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Good Things Come in Small Classrooms
The Value of Adventist Education

Incubating Innovators

Desmond Murray and the BEST Early Research Program

On a rainy afternoon in late April, 22 slightly nervous high school seniors sat in the Chemistry Amphitheater at Andrews University. In their hands they held notes for presentations titled, “Hyperbranched Amines” or “Acetoacetic Acid: Styryl Dyes.” With complete confidence, the students spoke in pairs about their projects—how they switched reactants and catalysts for better results, the difficulty of trying to isolate their product from the reaction mixture, and the potential implications of their research in a global economy. These twelfth graders were participating in early research. Kristine plans to enter Seventh-day Adventist schools part of the way through experience this increase in ability. As education and the achievement gap become more and more prominent concerns in America, the Adventist advantage is gaining prominence as a viable model for education reform. The results come from the CognitiveGenesis study, a four-year review begun in 2006 with the intent to improve learning and enrollment in Adventist schools. The research team at La Sierra ran a pilot study the first year, and once the results from that study came in, Thayer joined the team as the statistician. So the researchers administered a set of nationally standardized achievement and ability tests like the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and Cognitive Abilities Test (ITT) to over 50,000 students in Adventist schools in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. In addition, they gave surveys to the students, parents, teachers, and administrators for three years, asking questions about lifestyle, learning style, and educational practices in the schools. The early results indicated an encouraging result: Adventist students scored above the national average on standardized tests, but they also showed an above average growth in ability to problem-solve and think critically—and their ability increased the longer they spent in Adventist schools. “We didn’t anticipate this drastic increase in ability; it kind of surprised us,” says Thayer. Traditionally, small, one- or two-teacher schools like many Adventist elementary schools have been seen as too small to foster good learning. But the CognitiveGenesis study found that students in multi-grade classrooms and small enrollment Adventist schools were as capable in higher grades as their classmates of similar ability in larger Adventist schools and to all students nationally. Whereas many parents and educators may question the effectiveness of a faith-based science curriculum that may not have the latest science equipment, Thayer and his colleagues discovered that Adventist students scored much higher than the national average in science as well. Moreover, the students aren’t learning just technical knowledge—science research also was the area of science where they scored the highest.

Regardless of the school size or budget, students in Adventist schools across the country are experiencing an increase in knowledge and ability. This phenomenon, largely due to the curriculum and Adventist principles of education, is leading research— and the rest of the nation—to believe the “Adventist approach” might just be the key to better schools.

2 For more information on these and other statistics, visit http://www.bestearly.org/reports-links.

The Value of Adventist Education

Those who spend time in an Adventist elementary or high school quickly realize that Adventist schools promote an approach to learning different than most. Now, the rest of the nation is starting to take notice. A study recently published by Elissa Kido of La Sierra University and Jerome Thayer of Andrews University indicates that Seventh-day Adventist students of all demographics are performing above the national average in all subjects. Not only are their achievement scores increasing, but their ability scores increase as well. Even students who entered Seventh-day Adventist schools part of the way through experience this increase in ability. Education and the achievement gap become more and more prominent concerns in America, the Adventist advantage is gaining prominence as a viable model for education reform.

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