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TEACHER MODELLING IN CHRISTIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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TEACHER MODELLING IN CHRISTIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**I. INTRODUCTION**

The most important learning that takes place in the life of a person, is when he is young. A person's basic foundation is formed at this stage. The Holy Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Prov 20:6. The Hebrew verb "train up" means to be firm in discipline and to create a thirst for the things of God. Experience and research have shown that the longer the students stay or study in an SDA institution, the more likely they will remain in the truth.

Eve yielded to the temptation by the devil at the beginning of her life in the garden of Eden. In the same way Satan endeavors to tempt our children. This emphasizes the need to teach our students while young, because "Faith affects learning far more deeply than learning affects faith."¹ Worldly scholars do agree as they have said, "At the most foundational level, therefore, Christians must develop an integrative perspective in their studies."²

This paper has been developed to show how the Christian teacher in an elementary school models to his students the purpose of the school, Christian values, and the qualities and foundation for success.

II. PURPOSE OF A CHRISTIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

One purpose of a Christian elementary school is to create an awareness of the contrast that should be in the character and life-style of a Christian child compared to that of a non-Christian child. Students are not to be different for the sake of being different. Differences come from being the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." Corruption that surrounds the Christian can be stopped by the biblical "salt," and darkness can be dissipated by the biblical "light." Thus being the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world", the image of the Creator can be restored in the hearts of the little children.

III. GROWTH STAGES AND NEEDS OF A CHILD

Infancy Stage : A Time For Love and Trust (0-2 years)

Dr. Ruth Murdoch explained in her book Growing Kids, infancy usually covers from birth up to two years of age. Parents usually take care of their children during this stage. During this stage the child needs love from his parents from which trust is developed. "Without love the child does not prosper physically, mentally or spiritually. Love is the foundation of all growth."³

Preschool Stage: A Time For Forming Habits (2-6 years)

The preschool stage includes children age 2 to 6, about the time a child begins school. This is the period for habit formation. The total habit pattern of a child is very important. Toilet training, eating, sleeping, learning to hang up clothes, and other basic skills are included. Things children should be taught

before they start to school are: reverence, respect, obedience and self-control. Teachers continue this learning process. Children need to be taught that God is a God of cleanliness and order. Heaven will have order. Children are to be prepared for the heavenly society.

During the preschool stage the child forms faith by borrowing from others. Parents and teachers must be careful about what is transmitted to these little ones. Values are transmitted through modelling, instructing, relating valuable experiences, etc. The child develops faith in God by following others.

The Early School Years Stage: Initiative and Self-Confidence (6-9 years)

Early school years are important. It is a time for building initiative and self-confidence. When the child starts school he moves away from his tight attachment to the home. He does not, of course, pack his suitcase and move out, but emotionally his interests now gradually shift from home to peers. The child's first year in school is very important. If the child gets a good start, the school may be looked upon as a joy. If the child believes it is going to be a very hard experience, a barrier has been placed in the youngster's way. Much depends upon the teacher to change the class environment. Many times it has been said, "Oh, it doesn't really matter or doesn't count' if I send my child to a non-Christian kindergarten." An early childhood specialist, Dr. Donna Habenicht, shares the following:

"Children are strong believers at the age of five and six. They have a strong faith in God and in prayer. They show simple trust in a personal God. They believe an angel's and God's care is very real. They can understand right and wrong. . . . They tend to relate God to all of their own personal activities."

Middle Childhood Stage: A Time For Peer Group Identity (9-12 years)

The middle school or middle years of childhood, ages 9-12, are approximately related to grades 4, 5 and 6. This is a time for peer group identity. This stage is often called the "gang age," not necessarily referring to a real street gang, but rather to the fact that they identify with their own age group at this time, often girls with girls, boys with boys. It is a time of ritual. During this stage children act on reflected faith. The factors that play significant role in the lives of children are: parents, relatives, teachers and spiritual leaders. Lessons from stories and parables play a very important role in the lives of the children. Children of this age are very much influenced by the heroes, secular as well as biblical. During this stage, children approach God on a reciprocal basis: faithfulness in exchange for benefits. They believe that it is always possible to influence God through careful adherence to religious practice. The child desires to be accepted, to belong. He seeks a historical identity: he wants to know that he belongs to a group of people with a history and a destiny. By the end of this age he forms a personalized faith.

His Needs, Aspirations, Anticipations, etc

As the teacher endeavors to meet the needs of a child, the relationship between the child and the teacher is strengthened. He who seeks to transform humanity must himself understand humanity. Teachers can help their students by understanding their needs. The needs are physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social.

Spiritual Needs are spiritual rebirth, forgiveness of sin, trust in Christ for their righteousness, love of God, knowledge in the Bible, etc. Physical Needs are most simple but important and include healthful diet, clothes, bed, etc. Emotional Needs are sympathy and love. Realizing these needs the teacher can identify more fully with the feelings of the students. Intellectual Needs include a search for education. Students need someone to patiently respond to their questions and queries. Teachers are there to help them understand the Truths of eternal life. Social Needs focus on teaching the students basic skills of communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and healthy social relationships. In balancing needs of both teachers and children it is understood that teachers have needs as well as students. Everyone's needs must be met to the greatest extent possible.

The student likes to see the mother, hero, and model in the teacher. The teacher feeds the faith of the student. The child's worldview can be formed by the hand of the teacher. The child receives personal attention from the teacher. "The first task of integration is at the personal level of attitude and motivation."⁵

IV. MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD

Through the relationship of the teacher with his student, the way he teaches, from what he teaches and how he teaches, will determine if the teacher has met the basic needs of the child.

"There are only two classes of educators in the world. One class is made up of those whom God makes channels of light; the other of those whom Satan uses as his agents, who are wise to do evil."⁶

The teacher of truth is the only safe educator.

"There is great need of elevating the standard of righteousness in our schools, of giving instruction that is after God's order. Should Christ enter our institutions for the education of the youth, He would cleanse them as He cleansed the temple, banishing many things that have a defiling influence."⁷

Just as Mary said to the disciples at the wedding in Cana, "Whatsoever He says, do it," in the same way, the child's mother must be able to have faith in the teacher, so that she can tell her child to follow the teacher.

Responsibility

"Nothing is of greater importance than the education of our children and young people."⁸ The teacher has to be the true representative of God. He has a sacred responsibility to train up the youth. "The Christian believes that in all intellectually, socially, or artistically, she is handling God's creation and that is sacred."⁹

The Teacher: A Model

Children may not speak, but they do understand. The teacher's modelling role creates a great impact upon the students. According to Dr. John M Fowler, "The teacher can be like the

trumpet and the children like the little bells."¹¹

"The teacher should be himself what he wishes his students to become. Teachers are to watch over their students as the shepherd watches over the flock entrusted to his charge. They should care for souls as they that must give an account."¹²

The child's safety lies in learning daily in the school of Christ. This kind of education produces results as lasting as eternity. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10), and better than all knowledge is an understanding of His word. Dr. Akers mentions about the 5 P's of a model teacher. He describes the teacher as a: (1) Professional (2) Parent Partner (3) Pastor Partner (4) Prophet, and (5) Priest.¹³

His Teaching

Through the teacher's verbal and non-verbal communication he exerts a powerful influence upon his students.

"In seeking to correct others (that is the work of every teacher) we should be careful of our words. They will be a saviour of life or death unto death In giving reproof of counsel, many indulge in sharp, severe speech, words not adapted to heal the wounded soul Then our words will reform."¹⁴

Non-verbal communication is a very important silent language what we find everywhere.

"The teacher can gain the respect of his pupils in no other way than by revealing in his own character the principles which he seeks to teach them. Only as he does this in daily association with them can he have a permanent influence over them for good."¹⁵

Six Ways of Handing Down Faith to the Children

The teacher can pass on faith to the children through the following ways:

1. Principles - Instructing the children in the ways of God.

2. Pattern - Children probably learn more by watching what we do than listening to what we say.
3. Persistence - By repeating things over and over again, by living out the pattern over and over again, by being consistent in our responses to life's circumstances, we teach our children.
4. Participation - Something positive happens when we get involved in what concerns or interests our children.
5. Praise - It is the greatest motivation in the world for learning.
6. Prayer - It should be a part of each of the previous ideas.^{ib}

The Scriptures state of Jesus, "No man has spoken like Him." Jesus spoke with simplicity, yet He spoke powerfully. The important thing about His speech is that He reached every level of people in society. Jesus never forgot the children present in the audience. He talked to them in simple earthly terms, earthly things, but introducing heavenly things and lessons.

Building Upon Child's Interests

Dr. Thomas S Geraty said that the teacher has to build upon the interests of the child, just as Jesus talked to the woman at the well about water because that was her interest. Jesus talked to the farmers about the seed, to the fisherman about catching fish and to the hungry people about food and fish. He gave them food to eat. From their interests He led them to recognize their spiritual need.

When the teacher is aware of student's interests, it becomes easier to help him strengthen his ability. At that point the

teacher will possibly be able to lead him in his spiritual life.

V. CHRISTIAN VALUES IN ADVENTIST EDUCATION

"The word value means not only a product (what we value) but also a process (the method by which we arrive at what we value). This process begins in early childhood and continues throughout our entire lives."¹¹

The transmission of religious values is of great importance. These religious values have to do with relationships with God and with people. Therefore, teachers need to model the type of behavior that affirms and strengthens these relationships. Dr. Rasi has said,

"By the time children come to school, they have lived several years in a home and have been deeply influenced by the values of the family and the community. As children, . . . , however, they are still establishing their own personal values and can therefore be influenced by committed Christian teachers at all levels of schooling. The transmission of values can be done through models, dialogue, and experience."¹²

Curricula and Methods of Achieving Integration of Faith & Learning

Christianity and the Bible should be made the living center of the curriculum. Christian education seeks to distinguish and project toward knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. It says, that the Bible is not simply a sacred book; it is not simply the Word of God, it is to the Christian educator, God's way of sharing what He wants us to know about life. "The Word of God should have a place--the first place--in every system of education."¹³ "Used as a textbook in our schools, the Bible will do for mind and morals what cannot be done by books of science and philosophy."¹⁴

Every curriculum must be a conceptual paradigm. There may be a formal or informal curriculum, but there is always a hidden curriculum. The teachers must monitor the hidden curriculum.

Work Education

"It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers."¹¹ Through work education we are teaching the children to be responsible stewards. As they clean the blackboard, sweep, dust and mop the school room, they gain a sense of responsibility, punctuality, order and beauty. They learn that God is a God of order and beauty. This will help them to be practical in their lives. The teacher and the student will work together.

"As the teachers do this , they will gain a valuable experience. Their hearts will be bound up with the hearts of the students, and this will open the way for successful teaching."¹²

This will help the child in his physical exercise, so that when he is old, he will not be idle.

Place of Nature in Christian Education

When the child is young, nature will be the most interesting thing from which he can learn. Jesus the Master Teacher often talked and drew lessons from nature, so the human teacher should follow Jesus' example. A teacher's language should be simple and the conceptions should be clear.

Music

Music plays an important role in the lives of the young. It makes them happy and they make others happy. Students can witness

to others through music. They sing with pure joy. It is one of the most effective mediums of communicating ideas and preaching the gospel. The teacher can take their students to the hospitals, homes and even present special numbers in the community programs. As the teacher instructs the students regarding the right type of music, the spiritual lives of the students will be influenced. In 1703, Andrew Fletcher made this observation: "You write the laws, let me write the music, and I will rule your country."²³

Chapel Exercises

Children of all ages love stories. Character building stories such as Daniel, Esther, Job and Joseph should be told during the chapel exercises. Students while young are good followers. Thus the teacher can help develop students to be good citizens of this world and the world to come.

Various Subjects

Gaebelein states that integration of faith is most readily achieved in history, literature, and science. Mathematics may seem to be the hardest subject to integrate with Christianity. Can anyone really discover common ground between mathematics and Christianity? The answer is affirmative. There are, between mathematics and the Christian view, areas of agreement in the existence of number and order not only in the world but also throughout the universe. The world of mathematical precision is God's world, and it is His in a unique identity. The Christian teacher of mathematics must know the common ground shared by mathematics and Christianity, the presence of number and order

throughout nature and art, and the perfect congruity of the stars with mathematical conclusions. Out of these facts and others like them, he can show his pupils more than is generally realized. The teachers have to be careful to operate within the Christian worldview. Teachers should not spend valuable time in repeating evolutionary stories. We must be careful in choosing what we will teach our students.

Witness Through Discipline

While teachers discipline their students they we will show firmness with love. As soon as a teacher disciplines a student, the student may get a wrong idea that the teacher does not love him. Mrs. White says: "Never correct them in anger. . . . That is the time of all times when you should act with humility and patience and prayer."²⁴ "He has committed them to your care, to train and educate for heaven."²⁵

There are 3 types of Biblical correction as verbal, experiential, and physical. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Prov 13:24. If the student does not follow the instructions of his teachers, then certain experiences and consequences will follow. If no other methods work, physical correction may be necessary, but it ought to be an example of redemptive discipline. Such correction will produce security and respect.

Meeting the Student in Sabbath School and Church Service

If the child sees that the teacher is not present in Sabbath School or Church Service, he may think that these services are not

important. The teacher or the student may make this non-verbal appointment to meet each other in religious services. Thus the student will form a participative habit in the integration of faith and learning.

Visiting the Students in the Home Environment

The hardworking teacher may be sometimes impatient with the child if the teacher does not know the child's background. It is good for the teacher to visit the student's home and get to know him and his parents in the home environment. At the same time parents can be informed of how their child is growing. Parents will appreciate the personal interest. The cooperation of the parents should be solicited, so that the child's faith would not be spoiled.

Encourage and Invite the Older Students to Bible Class

The teachers should also encourage and invite the older students to join the Bible classes. Experiences have shown that as a result of this, not only the students, but also their parents have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour resulting in baptisms.

VI. QUALITIES OF SUCCESS CAN BE LEARNED

What does it take to be what everyone wants to be but relatively few are? Interestingly enough, regardless of the geographical location and regardless of occupation--whether dentists, salespeople, educators, ministers--the variables of success are remarkably similar. The qualities are:

honesty	commitment	goal-directed
character	sense of humor	personable
integrity	persistent	wisdom
hard worker	compassionate	intelligent
positive	loyalty	good listener
mental attitude	responsible	organized
enthusiastic	self-esteem	imagination
faith	caring	knowledgeable
loving	good-finder	energetic
dependable	friendly	thoughtful

God-fearing teacher through his own life will teach all these qualities to his student.

VII. THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

The teacher has to build a positive relationship by consistent modelling. We fail our students if we say, "Don't do as I do, but do as I say ." Teachers should be the living examples, epistles and ambassadors to our students. The teachers must be honest and truthful.

There's a Market for Moral Values

Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "To train a man in mind and not in morals is to train a menace to society."²⁶ If we fail to teach our students the real values in life, then we are producing "highly-skilled barbarians," says Steven Muller, president of John Hopkins University.

Sense of Humor

Sometimes a little bit of humors may help build little lives. "Laughter is the key to survival during special stress . . .If we can see the delightful side of our assignment, we can also deal with the difficult."²⁷ The teacher needs to create a loving

environment for the student. If we can change the input, the output will be automatically changed.

A Command

God's Book gives a beautiful, clear, commanding, but frightening example in Luke 6:39-40:

"Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple (a student) is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

That is frightening if the teacher's example is bad, but it's tremendously exciting if the teacher's example is good. We're going to teach what we are, not just what we say or do. The old statement is true, "what you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying." One never knows when a moment and a few sincere words can have an impact on a life.

Feed My Lambs

We must feed the students in pursuance of Christ's bidding to Peter, "Feed My Lambs." John 21:15. The body gets food from the visible world.

"The mind is nourished by the thoughts that enter it. The little ones cannot seek pasture for themselves. Christ looks to parents and teachers to bring to them divine wisdom and love, without which the soul cannot possibly grow."²²

Biblical Faith

A dynamic faith is the key to spiritual victory for both the teacher and the student, in this life and in the life to come.

"We are not saved by our knowledge, our beliefs, or our worship in church; just as we are not saved by our actions or our religion. We are saved by the anguish and love of God, and to live according to that trust is to have faith."²³

Mrs. White says, "Children must be drawn toward heaven. not harshly, but very gently."

Ultimate Destination

The promise of eternity with God is a final and crowning evidence of the believer's worth to God. God sees humanity to be of such value and significance that He planned an eternity in our company. Jesus is preparing mansions for the teachers as well as the students. John 14: 1-3.

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is not our responsibility to force our values upon our young students. It is our responsibility to model our values so attractively that these children in the elementary schools cannot help seeing that they are vastly superior to the competition, and will freely choose them for the integration of faith and learning. John Gardner summed it up nicely when he stated that young people

"do not learn ethical principles; they emulate ethical (or unethical) people. They do not analyze or list the attributes they wish to develop; they identify with people who seem to have these attributes. That is why young people need models."

Mrs. White says,

"Teachers, take your position as true educators, and pour into the hearts of the students the living stream of redeeming love. Before their minds are preoccupied with literary work, entreat them to seek Christ and His righteousness. Show them the changes that will surely take place if the heart is given to Christ. Fasten their attention on Him. This will close the door to the foolish aspirations that naturally arise, and will prepare the mind for the reception of divine truth."

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