

Bonding:

The Teacher- Student-Parent Connection

Bonding between teacher, student, and parent creates a winning team that benefits not only the individuals concerned, but also the school itself.

Miss Garland dreaded her last conference of the day. One particular father never cooperated with her suggestions and always acted angry and defensive. She could see his attitude being duplicated in his 7-year-old daughter.

“The teacher prayed for guidance. Chelsie’s father arrived. Without prompting, he poured out emotions from a broken heart. His wife had died of cancer the year before. Without family in the area, he was trying to raise Chelsie as best he could. God nudged Miss Garland and gave her a tender, listening heart. A bond formed as teacher and parent agreed to work together for a common goal: Chelsie.”¹

In the school setting, bonding between student and teacher is important to the success of the program, but, as the encounter between Chelsie’s father and Miss Garland makes clear, interaction between teacher and parent is also important. Bonding between teacher, student, and parent creates a winning team that benefits not only the individ-

uals concerned, but also the school itself.

Working for Common Goals

To develop a winning team, our schools need to solicit cooperation on all fronts, so that everyone, including parents, works together to accomplish common goals. In a Christian school, the teacher-student-parent bond is built upon a shared interest: the child’s success here and in the hereafter.

The term *bonding* signifies “a close, emotionally important relationship.”² In the school setting, bonding involves a feeling of congeniality. All parties feel acceptance, warmth, and concern. Each party in the bonding triad—teacher, student, parent—contributes in different ways.

What are the essential elements of bonding? In the context of school, bonding builds upon the basic foundation of connecting, interacting, and sharing. The teacher usually connects first with the student and then with the parent. Sometimes, this takes work because some students or parents may be perceived as difficult. One way teachers can bridge the relationship gap and begin con-

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necting early is to develop in themselves the qualities they appreciate in others³ and work to bring out the best in each new student and parent.

The interacting part of the triad requires the teacher to explore and expand his or her interpersonal skills. This means communicating to the parent, through positive words and actions, a deep sense of caring about the child. Focusing on this area usually will win over both parent and child.

While sharing is a two-way street, the teacher does not have to wait until the parent volunteers by showing his or her appreciation for the school by sending cookies or offering to decorate a bulletin board. The teacher can share ideas for helping the child complete homework assignments or become more focused. Or he or she might share a book or article relevant to a problem the child is experiencing. The teacher can also ask the parent to help supervise a class outing, talk about his or her job on career day, or teach various crafts. Most parents warm to these gestures.

Ideals of Bonding

With regard to the teacher-parent-child relationship, there are six ideals of bonding, based on the three foundation points of connecting, initiating, and sharing: (1) getting the parent to support the school program, (2) generating love and acceptance, (3) demonstrating faith, (4) creating a sense of belonging, (5) fostering inclusiveness, and (6) promoting enthusiasm. These ideals are within the reach of every teacher, who can serve as a catalyst to cement the bond that fosters the greater good—that of the school.

The first ideal is getting the parents to support the overall program. Parents want to know that the school environment is right for their child. Offering quality Adventist education means more than Bible classes, designated worship times, and textbooks extolling creationism. It has to do with the prevailing tone of the campus—its spirituality, the overall demeanor of the teachers, and its positive influence on the students. The parent must be able to feel comfortable with the values modeled by the teacher, administrators, and staff. When a parent, after talking with the child's class teacher, is impressed to say, "This is a good school," he or she means, "I feel that this is a wholesome place in which my child will develop into a good citizen and a dedicated Christian." Even if the school is strong academically, if it fails the climate test, it is unlikely to elicit the support of parents.

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Love and Acceptance

A second ideal of bonding is to ensure that both students and parents feel loved and accepted. Parents can detect when their children are loved at school. One parent complained to the principal that her child's teacher brushed aside a warm greeting from one of her students. On more than one occasion, the child had tried to hug her teacher, but the teacher rebuffed her. Sometimes things are not as they seem, but in this case, the parent's perceptions were on target.

Teachers should not show favoritism based on outward appearance or socioeconomic level. In a department meeting, one teacher presented some suggestions for "getting a better quality of student" into the school. He obviously was dissatisfied with the "quality" of some of those



already there, even though they were not creating any problems. They were just not of the "proper social standing." Teachers must be sensitive to individual differences; treating both parents and students, whatever their background or appearance, with warmth and respect. It is the teacher's responsibility to see that this part of the bonding process takes place. "[The teacher] should see in every pupil the handiwork of God—a candidate for immortal honors."⁴

Ideally, bonding begins when the parent and child first visit the school. If possible, the teacher who will have the child in his or her classroom should give the parent and child a tour of the school. He or she should show a genuine interest in the child, address the parent by name, and answer questions in a pleasant tone, even if the parent seems to be asking a lot of unnecessary questions. The

teacher should describe the school program and offer to be of assistance in any way possible.

Demonstrating Faith

Demonstrating faith is the third ideal essential for bonding to occur. In a Christian school, faith in God is central to every activity. This principle should be daily communicated to parents and students through word and action.

The parent must have faith in the teacher and in the quality of his or her work. Of course, the teacher must earn the faith of both parent and student. Competent teaching and good classroom management will help to build the parent's confidence, which will increase the child's level of trust in the teacher. The bond thus established will enable the teacher to have an impact on the child that far outlasts the time he or she spends in the school.

A fourth ideal of bonding, a feeling of belonging, relates to the unique kind of nurture that Christian teachers can give, and that every student deserves. The Christian school must be a place where each child feels a sense of belonging and where responsive teachers take time to learn about every child's success, hurts, and interests. In a word, the child must feel loved. If the child is happy at school, this will have a positive effect on the parent as well.

Inclusiveness

When teachers, staff, students, and parents see the school population as a family, this promotes inclusiveness, a fifth ideal of bonding, which, in turn creates cohesion among teachers, students, and parents. Whatever happens is seen as affecting the school family, of which everyone is a part. When a child suffers the loss of a relative, for example, the caring teacher should contact the family and help the other students to show their concern and support.

The school family is an extension of the family of God. Every parent, every child, and every teacher is a member. When this message of inclusiveness is communi-

cated consistently by the school, it will help to cement bonds between the teacher, the student, and the parent.

Enthusiasm

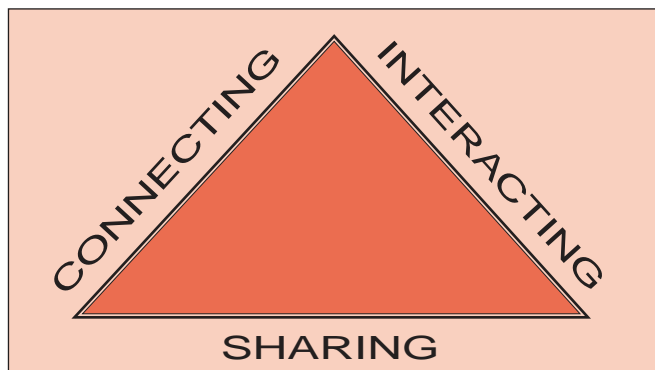
Finally, there must be enthusiasm, without which no enterprise can succeed. The school undertakes many ventures to help it stay afloat financially. The teacher should join in, working cheerfully alongside parents and students. A parent should never hear the teacher complaining about the burden of participating in these unpaid extra-duty activities. Together, they can accomplish worthwhile goals for the school. The interaction between teacher and parent is invaluable for building team spirit and gaining support for the school's ventures. Enthusiasm is contagious.

In a flawed world, problems are inevitable. Misunderstandings may arise that threaten the bond between home and school. Every school encounters situations in which a parent becomes upset and blames a teacher or administrator for some perceived mistake. When problems occur, it is important to act quickly to mend them objectively and lovingly in order to restore cordial relationships between the parent, student, and school personnel.

Public-Relations Dividends

Positive bonding between teachers, parents, and students can provide public-relations dividends for the school. In fact, teacher-student-parent bonding can serve as a tool for recruitment. A satisfied parent will be more likely to tell other parents about the school and thus boost enrollment. When critics of Christian education, or of the school itself, voice their negative opinions, bonded parents may be depended upon to speak up for the school. A parent's testimonial about a teacher, and by extension, the school, regarding its accomplishments in transforming his or her child both in behavior and academic achievement will be a powerful endorsement of the school's effectiveness.

Teacher-student-parent bonding has definite powerful advantages for a school. As the encounter between Miss Garland and Chelsie's father illustrates, it requires little time or money to reach out to others and bring them into the circle of love that is the Christian school. ✍



Bonding between teacher, students, and parent is an effective triad of connecting, interacting, and sharing that benefits the child, the parent, and the school.



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