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DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES in the Educational Preparation of Effective Leaders (Higher Education)

One of the fundamental purposes of education is to prepare young people to be effective leaders in academia, business, church, government, and in various fields of professional and practical life. This article will articulate five foundational purposes of Adventist education and five practical methods or approaches for achieving and nurturing these purposes. It will conclude with a brief discussion of a character-culture conundrum that often prevents educational institutions from achieving this mission.[1] While it is important for Adventist schools to develop character and leadership skills in all students, this article will focus specifically on college students.

The Need for Individuals Trained to Lead and Serve

Societies desperately need good judges, lawyers, doctors, and engineers who can make well-informed decisions as they seek to solve pressing problems and meet the needs of those who come to them for help, and through doing so, responsibly and successfully meet the needs of the larger society. Thus, one fundamental purpose of education is to develop and nurture students' talents and abilities so that they can become these kinds of leaders.

Yet, for our tertiary institutions, the task of developing and nurturing the talents and abilities of young people in order to prepare them to be effective professionals involves far more than merely helping them acquire a reservoir of technical knowledge and expertise in their chosen field of study. While every university strives for academic excellence and takes great pride in the professional caliber of its graduates and the research produced by its faculty, these are not the only goals that matter.

The reason for this is that good leadership and service, whether in government, business, or the professions, require more than content mastery and the acquisition of technical knowledge or expertise. One has only to listen to the evening news to see that there is a crisis in leadership in our world today—rampant stories detailing abuses of power, corruption, embezzlement, fraud, misappropriation of funds, deception, public disillusionment, resignations, and subsequent widespread loss of confidence in government, business, healthcare, the media, etc. These realities should alert us to the fact that high IQ, standardized test scores, content mastery, or even the acquisition of technical knowledge and expertise alone are insufficient to prepare young people for lives of service.

Rather, it is the attainment of wisdom in the use of the knowledge and skills one acquires at each level of education—K-12 through higher education—that is the real barometer of future servant leadership. As the wise king Solomon once wrote, "Get wisdom! Get understanding! . . . Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom and in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you" (Proverbs 4:5-9, NKJV).[2]

Yet, wisdom alone is not enough to ensure a life of service. For it is impossible to develop the practical wisdom one needs to negotiate the pressures, stresses, and demands of daily life without first acquiring another crucial quality: character. The importance of developing character in our students cannot be stressed enough. As Billy Graham once stated, "The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of character and faith."[3] Martin Luther King, Jr. similarly emphasized that, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think

critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."[4]

In short, to prepare students to be wise leaders and followers in their particular fields of study, we as educators must first help them to develop a solid foundation of character that will enable them to acquire the experience and skill to make prudent and wise decisions, regardless of the capacity in which they are called to serve.

How Can Educators Do This?

It is here that Christian education differs from approaches taken by secular universities in at least two significant aspects. Many secular institutions and philosophers have recognized the importance of developing wisdom and character. In fact, it was Aristotle who famously stated: "It is not possible to possess excellence [of character] in the primary sense without wisdom, nor to be wise without excellence of character."[5]

Yet while secular educators seek to foster wisdom in their students through teaching them to think critically, Christians believe that God is the source of wisdom; therefore, for our graduates to develop the wisdom they need to truly achieve long-term success in their lives and careers, they must first be introduced to the God who created them and who is the true source of all wisdom. The Book of Proverbs states: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10, NIV),[6] and again, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your path straight" (3:5, 6).

Second, while both secular and Christian education promote character growth through service-learning projects and a variety of curricula (e.g., general education, liberal arts, healthcare, technical, etc.), in Christian education, character development is not something that can be imposed entirely from without. In other words, character development is not merely a process of instilling discipline such as

is done by drill sergeants with recruits in a military boot camp, nor can it be accomplished as is taught by Buddhism (through a deliberate effort to change oneself or due to a life-changing experience that brings about the desire to change). Furthermore, true character development is not achieved by people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, nor is it the result of merely encouraging students to participate in service-learning projects or enroll in courses that advance their areas of study. While there are valuable lessons to learn from these approaches, Christian education calls for more.

To fully develop character in our students, two components need to be added to the college curriculum that are generally absent from the curricula of secular institutions of higher learning. First, we must introduce our students to Christ, who through His Spirit softens the heart to conversion—or as Jesus said in His midnight interview with Nicodemus, they need to be born again. Without conversion, the Bible indicates that it is impossible for the human intellect to comprehend the wisdom from above. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit." James 3:17 goes one step further, describing this wisdom that comes from above as "first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

To the unregenerate heart, wisdom from God seems to be foolishness. But without heavenly guidance, the process of trying to form a godly character is like trying to build a castle with blocks of sand. To achieve the goal of character development, emphasis must be placed on a fundamental purpose of Adventist education: to nurture students' faith in God as one who is trustworthy. This can be done by explaining to students that God, the Creator,

has revealed in His Word the principles on which the universe is built and that true wisdom consists of attempting to understand, appreciate, and harmonize with those principles. Trust in God grows when His followers align themselves with the principles upon which His universe was created. Doing so increases happiness and chances of a life lived for God and in service to others.

Through personal testimony, worships, chapel talks, sermons, clubs led by faculty, personal counseling, or merely letting beliefs and convictions "leak" into our class discussions,[7] this fundamental goal of Christian education can be accomplished. We will thereby awaken in our students a desire and need for, and ultimately a faith and hope in God as a loving Creator—One who longs to have a personal love relationship with them and who can give them the power they lack to reform their lives and enable them to develop the character they need to live a godly life and to be a blessing to others.

Two crucial additional objectives of Adventist education that are not shared by secular educational institutions involve a nurturing faith environment that supports the development of a saving relationship with Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We might call the five-pronged approach to Adventist education the **Pyramid of Curricular Innovation**: **Faith, Conversion, Character, Wisdom,** and **Talents** (professional competence, knowledge, ability, skill).[8] (See Figure 1 on the next page.) **Faith and Conversion** form the foundation upon which all other aspects are developed. These aspects can be aligned with the biblical stages of growth and maturity described in 2 Peter 1:5 to 8, which will be discussed in the next section under the subhead "The Incremental (Mentoring/Modeling) Approach."

Five Approaches for Developing Character in Our Students

The next logical question to ask is whether it is possible to nurture the five components of the Pyramid of Cur-

ricular Innovation in the college/university setting; and if so, how? Many people today assume that character is not something that can really be taught. As one of my (TE) professors put it in graduate school, "Isn't character something that is caught rather than taught?" To a certain extent, there is truth in this question. Character is often something we acquire as we are doing other things. However, universities can proactively facilitate the character-development process in their students by creating a learning environment that facilitates this goal. We will mention briefly five ways this can be done.

1. The Incremental (Mentoring/Modeling) Approach

One way to create an environment that encourages character development is through what might be called "The Incremental (Mentoring/Modeling) Approach." This approach involves teaching and modeling for students the different virtues that are needed to develop a godly Christian character and pointing out the corresponding vices that need to be avoided. For example, faculty can share stories with students about their own struggles and how by God's grace they were able to gain the victory. Faculty can assign students books to read on these subjects and encourage them to have faith in God if they don't yet have any. If they are believers, they can be encouraged when their faith in God begins to waver. Schools can hold weeks of prayer during which they encourage students to accept Christ as their personal Savior, share their faith in God with them during brief devotional messages at the beginning of class, and coach/mentor them spiritually through their roles as faculty advisors.

Another way we can create such an environment is by realizing that character development is not something that happens all at once but is rather a process that requires a series of steps or stages of incremental growth toward maturity. One helpful learning/growth model is "Peter's 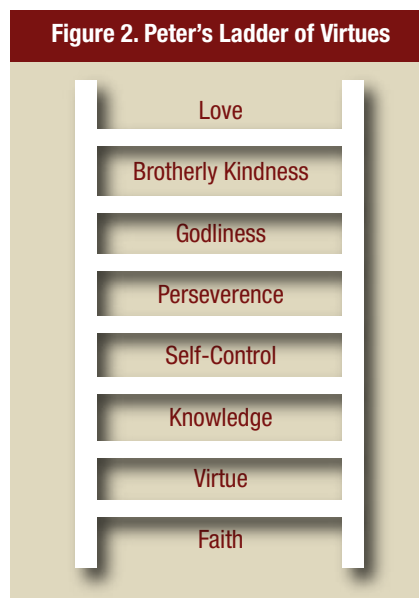Ladder of Virtues" found in 2 Peter 1:5 to 8. (See Figure 2). The developmental framework of virtues Peter outlines encompasses eight steps or stages of growth toward maturity in the Christian journey. These eight steps begin with *faith*, followed by *virtue* (corresponding to conversion), then *knowledge (*specifically here *knowledge of the law of God* and *an understanding of the principles of His kingdom)* that forms the foundation for character development, followed by *self-control* (the strength of will to handle distractions and manage emotions, passions, and desires in a wholesome manner), *perseverance* (steadfastness in difficult situations), *godliness* (the attainment of wisdom

Figure 1. Character Development Stages in the Preparation of Effective Leaders

Talent
Wisdom
Character
Conversion
Faith

Figure 2. Peter's Ladder of Virtues

Love
Brotherly Kindness
Godliness
Perseverence
Self-Control
Knowledge
Virtue
Faith

from above, obedience to God's law, and thoughts and actions proceeding from love for God), *brotherly kindness* (using one's talents and abilities to serve others rather than oneself), and the greatest of these, *love* (devotion to God and compassion for others).

As we share these progressive stages of character growth with our students, we can enable them not only to better understand the value of these virtues for their own future success and happiness personally and professionally, but also can help them to begin acquiring these virtues.[9] Ellen White, when referencing Peter's ladder, noted that "Christ . . . is the ladder. The base is planted firmly on the earth in His humanity; the topmost round reaches to the throne of God in His divinity. The humanity of Christ embraces fallen humanity, while His divinity lays hold upon the throne of God. We are saved by climbing round after round of the ladder, looking to Christ, clinging to Christ... so that He is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."[10] She further explained that these elements of character grow over the course of a lifetime rather than in a hierarchical order. The ladder, then, represents humanity's reliance on God for the transformation of the character.[11]

2. The Environmental (Healthful Living) Approach

A second approach we can take to facilitate character growth in our students involves carefulness, thought, and effort to create conditions that are conducive to clear thought and disciplined living. This approach involves creating a healthful environment for our students that is ideal for the development of a clear mind and a disciplined life. A valuable book addresses health principles that form the foundation for godly character development is the book *The Ministry of Healing* by Ellen White.[12] Another valuable resource that covers similar health principles is Neil Nedley's 2011 book, *The*

Lost Art of Thinking: How to Improve Emotional Intelligence and Achieve Peak Mental Performance,[13] which contains a wealth of research demonstrating the value of the eight laws of health outlined in the NEWSTART Program developed by Sang Gu Lee of Weimar College to provide the most optimal conditions for character growth.

One additional curricular innovation in this regard is the work-study framework in our Adventist philosophy that has been successfully emphasized by many Adventist collegiate institutions over the years. This approach stresses the importance of having students engage in some form of useful manual labor as a supplement to book learning, and as a means of promoting balanced character development.

To maximize the learning benefits of this approach, students could be either paired with peers (peer-paired) in completing manual tasks or assigned non-manual tasks such as working with professors in an internship. This brings full circle the inculcation and practice of our Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education, which combines the head, hand, and heart in balanced, wholistic development. The head is en-

gaged through classroom learning; the hands and heart through mentorship and practice opportunities that promote character and faith development. In fact, certain educational theories suggest that students become more secure in their own leadership identity by having work experiences they can reference and from which they can build a framework, as well as meaningful apprenticeship opportunities.

3. The Experiential (Service Learning) Approach

A third way to promote the character development of students is to provide them with service-learning opportunities. Proverbs 22:6 states: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (KJV).[14] The dictionary definition of the verb *train* is "to develop or form the habits, thoughts, or behavior of (a child or other person) by discipline and instruction; to make proficient by instruction and practice, as in some art, profession, or work."[15] In like manner, service learning is an academic activity tying classroom-based

learning to community-based applications. Providing service-learning opportunities is a vital component of Adventist curriculum, as it allows students to apply skills and theories from cross-curricular sources in real-world situations. They are essentially able to practice what their teachers preach. If we as Adventist educators fail to provide these service-learning experiences, then there is danger of students not acquiring or developing these skills, or even a failure to inculcate such skills and learning.

While community-service activities such as participating in mission trips abroad to build churches or schools or to conduct evangelistic meetings, opportunities to help put on health expos, visit the homeless or shut-ins, or get involved in community clean-up days are often unconnected to classroom-based learning, through careful thought, educators can integrate such projects as applied components of actual courses. Thus, as students are learning math, science, language, and literature, such applied, hands-on service-learning projects can help them begin thinking of others instead of themselves, develop altruism, and experience the rewards of constructive service.

A robust culture of volunteer service should also be cultivated. This gives students the opportunity to develop care for the communities in which they live and a lifelong commitment of service to others. For this to take place, students must be trained and prepared to serve, and opportunities for debriefing and reflection must be in place.

4. The Humanities (Critical Thinking) Approach

A fourth approach is to encourage students to read and critically evaluate materials that grapple with the human experience. For example, what are the assumptions in literature, social media, and current movies about what makes people happy, about the definition of success, about what people are for, about human relationships, and about power? How do these assump-

tions compare with what God has revealed to us about these things? (See Sidebar 1 on the previous page.)

To explore these issues, Adventist educators have traditionally made particular use of the Bible, as well as the written works of other inspirational religious writers to expand the moral horizons of their students and have regarded courses on these topics as a vital component of the general-education curriculum required of all majors. However, other literature bases in the humanities, as well as film and drama, can also be employed to challenge students' thinking, expose hidden and unexamined assumptions of modern society, and explore what is truly of value in life.

5. The Prophetic (Social Justice) Approach

One final way that colleges and universities can promote character development in their students might be called the prophetic (social justice) approach. This approach involves helping our students understand in a deeper way God's prophetic plan for the final and complete alleviation of human suffering, oppression, and injustice on this planet, and the role that He has called us to fulfill in confronting and opposing corrupt systems.

Such an approach involves helping our students think critically about current cultural norms and ideals, how these often promote injustice, intolerance, oppression, hate, and greed, and in contrast with these, what God's alternative pathway to human freedom, health, and happiness looks like, including its efforts to imbed freedom within the rational constraints of respect for divine law, without which there can be no true freedom. Through careful analysis of cause and effect in social systems, students come to understand that without moral law on which the universe is governed, there can be no real potential for creating a social fabric in which freedom of conscience, responsibility, diversity, and peace can flourish grow and in

which human suffering, sorrow, and loss can be prevented or alleviated.

It is this final approach, however, that provides a meaningful segue into one final issue of concern to ensure that Adventist tertiary educational institutions achieve their overarching goal of preparing their students to be effective leaders. This concern might perhaps be termed "the character-culture conundrum."
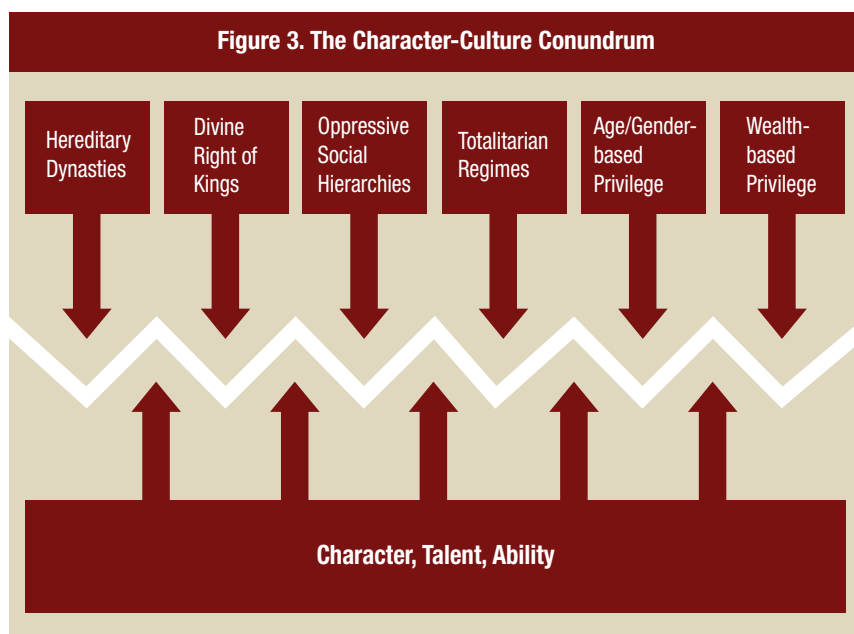
The Character-Culture Conundrum

The character-culture conundrum involves the acknowledgment of a seldom explicitly stated fact that despite the Herculean efforts of colleges and universities to develop in their students the wisdom and character necessary to prepare them to serve as effective leaders, there is no guarantee that those with the greatest potential will ever be given the opportunity to fill positions of power and influence in society.[16] (See Figure 3.) The reason for this is rooted in a perennial problem that afflicts all cultures as well as political and religious institutions to a greater or lesser degree: namely, the fact that more often than not, due to selfish human nature, powerful and privileged elites, cultural norms, and/or oppressive governments prevent those of exceptional character, wisdom, and ability from ever rising to the top, even though if they were allowed to do so, this would benefit their societies immensely.

One example of this conundrum being played out in all its corrosive and destructive power is the life of Yi Sun-shin, who would have likely made an effective political leader of South Korea[17] but was never given the opportunity to do so. Other examples abound as well, from Stalin's reign of terror, to the religious totalitarianism during the Dark Ages in Europe, to the deathlike stranglehold of the Kim family on power for more than half a century in North Korea, to the often corrosive influence that money and special interests play in controlling political processes in many parts of the world today.

In short, through the establishment of hereditary dynasties, the divine right of kings, rigid hierarchical class systems (such as those found in India, China, and Korea for centuries), and oppressive totalitarian regimes, character, talent, and ability, sadly, more often than not, fail to rise to the top. The same is true when rigid adherence to hierarchical norms prevent

Figure 3. The Character-Culture Conundrum

Hereditary Dynasties | Divine Right of Kings | Oppressive Social Hierarchies | Totalitarian Regimes | Age/Gender-based Privilege | Wealth-based Privilege

Character, Talent, Ability

Some readers may be curious whether the principles contained in this article are applicable to students in high schools (junior and senior level). Do the same principles apply; and if so, how should they be promoted? At Hawaiian Mission Academy in Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A., a new missions program was created for that purpose. It primarily enrolls juniors and seniors, though a few sophomores have joined as well. During the first semester, the students attend daily classes in which they take time to assess their skills (personality types, spiritual gifts, love languages, strengths finder, learning type, etc.) and with help from their teachers, form teams based upon discussion and reflection of these assessments.

The students then research and reflect upon leadership qualities found in the Bible as well as in notable missionaries (from various denominations), identifying key characteristics and leadership styles all of these individuals manifested. At the same time that students are forming teams with a collective goal, they are using critical and design thinking skills (using innovation process steps to develop ideas into actual products or events) to assess the needs of the communities nearby (on Oahu as well as on neighboring islands) and creating community-service projects to meet those needs. Students do all the "grunt work" of communicating with the individuals in charge, creating fundraising ideas, collecting the supplies, and implementing the projects. They serve as student leaders and recruit their peers to take part in these projects.

During the second semester, they engage in similar activities, but for a longer project trip, most often abroad. This curriculum allows the students to understand themselves from perspectives that they had never considered before, while challenging them to work collaboratively and teaching them conflict-resolution skills (as inevitably, conflict will arise). Furthermore, since the students have ownership of the projects, they recognize that they have skills, opinions, talents, and perspectives that are needed for the growth of our Adventist community. They come back from these projects with a greater desire for service as well as a deeper understanding of why they are learning the content included in the curriculum and begin to identify new ways in which they can apply their skills.

Programs such as this challenge students and faculty, and can foster growth; however, they can also be risky. In addition to providing training and debriefing, schools must ensure the safety of students and supervisors by having supervision policies and guidelines in place.

think critically, as discussed earlier. Promoting truly fair and unbiased democratic structures and institutions enables citizens to freely choose their future leaders.

Furthermore, tertiary institutions should do their uttermost to oppose and counteract oppressive forces that seek to stifle the attractive drawing power of character as a guiding force in society. With concerted effort, administration and governance bodies must strive to replace dysfunctional and ultimately crippling societal conventions, where they exist, with improved systems of governance and administration. Such well-structured systems will allow for the free flow of information and for new leaders to be chosen, not based on the color of their skin, the city where they were born, the schools they attended, their influential friends, or other such superficial and ultimately disingenuous factors, but rather based on their talents, wisdom, and professional accomplishments—and above all, on their character. For as U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt once stated: "Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike."[18] And as the famed Roman orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero, put it so well: "It is not by muscle, speed, or physical dexterity that great things are achieved, but by reflection, force of character, and judgment."[19]

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women, the young, and minorities from assuming positions of leadership in the public sphere, not to mention the oppression of the poor by the rich throughout history. (See Figure 3.) The advantage of democratic forms of government, as imperfect as many of them are, is that they more frequently enable cracks to emerge in the seemingly impenetrable facade that has traditionally prevented the sterling character of many in the lower classes of society, minorities, the young, and women from ever rising to positions of power and influence in society.

And it is for this very reason, if for no other, that every college and university must take seriously its role to prepare and nurture students to be servant leaders. Tertiary institutions play a crucial role in helping students become effective leaders in society and should feel a vested interest not only in peer-pairing students with others or to work with professors in internships, but also providing service-learning opportunities and challenging students to

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. While some specific examples contained in the article come from a particular cultural context, we believe that the principles shared can be effectively applied regardless of where one is located.

2. Proverbs 4:5-9, NKJV. Quoted from the New King James Version® of the Bible. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

3. Brainy Quotes (2017), Billy Graham: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/key words/character.html.

4. Ibid., Martin Luther King, Jr.

5. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics (London: Penguin Books, 2004); Nichomachean Ethics, 1144b30-32. Cited in Kevin Timpe, Moral Character (2017): http://www.iep.utm.edu/, para. 30.

6. Proverbs 9:10. Unless stated otherwise, all Scripture references in this article are taken from the New International Version (NIV) Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

7. This should not be done in a contrived or synthetic manner, but rather, as the teacher discusses events or theories, he or she should make a proactive effort to address the assumptions on which these events or theories are built and compare them with what God has revealed to us. God's eternal principles, as a result, can be scattered throughout course lectures and discussions, sometimes as confirmation of the assertions of literature, history, or various theories, other times as contrasts and, hopefully, corrections to them.

8. Some of our Adventist higher education institutions enroll a significant number of committed Christians as well as students from other religious traditions who desire an education based on Christian principles. Our point here is that our primary goal as educators is first and foremost to assist our students in becoming increasingly open to God's direction in their lives. We can do this through creating an environment that nurtures their faith journey.

9. Two other theoretical constructs that educators may find helpful in seeking to better understand the developmental needs of their students include James Fowler's Stages of Faith theory (see James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* [New York: Harper & Row, 1981]), and L. S. Vygotsky's work on the zone of proximal development (ZPD), guided participation, and the notion of scaffolding. Vygotsky posited that without attention to affective, relational, and volitional components of the learning process, students will have far greater difficulty learning. Vygotsky's work in particular highlights the need for us to use a practice-oriented mentorship approach in our schools in order for students to make progress in the Christian life. This involves coming close to students, listening to them, seeking to understand them, sincerely empathizing with them in order to win their trust, and then assisting them to make progress toward spiritual maturity. See, for example: Lisa S. Goldstein, "The Relational Zone: The Role of Caring Relationships in the Co-Construction of Mind," *American Educational Research Journal* 36:3 (Autumn 1999): 647-673; and Vasily V. Davydov and Stephen T. Kerr, "The Influence of L. S. Vygotsky on Education Theory, Research, and Practice," *Educational Researcher* 24:3 (April 1995): 12-21.

10. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1901), 6:147.

11. Ibid.

12. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1905).

13. Neil Nedley, *The Lost Art of Thinking: How to Improve Emotional Intelligence and Achieve Peak Mental Performance* (Ardmore, Okla.: Nedley Publishing, 2011).

14. Biblical principles for learning and development were action oriented (learn, then do), and parents were advised to train up their children in the ways they should go, which entailed character development as well as skills development.

15. Definition of train from Dictionary.com: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/under-training.

16. It is true that not all leaders exercise their leadership through formal, employment, or elected channels. There are, in fact, many ways in which effective informal leaders can enhance organizational and societal outcomes. After all, Jesus Himself never held any formal title or elected office. However, it is also true that being appointed to a designated leadership role can extend a person's influence, providing a sense of legitimacy and a platform for his or her voice to be heard in ways that would not be possible otherwise.

17. Yi Sun-shin became a great admiral, but his military prowess was not acknowledged during his lifetime because he was born to a poor ruling class family. See https://openendedsocialstudies.org/2016/06/25/admiral-yi-sun-sin/.

18. Brainy Quotes (2017), Theodore Roosevelt: https:// www.brainyquote.com/quotes/theocore_roosevelt_163799.

19. Ibid., Marcus Tullius Cicero: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/marcus_tulius_cicero_393419.