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THE HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP IN INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING
IN ADVENTIST SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parents are always concerned about the education and the well-being of their children. They send them to good schools with good teachers to prepare them for good jobs. But who is really responsible of the learning of the student? The student himself, the school teachers and administrators or the parents? James Coleman (1966), in the classic study of American schools noted that:

School brings little influence to bear on a child's learning that is independent of his background and general social context, and. . . the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (p. 325)

Supporting this idea, Jencks (1972) wrote that the school itself does not appear to be able to operate independently of the child's immediate social environment. In contrast, Heyneman (1976) and Bibby and Peil (1974) indicated that family factors have a small or random relationship to student learning at least in nonindustrialized societies. Their position implied that school authorities in nonindustrialized nations play a very important role in preparing students for academic success, and occupational attainment. The current position of many educators is that the home and school play an independent and significant role on student learning even though the impact may be different.

The integration of faith and learning is a deliberate and systematic process of approaching the entire educational enterprise from a biblical perspective. Its objective is to produce students who have internalized biblical values and a view of knowledge, life, and destiny that is christ-centered, service-oriented, and kingdom-directed. Ellen White says that the efforts of the best teachers must often bear little fruit, if fathers and mothers fail to act their part with faithfulness. (Fundamentals of Education p. 69,70). She is supported by Gaebelin (1968) who indicated that education is more than teachers and courses. Hence the involvement of parents in this process is imperative to achieve this objective. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the home and the school can work together for the effectiveness of the integration of faith and learning in adventist secondary schools.

2. THE PARTNERS

The partners in this educational enterprise are the parents, the teachers and the dormitory deans. Previous essays on integration of faith and learning more or less covered the role played by teachers in the classroom. This paper will focus more on other partners.

2.1. THE PARENTS

The role of the parents in their children's learning is not usually limited but it is more visible when their children are day students which is going to be discussed in this paragraph.

Sigel (1988) provided a conceptual framework that includes social and cultural concepts needed for studies of family background. In Sigel's suggested model, referring to studies on environmental factors influencing children's learning, the quality of mother-child interactions, can be seen as the primary influence on children's development of academic competence, supplemented by extended family network, school and church institutions, and cultural norms.

(See Figure 1 for relationships between the nuclear family and its environment.)

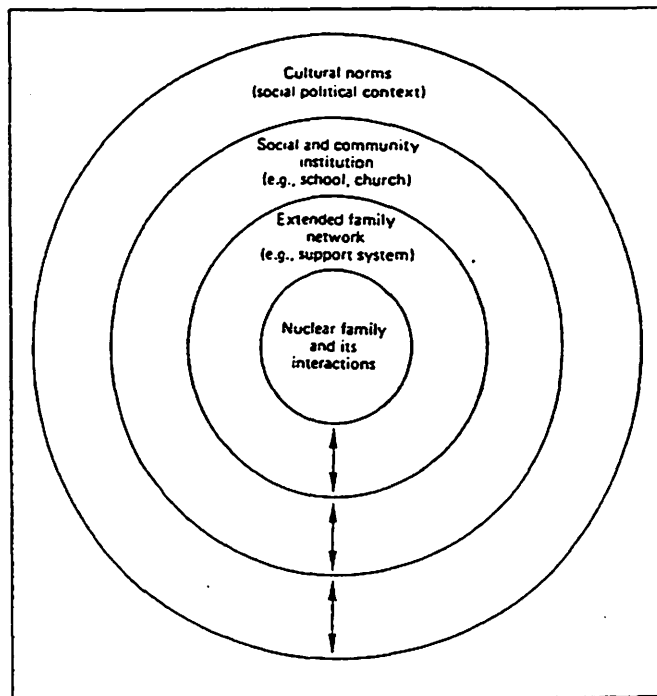


Figure 1: The nuclear family and its environment. (From "Commentary" by E.I. Sigel, 1988, Human Development, 31, p.385.)

This model supports E.G. White writing in the book of Education:

"The teacher's work should supplement that of the parents, but is not to take its place." p. 283

Coleman (1987,1988) also developed a theoretical strategy for looking at the environmental variables that affect student learning. According to Coleman, family background can be analytically separated into three components: financial capital, human capital, and social capital.

Financial capital is measured by the family's wealth or income; it is the source of physical resources that can aid achievement.

Human Capital is measured by parent's education and occupation. It provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning (e.g., the availability of a good home library, a good place to study).

Social capital refers to the interrelationships between people who live or work together. It refers to relationships between parents and children, between employers and employees, between teachers and students and between students themselves, etc.

Coleman further broke down social capital into three components: obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structure; information channels and norms and effective sanctions.

As physical and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well. For example, a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and trust is able to accomplish more than a comparable group without trustworthiness and trust.

Information channels as social capital are the potential for the information that inheres in relation and, as such, are important in providing a basis for action. As Coleman said, information is costly; at a minimum, it requires attention, which is always in scarce supply. In a home, children need parents' attention and a husband and wife need each other's attention to communicate and share information.

Concerning norms and effective sanctions, when a social norm exists and is effective, it generally constitutes a form of social capital. Norms in a home or a community that support and provide effective rewards for high achievement in school, greatly facilitate the school's task.

If the human capital or financial capital possessed by a parent is employed exclusively at work or elsewhere outside the home and is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parents have a good deal or small amount of human or financial capital. For example, a child can belong to a family in which members are well educated, wealthy, and generally capable, but for a variety of reasons (such as divorce, alcohol abuse, more involvement in business activities, or exclusive attention to self development), the resources of the adults are not available to aid the psychological health and the social and educational development of the children. The children are therefore likely to become low achievers if other institutions such as schools and churches do not intervene.

2.2. Dormitory Deans

Dormitory deans are important partners of this educational enterprise for dormitory students. Many of these children are uprooted from their homes at the age of twelve. In the Sigel's model considered above, the dormitory plays the role of the nuclear family and its interactions replacing the primary home of the student. However this does not exclude his/her primary home. Dormitory deans will not achieve their objective if the whole school team (teachers, administrations) does not support them playing the role of the extended family network. The role of other social and community institutions such as the church and other parents should not be neglected.

According to Coleman, a school can have a good infrastructure, high qualified teachers and dormitory deans, and a good library but if these resources are not complemented by social capital embodied in good relations between students and dormitory deans and between students themselves, it is irrelevant to the student's educational growth. If Jesus is the head of every dormitory room, the work of the teachers and administrators would be much easier.

3. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH LEARNING

The following discussion deals with values which are associated with learning as it has been identified in recent studies. Most of

these support the writings of Ellen G. White about two hundred years ago.

3.1. Strong family and dormitory leadership and parental involvement

According to Brophy (1988), schools that elicit strong achievement gains show more of the following characteristics:

- strong leadership (typically, but not necessarily supplied by the principal) that produce consensus on goal priorities and commitment to instructional excellence;
- a safe, orderly school climate;
- positive teacher attitudes toward student and positive expectations regarding the student's abilities to master the curriculum;
- an emphasis on instruction in allocating classroom time and assigning tasks to students
- careful and frequent monitoring of progress toward goals through student testing and staff evaluation programs;
- strong parent involvement programs;
- consistent emphasis on the importance of academic achievement, including praise and public recognition for students who excel academically.

Leone and Richards (1989) reported that increased study time was associated with better academic performance. Concerning parental

involvement, they indicated that the homework done with a parent or a family member present was associated with the highest attention levels and better academic performance.

Concerning parental involvement on a high school level, Henderson (1988) indicated that the effects of parent-involvement are particularly strong at the early levels but significant benefits can be derived from involving parents in the intermediate and high school years.

Strong family and/or strong dormitory leadership will be characterized by trustworthiness between members of the family and a commitment to its cause. According to Ellen White, parents will not criticize and censure the school management which encourages insubordination in the children or justify their children in their wrong-doing if they are involved in the training of their children (Education p.284). She added that one of the greatest difficulties with which teachers have had to contend, is the failure on the part of the parents to co-operate in administering the discipline of the college (Testimonies vol. 5, p.89). Helping students do their homework can be extended to help them appreciate and study the word of God including giving bible studies to non adventist students in school dormitories.

3.2. Integration of home and school culture

Coleman (1987) indicated that private school educators see themselves as extensions of the family they serve. They have the continuity of values between home and school which reinforces a child educational experience.

Ornstein and Levine (1989) indicated that the difference of punishment between the home and the school makes it difficult for many low working-class students to follow rules and procedures when sanctions are not consistent with those imposed at home. According to their findings, one would say that, in a boarding school, investment in social capital has a higher return to students whose home social capital matches the one available at the school. In order to be able to match home and school discipline, teachers and dormitory deans should do their best to know the child's home background. Knowing his/her home will solve many of the discipline problems with students.

3.3. Parenting style

Parenting style also is a powerful predictor of student achievement as Dornbusch cited by Henderson (1988) found that authoritarian styles are associated with low achievers, permissive styles with the next lowest achievers, and authoritative (firm but open to discussion and negotiation) associated with high achievers. This statement supports Ellen White when she says that:

"The teacher must be firm and decided, he should not be too exacting or dictatorial... the true object of reproof is gained only when the wrongdoer himself is led to see his fault, and his will is enlisted for its correction. None who deal with the youth should be iron-hearted, but affectionate, tender, pitiful, courteous, and companionable; yet they should know that reproofs must be given, and that even rebuke may have to be spoken to cut off some evil-doing" (Education p.280 and Fundamentals of Education p. 456, 457).

3.4. Peer-group characteristics and parental concern

Mickelson (1990) found that peer-group characteristics predict grades and that the proportion of friends planning to go to College is a powerful predictor of student GPA (grade point average).

Walberg (1984) cited by Hanson and Ginsburg (1988) found that parental concern and encouragement were twice as predictive of high school academic learning as was family SES (Socio-economic status).

Diprete (1981) also cited by Hanson and Ginsburg (1988) found that students who report that their parents monitor their school work and whose parents almost always know where they are and what they are doing have been found to behave better both in and out of school. Helping students or children choose good friends who will not only help them get good grades but also lead them to Jesus is one of the responsibilities of parents and/or dormitory deans.

3.5. Hardworking and strong work ethics

Hanson and Ginsburg also indicated that a number of studies suggest that students who rate themselves as hardworking, having a strong work ethics and having considerable control over their environment do better in school than others who score lower on these values.

Reglin and Adams (1990) in their study on why Asian-American high school students have higher GPA and SAT (Student Aptitude Test) scores than other students found that the Asian-American students attributed academic successes and failures primarily to effort and not ability.

Ellen White says that these values should be taught to children when they are still young. Teach them how to work with their hands.

3.6. Talk, play, and work with children

As it has been indicated by Ellen White and many other studies, talking, to children, playing and working with them has a positive effect on their learning. Ellen White says that:

"Both parents and teachers are in danger of commanding and dictating too much, while they fail to come sufficiently into social relation with their children or their scholars... If they would oftener gather the children about them, and manifest an interest in their work, and even in their sports, they would gain the love and confidence of the little ones, and the lesson of respect and obedience would be far more readily learned; for love is the best teacher". (Fundamentals of Education p. 58.)

This time gives parents and/or dormitory deans a chance to transmit cultural or christian values to students. For christians evening family worships is another time to talk, share God's blessings and reinforce family relationships.

4. IT CAN BE DONE

Many education systems have parent-teacher conferences once or twice a year to talk about the student's grade report; others have parents meetings at the beginning of the school year; others don't have any program of this nature. To ensure that students from christian schools have freely internalized biblical values, more

parental involvement is necessary and a model to regulate the partnership is needed. How about the following?

- The school administration should know what to expect from its partners (parents, dormitory deans and students). A pamphlet containing basic biblical values of christian education will facilitate the task.

- Openly discuss, at the beginning of the school year, these values with all partners present (parent and/or dormitory dean, and the student) in the form of interview, if possible, or in a small group. Let them ask questions, let them understand that it is for the benefit of the student and of the society.

- Provide an evaluation system in the middle of the school year in order to correct the mistakes and/or commend what has been done correctly.

5. CONCLUSION

The process of integrating faith and learning is not a responsibility of either the school or the home alone, but of both institutions in a partnership as each plays a positive and significant role in student learning. Since many secondary school students are uprooted from their homes, dormitory deans are recognized as new parents of these youngsters. In many ways, the home/dormitory plays a more important role than the teacher in the classroom and to succeed academically and to prepare students for the kingdom of God. They are called to be strong leaders, to know the student's background, to be involved in their academic work, to teach them strong work ethics and to talk to them, to play and work with them; and IT CAN BE DONE.

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