

EDUCATION AND FAMILY LIFE

Introductory

Family life provides the basic environment for the formative education both of the adult members of a family and children. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that this particular sort of environment, that is family life, should not be broken up but built up and utilised for its vital educational purpose. Mention has now been made that family life provides, among other functions, for the education of the adult members.

Significant here is the fact that family life is dynamic, challenging all its members to live and learn and to adapt to change. By so doing, the adults concerned become better or worse in their growth and development. They have ample opportunities to learn the give-and-take procedure, to learn to sacrifice, to share not only feelings and thoughts but also things, to share gain and pain as also to exercise privileges and obligations as they render or attempt to render unselfish service to the household. On the other hand, actions that involve greed, dominance, aggression and irresponsibility are significantly held in check. If for one or the other unfortunate reason, greed, dominance, aggression and irresponsibility have been developed the pressure and wisdom of family life should compel the party or parties concerned to unlearn these characteristics, replacing them with more creative and beneficial ones. In such an environment, therefore, the chances of building up an integrated personality are good indeed.

It must be stressed that the good in human nature finds full expression in family life. For example, the desire to protect and obey, the urge for companionship, pride in rhythmic order and beauty and related interests are satisfied. It will, therefore, be easily appreciated that outside family life, the experiences encountered will in the main contrast sharply with those referred to above and their impact on

the persons concerned is better imagined than described.

This then in brief is the position from the standpoint of the adult member of the family. And now to examine the situation briefly from the point of view of the child in the family, the following should be said: the child's basic needs should be appreciated. Apart from the fact that the child needs food, protection, shelter and medical care as well as security, it is important to add to the list the following:- sound formal education and ideals, character, social awareness and integrated personality. Thus the family has vital responsibilities for the child.

Educationally the family provides the child with the first and important lessons concerning his person, health habits like cleaning and feeding himself, lessons on relationships like behaving himself properly within the family group where behaviour patterns are dignified and respectable, in helping with family chores, in learning the home language, in learning care of family property and the like. These important formative lessons are possible in full measure where family life is in fact. Where there is no family, these lessons can be learned at best haphazardly and the necessary foundation of proper growth and training of a desirable character will be in grave danger. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that such vicious circumstances as go along with homelessness or bad homes constitute a breeding ground for delinquent behaviour and dangerous men.

It should now be added that for family life to achieve its educational purpose, it must be lived obviously in decent surroundings reasonably sanitary, where accommodation allows for the satisfaction of adult and children's interest, for recreation and work. Further, such contacts as are made in the home between the young and old should be as instructive as wholesome, and not just touch and go.

African Family Life in the Urban Areas

The remarks thus far have given a general picture of the situation. I should now like to take the opportunity to refer briefly to the problem of education and family life of the African on the Witwatersrand in particular and in the urban areas generally. The acute shortage of houses on the Witwatersrand and in the urban areas is a well known fact and requires no labouring. In the circumstances, people, with few exceptions, are trying to rear families in two-roomed, three-roomed, four-roomed and here and there in five-roomed cottages. There is chronic overcrowding everywhere. Nurseries are unheard of in such homes, nor has each yard any play space to speak of for children. The most careful parents find it difficult to keep children out of the way. Children are always either in close proximity or within earshot and what they see and overhear of adult life in these crowded circumstances is better imagined than described.

On the other hand, the homes have become places for "touch and go" and not for stay. On the average, parents leave for work daily before 6 a.m. and return after 6 p.m. They merely touch and go from the homes for the greatest part of the time. Thus the contacts between parents and the children are casual and less formative. In the circumstances, the corrective influence of the parents is hardly felt, and the education of the children is left to chance indeed.

Homes and Pre-school Children

In this set-up, pre-school children seem to be the hardest hit. Either they are left in the precarious care of old grandmothers or in that of other children of schoolgoing age. There are cases, however, where the pre-school child is sent to a nearby creche or day-nursery.

The latter is, no doubt, a step in the right direction but as I see things presently neither the creches nor the day-nurseries attempt to solve an educational issue. On the contrary, they are efforts at solving a labour problem, for creches and day-nurseries obviously meet the case of working mothers whose children qualify for admission there. Otherwise such mothers would not know what to do with their young ones! These mothers are thus saved from taking a difficult decision, namely, to give up a job in order to care for a baby, whatever the attendant consequences.

If the creches or the day-nurseries are to answer an educational question, then professionally well trained personnel must be provided in place of the willing but untrained hands now in charge of this service. In addition, a curriculum or programme of activities will have to be worked out and followed for its educational value and a thoroughly co-ordinated system of administration, supervision and inspection by specialist persons will have to be evolved to ensure that the service achieves educational goals by recognised standards. Such a venture will, of course, obviously entail the establishment of a training centre for nursery school teachers.

The magnitude of this problem speaks for itself. Though private organisations may well be encouraged to tackle it yet it seems obvious that, for the community to derive the best from the scheme, institutional agencies like the School Boards should take this matter up. Since the training of nursery school teachers, administration and supervision of the service to uphold good standards are vital matters, no risks should be run here. Careful researches will have to be done. In the process, the opinion of competent educationalists in this field should be solicited and the support and co-operation of State Departments of Education should be enlisted. Regarding the matter of training teachers, for example, I feel sure that it would pay dividends if facilities were provided at one or other of the teacher - training centres already in existence. This, of course, is the challenge of our time!

This whole service to the pre-school children is absolutely necessary and should receive widespread public support. It merits attention urgently if Soweto and other urban centres with concentrated populations are to influence creatively the growing points of the communities as also to curb the growing menace of juvenile delinquency and crime and to bring new thinking, hope and progressive education to the families.

Homes and Primary Education

From the foregoing, it will be clear that most homes with few exceptions provide poor conditions for the education of the children. Since primary schools are the next in succession to the institutions that have to do with the formal education of the young, it should be expected of this type of schools to reinforce the harassed homes in some important way. To that end, therefore, the schools should carry more than their share of the burden of education. That is apart from providing the instruction and the basic skills in reading, writing, reckoning and relationships, i.e. the four R's so called, schools should also provide for the physical care, discipline and experiences which are normally provided by an orderly home. The schools should fill in the gaps, as it were. In other words, having special regard for the dangers and needs of urban and industrial life, children should not just be sent to school but should have a much longer life at school than is the case presently. A longer life at school will more than anything else provide for the opportunities for enrichment in knowledge, basic skills and attitudes and for gaining direction and purpose.

With acute shortage of schools, however, there are dilemmas: a substantial majority of children, especially those in the grades, can only stay at school for three hours daily. Other children in the standards drop out before they reach the Standard 6 level, which is the end class in the primary school. Just to cite by way of illustration some figures in the Republic: in 1964, there were 404,143 children in S.S.A. or Grade 1 class. In Grade II or S.S.B.,

there were 289,832 children, while in the Standard 6 class there were 69,771 pupils. The difference between S.S.A. and S.S.E. was 115,311 pupils. The drop-outs are therefore very many indeed. A third group of children does not attend school at all but remains wild and illiterate. Thus the position of the primary school child is thoroughly tangled up.

The problem here is extremely intricate and intriguing. Its solution is not easy to find. The urgency of the need to find a solution is felt acutely when account is taken (1) of the precarious home conditions but for a few exceptions; (2) of the young children who return home from school after an absence of three hours to find no responsible company to keep except that of their playmates who either do not attend school at all or who have dropped out from the schools. This situation is definitely pregnant with dangers of maladjustments, delinquency and crime. NO parent or guardian in the urban areas is a stranger to this menace.

The great need is that something constructive should be done as soon as possible. It is indeed imperative and it is in the interest of the Bantu Communities that each child of school-going age should be at school and should have a much longer life there to gain firmly some direction and purpose.

The conclusion in this regard is irresistible, viz. that there is a good case for compulsory education at least for the first four years. It is the duty of the responsible parent community to do everything in their power to drive for the attainment of this constructive goal.

Funds will be required to make such an ideal a reality. It may be expensive too. But it is certainly more expensive to have the children turned into delinquents and criminals rendering them dangerous and useless to the community. Indeed it is cent wise and rand foolish in a world such as ours, which is urban, industrial and commercial, increasingly becoming scientific and technological, for the Bantu parents to waver in providing adequate schooling oppor-

tunities or to avoid sacrificing a little more in this regard to bring about compulsory education of their children. Modern life must be learned and lived effectively and the tools for this way of life are provided by schooling. How can any one child, therefore live amongst others without these tools?

Homes and Secondary Education

When the Bantu child reaches differentiation studies at the Secondary and High School level, his needs invariably increase and peculiar problems arise. No attempt will be made here to give an exhaustive treatment of the problems except for a brief reference to one or two.

The home being small and over-populated, it can provide neither congenial room nor quiet for private study and concentration and the young student has to face this situation in some way. Reactions vary normally from person to person. Some student, avoiding the home, elects to spend at school as much of his spare time as possible to snatch moments for private study or even for quiet and relaxation. Another goes to a club-house nearby or some long distance away where conditions permit study and concentration.

Another goes to a friend's home where the family might have gone out of town for a visit or for some other reason and an opportunity for study and relaxation presents itself. Of late, it is common experience for School Boards to receive requests from a stranded study group of students for the use of a classroom of a Lower Primary School in the evening. These reactions are evidence of the fact that the home is failing in its role to support the school programme. It should further be borne in mind that the home has no library or means for hobbies, nor is there any reading material to speak of. There is a lack of comfort, companionship, motivation and satisfaction of aspirations. Rather there is more than elbow room for discouragements and frustrations. What is learned at school cannot be lived at homes. In

these circumstances, therefore, youth tensions mount very easily against family life, its discipline and preferences.

Conclusion

The inadequacies of urban family life in the education of the children are obvious. The measure of juvenile delinquency and crime in the Bantu Townships is a direct consequence of this sort of life that is unable to provide sufficient opportunities for education from the nursery to the secondary school.

It does seem that the fact of family must be accepted as an anchor or support of a growing industrial and urbanised order of society, that a family is not a place where the old and the young members touch and go but a place where abiding human relations and behaviour patterns based on respect and dignity are possible for the common good. A community that makes improper and inadequate arrangements for its family life will pay the price.

A school system, however good, cannot replace a good home but can only reinforce it fruitfully; nor can a good home replace a good school. For the proper nurturing of the individual both a good home and a good school are essential.

C.N. PHATUDI