

Families within the Family

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In the "*Schoolscapes*", February 2004 issue, a Quebec Education magazine, published an article under the caption Family Life. Pascale Sauvé, the author, reports that a team of educators had been experimenting with an organizational model over the last three years, and were very excited about the results.



What was the experiment about? The 1600 students of Ecole Secondaire Cap-jeunesse were divided into work units called families. So were the 140 staff members. Each family was made up of between 4 and 6 mixed student groups. Teachers got to know every student in their family, to follow their progress in different disciplines, and to adapt to their needs.

Each student was given a profile, which was chosen according to personal interests. A block of 4 periods per nine-day cycle was devoted to the student profile. Among other benefits were the following: partnerships and collaboration were facilitated; teachers were freed-to some extent-from the core curriculum, and could meet together; activities were close to students' lives and needs.

This new model called for flexibility. The class schedules were modified. Between 10% and 20% of school time was devoted to integrating projects as a growing emergence of tasks occurred. Time was no longer a constraint, but a resource. Students still followed a core curriculum, but at the same time, they worked within the chosen profile, which kept their motivation up.

Apparently, the success rate with this model of learning has been astounding. According to the school principal, 60% of students who made it to secondary 5 (Quebec-final year of high school) had not finished Elementary 6 (Quebec-final year of elementary school) successfully. The families showed increased concern about the success of their members, and were more attentive to their learning needs. The learning climate and the quality of relationships had improved. Systematic follow-up ensured good student support and guidance. Students were happier at school. This model ties well into the Quebec educational reform.

As for teachers, they draw great professional pride and motivation from the new model. They feel less isolated, and find greater pleasure working with their colleagues. Although some find it hard to change from their routine and work habits, the old attitude of resistance to change is subsiding. One of the potential problems is professional burnout, as there is a bigger demand on their time. This issue needs to be addressed by the school administration.

This new approach to learning might appeal to the Seventh-day Adventist school system. Looking retrospectively at my experience with Adventist education, the family spirit stands out prominently. Students of very different backgrounds, nationalities, races and religious affiliation develop close and

lasting friendships. They are surrounded by teachers who counsel them and pray with them. *With the Seventh-day Adventist school being a family already, it should be possible to implement the model, creating family units within the school family at large.* Such an undertaking requires all the related information, training, adjustment and funding. But first, it must be piloted in a number of schools. It would be great to have this approach to successful learning in a church sponsored and financed educational system that believes so strongly in the potential of the family.

Resources:

- Sauv , Pascale , Family Life, *Schoolscapes*, Vol.4, No 3, February 2004, pages 12 and 13, Education Quebec