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By Annette D. Melgosa

A Window of Opportunity

Seventh-day Adventist education is unique because it seeks to educate not only for this world, but also for the world to come.¹ A strong faith philosophy of salvation and restoration must there-

fore govern every part of the system. This philosophy can be broken down into four basic parts:

- First, God created us in His image.² This means we have great value in His sight.
- Second, we are sinners, and only God can save us.³ Acknowledging our sinfulness and our need is essential to our restoration into an eternal relationship with God.
- With our consent, God transforms us and restores His image in our lives.⁴
- Finally, this transformational, restorative philosophy compels us to carry the message of hope and warning to those around us.⁵

The Seventh-day Adventist school, then, must be committed to sharing these concepts with its students. The sharing process can be likened to a series of windows through which the student looks as he or she develops a faith-based worldview. The inspired revelation of God through His Word, His prophets, and His creation, when taught in the school, is undoubtedly one such window. The living examples of committed Christian teachers are yet another view.

When faith is consciously built into the curriculum, this, too, can be a window, as can extracurricular activities, properly organized and implemented. Even the facilities can provide a physical view of faith. The Christian school library, too, can offer a unique faith-based view of the world.

So how does the school library contribute to the mission of the school? How does it open windows to a world of ideas, culture, dreams, and faith?

Going back to our philosophy, the library supports each of the four points in the following ways:

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Philosophical Belief

Library Materials

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| God created us. | Quality literature on creationist theory. |
| We are sinners. | Historical and theological documentation that enables students to trace the theme of salvation through Earth's history. |
| God restores His image in us through the renewal of our minds. | Safe materials for students to use as they explore their world. |
| We have a unique message of hope and warning for the world. | Adventist heritage materials help students catch the vision of our pioneers. |

BRARY

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The Library: A Window of Academic Excellence

Adventist schools also strive for academic excellence because Christian education's true objective is to "restore in men and women the image of their Maker."⁶ Ellen White counsels, "Every student should remember that the Lord requires him to make of himself all that is possible, that he may wisely teach others also. Our students should tax the mental powers; every faculty should reach the highest possible development."⁷

The library can make a significant contribution to academic excellence. The popular phrase referring to the library as "the heart of the institution" (see guest editorial on page 3) acknowledges

that the library has a privileged position in supporting academic endeavors. Recent research, however, has given teeth to this oft-toothless adage. A number of statewide studies conducted in the U.S.⁸ show that libraries positively affect student achievement on national achievement exams. Literature shows that "where library media programs are better staffed, better stocked, and better funded, academic achievement tends to be higher."⁹ Studies also show that academic achievement is influenced by "the extent to which library media staff engaged in particular activities related to the teaching of information literacy and to the exercise of leadership, collaboration, and technology."¹⁰

The library can provide a safe place for students to catch glimpses of the greater world outside their small community or school. They can expand their powers of thinking and test their ideas against those of great thinkers through the wise choice of reading. They can find in the library a place to dream, to reflect, and to cultivate their critical reasoning skills.

The Library: Window of Opportunity?

Seventh-day Adventist educators must ask themselves whether their school libraries adequately fulfill these roles. Is the library a window of faith and of academic excellence? Has enough care been given to ensure that the view it provides is clear and compelling?

Jonathan Kozol, speaking of libraries in poor communities in the United States, paints the picture this way:

"Books, however—and not simply books as inert objects shoved into a barren room or closet in a darkened corner of an overcrowded school, but books in artful presentation, books displayed and offered as . . . enticements, books in short, in beautiful school

libraries developed with the artfulness of skilled librarians—remain the clearest window to a world of . . . satisfactions that most children in poor neighborhoods will ever know."¹¹

From our transformational Christian worldview, we can compare our students to these impoverished children. Our students are growing up in the impoverished world of evil, pain, and ugliness. It is up to us as educators to give them a clear window to the delights of life in Christ. Ellen White encourages this view when she says, "Books should have been prepared to place in the hands of students that would educate them to have a sincere, reverent love for truth and steadfast integrity."¹² It is our privilege to



How does the school library contribute to the mission of the school?

help our students "reach the highest attainments for the purpose of doing others good. Knowledge harmoniously blended with a Christlike character will make a person truly a light to the world."¹³ The school library, properly set up and properly managed, can provide this window of faith, academic excellence, and opportunity.

Dr. Stephen Guptill, education director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists and a firm believer in the transformational power of quality school libraries, has had extensive opportunities to visit and evaluate Adventist school libraries. He has also been instrumental in organizing and supporting individual school libraries. The interview that follows offers important insights into the challenges that Adventist libraries face, along with workable solutions.

Interview

By Annette D. Melgosa and Stephen Guptill

Do you see differences between an Adventist and a non-Adventist school library?

I think the critical difference has to do with mission. The library should inspire students to embrace the mission of the church, along with the teachings of Scripture; and to use their talents and careers as light bearers for the future.

Literature shows that “where library media programs are better staffed, better stocked, and better funded, academic achievement tends to be higher.”



What, then, is the role of the Seventh-day Adventist librarian?

It is being aware of how the library can contribute to our distinctive church mission. An academy or college may be located in a cultural community where there is no other entity to represent the Adventist mission. The library can nurture this by providing Christian and evangelistic materials.

I think the librarian also empowers the faculty by providing resources that help them include an Adventist perspective in their disciplines.

What types of materials should an Adventist school library collect?

Certainly, the library should collect anything published by the church in that country or language. The library ought to be an archive for this type of material . . . Sabbath school lessons . . . whatever. Local cultural materials will also help the church fulfill its mission. Other core Adventist publications, even in other languages, should be available for the faculty to use.

There are also some distinctives that we hold as a church and

as an educational system. For instance, our view of science in terms of creationism. Our collection in this area needs to be especially strong.

In our college libraries, we need to support the majors of the students. Ministerial students need to become acquainted with resources that a pastor would use. Education students should have access to teaching materials. When I go to some colleges offering teacher education, I don't see any elementary textbooks to support these students as they learn to teach.

Do you think people have a clear understanding of the school library's role and mission? Are there any misconceptions?

On the secondary level, you run into all kinds of misconceptions. One of the biggest ones is that the library is a study hall, someplace the kids go when they're not having class. Others see the library as a meeting room for potluck dinners and other activities. This could compromise the security of the collection.

I've seen some libraries that are simply archives. They're a closet where you stuff away the non-textbooks. Other times, it is a book

Is the library a window of faith and of academic excellence?

bank with shelves and shelves of textbooks for the different classes.

Sometimes, we see libraries where the important thing is the book count . . . the more, the better. It is a place where the kids don't particularly want to go because the books are old or irrelevant.

What are some of the challenges that you've identified in Adventist school or college libraries?

Sometimes, the problems relate to lack of a trained librarian. Without a trained librarian, the vision is not there.

Other times, acquisition guidelines are missing. There are books in the library that have not been screened and are clearly inappropriate.

At times, it has to do with facilities or budget. I have seen institutions with terrible facilities but wonderful library programs where great things are happening. I've seen libraries that had beautiful facilities but very little use. So I think the answer is to find a balance between good programs and facilities.

Also, I think it's very important that the librarians and libraries have a vision . . . what the library is about. A library is not simply to give research opportunities for the students. It's also a way of nurturing the love of knowledge, the love of reading and going to the library.

So how can schools meet these challenges? Do you see a role for alumni, parents, and the community?

I know one school that was really strapped for budget. They didn't have anything. And so, the librarian and administration sat down with students and the parent-teacher organization and asked, "What can we do?" Brainstorming together, they decided that they would go to the community, parents, and church members and ask, "Are there books that you could donate to our library?" Over the period of a month or so, they collected more than 500 books that were consistent with their collection parameters.

Reading Buddies is a very popular program in some places.

Volunteers sit with kids who are learning to read or have reading challenges and give individualized instruction. Sometimes, community people come in to help students learn to find books, or they shelve books or provide security at the door.

There are lots of ways to involve the community. It means selling the vision. When the school staff visualize what they want to see happen, they can gather the financial and personal support of alumni, parents, and community.

Where does the librarian fit in?

Unless you have a librarian who has the vision and training, who knows how to lead the library forward, budget and facilities

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lose their reason for being. Trained personnel are critical.

What would you consider to be the three most essential things that school principals or presidents can do to help their library?

First, I think the administrator needs to have a trained librarian; then they can work together on establishing clear goals.

The second thing, I suppose, would be a budget. There's no point having goals and accountability without some enabling.

Along with that would be support personnel. In some cases, this would mean part-time workers, or volunteers, perhaps students.

You need both budget and personnel. Administrators are the ones who can enable that.

And then, the last thing would be facilities. This could include equipment, furniture, and a building. Sometimes, institutions spend a lot on a building that they should have spent on the collection.

To me, the collection is the most important thing. There's no point having a nice building and nice shelves unless you've got the collection.

What about school boards or trustees? How can they help the library?

I think that the critical thing for the board is to hold the principal or the president responsible for achieving the school's philosophy and objectives. If the board knows the requirements of education policy for the library, and they are aware of the recommendations from accreditation bodies, they will then hold the administrator's feet to the fire and ask, "How are you meeting these goals?" "How are we achieving *Adventist* ideals in our library?" "Do they have the budget to do this?"

I hope the board sees that its members have an enabling role, as well.

They are trustees. Trusteeship involves looking for ways to make things happen. So, two levels . . . accountability and enabling.

And the educational superintendent?

The superintendent and the union education director need to promote ways to work together as a system. We have some examples of this in North America where the expertise of a college is used to help purchase books for several of the local academies and schools.

I think that as a system, we should recognize the need for trained librarians. We had this problem in our division, so we worked on a Master's program with the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (AIAS) to meet that need.

Certainly now with the Internet, we should be looking for ways to gain system-wide purchasing advantages and to share resources. Another example would be to have Web sites that provide resources for primary-level and secondary librarians. I hope educational superintendents are doing these kinds of things.

I also think it is important that the superintendent track vital statistics for the different institutions and then look at the benchmarks in order to help set strategic plans and goals.

Do you foresee libraries also working together?

Yes. College libraries can help school librarians by suggesting floor plans, collection lists, or other types of resources and guidance. The secondary schools could help the primary schools.

Another way would be to provide information about library tools. Where do you get the Dewey Decimal materials? How about online software and library materials? Classification is another area where cooperation would be useful. For years, librarians had to classify Adventist books one by one. Sharing these records electronically or on CD would be very helpful.

The Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians provides a healthy example of how we can work together as a system in

order to expand and share services throughout the wider community of Adventist schools and colleges.

So summing up, how important do you see the library as being, in terms of the school's success?

Well, in some ways, the library is the center of what is happening in the school. It is like a thermometer. We typically find that if no resources are being put into the library, little is being set aside for classroom instruction or for teacher development.

There's no question that when students are engaged in a lot of reading and library activities, they're learning much more than what they would get simply in the classroom. That has a tendency to raise their language skills. Research shows that good language skills lead to better grades in all subjects. So, yes, I see the library as central to the educational program.

Thank you, Steve, for your time and your continued support of Adventist libraries. ✍



Annette D. Melgosa



Stephen Guptill

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5. Matthew 28:19-20 (KJV).
6. Ellen G. White, *True Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2000), p. 11.
7. _____, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1913), pp. 393, 394.
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