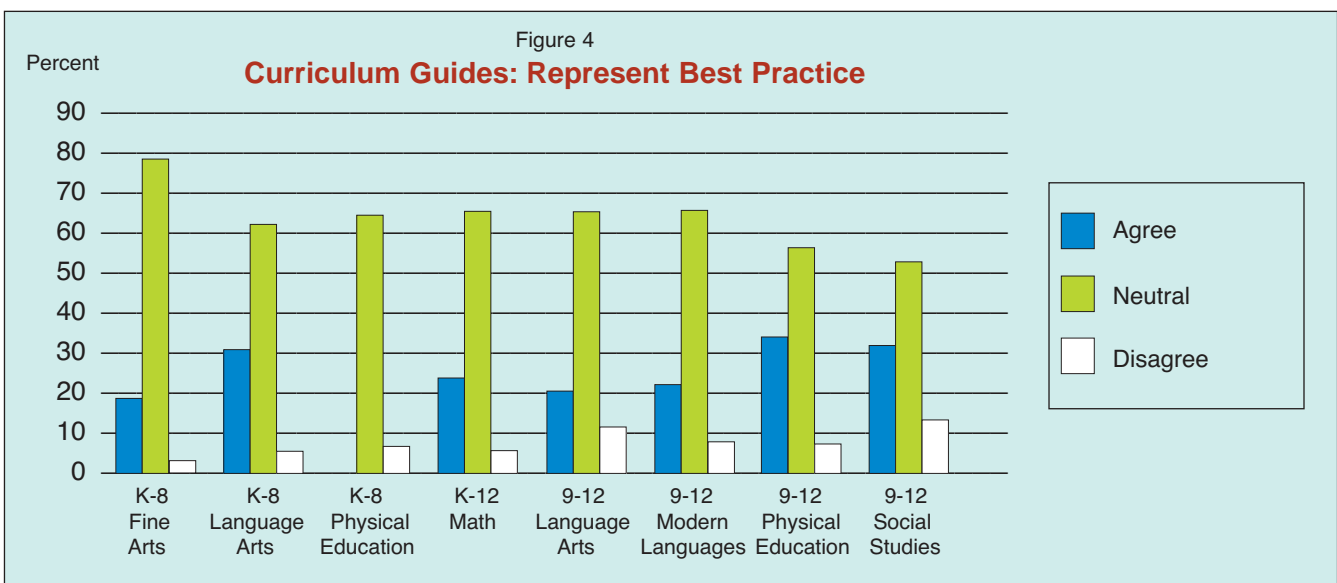
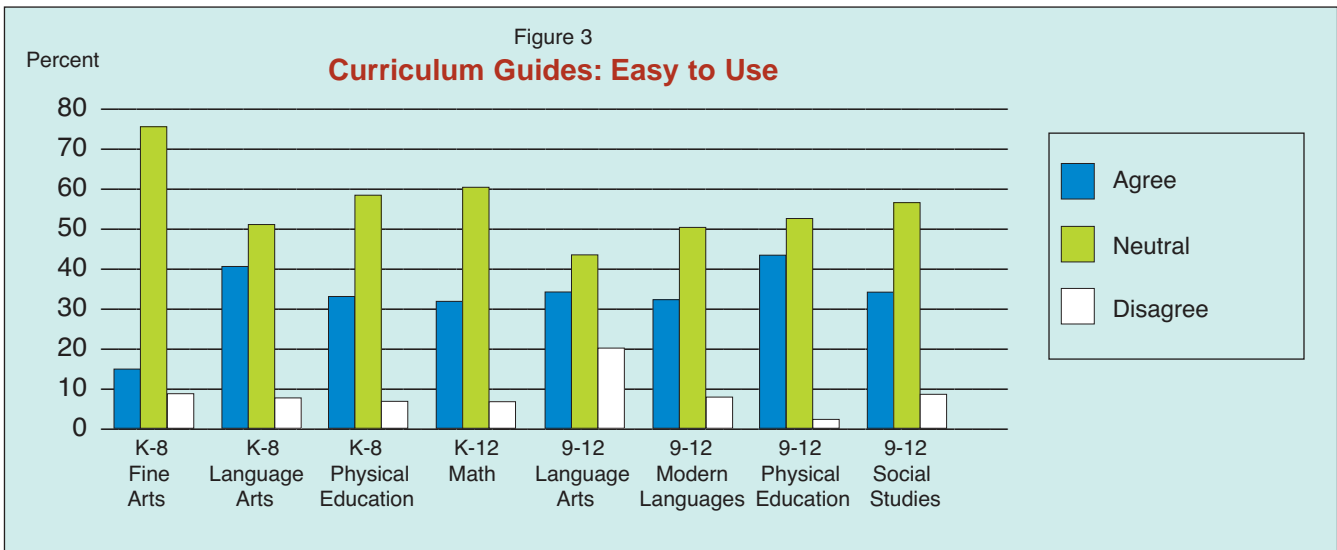
In looking at teachers' perceptions about the "ease of use" for all elementary curriculum guides, the language arts guide received the best ratings. At the 9-12 level, the secondary physical education curriculum guide received the best ratings. A disconcerting discovery was that fully one-fifth (20.8 percent) of secondary language arts teachers said their curriculum guide was not easy to use. Perhaps further investigation will reveal that some teachers who rated curriculum guides as difficult to use actually used them in-

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frequently, if at all, because they preferred other curriculum materials. It could also be that providing a "neutral" response option allowed the teachers to reply without giving the question much thought.

Support of Best Practices

When asked if the curriculum guides represented best practices in the discipline, again the teachers' most common response was "neutral." The three highest-rated curriculum guides in this area had just over 30 percent of respondents who said the *K-8 Language Arts Curriculum Guide*, the *9-12 Physical Education Curriculum Guide*, and the *9-12 Social Studies Curriculum Guide* represented best practices within their





disciplines. The *K-8 Language Arts Curriculum Guide* and the *9-12 Physical Education Curriculum Guide* were also the highest-rated guides in terms of ease of use (see Figure 4).

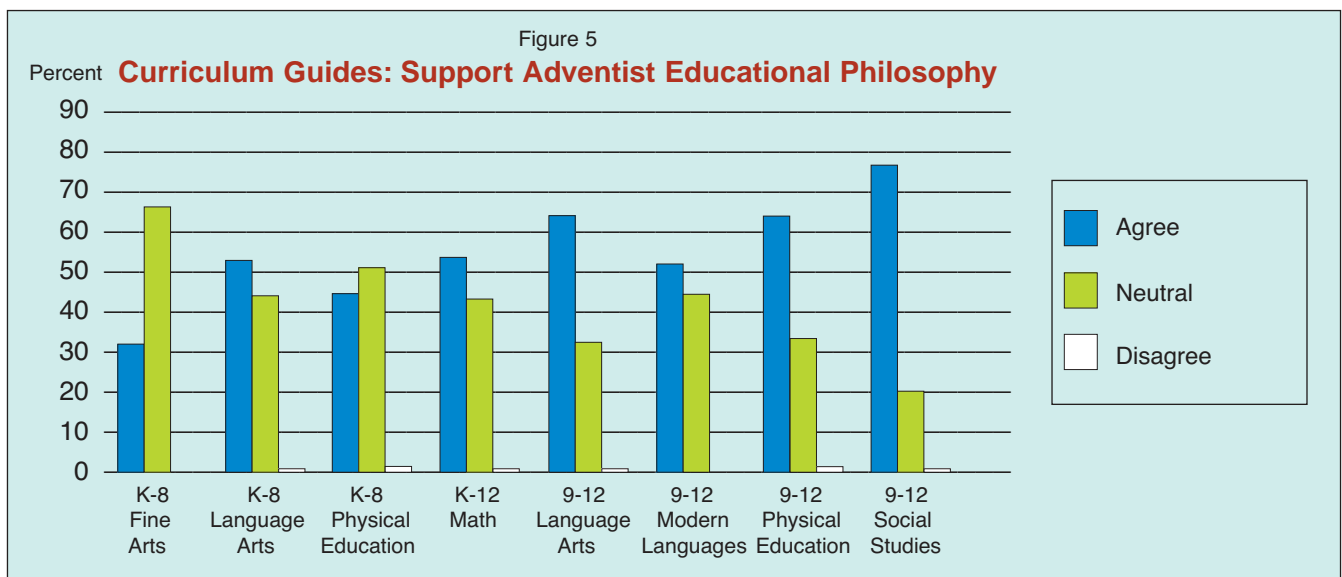
There are at least two possible explanations for the large number of neu-

tral responses to this item. One is that the teachers did not feel confident that they knew what best practices were in their discipline, and therefore felt obliged to either mark “neutral” or leave the question blank. Another possible explanation is that the teachers were not

familiar with the curriculum material and therefore didn’t know whether it represented best practices or not.

Support for the Adventist Philosophy of Education

Another item asked teachers



whether they thought the curriculum guides supported the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education. In contrast with the response patterns on the previous two items about curriculum quality, teachers responded positively to this question. More than half of the respondents believed six of the guides supported the educational philosophy espoused by the church. More than three-fourths of secondary social studies teachers believed their curriculum guide supported the Adventist philosophy. However, just under half of those rating the *K-8 Physical Education Curriculum Guide* said that it supported Adventist philosophy, and less than a third of elementary teachers agreed that the fine-arts guide supported Adventist philosophy. In general, secondary teachers were more likely to agree that their curriculum guides supported the Adventist philosophy of education, whereas elementary teachers were more likely to select a neutral response (see Figure 5).

Of the three quality indicators used in Profile 2004, teachers were more likely to say that the curriculum guides supported the Adventist philosophy of education than to rate them as easy to use or as representing best practices. Still, the large percentage of neutral responses to the philosophy item is a

cause for concern. This could indicate that many teachers believed the curricula materials did not effectively support the Adventist philosophy of education. Another possible interpretation is that the teachers were unsure of their own understanding of the Adventist philosophy of education. Or perhaps they had a theoretical understanding of the Adventist philosophy of education but were unable to discern its presence or absence in the guides. The explanation for these responses will require additional investigation. This “soft” response to whether NAD curriculum guides support an Adventist approach to education indicates that the church may be faced with a challenge in maintaining the unique environment and ethos of Adventist schools.

Correlations Between Use and Perceptions of Quality

The figures presented above are somewhat disconcerting at first glance. However, these descriptive statistics cannot reveal the subtle patterns of relationships that may exist within the teachers’ responses. To understand the responses more fully, we conducted a correlation analysis, using inferential statistics, to see if we could discover additional information. An analysis of teachers’ responses to these survey

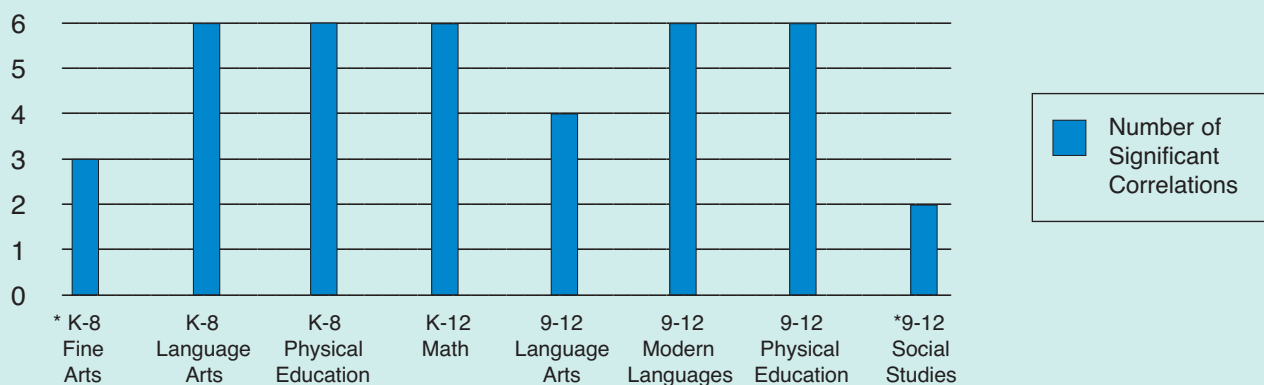
items produced multiple correlations between the teachers’ use of curriculum guides and their perceptions of the guides.

There were six possible correlations for each curriculum guide. Three correlations were possible between the use of curriculum guides and as (1) easy to use, (2) representing best practices, and (3) supporting the Adventist philosophy of education. Two correlations were possible between perceiving guides as easy to use and perceptions of guides as (1) representing best practice and (2) supporting the Adventist philosophy of education. A final correlation was possible between perceptions of the guides as representing best practice and supporting the Adventist philosophy of education.

Our inferential analysis of teachers’ perceptions about most NAD-developed curriculum guides revealed the following pattern: The teachers who **used** the curriculum material were also more likely to say the guide was *easy to use*, it *represented best practices*, and it *supported the Adventist philosophy of education*. This correlation pattern was evident for five NAD-produced curriculum guides: the *K-8 Language Arts Curriculum Guide*, the *K-8 Physical Education Curriculum Guide*, the *K-12 Mathematics Curriculum Guide*, the 9-12

Figure 6
Correlations Between Use and Perceptions of Curriculum Guides

Note: Six correlations were possible*



* For full statistical details on the correlations, visit <http://www.andrews.edu/burton/> or <http://circle.adventist.org>. Only three correlations were possible for the K-8 Fine Arts and 9-12 Social Studies guides due to missing data.

Modern Languages Curriculum Guide, and the *9-12 Physical Education Curriculum Guide*. Although the other curriculum guides did not show significant correlations for each of these items, all showed correlations between at least two items. Thus, in general, the more a teacher used a particular curriculum guide, the more likely he or she was to have a positive perception of its quality (see Figure 6).

Since the teachers who used the curriculum guides were more positive in rating the quality of the guides, it follows logically that ongoing training is needed related to the curriculum guides, their use, their inclusion of best practices, and their support of the Adventist philosophy of education. This training must start in the teacher-education programs in the North American Division colleges and universities. However, introduction to the curriculum guides in a single methods course is inadequate to ensure their use in the classroom. Training in the use of the curriculum guides needs to become a core component in the professional development cycle offered by local conferences and larger Adventist schools. But rather than focusing on curriculum documents in isolation, professional development needs to include training related to instruction and assessment, as well. Otherwise, such efforts are doomed to failure.**

Professional development should also focus on the unique features of Adventist education, including the implementation of our philosophy of education. Emphasis should be placed on demonstrating how these unique features and distinctive philosophical positions inform the selection of curriculum material, instructional methods, and assessment techniques at the classroom level. Ideally, this professional development will provide a bridge between philosophy and practice. This will help teachers understand the day-to-day implications of the philosophy of Adventist education.

In larger Adventist schools, principals need to become more active in communicating to teachers the need to obtain and use NAD curriculum

guides. Ongoing dialogue about their use, relationship to best practices, and Seventh-day Adventist distinctiveness will help teachers better understand foundational issues relating to the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education.

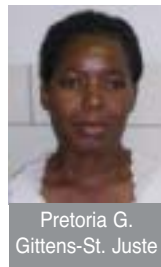
It appears that instead of conducting another Profile study at this time, the NADCC should sponsor an alternative investigation to answer the pertinent questions arising from Profile 2004. While seeking for answers, the researchers should engage teachers in dialogue individually and in small groups. This interview approach can serve to clarify issues that tend to “hide” in the survey approach.

North American Division education administrators and teachers desire to work in unison; the results of Profile 2004 can be used to develop initiatives that will cement this unity of purpose in a manner that will be beneficial to students and educators at all levels. ✍



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You can access these articles online at the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION Website: <http://education.gc.adventist.org/jae>.

** Larry Cuban, “The Lure of Curricular Reform and Its Pitiful History,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 75:2 (October 1993), p. 182; Bruce R. Joyce, Beverly Showers, and M. G. Fullan, *Student Achievement Through Staff Development* (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002).