

Portrait of Adventist Educators

A Survey of Recent Research

By Gail Taylor Rice

Research on Adventist schools has increased dramatically in the past few years. Doctoral dissertations in the early 1980s at the Loma Linda University School of Education investigated the motivation and satisfaction of thousands of respondents.¹ The denominationally sponsored Seltzer Daley study also yielded valuable data. We have looked at Adventist youth, the effects of Adventist schooling, the influence of parents, pastors, and teachers.

We are now examining the attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and characteristics of teachers and administrators in Adventist schools. What are these educators really like? What motivates them? How satisfied are they? What frustrates them? What will keep them in the system?

The most recent attempt to answer these questions is just being completed. Valuegenesis—the national research project directed by Bailey Gillespie and a team of Adventist educators and researchers²—draws upon the resources of Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota, a major research organization dedicated to studying values and religion in American youth. According to Search's directors,³ this study is "unprecedented in size and scope... a research model."⁴ The study provides a wealth of information, not only about Adventist young people, their values, faith, commitment, and denominational loyalty, but also about their homes, churches, schools, and significant adults.

The study focused on students in grades 6 to 12. However, it also surveyed teachers and administrators in Adventist schools. The sample was selected to

represent 20 percent of all North American Adventist schools. Stratification and oversampling ensured adequate representation from different types of schools and geographic areas. More than 15,000 questionnaires were analyzed.

The principal and up to four randomly selected teachers from each school were asked to respond to the lengthy survey instrument, which included about 400 questions.⁵

The study incorporated responses from approximately 600 teachers and administrators in Adventist schools at the elementary and secondary levels. The Valuegenesis study did not survey postsecondary students or teachers.

Quality of Adventist Schools

Recent studies have shown that parents and students want Adventist schools to provide high quality education.⁶ Are our schools succeeding in this area? How much do Adventists know about the level of quality provided by the church's educational system?

Some common measures of quality in schools include (1) academic preparation of the faculty, (2) time spent on homework, (3) student scores on national standardized tests, (4) percentage of high school graduates who attend college, (5) teacher-student ratio, and (6) perceptions of quality by teachers and staff.

Advanced Degrees

Fewer K-12 teachers in Adventist schools reported having a postbaccalaureate degree (45 percent) than did teachers in Catholic schools (52 percent), or public schools (50 percent).⁷

Teachers in Adventist schools cite fewer salary and job security benefits

from obtaining advanced degrees than do teachers in the public sector. One teacher wrote, in response to a questionnaire on motivation, "[There is] little financial reward for teachers who gain an M.A. versus the cost to obtain it."⁸

If employing agencies wish their instructional staff to study for advanced degrees, they must provide more incentives. If all of our teachers held excellent academic credentials this would strengthen support for and enrollment in Adventist schools, increase teacher morale, and improve teachers' chances for major salary increases. Most important of all, members would perceive and respect teachers as professionals. We cannot market our product to a constituency that demands quality if our teachers have less education than those in competing schools.

Minority Representation

Adventist schools can be proud of the number of minority teachers in their schools. The teaching staffs of Adventist schools more accurately reflect the expanding presence of minorities in North America than do other teaching populations. Seventeen percent of the Adventist teaching population are minorities, compared with only 5 percent of Catholic teachers and 10 percent of public school teachers.

What are Adventist educators really like? What motivates them?

Homework

The amount of time students spend doing homework is considered a valid measure of school quality by many educators. Throughout the first seven grades students in Adventist schools consistently indicate more hours spent on homework than do those in public schools. In the 10th through 12th grades, more than twice as many students in Adventist schools (63-66 percent) report spending six hours or more on homework per week than do students in public schools (30-32 percent).

College Attendance of Graduates

Another indicator of school quality is enrollment in advanced education. Sixty-six percent of Adventist academy graduates enter a four-year college or university following graduation. During the past decade, an average of 54.7 percent of public school students and 51

percent of Catholic school graduates went directly to college.⁹

Course Offerings

Adventist academies compare favorably to public and Catholic high schools in the availability of advanced courses, such as family life or sexuality education, ethnic history and culture courses, chemistry, and mathematics.

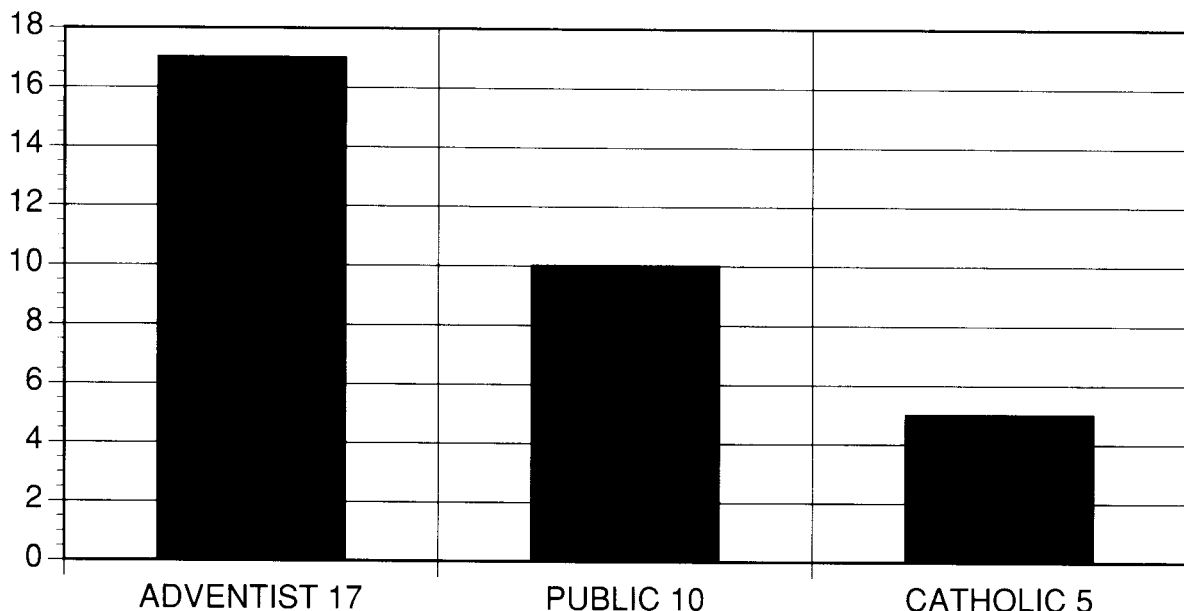
However, Adventist schools compared poorly in advanced language offerings. Table 2 indicates the percentage of academies offering third-year language courses.

Teachers' Perceptions

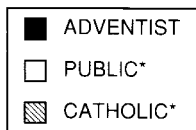
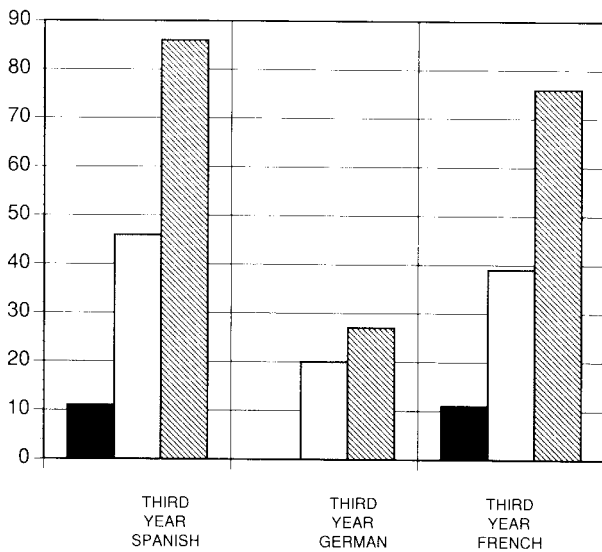
School administrators and teachers were asked to evaluate important indicators of quality in Adventist schools. They gave very positive assessments. Table 3 shows their responses to questions regarding religious education, academic programs, student ability, and academic quality of teachers.

Adventist education can boast of a number of indicators of excellence. Individual schools can point to an unusually low teacher-student ratio. Schools can make public their scores on national standardized tests, which generally are well above the average. The high numbers of academy graduates entering college, the minority representation

TABLE 1 - PERCENTAGE OF FACULTY FROM MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS IN THREE TYPES OF SCHOOLS

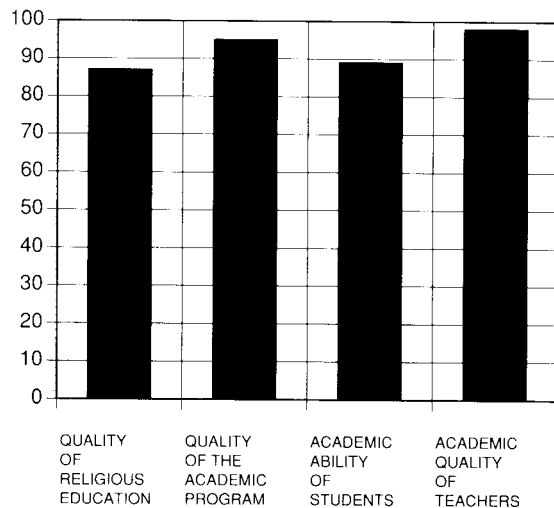


**TABLE 2 - THIRD-YEAR LANGUAGE COURSE OFFERINGS
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**



*Benson, et al.
The Catholic High School
pages 52, 53

**TABLE 3 - ADVENTIST TEACHERS' AND
ADMINISTRATORS RATINGS OF
ACADEMIC QUALITY IN THEIR SCHOOLS**



PERCENT
RATED AS
GOOD OR
EXCELLENT

of Adventist teachers, as well as educators and administrators' perceptions of high quality can also be cited.

Areas of concern include lack of advanced course offerings in languages and the lower level of academic preparation by Adventist faculty.

Teacher Motivation/Satisfaction

Some Adventist administrators have expressed concern regarding the rather high teacher turnover rate at the K-12 level. To investigate this, researchers sought to answer the following questions: Why do teachers choose to work in Adventist schools? What motivates them? How happy are they in their current jobs? Are Adventist teachers more dissatisfied than their counterparts in public and parochial schools?

Adventist teachers and administrators were given a list of 11 possible reasons for teaching in an Adventist school. The

How much do Adventists know about the level of quality provided by the church's educational system?

survey then asked them to choose which item corresponded with their most important motivation, and which was a secondary reason for teaching in the system. Table 4 shows the ranking and percentages of teachers who chose each item as their major reason for teaching in an Adventist school.

More than two-thirds of those sur-

veyed saw teaching in an Adventist school as God's choice for their lives or viewed teaching as a ministry. One teacher wrote on an earlier survey, "As a teacher this is one of my greatest motivating factors—I know I am doing one of the greatest tasks God could ask me to do."¹² Truly, Adventist teachers feel "called to their ministries," just as pastors do.

Table 5 compares Adventist teachers' commitment to values clarification and religious education with a similar sample of teachers in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools employ more non-members on their teaching staffs than do Adventists. This might partially account for the statistical differences in Table 5. Nonetheless, Adventist teachers certainly stand out in their concern for values clarification, personal witnessing, and religious instruction, no matter what their discipline. One teacher wrote, "The most enjoyable part of my job is the one-to-one communication I have with many students. Telling others about how much I love my Jesus is most important to me."

Respect

Not all Adventist teachers feel respected by other church members and by their local pastors. Thirty-nine percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement, "As a teacher, I do not feel respected by Adventists." And 27 percent agreed with the statement, "I do not feel supported by local Adventist pastors." On a separate questionnaire item, 32 percent of the teachers rated pastoral support as either poor or fair.

What about overall satisfaction? Table 6 compares the three groups of teachers' general satisfaction in two areas: teaching, and salary and benefits.

The future of Adventist education—indeed, the future of the church—depends to a large extent on what happens in the Adventist school. We must address the real agony that results when teacher job satisfaction is low.

Only 24 percent of Adventist teachers are "very satisfied" with their current teaching jobs. Compare that with 42 percent of teachers in Catholic schools and 50 percent of public school teachers. This is especially significant when one considers the tremendous frustrations that many public school educators face with increased disciplinary concerns, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang problems.

Only six percent of Adventist K-12 teachers feel "very satisfied" with their salary and benefits, while a third say they are "satisfied." This is a distressingly lower percentage than that of Catholic teachers, of whom about half expressed satisfaction with their salary and

TABLE 4 - ADVENTIST TEACHERS' MOTIVATIONS FOR TEACHING

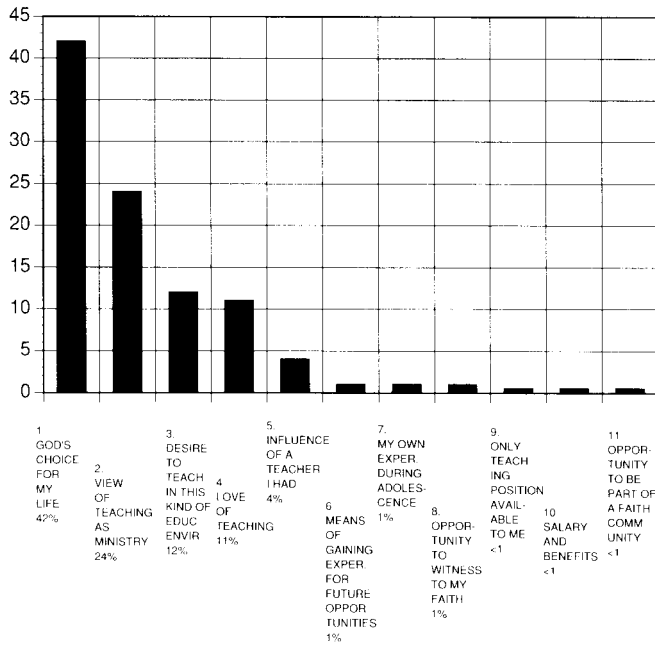
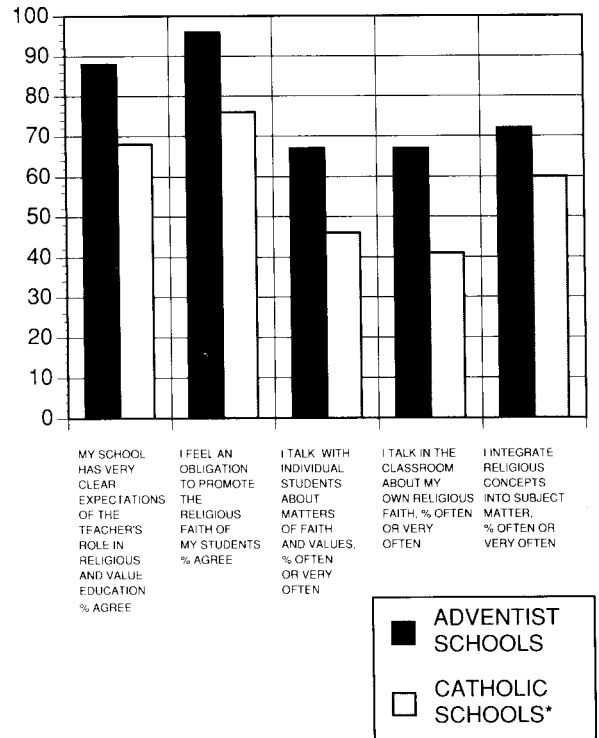


TABLE 5 - ADVENTIST AND CATHOLIC TEACHERS' COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



* Benson and Guerra, Sharing the Faith, p. 48

TABLE 6 - TEACHERS' RATINGS OF JOB SATISFACTION¹³

	Adventist Schools	Catholic Schools	Public Schools
Overall, how satisfied are you with your current teaching job?			
Satisfied	52	43	30
Very satisfied	24	42	50
Total	76	85	80
How do you feel about your salary and benefits?			
Satisfied	33	42	—
Very satisfied	6	7	—
Total	39	49	—

benefits.

Comments from Adventist teachers relating to this point include "Secondary teachers at the present are paid far less than their value—sure it is God's work, but so is a minister's whose salary is much higher." And "At present we seem to have a problem, as an experienced teacher with an M.A. is often paid less than a ministerial intern."¹⁶

Conclusions

The Adventist Church is to be commended for investing in the future by taking an in-depth look at its youth and their families, church environments, and schools. We now have the necessary information to make needed changes and to develop and maintain an excellent educational system that receives strong support from its constituency.

Positive Areas

1. We have a tremendously dedicated, sacrificing, involved teaching faculty in our schools. They are anxious to be used by the Lord to help our young people in all areas of their development. Our teachers have an evangelistic zeal that has not been adequately tapped—particularly in the area of drawing into our fellowship non-Adventist young people who might want to attend our schools.

2. We have teachers and administrators who are optimistic in their perceptions and in their ideas of what is possible in our school system. In the vast

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majority of cases, those closest to the academic experience perceive it to be good or excellent.

3. Recent studies indicate that in many areas Adventist schools are doing an excellent job.

Areas Needing Further Study or Action

The Project Affirmation Taskforce Report on Academic Quality and Valued Educators has formulated a number of recommendations. In light of the initial data review, the following areas seem especially important:

1. We need to increase the number of K-12 teachers with advanced degrees and appropriate certifications. The qual-

ity of our academic programs depends on the qualifications of our faculty. Salary scales must reward more than just experience and commitment.

All of our teachers should upgrade their education on a regular basis. Perhaps some of the teacher burnout that occurs is related to the lack of stimulation that teachers would receive through interaction with other students in graduate school classes.

2. We must provide more foreign language classes at the elementary level, as well as the opportunity for advanced study in at least one language at the secondary level. American society, concerned over cultural illiteracy, is increasingly focusing on the need for language skills. The ongoing educational reform movement seems to be giving special attention to this issue. If Adventist schools want to provide quality education, they must address this trend. We're woefully behind at present.

3. We must find ways to enhance the status of our educators in the eyes of church members and pastors. While dramatic improvement has occurred in certain locations, we still need to foster an overall climate of cooperation and respect.

One teacher wrote, "It's a nationwide 'fad' for teachers to be considered the lowest of the low—the scapegoat for kids' problems—and SDA people are no different! Consequently, many good teachers are and will be lost to other careers. I really feel this is worse in SDA academies than in public schools!"¹⁷

If we increase the academic preparation of our teachers, as well as their salaries and benefits, we will see corresponding improvements in the value placed upon them as professionals serving the church. Only when we pay our teachers the equivalent of their colleagues will we find that they are valued and respected as they deserve to be. □

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TEACHER BURNOUT: COPING STRATEGIES FOR ADVENTIST EDUCATORS

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cooperative strategy will benefit everyone involved in the learning program.

Finally, the most important resource for coping with stress and burnout is trusting in divine power. More than a century ago Ellen White penned these lines:

Teachers meet with many trials. Discouragements press upon them as they see their efforts are not always appreciated by their pupils...Satan strives to afflict them with bodily infirmities, hoping to lead them to murmur against God, to forget His goodness, His mercy, His love... But He lays on them no burden greater than they are able to bear. And He declares "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5.¹⁶

Even if all else fails, teachers have a Friend and Counselor in the Master Teacher. A life attuned to Him helps to banish burnout and bring encouragement to the soul. □

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- ¹² White, *The Ministry of Healing*.
- ¹³ Paul S. Brantley, "N.E.W.S.T.A.R.T. Personal Record," Unpublished document.
- ¹⁴ Sparks, p. 34.
- ¹⁵ Candice Carlile, "Reading Teacher Burnout: The Supervisor Can Help," *Journal of Reading*, 28:7 (Apr. 1985), pp. 590-593.
- ¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn. 1905), p. 226.

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² Members of the research advisory team include Bailey Gillespie, Won Kil Yoon, Gail Rice, Stuart Tyner, Jan Kuzma, Roger Dudley, Steve Case, Edwin Hernandez, Tom Smith, Melvin Davis, and Marvin Nygaard.

³ Search directors include Merton Strommen, Peter Benson, Michael Donahue, and others of national renown. Search has directed numerous studies of church youth, including studies of youth from Catholic, Lutheran, Southern Baptist, and other denominations. They have also conducted studies of public school youth.

⁴ Peter L. Benson and Michael J. Donahue, "Valuegenesis: Report 1—A Study of the Influence of Family, Church, and School on the Faith and Values of Adventist Youth," 1990, p. 1.

⁵ Search Institute, which collected the Valuegenesis data, reports a 55 percent response from the original 271 schools invited to participate in the main sample and an 86 percent response from the 73 senior academy oversample. The response rate is respectable, considering the national participation rate for studies of this type, which currently stands at about 60 percent.

Adventist schools can be proud of the number of minority teachers in their schools.

⁶ Unpublished report of the Seltzer Daley Research (Washington, D.C.: Board of Higher Education, North American Division, 1988).

⁷ Robert J. Yeager, Peter L. Benson, Michael J. Guerra, and Bruno V. Manno, *The Catholic High School: A National Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1985), p. 46.

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¹⁰ Statistics for Catholic and public schools are taken from Yeager and Benson, pp. 52, 53.

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¹⁴ Gifford, p. 405.

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¹⁶ Gifford, p. 411.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

MISSION STORIES AND THE ADVENTIST FUTURE

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reached an apex on March 3, 1913, when the Puno-based bishop personally led a mob of 200 men, on horseback, to expel the Protestant heretics.³⁰ After wreaking havoc at the Camacho and Stahl homes (the inhabitants being away at the time), the mob lashed together eight Adventist believers with leather thongs and led them off to prison in the dead of night.

Fernando's account notes how these bound prisoners were repeatedly assaulted by man and beast as they stumbled the 21 miles to the prison on foot, "hatless and coatless."³¹ The subsequent acquittal and release of the prisoners does not end the story. Commentators on the history of religious liberty in Peru say this incident provided the impetus for a 1915 constitutional amendment guaranteeing freedom of religious expression.³²

De jure change does not, of course, translate immediately into *de facto* reform. As the Adventist schools multiplied, so did the opposition to them. On numerous occasions, the Stahls barely escaped with their lives. Scores of believers were murdered, schoolhouses were burned, Adventist teachers were assaulted, and at least one student was reported to have been beaten to death after enrolling in an Adventist school.

Conservative newspapers catalogued alleged misdeeds of the Adventists. The perceived threats to the social order presented by these schools are explicitly described in a *memorial* filed from Azangaro in 1923:

These false evangelical schools bring together daily large numbers of suggestible individuals of suspect social desires, and ignorant Indians attracted through false and fantastic premises.

At these schools they teach the most depraved and heretical practices, and preach a war of extermination against faithful Catholics and the Church itself.

At these schools they work a labor of dissolution. They spread doctrines of the most crimonism. They attempt to destroy patriotism and the spirit of the nation by inculcating the most extreme and dangerous socialist concepts of social organization, class and racial equality, and unbounded liberty in the ignorant masses...

At these schools, finally, they openly attack our property system.³³

Near the end of the Stahls' stay in the *altiplano*, Puno progressives called for a commission to investigate local abuses and institute reforms, a call that was