FEATURE

Creating Educational Partnership Between School, Family, and Community

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Abstract — *The process of education is enhanced when school, family, and community collaborate. Specifically, such collaborative efforts contribute to increased student achievement. This article focuses on how the above three levels of collaboration work. Epstein's model of partnership is suggested as a practical framework for improved partnership. The application of this multi-dimensional model has helped to close the gap between schools and communities. The article cites examples of successful collaboration from different parts of the world to motivate educators to do their part in initiating partnerships between school, family, and community.*

Introduction

Education is a dynamic process moved by three wheels—school, family and community. This process would move efficiently and in the desired direction if the three wheels synchronized and shared the "load." While this idea does not surprise anyone, how much of such collaboration do we see in actual practice? Currently, as well as in the past, attempts have been made at collaboration. It is interesting to explore the possibilities available in this area.

For Adventist educators, the Scripture and the writings of Ellen White serve as guidelines for educational practices. The Holy Scripture says, "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:26, NIV). White (1952) adds, "true education means more than a preparation for the life that now is. . . . It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual powers" (p. 11). Even a casual look at these statements enables one to see that these descriptions of education of children are addressed equally to schools, families, and communities.

With regard to the education of the child as a continuous process, Carter and CADRE (1992, p.1) consider that "education is a lifelong process." Continuous or lifelong implies a certain beginning. This means that the education of the child begins somewhere. It begins from the family, the community of the child, and then the child goes to school "to progress." According to Comer (2001) school is that place "where a significant number of adults are working with young people in a way that enables them to call on family and community resources to support growth systematically and continually" (p. 3).

Such efforts in education, however, seem fragmented. As Roy and Freed (2003) point out, human beings are relational beings who function best in a community. But the sad reality, they say, "is that because of the Fall, we all experience fragmentation and alienation both personally and corporately" (p. 17). Fragmentation is visible when educational efforts are scattered. To avoid this fragmentation in education, schools, families and communities must put their efforts together. "No school is an island," to adapt the words of John Donne, is very true. Schools must initiate and gain the support of families and communities. Educators must pursue the mission of true education through participatory partnerships.

Levels of Involvement

Studies have shown that a partnership between school, family, and community results in "improved learning for all students and strengthened schools, families, and communities" (Caplan, 1998, p. 1). Rasi (2004) reiterates his convictions about how to achieve satisfaction and success in the sacred vocation of education and considers, "we must cultivate constructive relationships at multiple levels" (p. 3). A short discussion of each of these levels: school, family and community, follows.

School

School plays various roles as an avenue of education. Many authors have pointed out the different roles of schools. For example, Behrens (2004) claims that the mission of the school is to offer an excellent Christ-centered education through which students will become good citizens and principled in their lives. Hackett (2005) points out that the role of the schools is also to support children of all abilities in their learning. Schools will continue to help in research about how to avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs (Cunradi, Moore, Killoran, & Ames, 2005). Such school initiatives are carried out

through what is called preventive research centers and rehabilitation centers (Shirado, Watanabe & Kawase, 2005). These examples show how schools play an important role in the welfare of children, something that might be difficult if children were left entirely to their parents or communities alone.

While placing emphasis on the roles of the school, President Bush (2005) of the United States says that schools should "do what is necessary to make sure that every child—not groups of children—but every child can read and write and add and subtract . . ." (p. 1). In subsequent thoughts in the same speech, he mentions that the school should teach freedom and peace.

Schools provide formal education which is regarded as an investment in human capital. "Education and training are the most important investments in human capital," states Becker (2002, para. 3). Coleman came up with another similar concept in the early 1980s, called, "social capital," for what children gain from their family and community. Schools are expected to provide for both human and social capital for children, but schools cannot do it alone. They need to collaborate with family and community. In an example of how collaboration enhanced the effectiveness of schools, Johnston and Slotnik (1985) found that "The time and talents of the parents were vital to the program and the resultant breadth and diversity of learning experiences excited and stimulated, not only the students, but the teachers and parents as well. School became a place for doing, thinking, and actively learning" (p. 430).

Family

Children are generally educated by two groups of people—their parents or caretakers, and their teachers. Parents or caretakers serve as primary educators up to the time that formal education begins. Once children go to school, teachers become the primary educators. However, parents continue to play a critical role in children's education even during schooling. For example, parents can suggest changes in curricular programs as they know best the needs of their children (Armstrong, 2003). Also, parent involvement helps children learn to respect parents and other adults besides the teacher, as learning resources (Johnston & Slotnik, 1985). Thus family involvement becomes necessary in the discussions on education (Leapfrog Learning Institute, 2004).

Decades of research (Walberg, as cited by Leapfrog Learning Institute, 2004) combined with experiences of educators have shown that family participation in a child's education increases a child's success in school. Further, Walberg states, compared to any other

factor, family's influence was "10 times more likely to increase success in school" (p. 2). His research which analyzed more than 2,500 studies, reports that "an academically stimulating home environment is one of the child's determinants of learning" (p. 6). Research also shows, family participation in children's education resulted in "better school attendance, increased motivation, better self-esteem, decreased use of drugs and alcohol, and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education (National PTA Webpage, 2005).

Community

A community may be regarded as a group with collective identification, and local autonomy and responsibility (Bray, as cited in Uemera, 1999). One of these responsibilities is to share educational concern for the welfare of students. Theobold and Mills (as cited in Donald, 1999, p. 22) claim that, "schools have to rediscover community relationships and caring." As an example, the same authors say, "It is curious that rural communities, which for so long have been marginalized by the dominant culture, present precisely the qualities for which the critics of American schools are now looking" (p. 22). These words remind us about the importance of community participation in education. When we look at some facets of the society, such as corporate institutions, we realize that their involvement in education is core to the success of education.

Table 1
Types of Community Partners

Business/Corporations	Local businesses, national corporations and franchises.
Community Individuals	Individual volunteers from the surrounding school community.
Cultural and Recreational Institutions	Zoos, museums, libraries, recreational centers.
Faith Organizations	Churches, mosques, synagogues, other religious organizations and charities
Government and Military Agencies	Fire departments, police departments, chamber of commerce, city council, other government agencies.
Health Care Organizations	Hospitals, health care centers, mental health facilities, health foundations and associations.

National Service and Volunteer Organizations	Rotary Club, Lions Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, YMCA, YWCA.
Other Community Organizations	Fraternities, political, alumni, and local service organizations.
Senior Citizen Organizations	Nursing homes, senior volunteer and service organizations.
Universities and Educational Institutions	Colleges, universities, high schools, and other educational institutions.

Note: Adapted from Collaborating for student success: A study of the role of "community" in comprehensive school, family, and community partnership program, by M. G. Sanders, 1999, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada. Retrieved July 1, 2005, from http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/community.htm

In essence, communities can provide school and family with valuable resources to support the education of children. Table 1 (adapted from Sanders, 1999) shows various examples of community partners.

A Model of Partnership

Schools can initiate a collaborative approach using family and community involvement to improve the educational achievement of students. "The synergy resulting from such partnerships creates greater benefits than each group working individually" (Caplan, 1998, para. 6). Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at The Johns Hopkins University, has developed a model of such collaboration. In this model which she calls a framework, she has identified six types of involvement. According to Epstein (1995), "With frequent interactions between school, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, or working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school" (p. 702). This type of collaboration results in the success of students.

Table 2 (adapted from Leapfrog Learning Institute, 2004, p. 4) below shows Epstein's Framework, the six types of involvement, and describes various partnership activities among school, family and community.

Results of Involvement

The six types of involvement tend to produce certain positive results among students, parents and teachers. These can be summarized (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sander, & Simon, 1997) as follows:

Students

- Develop respect for parents, balance between time spent on other activities and homework, and realize the importance of school.
- Become aware of own progress in subjects, understand school programs and policies, and can make informed decisions about courses and programs.
- Improve skills in communicating with adults, aware of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers.
- Complete homework, view parents as more similar to teachers, and develop self-confidence.
- Realize the significance of representation of families in school decisions.
- Build positive relationships with adults in the community.

Table 2
The Six Types of Involvement

Parenting – Establish home environments to support children as students
- Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
- Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., college credit, family literacy)

Communicating – Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress
- Conferences with every parent at least once a year, and language translators to assist families as needed
- Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications

Volunteering – Recruit and organize parental help support, such as parent-room or family-center volunteer work
- School and classroom volunteer programs to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents
- Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families
- Annual surveys to identify all available talents, times, and locations of

volunteers

Learning at Home – Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions, and planning
· Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade
· Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home

Decision Making – Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
· Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership
· Networks to link all families with parent representatives
· Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements

Collaborating with Community – Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development
· Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support
· Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including students

Note: Adapted from Family involvement_a must in student achievement, by Leapfrog Learning Institute, 2004. Retrieved July 4, 2005, from http://www.leapfrog.com/content/ press_releases?Family Involvement.pdf

Parents
· Become confident about parenting, and develop feeling of support.
· Understand school programs and policies.
· Use school activities at home.
· Discuss school, classwork, homework, and future plans with children.
· Feel ownership of school.
· Participate in activities to strengthen the community.

Teachers
· Understand families' backgrounds, cultures and needs, and respect families' strengths and efforts.
· Use network of parents to communicate with all families.
· Become aware of parents' talents and interests in school and children.

· Create varied designs of homework, including interactive assignments.
· Improve their perspectives of families in policy development and school decisions.
· Use community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction.

Epstein's model has been widely applied in urban, rural and suburban schools throughout the U.S. and has been found to have helped students, teachers, and parents in their collaborative efforts (Ramirez, 2001). The multi-dimensional nature of the model has helped to close the gap between schools and the community.

Challenges and Difficulties

While the model looks thorough, perhaps it is important for one to realize that it can present certain challenges. Caplan (1998, p. 9) identifies several difficulties in implementation of this model. Some of these are:

· Teachers may consider working with parents and community as additional work besides their heavy responsibilities.

· Since teacher education at the undergraduate level typically provides little training in parent involvement, the school must provide professional development activities.

· Inconvenient hours, inaccessible personnel, communication that uses educational jargon, and unwelcoming visiting procedures all can be barriers to parent and family involvement.

· Sometimes a school may overlook the many ways families and community is participating in the school.

· When the school building is shared by a number of organizations in the community, several issues such as, coordinating activities, providing additional maintenance services, and procedures for the use of materials arise.

· Educators may not want parents and community members to challenge the school's professional autonomy and judgment.

· Some parents and community members may consider the school's overtures of help to be an intrusion rather than assistance (p. 9)

Despite the challenges and difficulties, collaboration is practiced in different parts of the world. The discussion below points out a few

examples from a body of scientific and anecdotal research that deals with collaboration.

Examples of Collaboration

Caplan (1998) cites several examples of collaboration in the United States. These include

· Atenville Elementary School, Harts, West Virginia, developed the parents as Educational partners program to overcome the geographic isolation of families in this rural coal-mining community.

· Ferguson Elementary School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, serving an inner-city area of low-income families, has a full-time school-community coordinator, a parent center, Parent Involvement Committee, and adult educational classes.

· Stockton unified School District, Stockton, California, a racially diverse urban district, provides a Parent Resource Center and a parent liaison and encourages families to volunteer as mentors.

· Veazie Street Elementary School, Providence, Rhode Island, opened a Family Center to enhance the partnership between the school, its families, and the community (pp.11-12).

Heneveld and Craig (as cited by Uemera, 1999) report that in Sub-Saharan Africa, positive communication between the school and the community helped children in coming to school well prepared, and in parents bringing support to the school with instructional materials and participating in school programs and governance.

In the case of Ohio Colleges of Pharmacy, as reported by Sweeney (2005), a strong relationship with the community strengthens the educational program for student pharmacists. This is an example of how educational institutions benefit from the community input.

Another powerful example of community involvement comes from Tanzania (Munyanziza, 2004). Here the project of mushroom cultivation by the University of Morogoro extended to the community when University professors trained women in mushroom cultivation. This has forged a lasting link between the university and community around it.

Uemera (1999) reports on cases of collaboration such as, in Thailand, where the government involved parents and community members to help utilize the limited resources in education. Parents in

Madagascar have been supporting schools even during the absence of government help in raising funds for schools.

In a report by USAID (2000), in Uganda, the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) project carried out by USAID helped community members as well as teachers and students use participatory action research. This research helped to find out the needs of the community around the school and decide actions to address these needs. In Ghana, USAID is working across the country to strengthen the role that communities play in education. Other projects include the protection of the environment in Latin America, Africa, New Zealand and Australia. These projects are giving parents and teachers opportunities to collaborate.

In the Philippines, the "Adopt-a-School" program focuses on the community's national high schools, which Holcim (n.d.) has adopted to improve their facilities. With a poverty rate of around 90% in Lugait for instance, many children need to drop out of school early. Holcim provides scholarship grants to 44 poor and deserving high school and college students from the community.

Conclusion

As the saying goes, "Two heads work better than one." In the dynamic system of education, collaboration works better than fragmentation. Partnerships among schools, families and communities create success for students at any level of education. Such partnerships create synergy, which helps the whole system to be more productive than when each works alone. Adventist schools, families, and communities especially can find many ways to utilize the ideas presented in this article. Let all educators join hands in moving the three wheels of education together.

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