

The Missing Link in the Integration of Faith and Learning?

Findings From a Global Survey of Educators in Adventist Secondary Schools

By Paul S. Brantley

Seventh-day Adventist schools exist for a singular purpose—to restore God’s ideal within each student. For the Christ-centered educational institution, nurturing the life of faith within each student is paramount.

Adventist teachers care deeply about integrating faith and learning. In her survey of the reading habits of Adventist educators, Beverly Rumble found that readers of the *JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION* chose “integration of faith and learning” as one of their favorite topics.* Given the secularism of our age, Adventist educators at all levels must seek ways to introduce Christ to their students.

Conspicuously absent, however, from most discussions of integration of faith and learning (IFL) is the role of administration. Support for IFL by school and college administrators is no guarantee of its success, but *non-support* by school and college administrators almost guarantees its failure.

More than any other individual, the top administrator is both responsible and accountable for school performance. Rarely does the organization rise higher than the caliber of its leadership—a concept as true today as during the time of the kings of Israel thousands of years ago. Why is this so? There are three reasons why administrative commitment is critical

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to faith integration or any other school-wide change.

Administrator as Standard Bearer

First, each school has a unique culture with many linkages, networks, and reward structures. School effectiveness research from the past two decades underscores the critical role of leadership in forming a culture with high expectations, order, and accomplishment. The research further reveals that successful schools focus on student performance and are driven by a sense of mission. This mission is visible both in written documents and in the school's unwritten ethos. The administrator is the standard bearer. He or she must develop a culture of change and promote a sense of mission throughout the entire organization.

Administrator as Educator

Second, the school is—in a sense—the top administrator's classroom. Schools and colleges are prime examples of learning organizations. In order for faculty and staff to implement any campus-wide reform, they must be trained to do so. Only the top administrator can set the agenda for learning and change within the organization. He or she chooses the curriculum for the learning organization and allocates time for staff training and development. One of the most precious commodities of a school

or college is *time*. It takes time to learn and to change, and only the administrator can schedule time for the faculty to learn new approaches. Moreover, the administrator can invite resource persons to help the staff prepare itself for reform in a way that no one else can.

Administrator as Resource Provider

Third, the administrator supplies critical resources and energy to the school. Even the most motivated staff member will find school change to be daunting unless it is supported by appropriate resources. The administrator

can provide those resources. In addition to supplies and courseware, other critical resources for school reform might include stipends and other tokens of affirmation to encourage faculty and staff to make desired improvements.

No one is more crucial to promoting this life of faith than the school leader. He or she is uniquely positioned to help (1) set a culture for reform that embraces the idea of faith-centered schooling; (2) provide important training for faculty and staff to competently carry out reform; and (3) supply resources necessary for the organization to implement the necessary changes.

A Global Survey of Faith and Learning

To what extent is the administrator's role critical in helping schools imple-

Table 1

"This year, our school administration was able to inspire IFL (integration of faith and learning) throughout the entire school."

| Response | Percentage of Teachers Agreeing |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Strongly agree | 12% |
| Agree | 29 |
| Uncertain | 20 |
| Disagree | 23 |
| Strongly disagree | 16 |

Source: Global study of 451 senior academy teachers in Adventist schools.

ment a distinctive faith? In order to explore this question, 375 Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools were randomly chosen from the 1997 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* to participate in a mail survey. The survey sought to determine to what extent qualities such as school leadership affect the integration of faith and learning in schools and classrooms.

Procedures. The researchers interviewed each division director of education at the 1996 General Conference Education Summit in order to identify potential areas for analysis. After receiving the directors' endorsement, the researchers chose two teachers per school, using a set number of language, history, science, Bible, and mathematics teachers for purposes of comparison.

The survey instrument was translated into Spanish, French, and Portuguese. These languages, in addition to English, accommodated the language needs of practically every respondent group. The survey instrument was analyzed for validity and sent to each school office with a cover letter from the General Conference education director. Administrators at each school site distributed the sealed

survey instrument to the appropriate teachers. After completing the questionnaire, teachers sent the confidential survey forms directly to our research office at Andrews University. More than 60 percent of the teachers, from nearly 60 countries worldwide, responded—a rather remarkable return rate.

Respondents. Almost all of the 451 teachers who completed the survey were Adventists (99 percent). Two-thirds were men, and most were young (only one in six was more than 50 years of age). More than half had attended Adventist academies (56 percent) and colleges (62 percent). Exactly one-third of the academy teachers had taken some graduate studies at Adventist graduate schools; a third had studied at non-Adventist graduate schools; and a third had not attended graduate school. A great majority had been baptized Adventists for more than 10 years. Half had been teaching at their present location for five years or less—suggesting that teacher turnover is a problem throughout the world field.

Research questions. Returning to the three preconditions for reform—a culture for change, training, and re-

sources—we asked the following questions about the integration of faith and learning in Adventist schools around the world:

- To what extent do administrators set a culture of readiness for IFL change and reform?
- To what extent do administrators provide opportunities for faculty and staff to become proficient and intentional in IFL?
- To what extent did administrators provide necessary resources for implementing IFL?

Findings

Almost all of the teachers (95 percent) said they wanted to implement faith and learning, and 93 percent indicated "definite plans" to do so during the coming school year. Less than one teacher in 10 questioned the concept of IFL in any way.

The administrator and the school culture. The respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement: "Our school administration was able to inspire IFL throughout the entire school." Forty-one percent agreed, while the remainder either disagreed or were uncertain (see Table 1). Only 12 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that faculty and staff worked closely together to make IFL extremely successful. When asked what makes it difficult for them to implement faith and learning, 23 percent cited little support from leadership, and 14 percent said "our school does not promote IFL."

The profile that emerged revealed that Adventist academy administrators neither actively promote nor obstruct IFL. Although few teachers gave administrators strongly negative IFL ratings, it is equally clear that IFL is not at the top of the administrative agenda—a finding further substantiated as one examines other preconditions of school reform.

Training for IFL. The respondents were asked to rate 15 problems that make it difficult to implement IFL. Table 2 indicates four areas seen as highly problematic by teachers and four not considered as serious obstacles. It seems noteworthy that the area cited *least* as a

Table 2

"It is not always easy to teach a distinctively Adventist curriculum. WHAT ARE THE GREATEST PROBLEMS that make it difficult to integrate faith throughout your teaching? Check all that apply."

| Problems | Percentage of Teachers Citing as a Problem |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Greatest Problems</i> | |
| Teachers need more training in IFL | 67% |
| Lack of good IFL teaching materials | 63 |
| Textbooks don't support IFL | 53 |
| Lack of library reference materials | 52 |
| <i>Least Problems</i> | |
| Lack of student interest in IFL | 17% |
| Our school does not promote IFL | 14 |
| IFL is difficult in my teaching area | 10 |
| IFL has philosophic problems | 7 |

Source: Global study of 451 senior academy teachers in Adventist schools.

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problem (seven percent) was philosophic disagreement with the concept of IFL. Moreover, only a few teachers saw lack of student interest or teacher understanding of the concept as a problem. However, the problem cited as making integration of faith and learning most difficult was teachers' need for more training (67 percent).

This finding should send a clear

wake-up call to Adventist educational leaders. Less than one in five teachers reported having attended any kind of seminar related to IFL. And the types of seminars they *do* attend may be a problem. Could it be that too much time is spent on philosophy and too little on implementation? Only one in nine respondents said they met in teacher groups to share concrete ideas about im-

plementing IFL.

Coaching and follow-up are critical for successful and sustained implementation. Yet less than one in five respondents reported having anyone come by to assist them by sharing IFL ideas.

Commercial businesses and industries invest prodigious amounts of money to train their workers because they recognize the direct link between

Table 3

What RESOURCES WOULD YOU CONSIDER USEFUL in integrating faith and learning in your classes?

| Resources | Definitely Useful or Useful | Somewhat Useful | Little Use or Not Useful |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Textbook supplements/guides | 65% | 33% | 2% |
| Sample teacher lesson plans | 60 | 36 | 4 |
| Workshops and training | 59 | 36 | 5 |
| Sharing ideas with other teachers | 57 | 40 | 3 |
| GC/division IFL seminars | 53 | 40 | 7 |
| Indexes to locate good IFL materials | 46 | 45 | 9 |
| JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION | 40 | 50 | 10 |

Source: Global study of 451 senior academy teachers in Adventist schools.

training and productivity. Training must take a high profile in Adventist education if reform is to become a reality. Once again, the administrator's role is crucial.

Resources. Every profession needs resources and tools, and teaching is no exception. Yet educators are often given only the most rudimentary of resources. Teachers considered resources and training to be a much bigger problem than support for implementing IFL. Respondents overwhelmingly (90-98 percent) indicated that a variety of specific curriculum materials would be useful to them in integrating faith and learning.

Only a minority of Adventist teachers surveyed said they owned any curriculum materials that helped them integrate faith with their teaching (ranging from two percent—computer software with ideas for teaching IFL, to 35 percent—subscription to the *JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION*). Although 95 percent of the teachers said they had a Bible available, only 65 percent had the services of a photocopier, 59 percent had an overhead projector, 49 percent had a computer printer, 30 percent had Internet or E-mail, and 23 percent had access

to the World Wide Web.

In Table 3, teachers indicated what resources they considered helpful. Again, this underscores the importance of the administrator's role in helping teachers secure these resources.

Recommendations

Integrating faith and learning is a favorite topic of Adventist educators. However, if IFL is to be more than rhetoric, Adventist educational administrators must be the driving force.

The following recommendations arise from the global study of teachers in Adventist academies:

1. *For IFL to be intentional and meaningful, administrators must put it at the heart of their agenda.* IFL is not an add-on or extra course in the curriculum. It is a culture—a mindset. The administrator can influence the culture in two significant ways: (a) He or she can promote cooperation between school, church, and home. In one of the most striking findings of the Valuegenesis study, student faith development scores were directly related to the number of supportive environments (home, school, church) experienced by students. More

than half the students with all three environments intact had high faith maturity scores, compared with only five percent of students with none of the environments intact. The administrator can encourage home, school, and church to collaborate in nurturing the faith of students. (b) The administrator can make IFL a part of the institutional curriculum—an ethos that pervades the entire school and is experienced by students, faculty, and staff alike.

2. *Administrators must view their schools as learning organizations—just as teachers do their classrooms.* Reform is a process, not an event. Faculty and staff members are at a variety of levels on the change continuum, as illustrated in Table 4. Administrators should identify where their schools fall along the continuum and then help faculty and staff to make IFL a dynamic part of the school culture. This nurture can take place in a variety of forms: IFL discussions during the hiring process, beginning-of-the-year faculty/staff retreats, participation in faith-and-learning seminars, church dedication services, faculty meetings, individualized faculty development plans, IFL support groups, and so on. Training is an ongoing process that must include follow-up for maximum benefit.

For integration of faith and learning to become a reality in Adventist schools, teachers need help to make it happen. Although a teacher's attitude is the most important precondition to integrating faith and learning, teachers also need resources and commitment from their administrators to ensure that they employ the most effective methods of communicating the faith. ☞

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* Beverly J. Rumble, "What Makes Educators Read? Relating Uses-and-Gratifications Research to the Specialized Audience Magazine," Master's thesis, University of Maryland, 1992. Reported in April/May 1993 *Journal of Adventist Education*, p. 17.

Table 4

Identifying Faculty Awareness and Implementation of Integration of Faith and Learning

Levels of IFL Implementation

- Non-use: little knowledge of IFL
- Orientation: desire to learn more about IFL
- Preparation: making plans to implement IFL
- Irregular use: superficial attempts at IFL
- Routine use: teacher-based IFL traditions
- Refined use: creative, student-based IFL approaches
- Dynamic use: IFL becomes an institutional collaborative

Source: Raquel Korniejczuk and Paul Brantley, *Journal of Adventist Education* (December 1993/January 1994), p. 11.