

# Importance of Co-Curricular Activities in Adventist Schools

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*ABSTRACT—The purpose of this article is to focus importance of co-curricular activities and how these can be integrated for students' spiritual growth, personal commitment with God and Jesus Christ in the Adventist schools. Learning is not limited in the textbooks and paper-pencil activities in the classroom. Students learn values, useful skills, strengthen faith and spiritual growth through co-curricular activities of schools such as: sports, drama, dancing, music, choir, leadership in the classroom, dormitories, clubs, school publications, work education, Adventist Youth (AY) programs, and governance of the students associations and various functions of the schools. The goals and objectives of the co-curricular activities of the Adventist schools focus on the multi- educational dimensions which have potential impact in mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual aspects of students.*

*Keywords: Adventist school, co-curriculum, AY, multi-education*

## I. Introduction

Learning does not take place in the classrooms only. Students learn besides their textbooks and paper-pencil activities in the classroom. In schools students are involved in sports, drama, dancing, music, choir, leadership in the classroom, dormitories, clubs, school publications, work education, Adventist Youth (AY) programs, and governance of the students associations and various functions of the schools. These co-curricular activities in Adventist educational institutions strengthen faith and spiritual growth of students. The goals and objectives of the

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co-curricular activities of the Adventist schools focus on the multi educational dimensions which have potential impact in mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual aspects of students. How co-curricular activities in the Adventist schools can be integrated to strengthen spiritual lives of students and personal commitment with God are focused in this article.

The term “co-curricular activities” has different implications in educational institutions. Generally, educators think of it as a separate domain of education (Kelly, 1999; Goodlad, 1994). The prefix “co” refers to those activities which are separated from the curriculum. Thus, it is named differently in schools, such as: non-curricular, semi-curricular, para-curricular, extra-curricular activities of schools (Berk, 1992). Encyclopedia of Educational Research (1960) defines school co-curricular activities as, “Program and events carrying no academic credit, sponsored and organized by pupils’ or students’ organizations or by institutions designed to entertain, instruct and /or provide exercise of interest and abilities, subject to some measures of control by the institutions” (p.507). John Good (1984) described co-curricular activities as interaction between students and the physical, social, environment and interpersonal relationship with people at the school traditionally. The school curriculum is defined by the class time-table, which is called the formal curriculum. Co-curricular activities which take place outside classroom lessons are known as informal curriculum. It is often regarded as less essential but they are not. In these activities students have privilege to cultivate values of cooperation, responsibility, effective use of time and developing one’s ability to their fullest form (Berk, 1992). Dowshen (2004) suggests that learning experiences, both formal and informal curriculum, are equally important. A study reveals that life-wide learning generally refers to the learning experiences that take place beyond the classrooms. Such experiential learning enables students to achieve certain goals that are difficult to attain through classroom learning (Mae, n. d). Preez (2000) emphasized that by practicing extra-curricular activities, school community conveys values to the students which retain in life-wide learning.

In Adventist schools there are a number of co-curricular activities through which teachers and staff have the privilege to integrate Biblical values. These co-curricular activities are chapel exercises, seminars, workshops, group activities, learning buddies, social interactions, dormitory worships and religious activities. Other co-curricular activities are sports, academic and social clubs, band, choir,

orchestra, drama, students association, work education, students' governance, publishing newsletters, yearbook and religious activities of the school. These activities in educational institutions play important roles for students' emotional, psychological, social, physical and moral development (AIIAS Bulletin, 200-2006; Berk, 1992; Kelly 1999; Sadker & Sadker, 1997). The effects of this curriculum are not immediately visible. It is not reflected on the grades or transcripts but is exposed through life style. Pointing to the importance of the hidden curriculum in the life of students at Spicer Memorial College, former president Gaikwad (1994) stated that hidden "curriculum influences more than what teachers intend to convey" (p. 24). He pointed that values do not transfer from the textbooks to the students but they acquire these mostly by involvement in co-curricular activities. Kennedy (1998) pointed out that co-curricular activities have potential contributions to value education. It may influence positively or negatively depending on what students experience in their associations and activities in the school. The students, who are involved in good activities, are influenced positively. Similarly, when students are engaged in wrong activities they are negatively influenced. Thus, integration of biblical values should not be limited in the classroom only, but must be also cultivated through co-curricular activities to strengthen students' relationship with God because the primary goal of Adventist education is to restore the image of God that has been lost by sin in the Garden of Eden (White, 1923).

The horizon of co-curricular activities is gradually expanding. The history of the curriculum tells that it began at the time when formal education started. Primarily co-curricular activities began at the secondary school level and continued in the colleges and universities, where more extensively developed (Ahola, 2000). The reasons to develop this program in the secondary school are based on the interests of the young children in the elementary schools. In the elementary school children are not matured enough to support and differentiate co-curricular programs in the school. Their social needs seem better served by the smaller and simpler peer organization of the self-contained classroom (Berk, 1992; Sadker, M. P., & Sadker, D. M., 1997). In the course of time learning experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom are expanding considerably through media and technologies. Students are exposed to television, cinema, movies, computers, internet, electronic games and this list could be added to as science is developing.

## II. Impact of Co-curricular Activities in Students

Dowshen (2004) mentioned that co-curriculum enrich students' learning experience beyond classroom activities. It enables students to develop essential skills and attitudes for both classroom learning and their daily lives, such as leadership training, thinking skills, adventure training and community service. Jackson (1992) emphasized that co-curricular activities help students to develop multidirectional relationships between academic and psychological outcome, including school achievement, educational aspiration, self-esteem, political attitudes, personality and character formation. Moreover, co-curricular participation is related to higher school retention rates. It promotes students' current sense of well-being and life satisfaction that carries over to community participation in adulthood.

According to a study done by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (n. d.) found that students who participate in co-curricular activities have positive effects in their behavior. These behavioral effects in students are: (a) students have a better attitude about learning; (b) their academic performance is better; (c) students have an increased sense of accomplishment, competence, and self-esteem; (d) students have lower risk of depression, use of drugs, and alcohol; (e) they develop a sense of well-being and friendships; and (f) students' active engagement in co-curricular activities reduce ethnicity and racial discrimination in schools. The educators believe that by making co-curricular activities contingent on academic performance, the students will be motivated to improve their academic performance (Berk, 1992). Arthur F. Holmes (1987), a profound Christian thinker, stated that "education cannot be impounded in the classrooms and libraries, but must extend itself into extracurricular" (p.84).

Coleman's research showed that among the students in grades 6 to 10 the average GPA is higher for those who participate actively in the co-curricular activities in the school than for those who are not involved. The students who are more involved in various co-curricular activities scored above average in their academic achievement. It has also a positive relationship between self-esteem and co-curricular participation (Berk, 1992).

### III. Adventist Perspectives of Co-curricular Activities

*Biblical View:* The concept of co-curricular activities developed in secular educational institutions as social and psychological development of youth. However, in the Adventist educational system it has even greater impact in students' lives. Co-curricular activities in the Adventist schools have broader implications. These programs develop social, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of students' lives in the schools. The Bible reveals that God created human beings in His image and they marred it by sin (Genesis 1:27-3:18). They were created like God mentally, physically, and spiritually. God created human as social beings too. He blessed them to increase and fill the world, which implies that they have to live interdependently (Genesis 1:28).

*Philosophical Perspective:* The Adventist philosophy of education is based on the restoration of the image of God in humankind that has been marred by sin (White, 1923). Co-curricular activities of Adventist educational institutions need to be also a part of the redemption plan. God instructed His people to nurture their children in every step from when they wake up in the morning till they go to sleep at night (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). In these perspectives co-curricular activities in the schools must lead students to salvation. These should be designed to develop and nourish four dimensions of humankind and these are mental/intellectual, physical, social and spiritual aspects.

(a) Mental/intellectual development of students occurs through co-curricular activities of the school in several ways. Learning does not happen only from the prescribed textbooks and class/course requirements. Students can acquire information, ideas, and concepts from various activities outside of the regular class requirements. Such activities are writing articles, poems, essays, jokes for school papers and newsletters. They work as journalists, photographers and editor of the year book/paper. These co-curricular activities help students to develop intellectually and make a deep impression in their lives (Kelly, 1999; Sadker & Sadker, 1997). Adventist schools support students' involvement in different activities outside of the classroom to provide opportunity for mental development. Southern Asia-Pacific Division Education Policy Manual (1998) pointed in one of the educational objectives that, " Striving for excellence in workmanship in whatever task they are assigned to perform will be developing

common sense, initiative, self-reliance, resourcefulness and reliability through work experience” (p. 0, 12).

In the Adventist educational institutions, mental development takes place in the involvement in various religious activities. The Holy Scripture mentions, “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of the wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverb 9:10). Therefore, involvement in the religious activities helps students to grow spiritually, morally as well as mentally.

(b) Physical Development. One of the four dimensions of Adventist education is physical development of the students. Paul describes our body as a holy temple, where God wants to dwell (1Corinthians 6:9). Ellen White (1954) pointed that the mind and the soul find expression through the body, both mental and spiritual vigor to a great degree, dependent upon physical strength and activity. Physical health promotes the development of a strong mind and a well-balanced character. Without health no one can particularly understand one’s obligations to fellow humans or to the Creator. Therefore, health should be faithfully guarded as character (White, 1954). Depending on this divine counsel, Adventist education promotes physical development through balanced sports, games, amusements and work education programs. Sports and games help students develop physically as well as emotionally and mentally. However, in many schools, sports and games are used for unhealthy competitions influenced by non-Christian worldviews.

The ancient Greek philosophy was influenced by Platonic metaphysical idea of dualism. Plato perceived soul and body as two separate entities. Body being matter is evil and mortal. The soul being non-matter is good and therefore immortal. Later on this metaphysical idea of immortality of soul influences philosophical and theological thinking. Gnostics believe that work or actions of human being corrupt body and soul is not polluted by the human action. So body destroys by death and soul reincarnate in different forms (Russell, 1972). However, the biblical concept of human beings is unlike metaphysical idea of dualism. The Bible describes that man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). He formed man from the dust and breathed into his nostrils and he became a living being (Genesis 2:7). It describes the composition of human being as body of dust, and soul is the breath of God. It does not separate man into two different entities but it describes the uniqueness of God’s creation of unity. The soul or spirit is inseparable from the body. It means that the soul does not have an ontological reality apart from the

body. Human beings are as an integral unity (Psalms 104:29, 30; Ezekiel 37:6-10). Their manifestations were as holistic and equally important. Thus the primary purpose of education is harmonious development of the physical, the spiritual and the intellectual aspects of humankind. Unfortunately physical development and work education are eliminated from the curriculum in many schools. These are considered unrealistic and unimportant aspects of school curriculum and involved unhealthy competition in sports and games which encourage rivalry spirit to win in any means.

However, in Adventist schools work education is considered one of the important aspects of education. It is a part of co-curricular activities which greatly influences students. It helps students to develop responsibility, leadership, trustworthiness and stewardship values. These values retain in students' lives permanently and prepare them for professions. God counsels Adventist educators through White's (1954) writings that schools should give instruction in useful trades. Schools should provide the best possible facilities for physical development and industrial training. Students should be given training in agriculture, manufacturing, covering as many as possible of the most useful trades. They need to learn household economy, healthful cookery, sewing, hygiene, dressmaking, gardening, workshops, nursing, computers and information technologies and work in every line under the direction of well skilled teachers and instructors. In the current age students should learn useful skills to have earning opportunities for students while studying. Some students earn their entire educational expenses in school/college as working students. Work education program increases respect to dignity of labor and helps students to choose a life career.

In my observation as a student and teacher at Adventist schools/colleges I have seen students, who were faithful, hard-working, and diligent in the work program of the schools/college, they are also successful in their career. I have heard many top leaders of the church, businessmen and professionals boldly saying that work education in Adventist schools and colleges influenced them to form their character to be successful in life.

(c) Social Activities of schools/colleges greatly impress students. In fact some of the memories of social activities in schools/colleges are much more distinctive, vivid and impressive than textbook information. As I think of my high school and college classroom experiences, I can recall very little information that I have learned from different classes/courses work though I have earned 'A' grades.

However, I have vivid memory of some school events that I will not forget. I learned some practical lessons about leadership in high school as a monitor in the dormitory at Kellogg Mookerjee Memorial Seminary and Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College in Bangladesh. I was elected two terms as president and one term as vice-president for the “Teachers of Tomorrow” club in the Education Department at Spicer Memorial College in India. These co-curricular activities in the school and college helped me when I became a teacher and principal of a school. The social activities of the school, college and universities enriched my leadership experiences, skills and interpersonal relationship with people. I can bravely witness that various responsibilities in the social functions of Adventist educational institutions such as student association, departmental club, dormitory clubs, sports, dramas, and social service activities provide real life experience and influence students to serve confidently life-long which cannot be taught in classroom.

(d) Spiritual nourishment and growth of students are a focal point of Adventist education. It is not an inseparable aspect from curriculum and co-curriculum activities. The Bible based values and principles, Christ centered education, integration of faith and learning is the prime objective of Christian education (Oberholster, 2004). Teaching of the biblical principles and values must incorporate and link with our thinking, speech, action, practice and dealings with others. However, there are some distinctive activities in the school to provide special emphasis in spiritual development. These activities are: morning and evening worship in the dormitory, weekly chapel program, Sabbath school, church divine service, Adventist youth meetings, pathfinder club activities, week of prayer, mid-week prayer meetings, cottage meeting, branch Sabbath schools, Dorcas’ society, 1000 missionary program, choir and small group activities, etc. (Education Policy Manual, 1998; White, 1923). These activities are called spiritual activities because these help to build a closer relationship with God through meditation, prayer, singing, studying scripture and discussion about God and His goodness. Thus, if we have a closer relationship with God then His character will be reflected through our life style which is one of the primary purposes of Adventist education.

#### **IV. Influence of Co-curricular Activities in Adventist Schools**

Experiences of educators and parents in the Adventist schools indicate that co-curricular activities have positive contribution to students' adolescent development and create moral support to the achievement of their social, moral, physical and academic performance (Kibuuka, December 2001/January 2002; Rice, 1993). The co-curricular activities in the Adventist schools play important roles in life-long learning. Sometimes Adventist schools are operated within the stipulated curriculum provided by the government and accrediting agencies. In this circumstance, we considered that the government courses should be integrated in the distinctive Christian approach. Integration of faith and learning should permeate in the classroom to teach every course. Similarly co-curricular activities need to be integrated with our faith and Christian values. An Adventist educator Kibuuka (December 2001/January 2002) stated that the goals and objectives of our schools should be to prepare students to face the future, rather than just teaching great truth of the past. Another Adventist educator Baldwin (October/November 2001) mentioned that co-curricular activities such as sports, music, drama, pathfinder clubs, youth ministry teams, religious programs can: foster enduring relationship between staff and students; promote goodwill within the community; and significantly influence students peer group interpersonal relationship.

A research has been done in North America and in Australia to study what influences students in the Adventist schools more than public schools. The result of this study is very impressive. They found that the students have a more significantly positive attitude toward Adventist standards. They also found that students who attended Adventist schools have life-long influences. The impacts of these influences in students' lives are high level of denominational loyalty, Christian commitment and social responsibility (Rice, December 193/January 1994). He reported in his article how Adventist schools are different than other schools. He asked students, "What makes Adventist school different to them?" In response to this question, students replied that –

- They feel they are getting a good academic education at their school.
- They see the school environment as warm as accepting.
- They feel accountability for their behavior.

- They view their teachers as Christian role models.
- They benefit from the planned religious curriculum of the school.
- Their teachers listen to them.
- Their teachers care about them.
- At school they have learnt how to accept themselves.
- At school they have learnt how to care for others.
- At school they have learnt Christian values.

The significance of this response is that the students are more influenced in schools with the co-curricular activities rather than classroom or academic experiences. Students' responses are associated with co-curricular activities. They mentioned about school co-curricular activities which influenced them mostly. It indicates that though integration of faith and learning occurs in the classroom through course work of Bible, mathematics, science, literature, language, social studies, and others subjects but their lives also are influenced by the co-curricular activities of the school. They are involved in the religious activities, social service, sports, games, work education, dormitory life, clubs functions and interpersonal relationships with teachers and students outside of the regular classrooms and formal educational programs. Thus, integration of faith and learning is not less important in co-curricular activities.

In one of my classes at Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College (BASC) an open ended question was "How does BASC help you to grow spiritually and develop Christian values?" In response to this question the students who have come from non-Christian backgrounds expressed that Sabbath activities, dormitory worship, pathfinder and youth programs were more helpful for their spiritual growth. Students mentioned they have privileges to learn and practice Christian values in work education, dormitories, social activities, sports, youth program, small group activities and class functions. These expressions of the students indicate that co-curricular activities influence their spiritual growth at BASC. Jacob (2000) mentioned that Gallup Survey was done among the 48,000 youth to find out what influences them most. The results were tabulated into six factors as: (1) friends 87% (2) home 51% (3) school 45 % (4) music 41% (5) television 32% (6) religion 13% (p.9). This study also indicated that, co-curricular activities with friends, at home and school have significant influence for spiritual growth and value development of the students.

## A. Implications

Considering the implication of co-curricular activities in the Adventist schools for true education, Ellen G White (1903) has provided comprehensive guidelines for the administrators, teachers, staff and students. She stated that,

True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come. (p.13)

In the guidelines she focused directions for school administrations, teachers, parents and students for selection of co-curricular activities in the Adventist schools which may lead them to achieve their educational objectives in this world for a joyful life, and prepare them for the kingdom of God. She also pointed that curricular as well as co-curricular activities in the school should have life-long influences in students. Thus selecting co-curricular activities and their implementations should be done with care. To implement co-curricular activities in the Adventist schools some of the suggestions can be considered as follows:

Staff and Faculty Selections: To implement the holistic approach of the integration of faith and learning in the classroom as well as outside of classroom faculty and staff play an important role. Thus, for selecting teachers White (1913) advised the school administrators and board members stating that, “In selecting teachers we should use every precaution, knowing that this is as solemn a matter as the selecting of persons for the ministry” (p.175). Further, it has been specified that-

The principles and habits of the teacher should be considered of greater importance than even his literary qualifications. ...In order to exert the right influence, he [teacher] should have perfect control over himself, and his own heart should be richly imbued with love for his pupils, which will be seen in his looks, words, and acts. He should

have firmness of character; then he can mold the minds of his pupils, as well as instruct them in the sciences (White, 1893, p.8).

In Adventist schools that provide dormitory facilities, cafeteria service and work education experiences in different departments the students have an environment that develops better interpersonal relationship, self-governance and responsible behavior. Behavior and attitudes of the students are influenced by the interactions with teachers, staff and students. Although it is expected that the staff shall be efficient and skilled in the responsibilities, it is also expected that they will possess Christian virtues such as love, grace, courtesy, meekness, friendliness, honesty, sincerity and commitment to the church as models to the students. Thus, selecting a staff in the Adventist schools is equally important as selecting a teacher to ensure Christian influence among the students.

**Modeling Co-curricular Activities:** In the super advanced technological era students are exposed to the world at home through literature, TV, computer, internet, radio, phone, and other electronic media. They have ample access to the amusement and entertainment such as music, videogames, sports and movies by which students could be yielded to drugs, violence, sex and pornography and other harmful habits and immoral activities. It does not mean the technology is evil. It can be used for constructive as well as destructive purposes. Thus, it is a challenge for faculty and staff in the school to save students from evil influence. What can be done to protect students in this sinful world? Devil is roaring like a hungry lion to attack young people for eternal destruction (1 Peter 5:8). Author F. Holmes (1987) stated that, "The primary purpose of a Christian college is not to insulate and protect students, but to educate them as responsible Christians" (p. 85). White (1954) had objectively pointed out the methods of saving our children from the influence of the devil. She stated that, "The object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government. He should be taught self-reliance and self-control (p. 223).

It is impractical to list or name all the games students should play, music they should sing or hear, literature they should read, movie they should watch, words they should utter, food they need to eat and how to act in different circumstances. However, the teachers can set examples and be role models based on biblical principles. The principles are- "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble,

whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.” (Phil. 4:8 NIV). Buckles (1997) pointed that, “faculty modeling is a primary force in motivating students to adopt new behaviors and a key factor in implementing programs and promoting wholeness” (p. 25). Christian education is not limited to the textbook and the classroom but goes beyond to include lifestyle. Paul confidently said to his congregation, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also [am] of Christ.” (1Cor. 11:1, KJV). Taylor (2001) pointed that, if teachers want that their students would be authentic Christians then they must set the model of thinking and living Christianly. It is a challenge to the teachers and staff to be models to the students through co-curricular activities based on the Christian values.

### **B. Caution to Implement**

To implement co-curricular activities in an Adventist school some cautions should be considered:

1. The co-curricular activities must be spiritually uplifting and religiously valid in the various cultures and ethnic background to strife the purpose of gospel and conform to the values of Christ-like character.
2. The co-curricular activities should be compatible with the ideals of the church and biblical values.
3. The co-curricular activities should maintain emotional, intellectual, judicious and spiritual balance.
4. Avoid unhealthy competition in sports and games. Competitive guts provoke rivalry, jealousy and enmity among the competitors and their supporters.
5. Music should be used to praise and glory God. The selection of music and songs in the school should endorse mission and objectives of the school.

### **V. Conclusion**

Primary objective of Adventist education is to prepare better citizens on this earth and for the kingdom of God. In consideration of this objective of education, we need to recognize that co-curricular programs are not separate and less important functions of schools. These greatly influence students to be loyal and committed Christians. In well-designed co-curricular activities of the schools, students have

privileges to build stronger relationship with God and develop interrelationships with the people for serving the needs of the society. These prepare students for careers, workmanship, responsibilities, honesty, trustworthiness, tolerance, friendship, compassion, love and develop qualities of leadership, dignity of labor and physical development. Co-curricular activities are important aspects to integrate Adventist faith for church growth and spiritual maturity of the students. These need to be implemented by “Administrators and teachers, with the involvement of matured students, have designed a rich program of activities that are congruent with and supportive of the Adventist philosophy of education. Included in this program, which seeks the wholesome development of students, are social cultural, recreational, artistic and missionary activities” (Rasi, 2009).

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