TEACHR

The Adventist school system and values transmission

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Abstract

In 2011 *Valuegenesis*, a major survey of beliefs and values and how they are generated was undertaken for a second time twenty years after it was completed in 1992. It revealed the strength of the concert between the home, the church and the school in generating the values and beliefs of adolescents. This article exclusively discusses the impact of the Seventh-day Adventist school system in this process.

> *The individual pupil's temperament and the climate of the home contribute to the children's receptivity of values*

There is a growing body of literature in this area. The most prominent has grown out of the Valuegenesis studies of North America were they have systematically surveyed cohorts over the past 25 years (Benson, & Donahue,1990; Dudley, 2000; Dudley & Gillespie, 1992; Dudley, 1995; Gane, 2005; Gillespie, 2002; Gillespie, Donahue, Gane, & Boyatt, 2004; Rice & Gillespie, 1992; Strahan, 1996). Both the Valuegenesis studies of North American students (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992; Gillespie Donahue, Gane, & Boyatt, 2004) and the first Valuegenesis study of Australian students (Hughes, 1993) found that the religious school system had a profound effect on the student and the acceptance of the beliefs and values of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church.

There is significant literature that overlaps with and supports the findings of the North American studies (Allport & Ross, 1967; Clark, 1998; Davidson, 1993, Flor, 2002; Hoge & Petrillo, 1978, 1982; Junkin, 2002; Kirschenbaum & Simon, 1974; Ozorak, 1989; Schmidt, 1999). Benson examines the relationship between the school and values transmission and his findings highlight that religious schooling does have a long-term impact on adolescent religiosity (Benson & Donahue, 1990; Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; 1993). Arweck and Nesbitt (2004, 2004a) did a year-long study on how religions and education interconnect. They looked specifically at Living Values: An Educational Program (LVEP). This program is constructed around talking about, experiencing, and practicing values in various ways. Arweck and Nesbitt (2004) state:

Through reflection, visualisation, silence and artistic expression, values are defined and explored in relation to self and others, made relevant, are intended to be felt, and represented artistically; creative skills are stimulated and social skills developed. Stories, songs and games are used as stimuli and vehicles for conveying values—components whose relevance for allowing spiritual qualities to develop is recognised and which are indeed used by other educators. (p. 135)

Arweck and Nesbitt believe that redirecting values can only happen through education, and although they see the classroom as the primary place for this to happen, they also see value in the family and in its process and refer to a similar program to LVEP for use within the family. They recognise that the individual pupil's temperament and the climate of the home contribute to the children's receptivity of values.

A provocative article by Steven Cohen (1995) looked at the effects of the American Jewish school system, both orthodox and non-Orthodox schools, concluding that they had a profound effect on the level of Jewish identity.

This article looks at four indicators of quality in a school program (Items E1–21). It considers responses to items investigating the impact of Adventist schools on the behaviour of students. A discussion of the relationship between a quality school program, Christian commitment and denominational loyalty leads to asserted conclusions.

Throughout this article comparisons will be made between the results of the 1992 study and this most recent research. To allow clear comparisons, the students within this study were divided into two groups based on religious attachment, SDA and non-SDA.

The research instrument

This study reports on responses to part of a larger survey of 331 items investigating adolescent attitudes to beliefs, values and behaviour (Gane, 2012). All items used Likert-type scales, with from four to seven categories (Donahue, 1990). Higher scale values indicated stronger agreement, or more positive and desirable behaviour.

Figure 1: Type of SDA school attended: What type of school do you attend (Item E23)
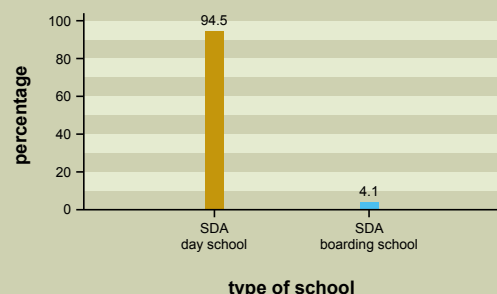
Student demographics

The sample for this study was taken from the Seventh-day Adventist school system across Australia and New Zealand[1]. A number of students did not take part in the study and a small number of surveys were removed from the final report after the data cleaning process. The report includes 80% of the possible SDA students in the Adventist school system.

Of 3168 respondents, 1359 were identified as coming from a home with at least one Adventist parent. The Valuegenesis report (Gane, 2012)

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[1] The sample in the first study of 1992 (Hughes, 1993) used randomly selected churches across Australia and New Zealand. The names of adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 were collected and they were personally sent an invitation to participate in the study. In the intervening years this approach has been deemed inappropriate and hence the school system was used and parents were alerted to the study and asked to grant permission for their children to be involved in the study.

focuses on the responses of students having at least one Adventist parent, however in this assessment of school quality the responses of all students are considered, including 1809 non-Adventist students. Of the 1359 Adventist youth, 1281 attended Adventist day schools, and 56 attended an Adventist boarding school. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to distinguish group differences.

Quality school factors

Teacher quality

Student perceptions of teacher quality were assessed by questionnaire items E1, 4, 12, 13, and 14. Table 1 presents the percentage agreement for these items. Sixty percent of students attending Adventist schools believed that their teachers do their job well. This is a 5% improvement that was reflected by the SDA and the non-SDA students as well. The criteria that students are using to make this assessment needs to be investigated since these responses indicate a large number of teachers (40%) are not meeting their students' expectations. Some evidence may come from student evaluation of teacher behaviours.

Sadly, only a slight majority (54%) consider teachers cared about them. Half of all the students believe that their teachers do not listen to them; while a larger percentage (54%) do not recognise the offer or receipt of any reward for work well done. It is the belief of many students that teachers use or may use embarrassment to control students. Only about forty percent, of both groups, agreed that teachers try to avoid embarrassing students.

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate 'student perceived' difficulties within the teaching profession and consequently the relatively low opinion that some students hold concerning the performance

Sixty percent of students attending Adventist schools believed that their teachers cared about them and that they do their job well

Table 1: Perception of teachers

	percentage agreement		
	SDA students		**non-SDA students**
	n = 1811	n = 1359	n = 1809
E1. My teachers do their job very well	55	**60**	**60**
E4. My teachers reward me for work that is well done	44	**46**	**45**
E12. My teachers care about me	56	**54**	**54**
E13. Teachers at my school listen to me	55	**50**	**50**
E14. Teachers try not to embarrass students	38	**41**	**42**

Note: 1. Percentage agreement includes both *moderately agree* and *strongly agree* categories.
          2. *Valuegenesis II* results are in bold.

> *The largest changes were in attachment to the school (-15%) and 'feeling responsible for my actions' (-14%)*

of their teachers. Individual schools may have somewhat different scores, but this report only deals with the combined data.

School climate

There is an obvious relationship between teachers and school climate. If teachers are perceived not to care, or to be punitive in their approach to students, this will obviously colour the students view of the school climate. Items E15–21 in the questionnaire dealt with school climate (see Table 2). In the first study, statistical analysis indicated that there were no significant differences between school climate scores for Adventist schools and non-Adventist schools. The scores have dropped by 10–15 percent in this study, but the data show that non Adventist students in the same school feel about the same

way as their Adventist counterparts. The largest changes were in attachment to the school (-15%) and 'feeling responsible for my actions' (-14%), both being lower for non-SDA students. No longer do a majority consider discipline to be fair. Has a change in the ratio of SDA to non-SDA student enrolment coincided with a change in SDA students' attitude towards the non-SDA norm? What may have caused this? Is it shared social change or the influence of this increasing segment of non-SDA students? In this study 38% of students attending Adventist schools agreed that they had a voice in the running of the school. Forty-nine percent of students attending Adventist schools preferred their own school to any other. Changes in sampling strategy resulted in having no data from state and other independent schools to make current comparisons.

Table 2: School climate

	percentage agreement		
	SDA students		**non-SDA students**
	n = 1811	n = 1359	n = 1809
E15. I like the way things are done at my school	41	**41**	**41**
E16. The discipline at my school is fair	53	**43**	**42****
E17. My school is a good school	66	**57**	**55****
E18. I am proud of my school	60	**51**	**47****
E19. Students have a voice in running the school	44	**38**	**37**
E20. At school I feel responsible for my actions	73	**59**	**55****
E21. I would rather go to my school than any other	64	**49**	**43***

Note: 1. Agreement includes both *moderately agree* and *strongly agree* categories.
2. *Valuegenesis II* results are in bold.
3. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01 applies to the difference between the *Valuegenesis II* group means.

Table 3: Relevance of school program

	percentage agreement		
	SDA students		**non-SDA students**
	n = 1811	n = 1359	n = 1809
E9. What I learn in class will help me in later life	72	**66**	**61*****
E10. At school I learn how to accept myself	51	**50**	**54***
E11. At school I learn how to care for others	55	**58**	**58**

Note: 1. Agreement includes both *moderately agree* and *strongly agree* categories.
2. *Valuegenesis II* results are in bold.
3. *p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001 applies to the difference between the *Valuegenesis II* group means.

Relevance of the school program

Items E9–11 dealt with the perceived relevance of the school program. Student responses are presented in Table 3. Sixty-six percent of students believed what they learned in class would help them in later life, a six percent drop in perceived relevance of learning. The Adventist students had a mean score of 4.38 for perceived relevance of the school program while their non-Adventist counterparts had a score of 4.32. Although this may appear to be a small difference it is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$). Fifty percent agreed that the Adventist school teaches them how to accept themselves while the figure was 54% for non-Adventist students. Fifty-eight percent of both categories of students attending Adventist schools agreed that they learned "how to care for others" at school.

Christian impact of the school

Items E6, 7, and 8 address the issue of the extent to which students perceive a Christian influence to be operating within the school program. A summary of student responses is presented in Table 4.

All of these scores have improved with the non-Adventist students scoring higher than the Adventist students from Valuegenesis I. Fifty-four percent of students attending Adventist schools agree that their teachers show them how to relate to God (only 5% of SDA students in non-SDA schools said this was true of their teachers in Valuegenesis I), 58% agree that they learn Christian values in their classes (only 5% of SDA students in non-SDA schools said this was true of their classes in Valuegenesis I) and 52% agree that they are able to talk to their teachers about God, (only 11% SDA students in non-SDA schools said this was true of their teachers in Valuegenesis I).

The impact of Adventist schools on behaviour
Alcohol consumption

A number of differences in behaviour were observed in students attending Adventist schools when compared with Adventist students attending state schools in the first study. In that study students at Adventist schools were significantly ($p \leq 0.01$) less involved in binge drinking and attended significantly ($p \leq 0.005$) fewer parties where alcohol was served. Almost twenty years have passed since the first survey and we now have real change in this area. There are now more students attending parties where alcohol is served and getting involved in binge drinking than reported by their counterparts from state schools in the first study. Differences are shown in Figure 2 and 3. The mean score for the current student is somewhere close to the second category of "1–2 times" for attending parties where alcohol is served. The mean score for binge drinking (had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row) is lower and closer to the "0 times" category. Sixty-seven percent of SDA students have never been to a party where alcohol was served and a further 13% stated they had been to only one party while 83% have not tried binge drinking. Highly significant differences ($p<0.001$) exist for both attending parties serving alcohol and binge drinking between students with increasing alcohol involvement, depending on whether they have two ($M=1.64$), one ($M=1.89$) or no SDA ($M=2.14$) parent respectively.

Attitude to Adventist standards and culture

Items I1–I11 of the questionnaire address the issues of Adventist standards and culture. For reasons that will be explained in the main report (Gane, 2012), items I1, I2, I6, I7, I8, and I10 refer to Adventist standards while items I3, I4, I5, I9, and I11 refer to Adventist culture. Adventist standards

> *Fifty-eight percent of students attending Adventist schools agreed that they learned 'how to care for others'*

Table 4: Christian impact of schools

	percentage agreement		
	SDA students		non-SDA students
	n = 1811	n = 1359	n = 1809
E6. My teachers show me how to relate to God	45	**54**	**50****
E7. I learn Christian values in my classes	51	**58**	**54*****
E8. I am able to talk to teachers about God	47	**52**	**50****

Note: 1. Agreement includes both *moderately agree* and *strongly agree* categories.
   2. *Valuegenesis II* results are in bold.
   3. **p<0.01, ***p<0.001 applies to the difference between the *Valuegenesis II* group means.

relate to the use of tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, whether sex should only occur within marriage, the use of unclean meat and Sabbath observance. The Adventist culture sub-scale includes attitudes towards heavy rock music, watching movies at

> *Non-SDA students in Adventist schools continue to 'slightly agree' with Adventist standards*

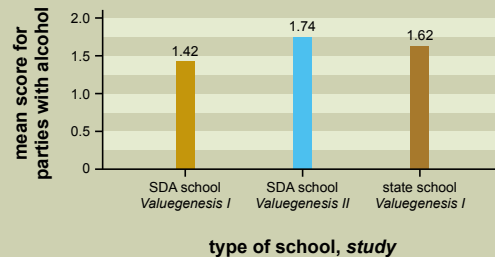**Figure 2:** Drinking parties: Gone to a party where kids your age were drinking (Item G4)

**Figure 3:** Binge drinking: Had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (Item G5)

Figure 4: Endorsement of Adventist standards: Mean scores

movie theatres, dancing, AO movies and the use of caffeinated drinks. While these issues will be dealt with in more detail in the main report it is interesting to note that in the first study students attending Adventist schools had a significantly ($p \leq 0.005$) more positive attitude to Adventist standards than did those who attended state schools. The mean score of 5.02 is interpreted as being moderately in agreement with the SDA church position. The mean score ($M = 4.16$) for the non-SDA places them in the category of slight agreement. Figure 4 presents this difference. In the current study we have no data from those attending state schools but we have shown the results for non–SDA students attending Adventist schools. Although the concurrence with Adventist standards has dropped a little, students still "moderately agree" with Adventist Standards. It is gratifying to see that the non-SDA students in Adventist schools continue to "slightly agree" with Adventist standards, even if with a lower mean score.

In the first study there were no significant differences between Adventists students attending Adventist schools and Adventist young people attending state schools in the areas of frequency of alcohol consumption (item G1), marijuana use (item G2) shop lifting (item G6) and the viewing of pornography (item G7) or sexual activity (item G8). In the current study there is significant statistical difference between those from an SDA background and those not from an SDA home for all of the above items with the exception of viewing pornography (G7). Seventy-two percent of SDA youth have not taken alcohol while only 58% of their non-SDA school-mates make the same claim. Thirty-two percent of SDA young people have attended parties where there was alcohol present while 44% their non SDA had had this experience. Fewer SDA youth, (14%), have had sexual intercourse than their non-SDA school mates, (19%). Recent research has investigated a potential behaviour-belief gap (Leonard, 2010). In all these items (except G7) an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with $\alpha = 0.05$ and the determined probability was $p \leq 0.005$.

Commitment and loyalty
Do Adventist schools make any contribution to Christian commitment and loyalty to the Church? The analysis result concerning denominational loyalty is very clear. Students attending Adventist schools scored significantly higher ($M = 4.12$, $p \leq 0.05$) on the denominational loyalty scale than did Adventist young people who attended state schools ($M = 4.03$, $p \leq 0.05$), however the current data only gives us information on those in Adventist schools but the
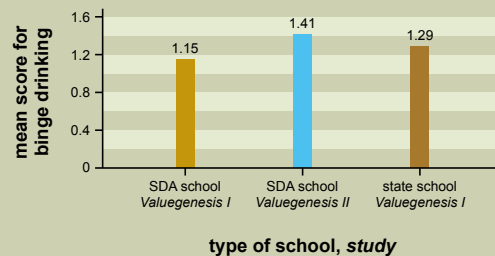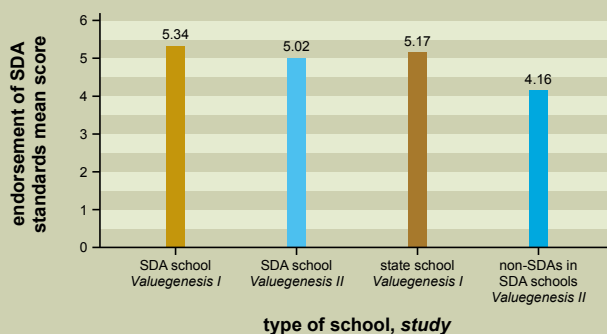
mean score has changed very little (*M*=4.09) though participation in religion has changed significantly over time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

While there is only a marginal relationship between attendance at Adventist schools and Christian commitment and denominational loyalty scores, there is a highly statistically significant relationship between each of the school quality factors within Adventist schools and denominational loyalty and Christian commitment. Table 5 lists

Table 5: Adventist school quality factors related to denominational loyalty, Christian commitment and social responsibility

	correlation coefficients					
	denominational loyalty		Christian commitment		social responsibility	
teacher quality sub-scale	**0.40**	*0.24*	**0.40**	*0.33*	**0.24**	*0.18*
E1. My teachers do their job very well	0.27	*0.22*	0.28	*0.24*	0.16	–
E12. My teachers care about me	0.37	*0.20*	0.38	*0.29*	0.25	*0.15*
E13. Teachers at my school listen to me	0.34	*0.19*	0.33	*0.30*	0.24	*0.15*
E14. Teachers try not to embarrass students	0.33	*0.16*	0.34	*0.22*	–	–
E4. My teachers reward me for work that is well done	0.22	*0.20*	0.21	*0.29*	0.16	*0.18*
Christian impact sub-scale	**0.37**	*0.27*	**0.45**	*0.39*	**0.30**	*0.18*
E6. My teachers show me how to relate to God	0.32	*0.23*	0.38	*0.35*	0.28	*0.17*
E7. I learn Christian values in my classes	0.36	*0.24*	0.40	*0.32*	0.28	*0.15*
E8. I am able to talk to teachers about God	0.29	*0.24*	0.40	*0.34*	0.22	*0.15*
personal relevance sub-scale	**0.34**	*0.26*	**0.39**	*0.37*	**0.27**	*0.20*
E9. What I learn in class will help me in later life	0.31	*0.21*	0.30	*0.30*	0.15	–
E10. At school I learn how to accept myself	0.23	*0.26*	0.29	*0.37*	0.20	*0.20*
E11. At school I learn how to care for others	0.31	*0.22*	0.37	*0.33*	0.30	*0.23*
school climate sub-scale	**0.46**	*0.29*	**0.42**	*0.39*	**0.23**	*0.19*
E15. I like the way things are done at my school	0.39	*0.18*	0.31	*0.28*	–	*0.15*
E16. The discipline at my school is fair	0.28	*0.19*	0.23	*0.29*	0.16	–
E17. My school is a good school	0.42	*0.28*	0.40	*0.33*	0.20	*0.17*
E18. I am proud of my school	0.43	*0.28*	0.41	*0.37*	0.27	*0.16*
E19. Students have a voice in running the school	0.34	*0.19*	0.30	*0.29*	–	–
E20. At school I feel responsible for my actions	0.28	*0.28*	0.35	*0.38*	0.25	*0.20*
E21. I would rather go to my school than any other	0.42	*0.25*	0.35	*0.31*	–	*0.15*
additional items						
E5. I have a clear idea of the important goals of the school	0.23	*0.16*	0.35	*0.30*	0.25	*0.20*
E2. My school expects me to master the basic skills	–	*0.17*	0.15	–	–	–
E3. My school expects me to do my best work	0.22	*0.18*	0.19	*0.17*	0.15	–

Note: 1. *p*≤0.01 for all items.
2. A dash (–) signifies a correlation less than 0.15.
3. *Valuegenesis II* results are in italics.
4. Correlation with whole subscales are indicated in bold.

each of the school quality indicators grouped in four major sub-scales—Teacher Quality, Christian Impact, Personal Relevance and School Climate that are significantly related to Denominational Loyalty, Christian Commitment and Social Responsibility within the context of Adventist schools. Correlations between each of the sub-scales and Denominational Loyalty and Christian Commitment are presented in bold type with Valuegenesis II values being in italics. Correlations between each of the individual items are presented in plain type. These data are consistent with the view that what happens within an Adventist school has a far more significant bearing on the development of loyalty and Christian commitment than does mere attendance at the school. Table 5 only lists the school quality factors that are significantly related to Denominational Loyalty, Christian Commitment and Social Responsibility within the context of Adventist schools.

The relationships between School Quality subscales and Denominational Loyalty have reduced by between 0.08 to 0.17, the change being largest for School Climate Sub-scale (-0.17), followed by the Teacher Quality Sub-scale (-0.16), both being changes from moderate correlation to weak correlation. This might be expected with a more denominationally diverse school population and recent trends (Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007; McCrindle, 2008, 2009). Moderate relationships between School Quality sub-scales and Christian Commitment have shown a smaller decrease (0.02 to 0.07) becoming weaker, the change being greatest for Teacher Quality (-0.07) and slightly less for the Christian Impact Sub-scale (-0.06). The Social Responsibility scale shows greatest decrease in association with the Christian Impact Sub-scale (-0.12); all School Quality sub-scales being weakly associated with Social Responsibility.

Discussion

This analysis compares changes over time in the attitudes of different cohorts of students. Further, although all students in this Valuegenesis II study attend an SDA high school, useful comparisons to earlier work can be made since it was possible to isolate those who went to an SDA or non-SDA school in the first study. From this analysis a number of important school quality outcomes are immediately apparent. Students' perception of teachers indicate more now think their teachers do their job very well (60% compared to 55%). However, fewer believe that their teachers care about them or listen to them. An increased minority, but only close to half, are aware teachers reward them in any way for work well done and about 60% consider teachers likely to embarrass them.

> **The system-wide, anonymously collected data in this article asserts the need for systemic responses on multiple levels**

These results reflect the broader finding that there has been a drop in the mean for overall School Climate, and for each item of that scale. Less than half of the students attending Adventist schools would rather go to their school than any other, compared to about two thirds earlier. A minority (about 40%) like the way things are done at their school, agree discipline is fair or consider students have a voice in "running the school". The factors potentially affecting school climate need further investigation but do include teacher performance.

While a majority of students (about 60%) judged the school program relevant to future work (-6%) and caring for others (+5%), only half considered schooling addressed acceptance of themselves. This awareness of personal development in adolescence appears to need considerably greater emphasis.

Anecdotal discussions with system administrators indicated these results differ from the type of responses they experienced when interacting with school-administration-selected focus groups during school evaluation visits. The system-wide, anonymously collected data of research reported in this article, however, asserts the need for systemic responses on multiple levels. Firstly, professional development for teachers should address the issues of apparent demonstration of care; fair, visible, appropriate discipline; respect for students, particularly avoiding embarrassing them; and perceived rewards for work completed well. Given this last factor has increased the most in its association with Christian commitment within this study, its positive impact needs to be utilised, but also further investigated. These teacher skills, expected in the performance of quality teachers, need to be included with other essential elements in the system instruments guiding individual teacher assessment, development and categorisation.

Administrators of schools across the system need to be involved in school climate analyses that evaluate and guide actions to increase positively contributing elements, and reduce detractors so as to ensure a strong majority affirm their school experience, school pride and preference. A 13% lowering of "feeling responsible for my actions" and a (-6%) lower awareness of voice in school operation implies a significant systemic, social and/or cultural disconnect with experiences in schooling. Social confinement, low self-efficacy, peer priorities, prescribed educational or school system structures and expectations should be considered. Is there a linkage to the low priority in the curriculum sensed by students for "learning to accept myself"?

The spiritual purposes of a Seventh-day Adventist School have shown increased student identification. More (54%, up from 45%) students believe that Adventist teachers show them how to relate to God; a majority of students in Adventist schools believe they learn Christian values in their classes (58%, up from 51% in the Valuegenesis I study); and that they can talk to their teachers about God (52% up from 47%). In Valuegenesis I comparative figures for non-Adventist schools were below 10%. It would be conjecture to suggest how these may have varied over time. However, these more recently achieved, small majorities, while being a positive development, are disappointing within the 'big picture', and should motivate educators to develop more effective, more influential outcomes.

Valuegenesis I revealed students attending Adventist schools had a significantly lower incidence of alcohol consumption and binge drinking than Adventists attending state schools and although we do not have the data to make a comparison, other studies (Cancer Council of Victoria, 2012; Gilligan & Kypri, 2012) would suggest "at-risk drinking" behaviours have not improved overall in the state school system. Students attending Adventist schools continue to have a positive attitude to Adventist lifestyle standards.

Conclusion

The Adventist school system was designed to give a holistic and balanced education that included connecting students to their religious roots and leading them to a lasting relationship with Jesus that guides their behaviour. It is encouraging to learn that students attending Adventist schools still have high denominational loyalty scores. This system, with its stakeholders, are challenged by this data and recent research into both teenage brain development (Begley, 2000; Brownlee, 2005; Monastersky, 2007) and current culture (Saulwick & Muller, 2006; Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; Sayers, 2011), to assess the potential for making an even stronger daily Christian interaction with its students through an intentional, planned and carefully designed, teaching ministry. TEACH

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