

An Adventist Curriculum Needs Assessment:

A Global Secondary Teacher Survey

How do Seventh-day Adventist secondary teachers perceive the concept of integrating faith in learning? To what extent are they practicing faith integration? What prob-

lems keep them from doing so effectively? Are secondary teachers aware of Adventist curriculum resources? Which ones do they actually use—and how effective do they perceive them to be? How can needed resources best be delivered? How have resource awareness, use, and needs changed since the first global survey of Adventist secondary teachers in 1997?

To answer these questions, the General Conference Office of Education funded a global curriculum-needs assessment of Adventist secondary teachers. The Curriculum and Instruction Resource Center Linking Educators (CIRCLE), sponsored by the North American Division Office of Education, surveyed 265 Adventist secondary schools, half of those listed in the 2005 Adventist yearbook online. Responses were gathered by mail, e-mail, fax, and online in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. To determine how perceptions of faith integration and resource awareness, usage, and needs had changed in eight years, many of the questions from Paul Brantley's 1997 survey of 450 high school teachers in more than 50 countries,¹ were included in the 2005 survey.²

A Profile of the Respondents

Of the 837 respondents from 12 world divisions, 94 percent were Seventh-day Adventists (a decrease of 5 percent from 1997) with 62 percent having been church mem-

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bers for 20 or more years. Fifty-five percent were more than 40 years of age (compared to 43 percent in 1997). Forty percent had 1-10 years of teaching experience (down from 50 percent in 1997). Thirty-nine percent were female (a five percent increase over 1997), and 87 percent possessed a teaching degree or certification for their region. Survey recipients were asked to indicate their major area of teaching, as well as their other assignments. Both are shown in Figure 1.

The proportion of Adventist secondary teachers who said they had completed undergraduate studies at an Adventist college or university decreased from 62 percent in 1997 to 53 percent in 2005. But in 2005, nearly three-quarters of the 319 respondents who had attended Adventist secondary schools had continued their undergraduate education at an Adventist college or university. Seventy-one percent of teachers who had attended non-Adventist secondary schools had also enrolled in non-Adventist tertiary education. Similar percentages were found when comparing the type of undergraduate and graduate institutions attended. These findings suggest that greater support for Adventist elementary and secondary education may be the best marketing strategy for Adventist colleges and universities.

Perceptions About Faith Integration

A major emphasis in Adventist education is the integra-

By Glynis Bradfield, Pretoria Gittens-St. Juste, and Jerome Thayer

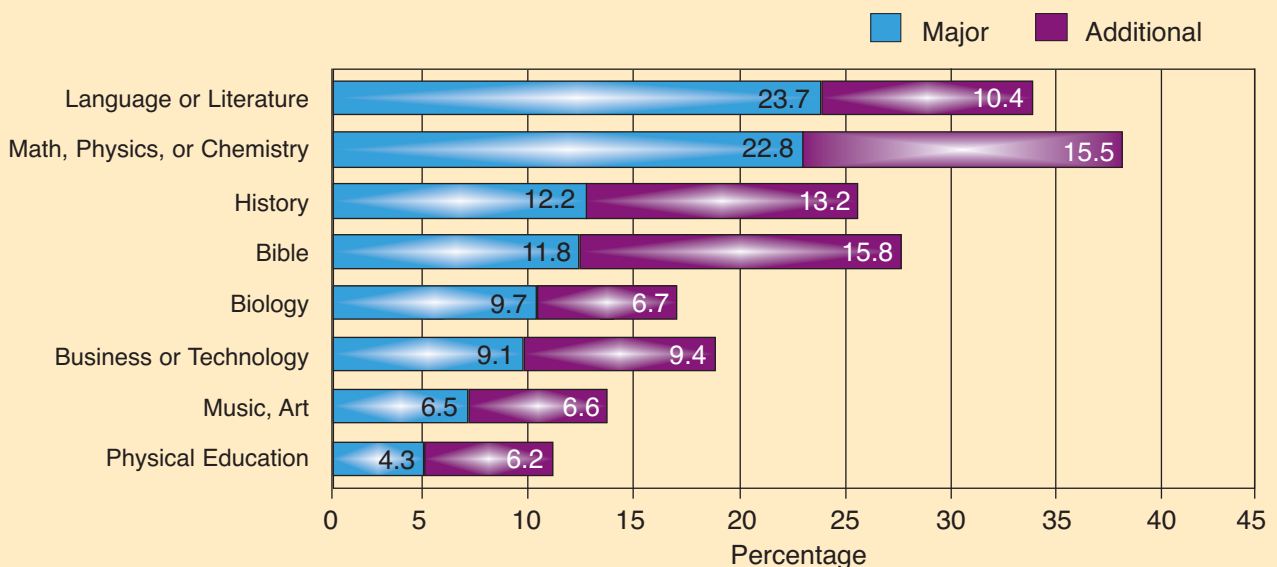


tion of faith and learning (IFL). Rasi defines this term as “a deliberate and systematic process of approaching the entire educational enterprise—both curricular and co-curricular—from a

Christian perspective. In a Seventh-day Adventist setting, its aim is to ensure that students, by the time they leave school, will have freely internalized biblical values and a view of knowl-

edge, life, and destiny that is Bible-based, Christ-centered, service-oriented, and kingdom-directed.”³ Seventy-nine percent of respondents said that they understood the term *integra-*

Figure 1
Respondents’ Teaching Assignments in 2005



[The survey's] findings suggest that greater support for Adventist elementary and secondary education may be the best marketing strategy for Adventist colleges and universities.

tion of faith. Seventy-two percent disagreed with the statement, "it is difficult to integrate biblical faith in the subjects I teach," and 79 percent indicated that it was realistic to make conscious plans to integrate faith in learning.

Eighty-four percent of respondents said they wanted to know more about faith integration. Three-quarters of these teachers were interested in receiving training on how to teach from the Adventist worldview. Seventy-four percent of teachers with a teaching degree or certification said they would like such training. Even more teachers without a teaching degree or certification (84 percent) indicated they would like in-service training. While 85 percent of teachers said that their school administration encouraged faith integration, only 47 percent indicated that their local education office had pre-

pared them to integrate faith in their teaching. Since the majority of the secondary teachers surveyed expressed interest in putting Adventist educational philosophy into practice and would welcome in-service training, education leaders would do well to invest in regular and practical IFL in-service training for teachers.

Faith Integration Practices

To what extent are secondary teachers integrating faith, and how are they doing this? Ninety percent of respondents indicated that living a Christlike life was the principal way they integrated faith in learning. A similarly high percentage, varying from 80 percent of music/art teachers to 98 percent of Bible teachers, said they often discussed Christian values in the classes they taught. These findings concur with those of a recent qualita-

tive study of 262 principals, chaplains, teachers, and students in 19 Adventist secondary schools in the South Pacific Division. In this study, teachers most frequently cited personal example as the key strategy to teaching Christian values and ideas.⁴

While 85 percent of teachers carried out some of their plans to integrate faith in their classes, only 58 percent agreed that most of the lessons they taught made specific reference to biblical ideas and themes. This varied greatly according to the respondents' major teaching assignment, as shown in Figure 2.

Fifty-eight percent of the teachers said they would be willing to share how they integrate faith in their teaching at a workshop, indicating that a slight majority were confident practitioners. While 61 percent of respondents said they regularly integrated faith in classes, responses varied by content area, from 46 percent of music/art teachers to 79 percent of Bible teachers.

Perceptions of the definition of faith integration and how to teach from an Adventist worldview were similar in the 1997 and 2005 studies. Brantley's 1997 observation still holds: "Whereas teachers overwhelmingly

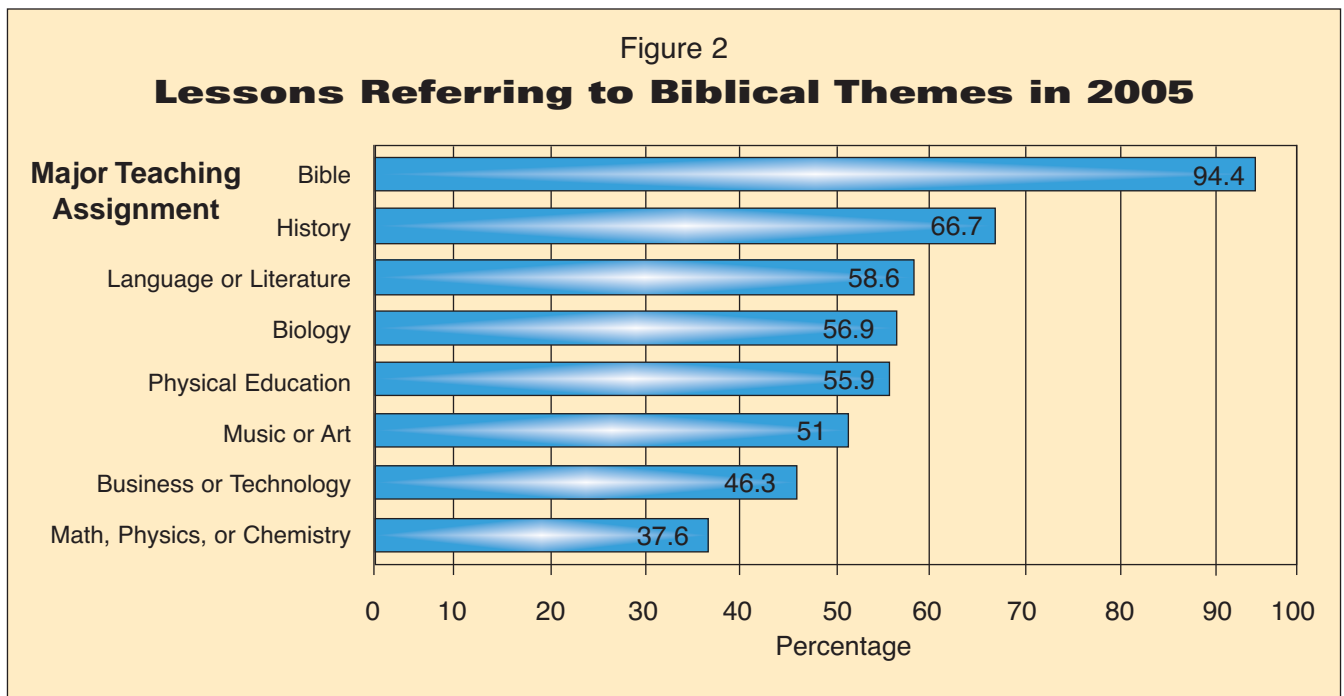
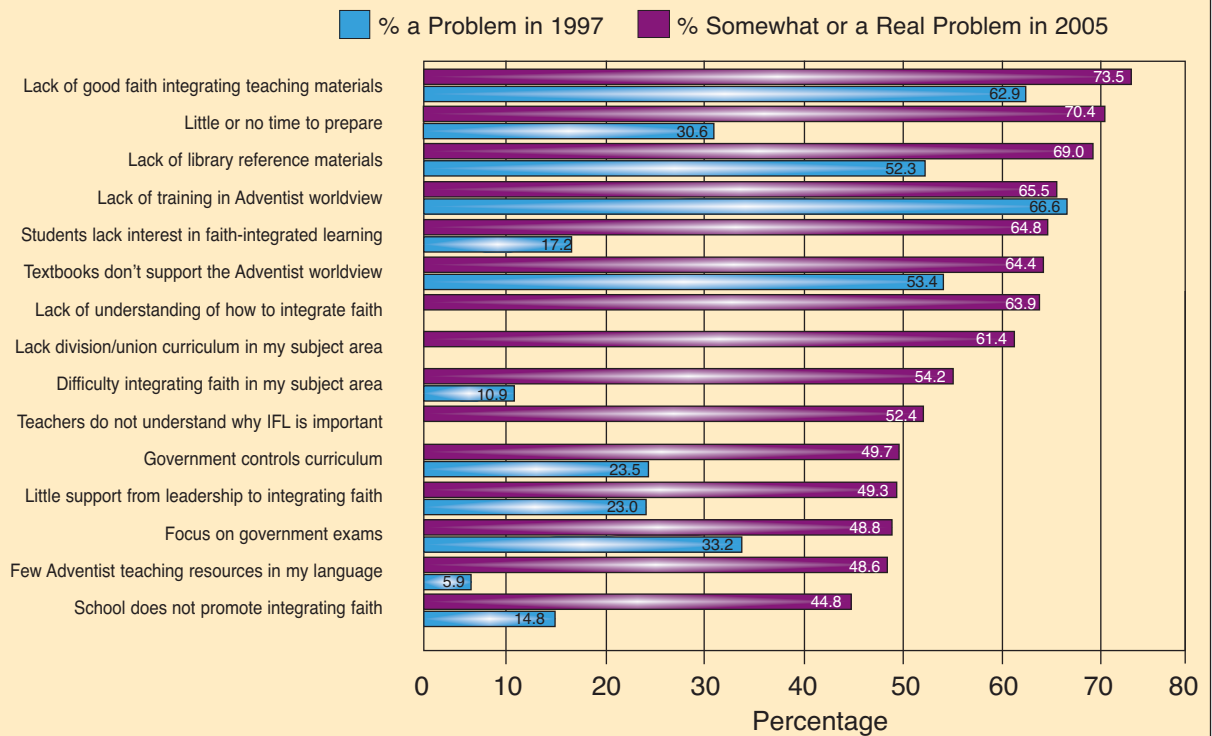


Figure 3
Factors Negatively Impacting the Integration of Faith in Learning



support the concept of integrating faith in their teaching, a smaller majority report significantly incorporating it into their lesson plans.”⁵

Qualitative responses to the 2005 secondary teacher survey echo the South Pacific Division research recommendation that teachers could more clearly verbalize their Adventist worldview and make more deliberate use of strategies for teaching values and ideas.⁶ A longitudinal study of individual teachers might provide more information on how teachers progress through the levels of deliberately implementing faith integration plans proposed by Korniejczuk.⁷ Such a study could help guide the development of pre-service and in-service training curricula that models and motivates biblical integration and teaching from the Adventist worldview.

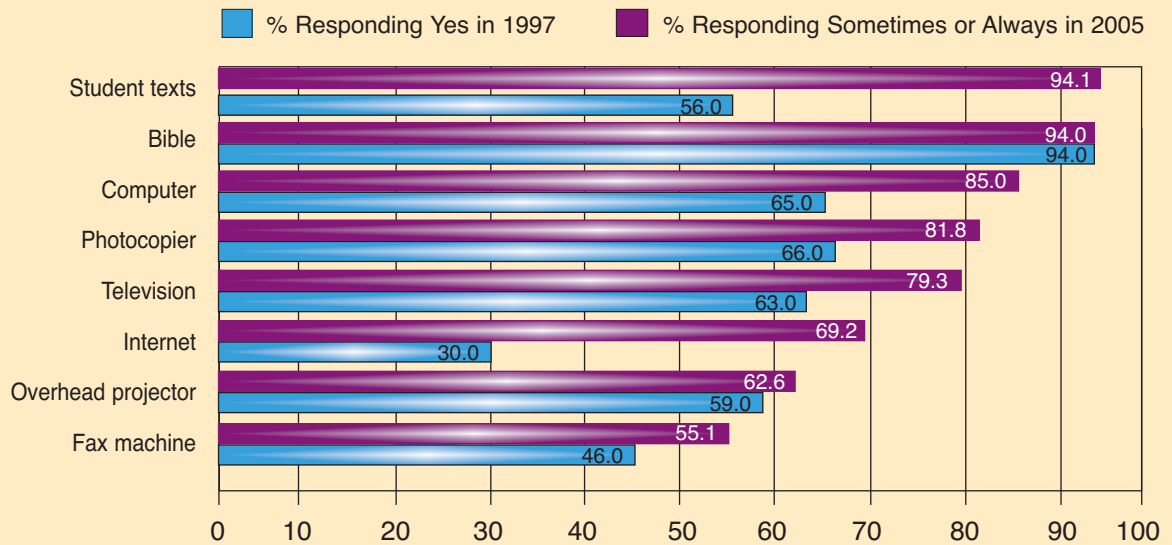
Perceived Obstacles to Integrating a Biblical Faith

It is not always easy to teach a distinctly Adventist curriculum. The study investigated the extent to which



Figure 4

Teacher Access to Resources



various factors negatively affected teachers' ability to integrate faith in learning. Findings for the 12 items included in both studies are shown in Figure 3.

In 1997, respondents checked items they regarded as a problem. In 2005, they had three options from which to choose: a real problem, somewhat of a problem, or no problem. The 1997 study surveyed teachers of five content areas in sampled schools, whereas the 2005 study invited all teachers to participate. While these differences may account for some of the variation, it is noteworthy that in 2005, 10 of the 15 listed factors were perceived as a problem by the majority of respondents. The *good news* is that three of the factors that most negatively affected teacher perceptions: lack of good IFL teaching materials (74 percent), lack of library materials (69 percent) and training to teach the Adventist worldview (66 percent) can readily be addressed through CIRCLE, the Adventist education resource clearinghouse that links educators across levels and world regions. Increasing awareness of CIRCLE, encouraging resource sharing, and distributing Adventist curriculum and other learning objects online could dramatically

change these results in the near future.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents said that student lack of interest

in faith-integrated learning was a problem in 2005, compared to only 17 percent in 1997. Focus on national

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How to Integrate Faith and Learning

Teachers interested in faith/learning integration approach their subjects from a biblical-Christian worldview perspective, discovering in the subject matter the themes and issues that naturally allow for an explicit connection between the curricular content, on the one hand, and the Christian faith, beliefs, and values on the other. Teachers highlight these connections in their course plans, lectures, student assignments, class discussions, thought questions in examinations, and other learning experiences, with the goal of leading their students to develop their own Bible-based view of knowledge, values, life's purpose, and destiny.

Educational administrators interested in fostering faith/learning integration set in motion an ongoing, campus-wide plan that involves both faculty and staff in selecting the beliefs and values that the institution wishes to convey to the students—based on the institutional statement of mission and vision—assigning responsibilities, providing the necessary resources, engaging all curricular and co-curricular activities, assessing the effectiveness of the plan, and making the necessary adjustments. This unified plan helps administrators to support initiatives and programs that foster the transmission of those beliefs and values and also to de-emphasize or discard those activities that are counter-productive.

Humberto M. Rasi

http://www.aiias.edu/ict/ifl_definition.html

Eighty-four percent of respondents said they wanted to know more about faith integration.

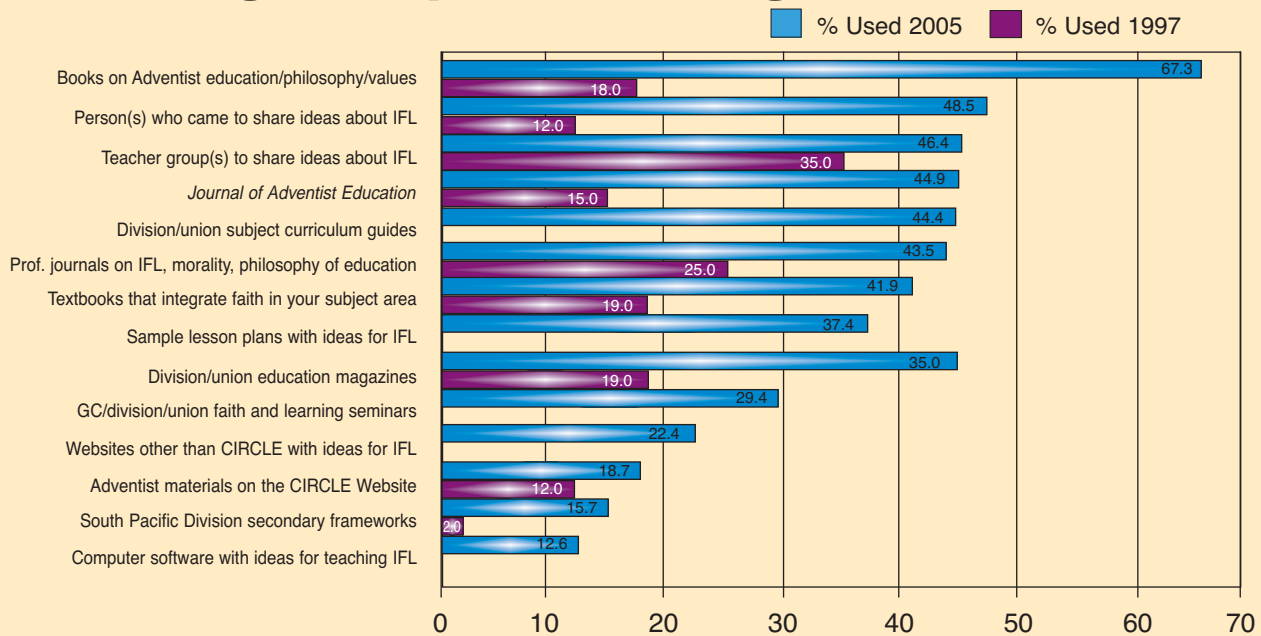
exams, government control of curriculum, and few Adventist resources in the local language were perceived as a problem by two-thirds of teachers in all divisions other than North America. Lack of time was a problem for 70 percent of teachers in 2005, more than double the response in 1997. Nine qualitative comments cited teacher assignment to extracurricular activities, scheduling issues, and low salaries necessitating additional work as reasons for lack of time. Difficulty integrating faith in a specific content area was perceived as a problem for 54 percent of respondents in 2005, compared to 11 percent of teachers in 1997.

New Ways to Deliver Adventist Education Resources

How can resources best be deliv-

Figure 5

Percentage of Repondents Using Listed Resources



ered? Almost all listed resources were more readily available in 2005 than in 1997, as shown in Figure 4. In 2005, secondary teachers were asked whether resources were available always, sometimes, or never (the figure combines “always” and “sometimes” responses). In 1997, those surveyed were asked to check items that were available anytime they wished to use them in their teaching.

In 2005, nearly 70 percent of all high school teachers had access to the Internet sometimes or always. The four divisions without reliable access to fax, e-mail, or the Internet reported limited access to almost all other listed resources as well. The dramatic increase in Internet access suggests that this will be an increasingly effective way to deliver faith integration resources to secondary teachers.

Improved Resource Distribution Is Essential

Given a list of 14 resources, respondents were asked which ones they actually used to integrate a biblical faith in learning, and how helpful they perceived each to be. Sixty-seven percent of respondents had used books⁸ on Adventist education, philosophy, and values. All other resources were used by less than half of those responding to these questions, with consider-

able regional variations. Figure 5 shows improvement in the use of all nine of the resources that appeared in both of the surveys. To best utilize major investments in the development of biblical integration tools for teachers, specific plans for resource distribution, promotion, and in-service training are essential.

Used Resources Perceived as Helpful

How effective do secondary teachers regard the resources they employ? Sixty-nine to 92 percent of respondents who *actually used* the listed resources rated them as helpful or very helpful, as shown in Figure 6. The *Profile 2004* study of North American Division teachers, education administrators, and teacher educators reported similar findings, with those who actually used the division’s curriculum guides considering them to be easy to use, and as reasonably reflecting the philosophy of Adventist education.⁹

Notably, “persons who came to share IFL ideas” and “teacher groups to share IFL ideas,” while available to less than half of teachers in 2005, were ranked as helpful or very helpful by 86 and 92 percent of the teachers who had experienced this support. Mentoring and training with practical ideas that work are key to improving teach-

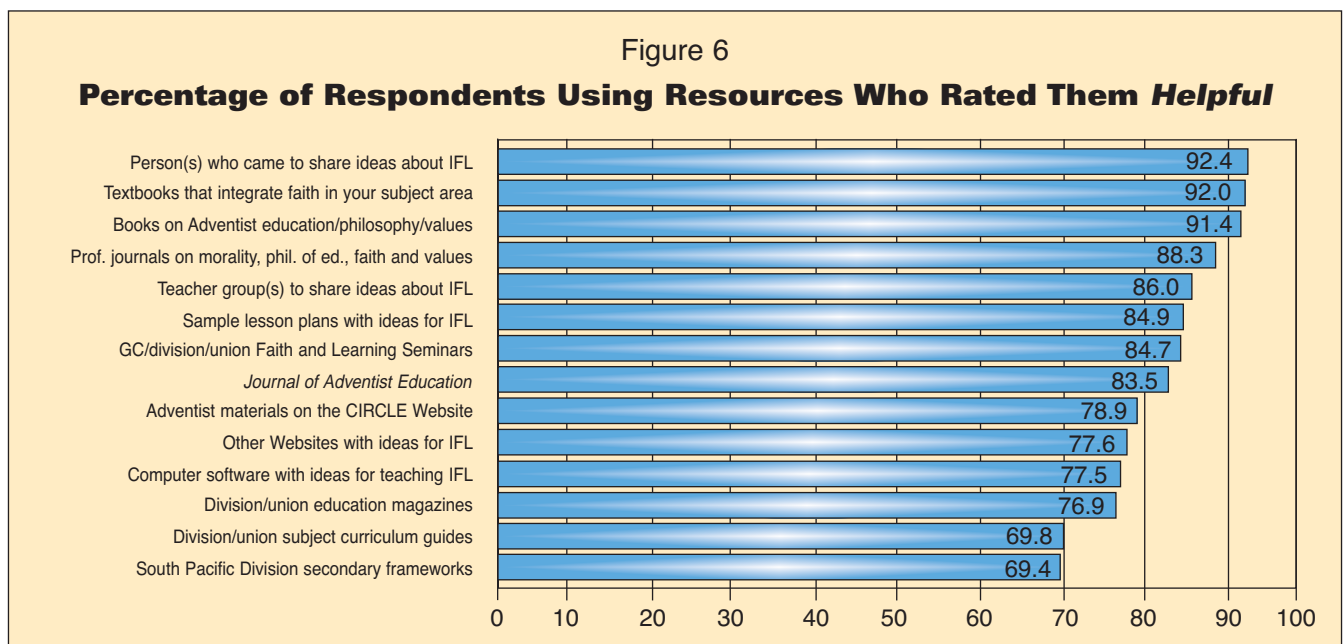
ers’ skills in sharing the Adventist worldview.

Teachers who had *not* used the listed resources were asked how useful each of these same 14 items would be *if* they were available. The majority of this group said that each item would be useful or definitely useful if available, with the highest percentage of positive responses in divisions with the fewest resources. More than two-thirds (66 percent to 74 percent) of these teachers said that textbooks, software, lesson plans, curriculum guides, presenters and teacher groups that share ideas, in-service training seminars, and Websites would be helpful.

Recommendations

Building redemption-oriented schools of excellence,¹⁰ “demands the most devoted, faithful workers and the very best methods of labor in order that a strong influence for Christ and the truth may be constantly exerted.”¹¹ Despite the problems noted above, secondary teachers said that training and resources to prepare students to live the Adventist faith would be useful if available. Education administrators and teacher educators are therefore encouraged to:

1. Re-emphasize the role of secondary education in providing students to Adventist higher education;



2. Promote the use of Adventist college/university campuses in orienting secondary teachers to the Adventist philosophy of education, and as a venue for continuing education;

3. Link certification and credentialing of secondary teachers globally to training in and commitment to the integration of faith;

4. Develop and implement an IFL training-of-trainers process and curriculum¹²;

5. Build a peer-mentoring network so Adventist educators at various levels can regularly share ideas and methods to integrate faith in their disciplines; and

6. Effectively use available technology to disseminate critical Adventist education resources and to develop and market highly engaging computer-based learning packages or distance-learning opportunities to prepare Adventist teachers to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ. ✍



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NOTES AND REFERENCES



Jerome Thayer

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2. The full report presented to the General Conference and world division education directors is available at <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=7044>.

3. Humberto M. Rasi, "The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Working Definition," *The Institute for Christian Teaching*. http://www.aiias.edu/ict/vol_10/10cc_239-255.htm.

While 85 percent of teachers carried out some of their plans to integrate faith in their classes, only 58 percent agreed that most of the lessons they taught made specific reference to biblical ideas and themes.

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5. Brantley, op cit., p. 13.

6. Hill, op cit.

7. Raquel Bouvet de Korniejczuk, "The Teacher as Agent in Integrating Faith and Learning: The Process of Deliberate Teacher Imple-

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8. While the survey question did not specifically list the Spirit of Prophecy books, qualitative comments indicate this may be what most teachers had in mind when answering this question. Forty-two percent of the 85 respondents who listed other resources that had been useful in preparing to teach from an Adventist worldview named the Bible and Ellen White's books on education primarily.

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10. C. Garland Dulan, "Future Directions in Higher Education," *Journal of Adventist Education* 65:3 (February/March 2003), p. 3: <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=4439>.

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12. Two recommended biblical integration in-service training options currently available: William Green, Larry Burton, Rita Henriquez-Green, and Constance C. Nwosu, *The Act of Integrating Faith and Learning: A Pedagogical Guide* (Mandeville, Jamaica: Synergy Plus, Inc., 2000); Ken Weslake, *Making Adventist Schools Distinctive* (Sydney, Australia: South Pacific Division, 2005): <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=6551>.

