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Small Schools:

An Asset to Adventist Education

Across the North American Division (NAD), more than 60 percent of PreK-10 schools are labeled as “small schools.”¹ In Adventist education, a small school is loosely conceptualized as having three or fewer teachers and hosting multigrade classrooms with three or more grades in each. In today’s educational landscape, single, and perhaps split-grade classrooms, appear to be the norm, and small schools are more reminiscent of the one-room schoolhouse of yesteryear. However, multigrade classrooms in small schools continue to flourish. The unique teaching and learning opportunities this environment provides have caught the attention of larger, even secular schools, so much so that they intentionally provide multigrade and multiage experiences.

As co-coordinators of this special issue on small, multigrade schools, we came to this topic from different viewpoints, but with the same end goal: to provide an exploration of theory and practice to support pre- and in-service teachers who work in small school environments. Maria Bastien

Valenca spent most of her K-8 years as a student in small schools, and with two teachers as her parents. Some of her best school memories are rooted in the freedom of flexibility that a small school provides teachers—explorations of science and art through black-and-white photography labs, math and home economics in the kitchen, and the opportunity to take on responsibilities in the classroom, such as leading fundraising efforts and working on a small school newspaper. Anneris Coria-Navia was inspired to undertake this issue as she searched for ways to disseminate a research project undertaken with Jerome Thayer, Elissa Kido, and Aimee Leukert on excellence in small schools, the results of which are also found in this issue. This research stemmed from the need to celebrate the excellent work that small schools were doing.

As both our teams pursued research on small schools, we were connected by the teachers and conference su-

perintendents with whom we were working, who desired and supported the need for another issue of JAE dedicated to this topic. In addition to our passion for small schools, we share a strong desire to support future educators in our care, as well as provide ongoing resources and support for teachers in the field. As education faculty, we were regularly faced with the challenge that there is no textbook on small schools, especially one that honors our distinct Adventist worldview, where the world of education and redemption are one.

Anneris Coria-Navia wanted to honor the contributions that her students have made over time by sharing some of the specific ways that what might be considered “usual” educational practice would not work in a small school. Maria Bastien Valenca wanted to ensure that teacher candidates could feel both prepared and perhaps excited about the possibilities that such an environment provides.

Martha Havens, in a previous special issue of JAE, explored the importance of the teaching principal putting teaching and instruction first. She noted that at the time of publication, “the North American Division *Principal’s Handbook* list[ed] 78 activities as ‘Significant Areas of Responsibility’ for a school administrator,” which, as Havens noted, did not even include “responsibility for finances, personnel, and curriculum and instruction.”² Teaching in a small school, whether a one-, two- or three-teacher school, includes wearing multiple hats (taking on a variety of responsibilities) that one might not have when teaching a single-grade classroom.

The topics presented in this issue explore aspects of these many roles and responsibilities and illustrate areas of interest that have arisen through conversations with students, teachers, superintendents, and other stakeholders connected with Adventist education. To balance the importance of research, theory, and concrete classroom practice, the articles in this issue come from a wide



Continued on page 55