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EH&S Issues

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H&S Issues

The students are excited. Bags in hand and chattering incessantly, they line up ready to board the bus for their 'Big Day Out', alias a class excursion. You, as their teacher, struggle to match their enthusiasm. The planning is done and you have made sure the learning will be worthwhile, but the memory of the risk assessment form and its potential hazards lingers, increasing your awareness of the duty of care you have for your precious charges.

There are many risks associated with a school excursion. Every teacher's worst nightmare is that someone may be left behind somewhere. Other hazards, both minor and major, wait to trip up unsuspecting students and their teachers.

Schools are diligent in identifying risky situations. They assess potential hazards and the severity of these hazards according to a risk code. However, identifying the risk is not enough. Schools must demonstrate that they have implemented measures to control the risk and minimise the possibility of harm to any student. Are we as diligent and intentional in identifying spiritual hazards, assessing spiritual risk and implementing strategies to ensure our students' eternal health and safety?

Below is a spiritual risk assessment activity that may be done individually or collectively by teachers. For each of the following characteristics of Gen Y (children born between the early 1980s–late 1990s) and the upcoming Gen Z (children born in the 21st century or late 1990s), answer the following questions:

1. What are the potential hazards this characteristic poses when it comes to the spiritual development of this generation?
2. How great are the risks?
3. What can Christian educators do to minimise the risks?

Each generation (Builders, Boomers, X, Y, Z) is the product of social and global issues of a particular era. The four characteristics that follow are broadly indicative of students in our schools. They apply to Gen Y, but are even more characteristic of Gen Z, who have reached primary school but are yet to make their presence felt in high schools.

Technology-savvy

Gen Y has grown with information and communication technology. Almost every year of their lives, a new application has hit the ICT market, and Gen Ys have embraced them enthusiastically.

Gen Z, on the other hand, can't even remember a world devoid of the internet, i-pods and mobile phones. Their skills as users outstrip both their teachers and Gen Y students.

Nature-illiterate

Linked closely to time spent with technology and the protectiveness of parents is the lack of connection that today's children have with the natural world. Children may have knowledge of rainforest habitats and threats to the environment via the virtual world of the internet, yet have never experienced the sounds, smells and sights of a rainforest first hand. As a result, they lack empathy with nature, and have increasingly less or no experience of the wonder of God's creation and the mysteries of the natural world.

Mini-adults

We are witnessing the demise of childhood, and the rise of the 'little people' generation. Children and even toddlers, listen to adult music, play adult games, watch adult television shows, wear scaled-down versions of adult clothing, engage in adult talk and are being increasingly pressured by society and educational curriculum to think, behave and make decisions like adults. As a result of pressure to prematurely deal with adult issues, anxiety disorder and depression are on the rise among pre-teens.

Risk-averse

Michael McQueen (2008), social researcher, indicates that later Gen Y and in particular Gen Z, unlike their confident older sibling Gen X, are more averse to taking risk. These children have been born into a society that fears everything from global warming, terrorists, neighbours and strangers to the unknown, failure, and litigation. The consequences of this fear are becoming increasingly apparent in the inhibitions of young children.

We cannot change the characteristics of the generations we teach, anymore than we can change who we are. It is, however, our responsibility to understand the forces in society that have shaped Gen Y and are shaping Gen Z so that we can interact with them in appropriate ways and build authentic relationships that will lead them into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. **TEACH**

EH&S issues are a joint initiative between the Adventist Schools Australia Curriculum Unit and Avondale College.

Reference

McQueen, M. (2008). *The 'new' rules of engagement: a guide to understanding and connecting with Generation Y*. Sydney: Nexgen Impact.