

Diversity With Inclusion: The Future of Seventh-day Adventist Education

BY WALTER DOUGLAS

Significant and dramatic demographic, cultural, and ethnic shifts are occurring in the world and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Bruce Larson tells the story of a group of hunters who hired a guide to lead them into the backwoods of Maine. After a few days of wandering, they realized that they were hopelessly lost. Naturally, they began to question the competence and reliability of their guide. “You told us you are the best guide in Maine,” they protested.

“I am,” he replied, “but I think we are in Canada.”

In an increasingly multicultural and diverse world, Seventh-day Adventist educators can end up in places they never intended to go if they fail to embrace and value diversity as a powerful force in shaping the future of Adventist education. Learning about diversity is a process. Learn it well, and you will be rewarded. Fail to do so, and you may end up in the wrong places.

Significant and dramatic demographic, cultural, and ethnic shifts are occurring in the world and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many nations are being transformed from insulated societies with one dominant race and culture to ones that are racially and culturally diverse. These shifts will inevitably have an impact on lifestyle, employment, patterns of behavior, and the way organizations and institutions do business.

Seventh-day Adventist educators can neither ignore nor escape the inevitability of the effect of these shifts on their educational mission and practice, institutional culture, pedagogy, and curriculum.

Diversity with inclusion should become a driving force in shaping the educational vision and mission in the future of Adventist education. Failing to embrace and value diversity in the educational landscape will severely limit the learning experience of our students and the creativity of our teachers.

There is an African proverb from the Bantu people of Cameroon, West Africa, that says: “Those who never visit always think that mother is the only cook.” The proverb implies that those who never leave the familiarity of their own culture (their own reality) will have difficulty conceiving of any other culture outside of their own. Therefore, all aspects of teaching and learning—our educational landscape, resources, references, illustrations,



pedagogy, and curricula—must incorporate cultural and ethnic diversity. As educators, we are challenged to adopt attitudes that intentionally honor, respect, embrace, and celebrate the diversity and giftedness of others. Carefully planned initiatives and work teams can help teachers and students to become aware of and to embrace the diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, and culture.

By practicing deliberate inclusivity, we will come to see differences in culture, ethnicity, and gender as opportunities to creatively enhance and fulfill our collective goals.¹

William Bowen, former president of Princeton University, and Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, make a compelling case for the importance of managing diversity in the educational process. In their carefully researched and highly respected work, *The Shape of the River*, they argue:

“No one doubts that having intelligent fellow students in classes, in study groups, and as roommates is a crucial part of the educational process. But in bringing together

people of different races and backgrounds, educators have recognized that much can be learned from one’s peers, beyond learning how to solve differential equations and how to interpret Michelangelo’s sculpture; it can mean learning what it is to grow up in a home with divorced parents, or to be looked at with suspicion because of the color of your skin. Implied in the idea of traveling (the African proverb)—‘going away to college’ is the notion that there is something to be learned from being in new surroundings; with new people, some of whom may be quite different from those you knew before.”²

Adventist educational leaders must embrace and manage diversity. Our mission, now more than ever, must be intentionally inclusive. Diversity with inclusion ought to be a central theme in recruiting, training, retaining, and qualifying young people to live and serve in an increasingly diverse and multicultural world and church. In fact, it should be integral to the institutional culture.

An impressive body of research has documented the educational value and rewards of diversity. These studies

support the notion that diversity extends beyond race and gender to include differences in cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, nation of origin, and religion.³

These forces will powerfully influence the imagination and creativity of students and faculty and profoundly affect their future and the future of Adventism. According to Dr. Samuel Betances, an internationally respected diversity consultant, educator, and practitioner:

“There is no greater joy than to discover a rich and engaging spirit in a student who shines brightly with imagination and creativity and a respect for the ground rules which yield the best outcomes in the teaching/learning milieu. To stand in the presence of a student experiencing a ‘breakthrough’ moment, is pure delight.”⁴

Diversity is an essential and indispensable element in shaping the future of Adventist education. Leaders, learners, and practitioners must become aware of and embrace

Loden offers a very poignant and provocative observation: “Regardless of how strong grassroots support for valuing diversity may be in an organization, leadership support is even more critical for successful cultural change. Without this, implementation efforts are doomed to superficiality—unable to move beyond the awareness training stage to address systematic issues and create substantive changes.”⁵

To bring about structural reforms and transform institutional culture, Adventist school boards and administrators, who are responsible for crafting policies, practices, and procedures, must go beyond cosmetic changes in curricula and admission requirements. They need to intentionally embrace and advocate diversity by creating inclusive environments where differences are safe, valued, recognized, and respected. Such an environment encourages students and faculty to fulfill the mission of the institution and to achieve their personal objectives.

Caroline Turner and Samuel L. Myers offer this challenge: “The questions confronting the academy are whether diversity is a legitimate goal; whether achieving a diverse student [or faculty body] is an educational value; and what is the educational role and purpose of higher education.”⁶

In order to fulfill its mission, Adventist education must go beyond theoretical and rhetorical assertions about diversity. In a profound and fundamental way, Adventist education is about the transformation of character, values, attitudes, and worldview. Embracing diversity throughout Adventist education will encourage and support these goals while at the same time enhancing personal and institutional life.

Several studies have concluded that a culturally and racially diverse college environment provides golden opportunities outside of the classroom for students to increase their awareness of one another’s cultures and to learn to respect and value them. In

Picture Removed

the power of diversity to help our schools and the church achieve their mission. The path to multicultural and cross-cultural understanding begins with awareness education, but does not end there. This must be followed by structural and curriculum reforms and diversity initiatives at every level within the organization. This is important throughout the church, but especially in our schools, given the rapidly increasing diversity of their constituents and students.

By practicing deliberate inclusivity, we will come to see differences in culture, ethnicity, and gender as opportunities to creatively enhance and fulfill our collective goals.

other words, to be transformed. Adventist educators, theoreticians, and practitioners must joyfully embrace the task of creating an inclusive, respectful learning/teaching environment. In such a milieu, the differences that separate people are dwarfed by the similarities that connect them, as Bowen and Bok observe: “The real test of diversity as an educational policy is not whether episodes of friction and misunderstanding occur, but what students think of their total experience after traveling the sometimes bumpy road toward greater tolerance and understanding.”⁷

When students come together to challenge each other’s ideas and perspectives, they discover a wonderful universalizing truth about their own humanity. By helping our students embrace and value diversity, we can help ensure that the next generation of leaders will understand that our differences are our strength, that our diversity most surely is the path to excellence.⁸

One of the recurrent themes in Ellen White’s book, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, is that our students need less to be told what they need to do in order to succeed. Rather, they need to see positive change happening in the lives, worldviews, and behaviors of their models and mentors, who are entrusted with the educational mission

of the church.⁹ Are we as teachers and administrators modeling for our students how to value, respect, and manage diversity? Do we integrate diversity throughout the curriculum and in our illustrations, examples, and practicum? Are we preparing our students to live and work in an increasingly multicultural and diverse world? The answers to these and related questions will test how ready, reliable, and relevant we are to make Seventh-day Adventist education a life-transforming experience for all.

How do we do this? Following are some suggestions or guidelines that will encourage and enhance the creation and implementation of diversity initiatives in Adventist schools:

Boards and Administrators:

1. Re-examine your strategies for recruiting, retaining, and qualifying students, especially those from minority groups and under-represented classes, in order to make your institution intentionally inclusive.¹⁰
2. Encourage, promote, and reward faculty and staff across all disciplines for engaging in ongoing education and training to achieve skills and cultural competence for doing their best work.

Picture Removed

3. Encourage your faculty to maximize the use of illustrations, case studies, models, and examples from the different cultural and racial groups in their classes.

4. Develop, promote, and implement clear policies, goals, and strategies to ensure the successful implementation of diversity initiatives at every level in the organization. Measure their effectiveness by doing periodic assessments.

5. Schedule community forums to measure institutional competence and success in promoting diversity. This will help make all members of the school community culturally sensitive and competent.

Administrators and Faculty:

1. Ensure that all students receive respect in a manner compatible with their cultural and ethnic background.

2. Obtain and create teaching materials and resources that have been translated and/or adapted from other cultures.

3. Provide language training and personal assistance to students whose language is not the official means of communication.

4. Encourage and lead out in initiatives that promote community participation and collaboration, especially if your school is located in a multicultural and diverse community.

From my experience as a diversity consultant and practitioner, I have found these guidelines to be highly effective in helping organizations create and implement diversity initiatives that set the stage for an empowering, productive, inclusive, and collaborative educational environment. Modeling and mentoring are absolutely essential for the successful implementation of such initiatives.

As a seminary professor and director of the Institute of Diversity at Andrews University, a microcosm of the world church, I have discovered that when diversity initiatives combine students from different origins and backgrounds, this enables them not only to collaborate successfully, but also to value and take advantage of their differences. Thus, the school can become even more effective and successful in achieving its mission than it would be if the differences did not exist.

“To build cultures that value inclusion, cooperation and mutual respect, implementers of diversity must do

Picture Removed

what has not been done before. They must become supporters of this new paradigm and advocate without impunity.”¹¹ ✍



Walter Douglas

Dr. Walter Douglas is Director of the Institute of Diversity and Multiculturalism at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. For more

information on diversity, contact him at wdouglas@andrews.edu.

RESOURCES

For additional reading on this subject:

Marilyn Loden, *Implementing Diversity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996),

Edward E. Hubbard, *Measuring Diversity* (Petaluma, Calif.: Global Insights, 1997).

For workshops, seminars, or keynote speakers:

Contact the Institute of Diversity and Multiculturalism at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, U.S.A. (Dr. Walter Douglas, wdouglas@andrews.edu) or Souder, Betances, and Associates (betances.com).

REFERENCES

1. Frank W. Hale, Jr., *What Makes Racial Diversity Work in Higher Education* (Sterling, Va.: Stylus), p. 46.
2. William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 229.
3. See also the following references on this subject: Caroline Sotello, Viernes Turner, and Samuel L. Myers, *Faculty of Colors in Academe: Bittersweet Success* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000); Hale, *What Makes Racial Diversity Work in Higher Education*; and James R. Rector, *Diversity Reader: A Quality Study in Workforce Diversity* (Cleveland, Ohio: Master Printer, 2003).
4. Samuel Betances, *Ten Steps to the Head of the Class: A Challenge to Students* (Chicago: New Century Forum Inc., 2001), p. 12.
5. Marilyn Loden, *Implementing Diversity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), p. 168.
6. Solello, Turner, and Meyers, *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success*, p. 17.
7. Bowen and Bok, p. 225.
8. Frank Hale, Jr., *What Makes Diversity Work in Higher Education*, p. iv.
9. Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923).
10. “Achieving diversity with inclusion does not require or even suggest lowering or abandoning admissions standards” (Bowen and Bok, p. xxiii).
11. Loden.