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9. Responses of Teachers in North America to the Competing Claims Regarding the Purpose of Adventist Schools

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Competing Objectives

Teachers in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA or Adventist) early childhood, elementary, secondary and K–12 schools across the North American Division (NAD) conduct their work amid a large number of overlapping and competing expectations. These expectations come from a wide variety of sources, including the curriculum they are expected to teach, the parents of the children they teach and the children themselves, their local church, the school system in which they work, various church-based and government-based accrediting authorities and their own professional training and self-image. This is not a complete list. Almost all the objectives inherent in these expectations are commendable. But to fulfill all of them at once is beyond the capability of mere mortals, especially those involved in the heavy day-to-day demands of teaching. One might describe the various expectations placed on teachers as competitors for their time and attention.

That expectations of Seventh-day Adventist schools can change over time is revealed in the departmental reports given to the leaders and elected representatives of the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church as they periodically meet in sessions called

General Conference (GC) Sessions. It should be remembered that the NAD did not meet separately from the General Conference Sessions until 1982 (Reid 1982, p. 16). Thus, General Conference Education Department Secretaries often managed concerns of the NAD educational institutions as well as those of the world field, at least until 1982.

Take for example the following clear exposition of the purpose of Seventh-day Adventist Schools by W. E. Howell, Secretary of the GC Department of Education from 1918 to 1930, at the 1922 GC Session:

Three great objectives lie before us in the conduct of our schools: the saving of the children of the church, the preparation of gospel workers, and the pioneering of evangelistic endeavor. (GCB1922-03 p. 9)

A very similar set of objectives was enunciated by E. E. Cossentine, Secretary of the GC Department of Education (1946–1966), who said at the 1954 GC Session (emphasis supplied):

Seventh-day Adventist education, where it is found in the world, is built on three propositions. It is the **first** concern of our schools **to evangelize the children and youth**. It is our **second** concern to educate for responsibility, expressed in competent, intelligent, honorable, and faithful **Christian service**. It is the **third** concern of our schools to discover the young people who have capacity for **leadership**, and to help them develop qualities of heart and mind and body, and that dedicated sense of mission that will fit them to be God's agents in leading His people and in preaching the gospel and winning souls ... (GCB1954-06, p. 13)

This emphasis of saving/evangelising the children attending classes at Seventh-day schools is notable in the GC presentations of both Howell and Cossentine. That Charles B. Hirsch, Secretary of the GC Department of Education (1966–1974, 1980–1981), had a different emphasis is evident from his report to the 1970 GC Session (emphasis supplied):

... In our schools the standard of education must not be lowered. It must be lifted higher and still higher ...' Counsels on Education, p. 112 [White 1923a]. It was with these words that the Department of Education set forth its goals four years ago ... From the preschool level to the highest echelons of education fostered by the church the constant aim has been to upgrade and to bring about the type of **quality** education that must go hand in

hand with Christian education ... (GCB1970-03, p. 27)

Hirsch bolsters his claim for the importance of quality in education by citing Ellen White, SDA Church pioneer, prophet, and strong advocate for SDA education. And no doubt, his comments on the quality of the education received by children attending SDA schools must have been an important issue for parents and teachers alike at the time they were delivered. But if one had taken him aside and asked him whether he was downplaying the role of SDA schools in converting children of SDA parents, he would likely have been hostile to the suggestion. Converting the children would be a given, he would have probably said. Nor would Howell and Cossentine have welcomed any comment that their emphasis of evangelism and service would have a negative impact on the quality of the education offered at SDA schools during their stewardship of the role of Secretary of the GC Department of Education. But in citing the words of only three of the GC Secretaries of Education, we have already discovered at least four different goals for SDA education: (1) saving/evangelising students; (2) inculcating an attitude of service; (3) training church leaders in outreach; and (4) quality. We can also observe that over time the emphasis on which of these goals should receive most attention has changed.

It is instructive to consider the reasons that SDA schools were originally started by SDA church-members and then adopted as part of the overall strategy of the SDA Church.

Reasons for the Establishment of the First SDA Schools

According to E. M. Cadwallader, early SDA parents felt the need for schools separated from regular state schools because their children had sometimes come under hostile attack for their beliefs, particularly about the soon return of Jesus, and because of the parents' general discontent with the moral standards advocated at state schools. He says,

Seventh-day Adventist[s] ... were unpopular and this was reflected in the behaviour [sic] of public school children who ridiculed the Adventist boys and girls by calling them 'Millerites,' teasing them about 'going up,' and plaguing them in other ways.

It is said that this state of affairs coupled with the immoral and irreligious influences prevalent in many public schools caused some parents to think seriously about their children's education. (Cadwallader, 1975, p. 5; see also Graham, 1983, p. 12-15)

At the heart of this observation is the perception that the Adventist schools were set up as a place of safety for the children of Adventist parents, where they could be sheltered from hostility to their beliefs and from the more relaxed morals found in state schools. Such SDA schools would create an environment in which children of SDA parents could be instructed in the beliefs that early Adventists felt important, beliefs that circled around such concepts as the soon return of Jesus and the importance of the Seventh-day Sabbath. In addition, the early SDAs were beginning to adopt principles of healthy diet (i.e. vegetarian) and eschewing habits that would damage the body, such as drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2010, p. 100-113). While there was and is an American subculture that likewise eschews alcohol and tobacco on religious grounds, such practices, together with the distinctive set of other beliefs strongly advocated by early SDAs, meant that they and their children were often socially isolated from those around them. Such distinctiveness also made children an easy target in the school grounds.

George Knight expresses this idea as the desire to inculcate the children of SDA parents with a unique philosophy. He says,

The existence of Adventist schools is no accident. To the contrary, the church early in its history realized that because its philosophy differed significantly from other segments of society, it had a responsibility to pass on that philosophy to young people through the development of an educational system. (Knight, 2016, p. 43; cf Knight, 2015)

Those that established and grew the network of SDA schools across America (and then the world) have left a very large repository of their thinking in church magazines. One cannot avoid being slightly overwhelmed and highly impressed by the compilation, "Reprints on Christian Education by Church Leaders," compiled by David James Lee (Lee, 1973). In this volume of writing many arguments are put forward for the establishment and support of SDA schools. Almost all of them repeat with some variation the themes already noted by Cadwallader and Knight: that SDA schools were originally set up to

be safe places where the children of SDAs would find an environment that was conducive to their adoption of SDA beliefs and practices; where they would be provided with a clear exposition of the Adventist worldview; and where they would be challenged to become leaders in the expanding Church.

Of the many writers advocating the establishment of SDA schools, few were as influential as Ellen White. During her lifetime, White herself gathered many of her writings about SDA Education into a one-volume work with the one-word title, *Education* (White, 1903). In later years the General Conference Department of Education sponsored a larger compilation of her writings, which was published in 1923 under the title, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (White, 1923).

White's writings present a clear viewpoint that the type of education offered in a Seventh-day Adventist school should have a very broad curriculum that not only embraces all facets of this life but provides a preparation for the life to come. She says,

True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to be with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, and mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come. (White, 1903, p. 13)

She also goes so far as to say,

In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" ... 1 Corinthians 3:11 ... The great principles of education are unchanged. "They stand fast for ever and ever" (Psalm 111:8); for they are the principles of the character of God. (White, 1903, p. 30)

Possibility of Institutional Drift

Institutional drift is the term given by sociologists to a near-inevitable process that takes place in institutions over time. In his highly influential book, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Max Weber (1947) outlines the start of the process of

institutional drift by describing “the routinization of charisma and its consequences.” He notes that religious movements and organizations founded to support them are often begun by a charismatic figure. But as the movement grows, social relationships that had previously been focused on the original charismatic figure need to become routinized, usually through a hierarchical structure (Weber, 1947, p. 363–364). Weber points out this is a very large change in the original movement and the organizations that have grown to support it.

More changes inevitably follow, as those involved are shaped not only by the founder’s vision, but by their own life experiences. Even though he was describing processes that take place in Universities and Colleges, I was struck by how Herb Childress (2019) described the forces acting in Institutions as they struggle to gather financial resources.

Every negotiation over a grant or a gift becomes an imperfect alignment of values. Without constant attention and focus, the college can be distracted from its core mission through the necessity of fundraising, each new initiative making a little different than it once had been. After ten or twenty or fifty years, the school becomes unrecognizable. (Childress, 2019, p. 90)

The best-known work on institutional drift is arguably that of James Tunstead Burtchaell, whose 1998 book, *The Dying of the Light: the Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches*, traces the Christian church-based origins of many of the prominent universities in the United States of America (USA). The institutions that he documents all began with ties and monetary support from one or other Christian denomination in the USA. But by a gradual process that often took several “generations” of College/University administration and constituents, the institutions gradually cut the ties that bound them to their original sponsoring church. Burtchaell (1998) summarizes this process as follows:

The elements of the slow but apparently irrevocable cleavage of colleges from churches were many. The church was replaced as a financial patron by alumni, foundations, philanthropists, and the government. The regional accrediting associations, the alumni, and the government replaced the church as the primary authorities to whom the college would give an accounting of its stewardship ... The faculty transferred their primary loyalties from their college to their disciplines and their guild, and were

thereby antagonistic to any competing norms of professional excellence relating to the church. (p. 837; cf Marsden 1994)

Some of the influences identified by Burtchaell can be traced in the church-based K–12 schools as well as to Universities and Colleges. Teachers working in church-based schools are necessarily highly influenced by the academic disciplines in which they teach, for example. Teachers need to have obtained at least a bachelor’s degree before they can be employed in a school, and in that process have been exposed to the changing intellectual currents of Academia. Their concrete thinking often becomes changed irrevocably into abstract thinking, and they have been provided with tools by which to make up their own minds independently of external authorities – church or state. Such teachers then bring a more sophisticated understanding to their Christian beliefs, and to their commitment to the schools and other organizations of the church. Furthermore, the demands of professional excellence, the changing face of society and shifts in the attitudes of parents all require that teachers engage with issues that previous generations would not have met. Through the tools of various accreditation arrangements, state agencies are continuously improving the quality of education offered to its citizens. Thus two of the conditions noted by Burtchaell could be said to be influencing the SDA schools in the NAD, viz., accreditation agencies external to the church and the teacher’s loyalty to independent discipline-based academic disciplines.

Yet, one condition identified by Burtchaell is not in effect in SDA schools in the NAD. The church has not been replaced as the financial patron of the schools. The SDA schools in the NAD have very little funding that is external to the SDA Church. In other words, they are still highly dependent on the SDA church for their source of income as represented by church subsidies, and as the source of a majority of their students. Many of the schools are struggling financially with smaller student numbers (see the data in Chapter 6, for example). As student fees are a key element of the school budget, and as most students in SDA schools in the NAD come from families associated with the local churches, it is a matter of survival that close ties between the local church and the local school be carefully maintained. The responses in the survey reveal that indeed the teachers in SDA schools in the NAD have a strong commitment to the local and world SDA church and

maintain very close links with their local SDA church communities by attending church regularly (see reports in Chapters 8, 13, 15 and 16).

21st-Century Objectives of SDA Education

When one considers more recent statements on the purpose and mission of Adventist schools, one can still clearly see the concepts of nurturing students attending SDA schools to become Christians who are committed Seventh-day Adventists. The key points raised by George Knight (a long-time writer on the philosophy of Christian education), Lisa Beardsley-Hardy (current Director of the GC Education Department), and the NAD Mission statement would have been familiar to Howell and Cossentine. Knight enumerates “the three essential goals of Adventist education” as follows:

The **first** is to prepare young people to function successfully in this present world. Education **for excellence** ... **second** ... education **for eternity** ... education **as evangelism**. ... **third** ... the teaching of its **unique doctrinal package** and especially the **denomination’s apocalyptic understanding** and the implications of that understanding for **worldwide mission** and the Second Advent. (Knight, 2017, p. 13, emphasis added)

Beardsley-Hardy states,

Adventist existence and purpose are biblically grounded. While education must develop students mentally, socially, physically, and vocationally, this goal is shared by all schools, religious or not. Christian education aims higher, **seeking to restore the image of God in students** and to prepare them for service in this life and the next. Its aim is to return to God’s original purpose in creating humans. Adventist education shares this spiritual and redemptive goal with other Christian schools. But a third aspect of education makes Adventist education unique: it is the denomination’s **apocalyptic mission to the world**. (2017, p.16; cf. Christian, 2010, p. 82–83, 87; emphasis added)

The mission statement of the NAD education department reads as follows (my emphases):

Our mission: To provide opportunity for students to **accept Christ as their Savior**, to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives, and to **fulfill the commission of preaching the gospel to all the world**. To develop the “**whole person**” concept in each student, educate them to accept service as a way of life, to be sensitive to

the needs of people at home and in society, and to become **active members in the Church**. [www.nadadventist.org/departments/education accessed 8 December 2019]

In each of these statements, all published in 2017 or later, one can identify the goal of converting students in SDA schools to become Christians who are committed to the doctrines of the SDA church, to its apocalyptic vision of the future and to a life of service and outreach.

Survey Questions 1 and 2 and the Respondents’ Understanding of the Mission of their School

Questions 1 and 2 of the survey explore the understanding of the mission of their school held by teachers in SDA schools in the NAD (see Chapter 6 for description of the survey). Question 1 was open-ended. It asked participants to write “one or two short sentences” in response to the statement, “I work at a Church-connected school. If I were asked what the mission of my school should be, I would say: ...” This question was placed first in the survey to allow teachers to give their unprompted answer as to what they considered the mission of the school. This was particularly true for the SurveyMonkey (online) version of the survey, which showed only his question on the screen, and prevented access to Question 2 until the first question had been answered or skipped. The responses to Question 1 from the participants have been analysed in an earlier chapter (see Chapter 8, “NAD Teachers’ Understanding of What Adventist Schools Should be Doing, and How Adventist Schools Are Different”). An analysis of Question 2 is given in this chapter. In Question 2 participants were given a range of suggestions about what the schools should be doing.

Question 2 was introduced with the following words:

There are many views on what an organization related to the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be doing. Some of them are listed below. Some of these statements may be found as part of mission and vision statements of one or other Adventist organization around the world. We would like to find out whether or not you think they represent what the school / organization you work for should be doing.

This survey will be seen by employees of different types of organizations – schools, hospitals, aged care homes, clinics, publishing houses, factories, media centers, etc., so not all of the

statements will be applicable to your organization (answer “does not apply” to such statements), but you will understand that it is desirable to ask the same questions of everybody.

Read questions 2a to 2o to pick out what you think the top three aims of your school /organization should be, and then shade in one circle for each question according to what you think.

Experience had shown that, presented with such a list, most participants will not discriminate in their answers. The request, “pick out what you think the top three aims of your school,” was made to encourage participants to identify what they considered to be the most important goals of their school / school system.

The following options were provided to participants:

- 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 / patients / clients
- 2c. Promote a healthy lifestyle
- 2d. Be competitive in the sector or market place in which it operates
- 2e. Meet the needs of the local community in which the organization is found
- 2f. Create a Christian environment in which to work
- 2g. Further the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus
- 2h. Create an environment that makes it more likely that each student / patient / client will accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and friend
- 2i. Create a positive perception of the Adventist Church
- 2j. Further the mission of the wider Adventist Church
- 2k. Make money to support the activities of the Adventist Church
- 2l. Be a link or interface between the Adventist Church and the community
- 2m. Put into practice the teachings of the Adventist Church
- 2n. Create opportunities for students / patients / clients to hear about the Adventist Church
- 2o. Lead students / patients / clients to join the Adventist Church and become baptised

When the survey instrument was being developed, it was planned that it should also be administered in hospitals, retirement villages, health food centers, media centers, and other organizations of the SDA Church. Many of the statements will be familiar from the analysis of different statements of the purpose of Adventist education given in the first half of this chapter: excellence (2a; cf words of Charles B. Hirsch cited earlier); saving of the children of the church (2o; cf earlier citation of words of Howell and Cossentine); create a safe environment for children of Adventist parents to be nurtured in their faith (2f and 2h); leadership and outreach (2e and 2j).

Some of the options were designed to be more suitable for some types of institutions of the church rather than others. For example, one would imagine “2b. Act in a manner which contributes to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing of our students / patients / clients” and “2c. Promote a healthy lifestyle” would be particularly appropriate to Adventist Hospitals,” although these concepts are often an aspiration found in the mission statements of schools and health-food factories. Option 2k. (“Make money to support the activities of the Adventist Church”), was formulated to provide an option for the Sanitarium Health Food Company in Australia, which does generate a substantial amount of money to underwrite the activities of the SDA Church in the South Pacific Division. It is not generally an option that would resonate with SDA school systems around the world, although there are some exceptions. The SDA school system in Brazil, for example, generates enough positive cash flow to allow the profits to underwrite the expansion of the school system and to support the education departments at the Conference and Union administrative levels of the SDA Church. But this is exceptional. Being “competitive in the sector or marketplace” is something to which many hospitals and health-food enterprises would aspire. It was expected that schools and universities would share this aspiration, although, as will be revealed below, this option did not gain more than modest support from the SDA teachers in the NAD.

The options were arranged to place the most overtly religious and evangelistically related goals at the end and the more generic goals at the beginning. This was done because in some industries only a small percentage of the workforce would identify themselves as SDA (such as some hospital systems and some health food factories). Such participants should be able to find goals at the beginning of the list that

they could affirm before getting to goals to which they may or may not be sympathetic, given that they are goals that are more closely tied to aspirations of the SDA Church.

Results

Participants were able to respond to the various potential aims of their school by using the following Likert scale:

1. Should NOT be a purpose or goal of my school / organization
2. I feel neutral about this as a purpose or goal of my school / organization
3. An important purpose / goal of my school, but not one of the top three
4. One of top three purposes / goals of my school (use this in 3 or 4 answers only)
0. Does not apply to my organization

The responses are listed in Table 9.1, which reports on the percentage of teachers that identified a particular goal as being one of the top two or three goals of their school, in rank order, starting with the highest percentage. The table also lists the percentage of participants who suggested that the goal should not be a goal of their school (see Chapter 9 for a fuller discussion of these goals and the responses from participants, and Tables B.25 through B.39 in Appendix B for details of frequencies of the responses to the individual items).

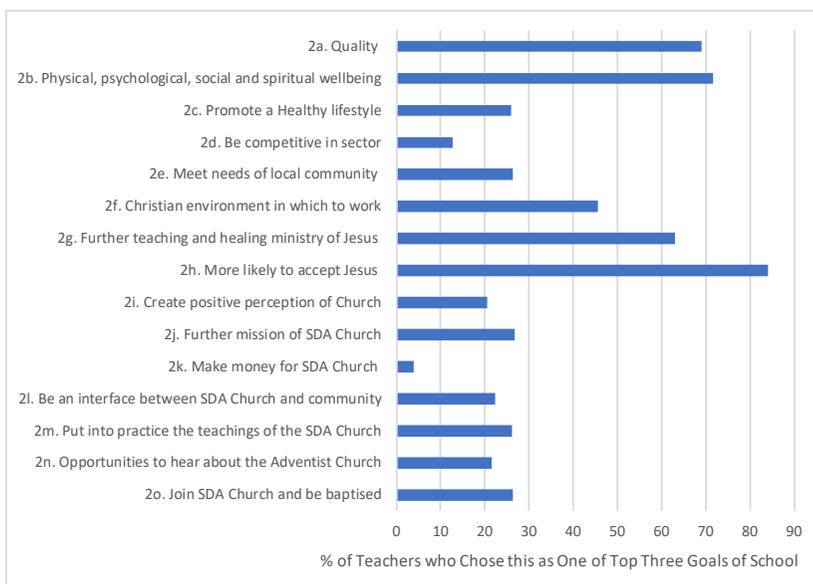
**Table 9.1: Aims of Schools
according to Teachers in NAD Schools**

	One of the top three goals of the School (%)	Should not be a goal of the School (%)
2h. Create environment where students more likely to accept Jesus	84.1	0.4
2b. Physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing of students	71.7	0.4
2a. Quality	69.0	0.8
2g. Further teaching and healing ministry of Jesus	63.1	0.3
2f. Create a Christian environment in which to work	45.5	0.7

2j. Further mission of SDA Church	26.8	1.9
2e. Meet needs of local community	26.4	0.2
2o. Lead students to join SDA Church and be baptised	26.3	4.2
2m. Put into practice the teachings of the SDA Church	26.1	1.2
2c. Promote a Healthy lifestyle	26.0	0.9
2l. Be an interface between SDA Church and community	22.3	1.7
2n. Make opportunities for students to hear about the Adventist Church	21.6	2.2
2i. Create positive perception of Church	20.6	2.0
2d. Be competitive in sector	12.7	6.9
2k. Make money to support activities of SDA Church	3.9	29.8

Figure 9.1 provides a graph of these responses which allows the easy identification of the aims that the SDA teachers in the NAD think their schools should most pursue, and those that they consider of much less importance.

Figure 9.1 What Adventist Schools Should be Doing



From Figure 9.1 and Table 9.1 it is evident that the top four goals that SDA teachers in the NAD think the schools should pursue are:

- 2h. Create an environment that makes it more likely that each student / patient / client will accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and friend.

2b. Act in a manner which contributes to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing of our students / patients / clients.

2a. Deliver the highest quality in the services we provide

2g. Further the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus

There were two objectives that stood out as things that teachers are least concerned about:

2k. Make money to support the activities of the Adventist Church (The figures in Table 9.1 are correct; nearly 30% of teachers think that this should *not* be a goal of SDA schools).

2d. Be competitive in the sector or market place in which it operates.

Summing Up

Teachers in SDA schools in the NAD face many challenges in their work. Every day they cope with numerous demands on their time as they build relationships with their pupils, their fellow-workers, and the wider Church environment in which their school is embedded. They also face various expectations about their role. From their responses to Question 2, three of the goals that they have chosen to prioritize relate to the spiritual well-being of their pupils. These goals are: (1) that their students accept Jesus as their saviour and friend; (2) that their students learn a holistic lifestyle that includes the physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of their being; (3) that they as teachers are furthering the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus through their work. These three spiritually related goals are approached with an intention of providing the highest quality education possible.

These are commendable, indeed, inspirational intensions. As such, contemporary teachers in SDA schools are standing in a tradition that goes back through Charles B Hirsch, E. E. Cossentine, and E. Howell, to the pioneers of the Adventist Schools system, including Ellen G. White.

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