

13. A Reflection on the Principal Findings of this Study

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The authors who have contributed to this book have touched on the philosophy that underlies the education that is provided in Seventh-day Adventist Schools in Australia and the Solomon Islands at two different time periods: (1) at the time when the schools were initially established; and (2) in the second decade of the 21st century.

Ellen White's influence on the establishment and early running of the Avondale School for Christian Workers is hard to overestimate. Her prophetic leadership was highly influential in generating funding, attracting students, and her voluminous writings, cited many times throughout this book, clearly outline the vision that she had for the mission of the school.

White's philosophy of education and her vision for Adventist schools reached far beyond the teaching of literature and science. She insisted that "the great aim of the [Avondale] school is to lead the students to God" (White 1897), that education "is the harmonious development of the physical mental, and the spiritual powers" (White 1903: 13), and that "in the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one" (White 1903: 30). For White and those around her that tried to put these and other principles into practice as they built their ideal school at Cooranbong, true education developed the whole person, and paid especial attention to the spiritual needs of students.

When Avondale School for Christian workers officially opened on April 28, 1897, exactly two boarding students had made their way to the school. The ceremony was led by Ellen White herself and bible teacher Stephen N. Haskell without the presence of other dignitaries. Present were the two boarding students, and some families from the

district (Hook 1998: 38).

The differences in Adventist Schools between 1897 and 2017 in both Australia and the Solomon Islands are stark. There are differences in numbers of schools, teachers and students, differences in funding arrangements, and differences societal and the church's expectations. Take, for example, the relative number of schools, teachers and students. In 1897 Avondale School for Workers was the only school. It had a tiny staff and a very small student cohort. Today in Australia there are 38 secondary schools and 43 primary schools, taught by more than 850 teachers, who teach more than 13,000 students. Indeed, there are more than twice as many teachers employed in Adventist schools in Australia than there are ministers employed by the Adventist church (2016 Annual Statistical Report). In 1897 the official Adventist church had yet to begin work in the Solomon Islands, and there were no schools there at all. Today there are approximately 120 Adventist schools scattered across the Solomon Islands (Solomon Islands Government 2016), and, as in Australia, there are more teachers employed in those schools than ministers employed by the Solomon Islands Mission (2016 Annual Statistical Report).

There is also a great difference in the source of financial support for the schools. Once supported entirely by student fees and subsidies from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Adventist school system in Australia is now almost entirely supported by government grants supplemented by student fees (Kilgour and Williams 2017). The teachers' wages in all Adventist and other non-government schools in the Solomon Islands are paid by the Solomon Islands' government.

The list of things that have changed society is lengthy, and includes such things as literature, television, movies, population growth, awareness of other cultures, better education, and technology. Each of these has had a significant impact. Take, for example, the technology of communication. Despite the opening of the first telephone exchanges in Melbourne and Brisbane in 1880, in 1897 most communication was done either face-to-face or by letters sent in the mail, and, rarely, by telegraph. It is possible to trace the thinking of church leadership as they struggled with the issues involved in establishing an educational system in the 1890s and early 1900s because the principals were continuously communicating by letter. Sometimes several letters were sent between them each day. Copies of these letters were filed and now are available to historians. Today leaders communicate frequently by email, but very sensitive decisions are made face-to-face, via telephone or via Skype. Future historians

will be faced with an avalanche of data, but will be missing data from meetings that were not recorded. Emails, text messages, and social media have changed communication. The technology of travel means that travel between the different parts of the world church that used to take church leaders days and months now can be done in hours or days. Preparing students with the intellectual framework to understand and use the technology of the modern world has brought important changes to the curriculum. State agencies have been developing and improving the implementation of the curriculum that they demand, not only from state schools in Australia, but also from independent schools such as the Adventist Schools. So compared to 1897, the curriculum in Adventist schools definitely has been shaped by government standards. These are generally the kinds of standards that are compatible with the church's goals for its educational system. The improvement of skills in mathematics and writing, for example, has always been part of the intellectual development of students in Adventist Schools. But the greater sophistication in the curriculum has called for a more-sophisticated teaching workforce. Teachers are now required to have tertiary degrees as part of their qualifications.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is also very different in 2017 from what it was in 1897. It has grown in numbers, it has a much better-educated clergy and membership, and it has participated in the intellectual issues that have arisen in the last 120 years. It is hard to overstate the changes that have taken place in the church and society since 1897.

What has been the impact of all these changes on the current philosophy of Adventist Education? One might expect this to have changed as dramatically as the church has changed. Yet the mission statement of Adventist Schools Australia has a striking correspondence with the goals of Adventist education expressed by Ellen White and other educational pioneers in the Adventist Church. The mission is stated as follows:

Our Mission: Our belief about Christian education is Biblically based with an unashamed desire to emulate the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, the aim of Adventist education in Australia is to create an educational environment that makes it more likely that each student will accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Friend.

Adventist education is built on the belief that each student is unique and of immeasurable value. It values the importance of systematic development of the whole person. Students are taught to accept the concept of service as a principle of life; to be sensitive to the needs of people; and to become contributing members in their home, church, and society. (<http://asa.adventist.edu.au/index.php/Home/Mission> accessed 28 December 2017)

Embedded in this mission statement is the goal to “create an educational environment that makes it more likely that each student will accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Friend.” That the emphasis is to be on the education of the whole person is explicitly stated. The conclusion seems clear: the administrative perspective of Adventist Schools Australia is highly congruent with the vision for the school system expressed by Ellen White. But what of the actual practitioners?

The responses to Questions 1 and 2 of the survey, which all teachers in Adventist Schools in Australia and the Solomon Islands were invited to complete, provide an insight into what teachers in Adventist schools consider to be the mission of their school. When asked to express the aims of their school in their own words, fully one hundred and fifteen Australian teachers stated that the mission of their organisation was to lead their students to Jesus. They used their own words but the meaning was the same. One teacher stated their goal was to “facilitate those I come into contact with into a meaningful relationship with Christ.” The themes of “sharing the good news,” and “leading others to Jesus” were two of the top three themes that emerged from the responses provided by Australian teachers (Hattingh 2017a). Eighty-six of the teachers in the Solomon Islands stated that the aim of their school should be “education for eternity.” They used such expressions as “training pupils” and “to educate and prepare students not only for a life of service here on earth but for eternity.” Sixty-five of the teachers in the Solomon Islands mentioned that an important aim of their school should be to lead people to Jesus. They said such things as, “The mission of my organization should help young people, church member, youths, to really think deep in their spiritual life to know how is Jesus in their life and to help them have a close relationship with him.”

What was revealed in the open-ended answers was confirmed by the choices made from a series of possible aims for Adventist Schools listed in question 2. The top three responses of teachers in Australian Adventist Schools were:

- 2a. Deliver the highest quality in the services we provide
- 2b. Act in a manner which contributes to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing of our students
- 2h. Create an environment that makes it more likely that each student will accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and friend.

The teachers in Adventist Schools in the Solomon Islands ranked the following four as their top choice of aims for their School:

- 2f. Create a Christian environment in which to work
- 2h. Create an environment that makes it more likely that each student will accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and friend

- 2m. Put into practice the teachings of the Adventist Church
- 2o. Lead students to join the Adventist Church and become baptised

It is remarkable that even after the changes wrought in the church by 120 years of social material and intellectual development, the philosophy of education expressed by today's teachers and school-administrators is highly congruent with the educational philosophy of the pioneers of Adventist education in Australia and in the Solomon Islands.

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