



# THE BETTER PLAN

## **The Challenge**

“I don’t know why we have to go to secular authors when we have the Red Books.” The words, part statement, part question, part accusation, hung in the air of the multipurpose room before hitting me with a thud. The attendees had come to the school that evening for a workshop several teachers had put together called “Cooperative Learning for Parents.” During my concluding comments, I mentioned William Glasser and his Quality School<sup>1</sup> ideas. That is when the parent quoted above raised his concern about secular authors. I tried to describe how I, and the rest of the staff, desired to follow the Red Books, but for a long time afterward, I remained unsatisfied with my answer. The statement seemed to deserve a detailed and knowledgeable explanation, and I didn’t have one.

## **Our Calling**

As Adventists, we believe that God has called us to be a

light to the world, reflecting His way of thinking and behaving. God promised Abraham that “all the families of the earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3; 26:42, Message).<sup>2</sup> Adventists desire that this promise be fulfilled through our ministries as well. A major part of that ministry is accomplished through our schools. Although comparatively small among the world’s religions, the Adventist Church sponsors an impressive system of education. And while motives for supporting our schools may vary, we would do well to reclaim God’s promise to Abraham.

## **Factories and Schools**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized in the early 1860s, about the same time a formal system of schooling began to develop in the United States. To our pioneers’ credit, they recognized the need/opportunity to train and instruct the church’s children. Yet in the early days, they struggled with the ingrained cultural habits and social

forces in the late 19th and early 20th century. So important was the church's educational work, however, that Ellen White, one of the founders of the denomination and a special messenger for God, wrote extensively on the work of education.

The time period 1890 to 1910 was an incredible one in the history of education in general. The Industrial Age was having a profound effect on educational design. Schools began to adopt the assembly-line model, reasoning that if it worked well in factories, it would succeed in education. A few voices decried this approach, calling for a more humane learning environment. John Dewey's (1859-1952) was such a voice. So was Ellen White's (1827-1915).

### **External Motivation—Common Sense?**

Besides the baleful effects of the factory-model approach, education was further degraded by application of a "common-sense" view of human motivation. Dewey captured this struggle when he wrote that "The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure."<sup>3</sup> In one sentence, Dewey described the most important question educators have to answer: *Are students motivated from within, or must external pressure be applied to get them to perform well in school?*

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students' failure to learn self-control if others always define appropriate behavior for them.

These were just a few of the concerns of John Dewey, Ellen White, and William Glasser. In their thinking, educa-

cal setting, are ultimately destructive. Strategies that rely on external pressure—ranging from subtle manipulation to physical force—may appear to work for a short time, but the results aren't permanent, and in the end, leave things worse than before. In classroom settings, coercion can work—with some of the students, some of the time. Yet even when it does appear to work, the negatives outweigh the positives. One negative product of external control is the deterioration of relationships that occurs whenever someone tries to coerce or manipulate another person. Another important downside is stu-

# EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS FROM AN UNLIKELY DUO

BY JIM ROY

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the answer to this question and the effects of our strategies on homes and classrooms. Throughout history, humans have embraced a psychology of behavior known as external control, or in more clinical terms, stimulus-response. External control psychology is based on the belief that people can manipulate the behavior of other human beings, either individually or collectively. The proper stimulus will result in the desired response. This belief leads people to reward or punish others when they do not behave as desired. This kind of manipulating behavior regularly occurs in homes and workplaces. Unfortunately, management based on external control is also common in classrooms.

I believe that management practices based on external control, whether in a home, classroom, corporate, or politi-

tion had to be based on a different approach, one that more effectively engaged students in their own learning. Instead of trying to develop better external control gimmicks, they recommended an educational approach based on internal control.

### **Glasser and Internal Control**

For the past 50 years, William Glasser has been pointing out the need to operate classrooms based on internal control or Choice Theory, which maintains that people make choices for reasons that are important to them. A ringing telephone doesn't force us to answer it. It simply lets us know that someone out there wants to get in touch with us. Some people rush to pick up a ringing telephone, while others screen their calls and then decide whether to answer. Ac-

According to Choice Theory, motivation comes from within. We may allow ourselves to be manipulated if we desire the reward or fear the punishment, but this is a decision we make. And if the reward or punishment doesn't matter to us, no amount of manipulation will work.

**S**ince humans are internally motivated, Glasser explains that we can—indeed, we must—operate schools using different strategies than in the past. Toward that end, he has written five books on education, beginning with his landmark work, *Schools Without Failure* (1969), and continuing with *Control Theory in the Classroom* (1986; 2001), *The Quality School* (1990), *The Quality School Teacher* (1993), and *Every Student Can Succeed* (2000).<sup>4</sup>

Several months after fielding the question about the Red Books versus secular authors, I began a study comparing the ideas of Ellen G. White to those of William Glasser. Although they are separated by almost 100 years and come from very different backgrounds, I discovered their views on education to be amazingly similar. (A more complete review of these similarities is available in a book I wrote entitled *Soul Shapers: A Better Plan for Parents and Educators*.<sup>5</sup>) The

rest of this article will describe some of the similarities.

### **The Better Plan**

Describing teachers who depend on external control, Glasser writes that, “Boss-managers firmly believe that people can be motivated from the outside: They fail to understand that all of our motivation comes from within ourselves.”<sup>6</sup> Some Christians have expressed concern about this emphasis, which values human strength and insight, even condemning it as New Age philosophy. Imagine my surprise to find a similar passage in Ellen White’s writings:

“Those who train their pupils to feel that the power lies in themselves to become men and women of honor and usefulness, will be the most permanently successful. Their work may not appear to the best advantage to careless observers, and their labor may not be valued so highly as that of the instructor who holds absolute control, but the after-life of the pupils will show the results of the better plan of education.”<sup>7</sup>

As a second-generation Adventist who has attended church schools or taught in them my entire life, I have heard the phrase “blueprint for education” more than once. Yet I have never seen such a blueprint. The closest I have come to one is this phrase “the better plan,” which refers to



teachers who recognize the value of internal control rather than external force or coercion. Glasser believes that creating classrooms that operate from an internal-control perspective is more likely to promote quality school work. Ellen White takes this idea even further through the use of phrases like “permanently successful” and “after-life” to remind us that our teaching strategies have eternal implications.

Glasser observed that schools frequently use external control when students don't do what they are supposed to do. Blaming, threatening, punishing, and rewarding are widely used teaching strategies. But do such tactics solve the problem? As Glasser points out, “We can force students to stay in school. We can even try to force them to do school-work, but we will almost never succeed.”<sup>8</sup> In this kind of atmosphere, teachers and students become adversaries, each focused on how to gain the upper hand. Because human motivation comes from within, Glasser emphasizes that, “We cannot pressure any student to work if he does not believe the work is satisfying.”<sup>9</sup>

Ellen White highlighted this point as well when she wrote, “True education is not the forcing of instruction on an unready and unreceptive mind. The mental powers must be awakened, the interest aroused.”<sup>10</sup> This is our challenge as educators, to plan learning opportunities that create interest in our students. Alfie Kohn approached this from another angle when he wrote, “When students are ‘off task,’ our first response should be to ask, ‘What’s the task?’”<sup>11</sup> We need to ask ourselves whether the assignments are part of the problem and if so, work to modify them. Typically, when students don't do what we want them to do, we start thinking about how we can make them perform, which may say more about our personal journey than it does about good teaching strategies.<sup>12</sup>

Ellen White warned Adventist teachers to stay away from

## Choice Theory Workshops and Training

Different options are available for Adventist educators wanting to receive training in educational strategies that are based on Choice Theory. Soul Shaper training, a workshop based on a combination of Choice Theory and Christian principles, is available at Pacific Union College each summer. For more information, get in touch with Jim Roy at (707) 965-6644 or at [jroy@puc.edu](mailto:jroy@puc.edu) or [thebetterplan@sbcglobal.net](https://www.facebook.com/thebetterplan@sbcglobal.net).

Choice Theory training is also available through the Glasser Institute. The Institute can be reached at (800) 899-0688 or at [wginst@wglasser.com](mailto:wginst@wglasser.com). Visit their Website at <http://www.wglasser.com> for a list of the regional organizations in the U.S. and Canada. From the Institute home page, click on the *Who We Are* link and then click on the *Advisory Board* link. You will then have local contact information for trainers in your area.

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the use of force because of its effects on children. Glasser and White both point out that whenever force is used, it arouses a spirit of resistance in the recipient. But White condemns coercion even more strongly because of the eternal implications.

“Those parents and teachers who boast of having complete control of the minds and wills of the children under their care, would cease their boastings, could they trace out the future lives of the children who are thus brought into subjection by force or through fear.”<sup>13</sup>

We must teach our students to be aware of their own internal compass, powered and influenced by the Holy Spirit, instead of trying to be a compass for them, through force and fear. Glasser refers to teachers who behave in this way as lead-managers, in contrast with boss-managers, because they lead through inspiration and invitation, rather than threats and punishment. Mrs. White captured the essence of lead-management when she wrote: “Let it never be forgotten that the teacher must *be* what he desires his pupils to become.”<sup>14</sup> Instruction about internal compasses begins with the teacher.

One such teacher who was on the journey of becoming a lead-manager shared with me that when he read in *Soul Shapers* that we have to be what we want our students to become, it really hit him. He admitted that much of his time and energy had been devoted to changing the behavior of his students. Suddenly, he realized that he needed to focus on allowing the Holy Spirit to change him. He saw that as he came to understand and follow his own internal compass, he would, in turn, model an internally controlled life for his students.

Glasser has been at the forefront of a growing body of work that recognizes the power of people to make decisions and to take responsibility for their choices. Rather than humans being victims of circumstances or of bad brain chemistry, Glasser writes that “for all practical purposes, we choose everything we do, including the misery we feel. Other people can neither make us miserable nor make us happy,”<sup>15</sup> adding that “We choose all our actions and thoughts and, indirectly, almost all our feelings and much of our physiology.”<sup>16</sup> This flies in the face of present psychiatric practice, which classifies less-healthy behavior as mental dis-

ease and prescribes drugs as the answer.

Ellen White emphasized the same power of the mind that Glasser described, although long before Glasser was born, when she wrote: "It is within the power of everyone to choose the topics that shall occupy the thoughts and shape the character."<sup>17</sup> Applying this principle to the training of children, she wrote: "Every child should understand the true force of the will. . . . The will is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or choice."<sup>18</sup> White and Glasser clearly describe the power of choice each human being possesses, yet we often misunderstand the implications of such statements.

### **Stimulus-Response of Choice?**

Dewey described the basis for this misunderstanding as the dilemma over whether learning comes from within or is manipulated under external pressure. A leader in the field of Behaviorism, B. F. Skinner proposed that human behavior can be shaped by controlling various aspects of the environ-

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ment.<sup>19</sup> Certain desired behaviors can be reinforced and undesirable behaviors extinguished, all through external manipulation. Many parents and educators sense the danger in such beliefs. If human behavior is shaped entirely by the environment, where then is the power of the will? Teachers



may not see themselves as behaviorists, yet their efforts to manipulate their students' behavior through rewards and punishments say otherwise. The principle of stimulus-response is alive and well in many Adventist classrooms.

Glasser pointed out that "Teachers and students are being managed in the same way they always have been, the same way that people have been managed for centuries, by a method based on an ancient, 'common sense' theory of how we function, which is best called stimulus-response . . . stimulus-response theory is wrong. When it is used to manage people, it leads to a traditional management method that I will call boss-management. Boss-management is ineffective because it relies on coercion and always results in the workers and the managers becoming adversaries."<sup>20</sup>

### Ineffective and Short-Lived

Glasser concluded that stimulus-response theory was not only an ineffective approach to human motivation, it was also based on flawed science. External stimuli, no matter how forceful, cannot make people do something they don't want to do. A gun might appear to be an effective external motivator, yet history is full of examples of people who gave their lives for a cause in which they believed. The three Hebrew boys (Daniel 3) refused to be swayed by the threat of the fiery furnace, and Daniel exhibited the same resolve when threatened with the lions' den (Daniel 6). Even when the manipulation appears to work, if students do what we want because of threats, the results are short-term, and they will ultimately resent both the manipulation and the manipulator.

**E**arly one morning, five months after the "I don't know why we need secular authors when we have the Red Books" incident, I was reading one of the Red Books and came across the following passage. It is a powerful comment on stimulus-response and strategies that seem to regard students as animals to be trained. It was, in fact, the quote that started me on the *Soul Shapers* journey.

"The training of children must be conducted on a different principle from that which governs the training of irrational animals. The brute has only to be accustomed to submit to its master; but the child must be taught to control himself. The will must be trained to obey the dictates of reason and conscience. A child may be so disciplined as to have, like the beast, no will of its own, his individuality being lost in that of his teacher. Such training is unwise, and its effect disastrous."<sup>21</sup>

### Free to Choose

Coercive practices do work, with some students, some of the time, but at what cost? Glasser and White have described an alternative based on internal control. White commended students who were "strong to think and to act" and who were "masters and not slaves of circumstances."<sup>22</sup> Behaviorism would have us believe that we are all victims of

circumstance and can only respond to stimuli that are beyond our control. Nothing pleases Satan more than for us to embrace a system of external control. Jesus died to preserve our freedom to choose. Isaiah 42, 49, and 61 prophesied that the Messiah would set the captives free. Christ's death ensured that Satan would have no unfair advantage over us. We are free to choose our destiny.

It is within this amazing context that Adventist teachers go about their business every day. Little by little, students either become pawns of outside forces, a role too often assumed by well-meaning parents and educators, or they become aware of the power within themselves provided by an awesome heavenly Father, which empowers them to become masters and not slaves of circumstance. ✍



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