

Valuegenesis Report III

Where Do We Go From Here?

A “retrospectoscope” would be one of the most useful educational tools anyone could invent. If we could look back before we began, we might make fewer mistakes and unwise plans. With such a device we could build a better future for Adventist education. Teachers would know what to teach, when to teach it, and how to do so most effectively. Parents would understand their children’s needs, and administrators could make insightful decisions to move their schools creatively and effectively into the next century.

Adventist education has an opportunity to use the Valuegenesis data base for just such forward-looking decision making. This massive study is our own personal “retrospectoscope.” The third report in the Valuegenesis series summarizes information on school quality. It was gleaned from in-depth questionnaires from personnel in 204 schools chosen as representative of all K-12 schools in the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

For this report, the researchers created a 32-item index to analyze school quality. The 32 indicators of school quality fall into 10 areas: staff training; commitment to Adventism; religious education program; academic program; climate: caring community, effective discipline, and enthusiasm; resources; mission and governance; and systems of support. Adventist schools score well on about 18 of the 32 indicators, and some 27 percent of schools have 20 or more of these factors.*

The three school quality indicators most commonly found among Adventist schools are these:

- “Teachers feel an obligation to promote the faith” of students.

Adventist schools in North America score well on about 18 of 32 indicators of school quality.

- The “school’s mission is widely shared,” and
- “Teachers are committed to Adventism.”

However, three very central issues in Adventist education seem to be seldom accomplished: “teachers refrain from putting down students,” “Students avoid at-risk behavior,” and “Students benefit from the religious education program.” This last assertion is based on the finding that, in the vast majority of schools, less than 75 percent of students claim that religious education programs help them to grow in faith. These sobering results from *Valuegenesis III* call for serious reflection.

What Has Valuegenesis Taught Us?

The Valuegenesis researchers suggest that we have learned the following:

1. Our educational system is in a state of flux. We share the concerns of all major faiths—low faith maturity, at-risk student behavior, and climate problems that affect learning and spiritual growth;
2. We have gained clearer perceptions of the educational activity occurring in our schools;
3. We have had reaffirmed that our teachers are deeply dedicated to developing

Christian character in their students; and

4. Our teachers are trying to educate students who are moving closer and closer to the secular population in life-style and beliefs. This conclusion provides us with some frustration, draws us to re-evaluate our teaching task, and calls us to refocus our unique mission.

There is a bright side, however. In several important school quality indicators, Adventist schools outperform public institutions. These include college attendance rates for graduating seniors, the amount of homework students do, and the absence of discipline problems common to secular education.

We might ask, as my students sometimes do toward the end of a quarter: “Pastor Gillespie, what does all of this mean?” What these students are really asking is this: “So what?” What is the true significance of Valuegenesis? What is happening in our schools and churches? Can we draw any conclusions about changes that will be beneficial to schools, teachers, and administrators? I have identified five areas in which the North American Division is attempting to solve some of the problems described in the *Valuegenesis III* study.

Administrators are beginning to focus on crucial activities that relate to the serious realities facing Adventist education.

Throughout the North American Division, principals seem to have a renewed interest in helping local boards understand the problems faced by school personnel. This is not new, but it has been refocused in the past two years. As a result, people are getting involved in their schools in new and exciting ways.

A number of school boards with

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whom I have met are trying to make their schools uniquely Adventist, specifically Christian in approach, and beneficial in practice. For example, one school has begun to take seriously its role in educating parents about popular cultural standards, recognizing the negative consequences when such issues are discussed only at school and church.

We have heard reports of school boards and local church boards working together on parenting programs. Valuegenesis research identified the centrality of the home environment in supporting Christian education and developing values. I was impressed to hear about a school that is using a small-group model for discussing values and standards. The feedback and dialogue among faculty members, students, and parents has helped meld the family to the school. Their discussions have identified the values that are central to the mission of the local school. They see their task as consonant with that of the church.

In at least one academy, students are involved in significant ways at their campus church. Our campus churches are set up to nurture youth. Why not let the young people take a serious look at what makes a church tick? This church is trying to assign a majority of church offices to the youth. This is a model worth watching.

Administrators in the NAD are using the Valuegenesis research data to set priorities in teaching practice and curriculum assessment. New approaches to religious instruction are emerging. Community service is being integrated into the Bible curriculum.

Curriculum meetings all over the U.S. and Canada have begun to focus on the problems identified by this research. We will need some time to see positive results, but already, new religion textbooks are being developed. Many Valuegenesis concerns will be addressed in these books.

Teachers are taking a renewed interest in their roles as religious educators.

If Valuegenesis identified anything, it showed that the teacher is central to the task of religious education. Many have argued



their approaches to problem solving.

At one school I visited, study groups are focusing on the nature of grace and its implications. They are looking at legalism, enforcement of standards, and interactions with students. Through discussion and dialogue they hope to more successfully represent the grace of Jesus in their relationships with students.

Parents are deeply concerned about their children's life-styles and are getting involved in schools.

Valuegenesis has reinforced the key role of parents in the religious development of their children.

One school is developing a series of parenting workshops. Each family is asked to relate their role in values formation with their relationship to the school. The seminars topics include teaching children to obey, learning to have family worship, talking to your child, dealing with anger, Adventist life-style standards and their importance in the home, drug and sex education, and family values. These types of programs stress the centrality of the home in educating for eternity. Several teachers have told me that because of Valuegenesis, they have developed a renewed interest in learning about their students' family life.

Parents are recruiting new students and participating in their school's religious education. Volunteers are cropping up all over North America as schools begin to broaden their educational outreach to the families of their students.

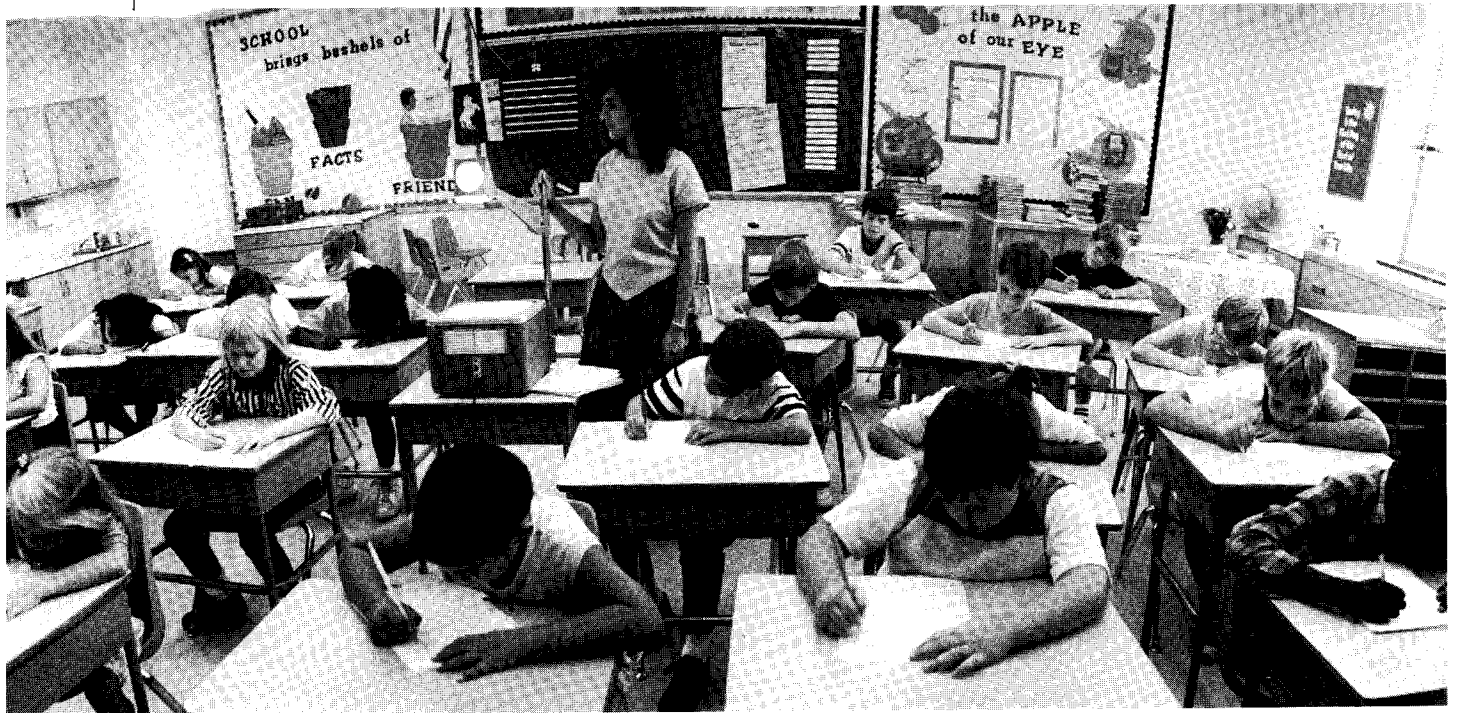
Adventist schools that want to make it into the next century are going to have to find ways to involve parents and boards of education. With escalating tuition costs, schools must communicate the uniqueness of Christian education. This requires a clear flow of information from schools to parents.

In speaking to numerous parent groups during the past school year, I have noticed the deep concern of parents about their children's religious growth. When they learn about the need to establish service projects in the home and not rely

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that the reason faith maturity was as high as it was in Adventist youth (22 percent) is due to the influence of Adventist educators. Since our system does not support a rigorous professional youth ministry, the burden of religious nurture has fallen by default to those who are least trained but have the deepest commitment to youth. Kudos must be given to teachers for this ministry. Without them, I would fear deeply for the youth of the church.

However, teachers are taking the Valuegenesis study seriously. Many are trying to understand and apply a "grace orientation" in their teaching, a concept that the research identified as important. Recognizing that this orientation affects teaching techniques as well as theology, many teachers are re-evaluating their actions, their discipline, and



on the school exclusively to provide these experiences, they have been surprised but excited about the nurturing potential.

Schools that help parents do their job better will succeed in the marketplace of the future. Helping parents is a new role for schools and for overworked teachers. However, parental involvement helps en-

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hance both the educational enterprise and the spiritual mission of the school in meaningful ways.

Reorganizing Our Priorities

The Valuegenesis study has resulted in a number of suggested actions for administrators, teachers, and parents. But some of the hardest to judge are the ones directed to the educational system itself. Changing the system is time consuming and sometimes seems hopeless, since it is so large. However, recog-

nizing the system's role in facilitating change, the North American Division is making material available to help teachers, pastors, parents, and administrators to do their jobs more effectively.

Five projects or approaches stand out in this process of change:

1. *The marketing seminar* developed by the NAD. Many schools have sent their administrators and parents to learn about marketing. We have one of the best-kept secrets in values education, and we need to learn how to share it. Increased student enrollment and parental support will undoubtedly result.

2. *Project Affirmation books.* A new series is being developed through the La Sierra University Press in association with the NAD Board of Education and the John Hancock Center for Youth Ministry. The first in a series of four or five books is available now. *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*, by Roger L. Dudley, offers a complete look at the data. Dr. Dudley has written a magnificent outline of research on Adventist students both inside and outside the educational system. Additional information added to Dudley's text makes the book both exciting and relevant. Send \$12.20 (postpaid) to La Sierra University Press, Riverside, CA 92515 for this 334-page volume.

The next book, *Teaching Values* by Roland and Doris Larson, will be released shortly by La Sierra University Press. This volume includes exercises for teachers and religious educators to use with their young people. It includes more than 3,000 activities that help focus readers on life-style issues and religious values. Later this year *Perspectives on Values* is scheduled for release. In this book a number of prominent Adventist theologians analyze recent changes in Adventist values.

Finally, the book *Youth Ministry Today* focuses on reaching youth through the local church. Additional materials include a book on *Hot Topics* for youth ministry. The author of this book offers ideas parents can use in talking to their young people about Adventist standards. All the books in the Project Affirmation series will be available through Adventist Book Centers or by direct order from La Sierra University Press.

3. *Manual for Volunteer Programs in Seventh-day Adventist Schools*. This Project Affirmation publication was written by Melvin Campbell. It provides practical information to help schools raise their students' academic achievement and spiritual commitment without raising tuition. Campbell's solution explores volunteerism in the local school. Pilot studies have shown that this approach has a significant impact on the quality of both education and involvement in the local school. This manual is available from the North American Division Office of Education.

4. A *Valuegenesis: The Short Form* survey has been produced by the Hancock Center for Youth Ministry; the Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the North American Division Office of Education. Any local school or church youth group with 30 or more students can participate in their own Valuegenesis research project. This 120-question survey provides the basis for a complete evaluation in the same areas as the larger Valuegenesis study. For \$300 per report + \$1.25 per student, your sixth- to 12th-grade students can be analyzed and compared with overall North American Division student scores. Write to the Hancock Center at La Sierra University, Riverside, CA 92515 for information.

5. Vision-to-Action teams are functioning in each union conference. These



Puppet witnessing programs can play a part in the religious education and outreach programs of Adventist schools.

professional facilitators can help your local school board or church board begin to clarify pertinent issues at the local level and to formulate action plans. Contact your conference office of education for a list of facilitators in your area.

The Valuegenesis project offers some suggestions that can produce a more successful educational program. For anything significant to happen, however, the church, school, and home must work together. Together, we can make religious education more important and central. Schools and churches must undertake local projects based on the

research findings of the study. We can feel optimistic that as a result of that cooperative effort, the youth of the church will begin to develop a more mature faith. ✍

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** See Peter Benson and Michael J. Donahue, Valuegenesis Report III (Minneapolis, Minn.: North American Division Board of Higher Education and Board of Education, K-12, 1991), pp. 5-22.*