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THE
Parent-Teacher Associations
FEASIBILITY OF (P.T.A.'s) IN LEBANON

BY

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author, of Greek origin, was born in Beirut in 1934. She had her elementary and secondary education in the French school Collège Protestant Français de Jeunes Filles. She received her Associate of Arts from the Beirut College for Women in June, 1954. She expects to receive her Bachelor of Arts in June, 1956.

ABSTRACT

P.T.A's are very important because they bring together the most outstanding influences of the parents and teachers on the child's personality.

In the first chapter, I present a survey of the P.T.A's in the United States and how the National Congress of Parents and Teachers was born and has developed through the years. The P.T.A, being a well-organized association, has officers and committees that carry through the main policies of the organization which are found in the by-laws. In the first chapter too, I tell in what ways the American P.T.A's can be useful (closer relationships between parents and teachers; educating the public; promoting laws for protecting children; caring for individual differences such as the gifted or the handicapped child) and how the cooperation between parents and teachers comes about through lectures, individual conferences, group meetings, and so on...

In the second chapter, I describe the situation in Lebanon. There are no formal organizations in Lebanon but some parent-teacher relationships in certain schools.

In the third chapter, I give some of the factors that hinder the development of P.T.A's in Lebanon. Those factors are the ignorance of parents and their non-cooperation with

teachers due to their lack of interest and their ignorance in the educational aims of the schools where they send their child. Also many teachers do not care enough to maintain relations with parents; they are not interested enough in the students they teach.

I conclude that P.T.A's could only be feasible in Lebanon in some near future when the public would be better prepared for and oriented towards cooperation between parents and teachers and would come to realize that the education of children is not only the job of the school but of the home as well. Some suggestions such as lectures in colloquial Arabic and individual conferences and the putting aside of the prejudices of parents and teachers may help in bringing parents and teachers together in a formal organization such as the P.T.A.

INTRODUCTION

Education has undergone many changes through the years. From a subject-matter centered schooling, it has come to mean the all-rounded development of the child due to a more modern concept which says that education is nothing else but "guidance of the child in the activities of everyday living". That is why more stress is put on the training of teachers and on the careful selection of courses in the curriculum. The development of the "whole" child implies both influences of the home as well as the school in the molding of the child's personality. The parents are teachers in the home and they supplement the work of the teachers in school (1). Both parents and teachers meet as partners to form an organization called a P.T.A. This association tries to better the present world in which the child lives and to promote the best of conditions so that the present child will develop into a future well-adjusted citizen.

The influences of the home and the school upon the child are outstanding. I have tried in this project to show how parents and teachers come together in a P.T.A to discuss and

(1) Reavis, W. C., Pierce, P. R., Stullken, E. H., Smith, B. L., Administering the Elementary School. Prentice Hall, Inc., N.Y., 1953, pp. 540-543.

remedy the problems that the child encounters.

Having read the literature pertaining to the P.T.A's of the United States, I was quite astonished at the wonderful results brought about by the cooperation of parents and teachers. Of course this cooperation does not come automatically; it has to be worked out very carefully.

It was a group of women who started the movement in the States. Why not a group of Lebanese women to start a movement in Lebanon?

In this project then, I shall try to give an aperçu of the relevant background of P.T.A's in the United States of America and of the extent to which the parents cooperate with teachers in Lebanon. Granted this, are P.T.A's feasible in Lebanon?

CHAPTER I

P.T.A's in the United States.

a. Rise and Development of P.T.A's in the United States.

America, in the period of the nineties gave signs of a land with great promises, growing at a rate that was quite astonishing after the depression of 1893. Progress was found everywhere; industry was in a flourishing state; yet, the cries of the reformers and educators were just beginning to be heard. New light was being shed in education with Herbart's theories of the "correlation of studies" and the use of maps, together with investigations in the virgin field of child study; problems such as teacher training, more practical curriculums, more attention given to special individuals were becoming the main concern of educators(1).

In this world, where the appearance of wealth contrasted with the sad reality, journalists and writers, denouncing the situation, prepared the opinion for the sake of the child.

At this time, Alice Mc Lellan Birney, an inhabitant of Washington -the city of congresses and conventions- thought of a Congress of Mothers which would aim to secure the welfare of the child, motherhood, and the home. Very quickly, this active woman realized that her dream would never become true, if she was to work alone on this project. So she began looking for able women that would approve of the idea and expand it throughout

(1) Golden Jubilee History 1897-1947., Published by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1947. pp.13-15.

the country. One of her first co-workers, who supported the project financially for some years was Phoebe Apperson Hearst the widow of the senator from California. Both women started working hard, looking forward for a nation-wide meeting. They tried to contact as many women as they could at different clubs and social meetings, through circulars sent to the people in the various localities, making their ideas known to the public. Mrs. Cleveland, the first lady of the land volunteered the use of her name for influencing the wives of the Cabinet members(1).

The project taking form little by little, the small group of women met and decided about the organization of the Mothers' Congress: Mrs. Birney was elected President, Mrs. Hearst Vice-President, and other women, chairmen of the different committees. February 17, 1897 was the date fixed for the first meeting and Arlington Hotel in Washington as the center of activities. The great day came, and the hall of the hotel, although big, was overcrowded against all Mrs. Birney's expectations: "If only fifty mothers come, I shall be satisfied. Yes, even if only twenty-five are here"(2).

Mothers, few fathers, reformers, educators composed the assembly of the three meetings that were held for the First Congress of Mothers. The program was taken over by outstanding speakers; there were the psychologist G. Stanley Hall who gave some of the

(1) Ibid., pp.16-17.

(2) Ibid., p.18.

results of research done in child study along with signs of a trend found in the modern curriculum: "interests must be utilized each at its golden period; it enables a vast amount of work to be done without fatigue" (1); the ethnologist Frank Hamilton Cushing spoke about mothers and children in primitive tribes; Margaret E. Sangster's "Reading Courses for Mothers", and Anthony Comstock's fighting discourse against evil literature were not less contributive to the debates in which the child was the main hero. Kindergartens, health and aspects of growth, all pertaining to the child were also discussed.

When the meetings came to an end, the National Congress of Mothers was born. It was hailed by the New York Times and a reporter of the same newspaper went so far as to suggest state congresses. He did not have to wait long for his wish to be fulfilled; before the end of the year 1897, the New York Assembly of Mothers was founded, forming the first state branch of the National Congress (2).

The founders of the National Congress who were to lead its activities for the first few years following the first meeting were both educated mothers very well read in child literature. Alice Birney and Phoebe Hearst came from well-to-do families and lived very happily in their homes. Yet, this fact did not prevent them to start one of the greatest movements in favor of all children. This very happiness made Alice Birney say: "I do not believe that happiness is calculated to make us selfish. On the contrary, the highest happiness develops sympathy for those less blessed than ourselves.... It was my perfect home life and the influence of my two little ones that gave me that idea of a Mothers' Congress, that

(1) Ibid., p. 20.

(2) Ibid., pp. 20-21.

might help to raise motherhood to a place which, alas, so few of us realize" (1).

Both women believed that education and especially the early education of the child would be one of the remedies to the state of things. Ideas such as these, may explain the untiring efforts of those pioneers who had faith in people for a better future. Their efforts were remunerated by the big success of the first meeting and the huge response of the people all over the country in the following years. Most of the members of this Congress, although some were famous kindergartners such as Frances Newton and Mary Louise Butlers were enrolled among women whose family lives could be set as examples to others (2).

In the same year following the first meeting of the Congress, the Executive Committee organized themselves as the Board of Managers of the National Congress, and formulated the policies of the Congress in a "Declaration of Principles" in April 1897, which were summarized by Mrs. Birney in a magazine article: "The National Congress of Mothers irrespective of creed, color or condition, stands for all parenthood, childhood, and homehood. Its platform is the universe, its organization, the human race" (3). The means to be used to carry out these policies would be: parent education through clubs and publications; home-school cooperation through parent-teacher associations and use of all agencies for the welfare of

(1) Ibid., p. 27.

(2) Ibid., p. 31.

(3) Ibid., p.35.

children (1).

Although the Congress, was a Congress for Mothers, Mrs. Birney encouraged husbands to accompany their wives at the meetings from the very start; the presence of men at that time was to be emphasized still more, later, by the creation of an Advisory Council composed of men only (2).

By the second Annual Convention, the Congress had a well-defined structure, and the different committees were working hard on programs for promoting parent education, bringing in experts who cooperated wholeheartedly in giving courses to the mothers and publishing small papers written in an easy language. Mother clubs were spreading at an astounding rate all over the country raising motherhood to its primary glory. Mother congresses were found in some states, and in 1899 the first Parent-Teacher Association of Kansas City in Missouri was founded. In the same year, Mrs. Birney on a trip in New York met Theodore Roosevelt, governor of New York at that time, who was immediately interested by the fine work of the Congress mothers; he became the chairman of the Advisory Council of the Congress -a post that he kept till his death in 1919 (3).

In 1902, date of Mrs. Birney's resignation, the Congress had grown into a well-organized association, having already eight state branches and numberless mothers' clubs spread in the local

(1) Ibid., p. 36.

(2) Ibid., p. 37.

(3) Ibid., pp. 37-45.

centers. With every Annual Convention, more and more concrete results were brought to the attention of the members. By that time, too, the movement expanding in all directions, began to arouse interest outside of the States, in countries such as Canada, England, Brazil, India, Japan and Australia (1). This beginning was to be crowned some years later, in 1908, by the first International meeting of the Congress which was held in Washington, where representatives from twelve countries sat at the meetings besides thirty-one state delegates. President Roosevelt opened the meeting which was followed by an interchange of impressions among the audience. This meeting was followed two years later by the Third International Congress for Home Education held at Brussels which was attended by Mrs. Schoff, the President of the National Congress as the representative of her country. In the Second International Congress, foreign and American delegates came to discuss the vast subject of "The Relation of Home, School, Church and State to Child Welfare" (2). In the Third and last International Congress taking place in April 1914, two months before the first World War, parent education was reemphasized: "Parents cannot go to a college for parents. The college must go to the parents and that is what it does through the system used by the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations" (3). The Congress was on its way to

(1) Ibid., p. 47.

(2) Ibid., pp. 60-61.

(3) Ibid., p. 62.

become an international organization and, moreover, the Departments of State, Agriculture, Interior and Labor were represented at this Congress, thus showing the interest of the Federal Government in the International Congress (1).

Along with the international activities, the National Congress, now, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, achieved some practical results such as the establishment of juvenile courts and a probation system undertaken by a committee added for this end to the Congress and the publication of "The National Congress of Mothers' Magazine" which became the "Child Welfare Magazine" in 1909 and later still the "National Parent-Teacher" -one among the educational journals till to-day. This was not easy work: any measures that were taken, were preceded and followed by campaigns of enlightenment led by the members who continuously travelled to prepare the public. All these manifestations that proved the constant progress of the National Congress were to be stopped by the first World War -yet, the International meetings were to be the basis of the International Federation of Home and School founded thirteen years later (2).

One transcontinental tour and another one in the Southern States -called "mothers' crusades"- in the years 1915 and 1916 raised membership from 60,000 to 122, 000; besides, cooperation of the Congress with other organizations extended its activities, and new committees had to be added (3).

(1) Ibid., p. 62.

(2) Ibid., pp. 62-73.

(3) Ibid., p. 72.

But, with the breaking out of the war, the concern of the Congress had to be shifted to war activities. It contributed largely to the mothers and children of the nations at war and established club services for the enlisted men. The biggest part of the job was to come with the postwar difficulties and problems (1).

As the years went on, the Congress kept on growing and developing as a means of cooperation between home and school. P.T.A.'s were being created and adapted to schools and churches in rural as well as urban centers; their aim being: "to assist the mother by giving her a knowledge that shall enable her to make her home a sanctum of health, strength and happiness based on family unity. It follows the desire and ambition of the parent as the child launches forth into its separate life in the school, and it combines the efforts of the parents and teachers in the making of future citizens" (2) as was stated by the seventy-three year old Mrs. Higgins who was the President of the Congress in the 1920's.

The postwar problems were taken care in the possible limit; the Congress took resolutions as to public education and training of teachers -the teaching profession coming to be considered as "equal to that of lawyers and other professions" (3). School lunch was the novelty introduced in schools in the postwar period for health reasons (4).

(1) Ibid., p.73.

(2) Ibid., p. 89.

(3) Ibid., p. 87.

(4) Ibid., p.88.

In the meantime the movement reached the Northern country of Norway and over to the Pacific in Honolulu(1). By 1923, the membership had risen to 532,000(2).

The year 1927 was marked by a program of intensive concentration on child rearing and parent education which was observed in state branches and local units. It was through a long process of trial-and-error that the Congress came to achieve some worth while projects. The first one, was an attempt to experiment the effects of a parent-teacher effort carried through in the rural areas of North Dakota in a space of five years' time. The other project was the Summer Round-up of the Children carried out with the cooperation of the U.S. Bureau of Education -from a simple health project at the start, it came to be essential for the welfare of the preschool child. During that period too, we have also a movement carried by the government toward the promotion of adult education and also toward the formation of a National Congress of Coloured Parents and Teachers. The Indian P.T.A was born too(3).

Parent education was given a further impetus in the years 1928 and 1929 by the issue of a "Memorial on Education for Parenthood" which suggested some measures to be adopted by educators and librarians , and by the creation of a Bureau of Parent Education and the publications of the first "Parent Education Yearbook" in 1930. Programs were developed and courses given in

(1) Ibid., p.90.

(2) Ibid., p.93.

(3) Ibid., pp.95-101.

order to educate every parent-teacher member for the achievement of the purposes of P.T.A's(1). The work of P.T.A's was stressed in the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1930. In this conference, Mrs. Bradford, president of the Congress then, said to the members: "The parent-teacher associations are a cross-cut of democracy, and we offer them to you as channels for your programs and recommendations"(2). Besides, the Children's Charter was promulgated, which stated the rights of children as observed and striven for by the Congress from the beginning. More and more, the individual was being considered as a valuable entity endowed with many possibilities, and so, the efforts of the P.T.A's were directed to "help the individual help himself" as Mrs. Hearst, the co-Founder had said some time before(3).

Then, through conferences, courses given in different colleges and universities, radio programs, the Parent-Teacher movement was spreading rapidly and beginning to be considered seriously by the teachers who were becoming aware of the P.T.A as an instrument for bringing the home and the school more closely. P.T.A's were discovered to be most useful in providing their services in such emergencies as the big economic depression of the 1930's with its disastrous consequences in education, and the second World War some years later. By 1937, the P.T.A played such an important role in the locality where it was found that "any school without its P.T group was thought to be in some measure incomplete"(4).

(1) Ibid., pp.109-112.

(2) Ibid., p.119.

(3) Ibid., pp.119-121.

(4) Ibid., p.146.

It was in 1941 that the Congress showed once more its ability in facing difficulties raised by the war and planning for postwar years. Some of the discoveries that were made at that time were quite depressive; the enrollment in the army brought into the open that thousands of young men could not be enlisted due to health troubles and insufficient education. This state of things increased the conviction and enthusiasm of the Congress members for their organization (1). The reason for all that was given by Mrs. Kletzer, the President of the Congress at that time: "It is obvious that most of the difficulties which cause rejection are not acquired in the few months or even years preceding induction but are rather the accumulated results of childhood neglect, poor nutrition and even natal and prenatal conditions" (2).

Yet, the Congress, its state branches, and its local units, continued their work valiantly fighting for family morale and unity. The "National Congress Bulletin" and the "National Parent-Teacher" -the two monthly publications of the Congress- were very useful means for reminding the members constantly of the objectives of their associations and giving them suggestions for programs and activities (3).

About the end of the second World War, P.T.A's contributed much in preparing the public for the future United Nations Conference. For this new responsibility of the Congress, the

(1) Ibid., pp. 161-162.

(2) Ibid., p. 162.

(3) Ibid., p. 181.

national Board gave some recommendations pertaining to the formation of an international organization, to "educational reconstruction" and child welfare and youth throughout the world. Some months later the Congress was asked to send a representative to the San Francisco Conference on International Organization. This meant once more "the recognition of the organization's ability to perform invaluable services in the cause of world-wide peace" (1). The Congress along with three other educational organizations succeeded in influencing the makers of the Charter, to provide for educational and human welfare. These trends were to be found later in agencies such as the UNESCO and the UNRRA (2).

From 1946 to 1951, the Congress cooperated with Universities and Colleges -one being the Northwestern University- establishing workshops in order to educate parent and teacher groups and make them familiar with the procedures and aims of the P.T.A'S (3).

Thus, for nearly sixty years, the National Congress has done and is doing a marvellous job. How many organizations that come into life, reach a climax and then begin to go down the scale; yet, the history of the Congress, on the contrary, shows a continuous growth; 39,000 P.T.A's in America with more than 8,000,000 P.T.A members nowadays, testify of this development(4). This is the extent

(1) Ibid., p. 193.

(2) Ibid., p. 193.

(3) Parent-Teacher Manual, Published by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1952. p. 58.

(4) The P.T.A Story: Ways of Telling it, Published by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1954. pp. 46-47.

of a movement that grew in a woman's mind. Its worthy goals carried through by able leaders make it not only a national but also an international movement.

b. What is a P.T.A?

The Parent-Teacher Association (P.T.A) in the United States is the local unit of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers which is the American national organization, founded in 1897, in Washington. The P.T.A is an organization, of parents and teachers who are concerned with the welfare and education of children and youth at the preschool, primary, secondary and college level (1).

The P.T.A, as its name indicates, is a means of bringing together parents and teachers and giving them the opportunity to discuss some of their respective problems. This cooperation between parents and teachers results in better attitudes on both sides. The understanding parent brings up his child in an atmosphere where self-respect and respect for others play an important role and leaves to the teacher the care of teaching him the fundamentals of the 3R's. The understanding teacher in turn, respects the personality of the child and his capacities at different ages and considers seriously his home environment (2). The P.T.A, then, strives for better homes, better schools and consequently better communities. Although all P.T.A's have the same structure, yet, their programs for the year may differ due

(1) Parent-Teacher Manual, op.cit., p. 9.

(2) Ibid., pp. 40-41.

to the special needs and problems that are found in each local community(1).

The purposes of the P.T.A are educational but that does not mean that the P.T.A interferes in the administration of the school. The association does not emphasize any particular religion nor does it have to be on the side of any particular party; it helps any child of any "creed, color or condition". The objects of the P.T.A which are the same for the national and state organizations give an idea of its policies; all of them center on the child:

"To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, church and community.

"To raise the standards of home life.

"To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.

"To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the training of the child.

"To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for every child the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education"(2).

The association is very well-organized: the executive committee -composed of the officers of the association, the chairmen of the standing committees and the principal of the school-

(1) Grant, Eva.H. Parents and Teachers as Partners.
Science Research Associates, Inc, Chicago, Illinois, 1952.
p. 32.

(2) Parent-Teacher Manual, op.cit., p. 12.

carries out business matters and gives recommendations to be considered by the rest of the group; the standing committees are permanent; they are indispensable for the planning of some of the outstanding tasks of the organization such as budget and finance, the Congress publications, hospitality, membership, the "National Parent-Teacher: the P.T.A Magazine", program and publicity; the special committees are those created for specific purposes and as soon as the purpose is accomplished and a report is given, the committee comes to an end (1).

Membership in the association is secured through the payment of dues for the whole year. The association elects officers who carry out precise functions for a lapse of a year, at the end of which new ones are named for these offices -a nominating committee taking care of the nominations of officers. These officers must be well acquainted with the by-laws, the monthly publications of the association and any other new information that could be of help in the handling of the problems they come across. Leadership in such an association is a heavy responsibility and assumes able persons who will sympathize with the movement as a whole, and have in mind both parents' and teachers' goals as related to the children. The number of officers is not limited; the bigger the size of the association, the greater the number of officers. The minimum number of officers that participate in the administration

(1) Ibid., pp. 18-20.

of a P.T.A are(1):

The President, whose decisions are based upon the majority of the group's votes, directs the proceedings during meetings with the cooperation of the other officers; besides, he studies the reports left by his predecessor, asks for plans to be prepared by the chairmen of the different committees that are later discussed in the meetings, talks matters over with officers and chairmen before each meeting and finally signs all important documents.

The Vice-President comes next in the list of officers. He replaces the president in case the latter is absent or has resigned and helps him in the administration of the P.T.A.

The Secretary is the officer who does all the written work of the organization. Having some previous secretarial experience, he is the one who keeps records of the minutes of the meetings and does the correspondence of the association. His signature figures on the orders signed by the president and treasurer. He sends notices out to the members and keeps their addresses. At each meeting he reads the minutes for approval; if approved they are entered into a book which will be passed to the succeeding officers of the P.T.A.

The Treasurer collects the money of the organization and gives from time to time a statement on the state of things. This money is deposited in a bank and bills are paid by means of checks.

The Historian keeps a record of the past activities and

(1) This paragraph and the following are taken from the Parent- Teacher Manual, op.cit., pp. 23-31.

achievements of the association along with a record of the current happenings during the year of office.

The Parliamentarian is the officer who states an opinion which comes to be considered as the decision, by the president.

All these officers, once elected, start their work by selecting chairmen of the different committees and trying to plan a program for the year to come(1). The program is a very delicate thing to settle -so, there is a special committee for that purpose, which plans a program concentrating on the ends to be fulfilled and considering the interests of the members. Sometimes, the needs of a certain community are obvious, but at other times, there is need for research in order to find them(2). The P.T.A carries the program set for the year according to the goals and objectives it aims to achieve, through its committees and also through the cooperation of official agencies and professional organizations which are concerned with the welfare of the child and the betterment of the community. This cooperation results in the education of the public through the spreading of scientific knowledge on the growth and development of the child and on some very important issues in education. The committees, in turn, contribute to the general program, by sponsoring various activities that are within the members' capacities and interests(3). Once the program is agreed upon,

(1) How to Organize a P.T.A., Published by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1954. p. 12.

(2) Parent-Teacher Manual, op.cit., p.85.

(3) Ibid., pp. 51-52.

it may be presented in different ways; some of them being the lecture, conference, symposium, panel, quiz, forum, question box, debate, dramatization, exhibit, motion pictures and others (1).

Considering the structure and the policies of the P.T.A, we come to the conclusion that it is a democratic organization using democratic procedures such as the participation of all members in activities for a worthwhile cause: the welfare of the child who is to be the citizen of to-morrow. "Only to the extent that P.T.A members live democracy in home, school and community can they help to preserve democracy in the nation" (2).

(1) Ibid., pp. 93-97.

(2) Ibid., p. 45.

c. Usefulness of P.T.A's.

"There is a growing conviction among educationalists that, however good the system of schooling is, the benefit that a child will get from it depends much on the help or hindrance he gets from his home". This statement found in the "Times Educational Supplement" shows once more the importance of the cooperation of the school and the home in behalf of the child. The child must live in a uniform world in which parents and teachers are not rivals but partners (1). This is one of the major accomplishments of the P.T.A which brings together those outstanding forces that mold the child's personality. It is through the P.T.A that the parents acquire new insight as to the physical, social and spiritual needs of the child. In the group meetings of the P.T.A's, parents come to understand the school's aims and learn to cooperate with the teachers in order to achieve these aims (2).

Besides the promotion of home-school relations, the P.T.A is the most powerful means used in educating the parents and also the public in general. The publications and guides issued by the P.T.A regularly, help in enlightening the people about the recent findings made in child study and their consequent import in education. Moreover, there is quite a big number of books written on these fascinating matters in an easy and

(1) Alan, Stephen, "Parent-Teacher Associations" in The Journal of Education, Vol. 87, N= 1036, Nov. 1955. Camfield Press, London. p. 488.

(2) The P.T.A Story: Ways of Telling it, op.cit., p. 46.

entertaining language that can be read by nearly every one(1). The reading of materials on the topic the parents are most interested in, is more helpful if it follows a group meeting where this topic has been previously discussed by parents and teachers. These group-discussion meetings contribute very much to the building of strong friendships among parents and between parents and teachers -those people whose ways did never meet in the old days. It's through discussion that some troubling problems are brought into the open, that new ideas are acquired and relief and security gained due to the informal atmosphere of the meeting where a parent comes to realize that she or he is not the only one to have problems with the child but is one among thousands who have the same troubles(2). Parents that are given an opportunity to learn more about the aims of the school, the methods used and the nature of the curriculum try to help the school in giving to the child a wholesome education(3).

P.T.A's provide for parent participation in school activities, giving a chance to parents to live with their children. Parents may drop in the school to come and observe, or help a teacher who is overcrowded with work, by looking after a group of children or may be useful in repairing the school equipment. Parents who

(1) Ibid., p. 16.

(2) Baruch, Dorothy, Walter, Parents and Children Go to School. Scott, Foresman and Company, U.S 1939, p. 34.

(3) Kyte, George, C., The Principal at Work. Ginn and Company. N.Y., 1952, p. 459.

help in the school give the teacher more time to spend with the children, and at the same time they, themselves, learn a lot about the behavior of children (1).

It is through P.T.A's that some changes were introduced in the curriculum forming the present curriculum. It was mentioned before that the purpose of the P.T.A was purely educational and that it did not have to interfere in the administration of the school; but, that does not mean that an association constituted by parents and teachers -both elements seriously interested in the education of the child- has to be apathetic to the state of things. The P.T.A members and especially the parents who are in constant contact with the business and cultural world, come to be aware of the discrepancy existing between the stable curriculum and the fast changing world. The P.T.A's along with other educational organizations and the administration of the school participate in planning a curriculum that would meet the needs of the students of the school in that special community (2).

The P.T.A is also most useful in helping special individuals develop their own capacities; such as the gifted or the handicapped child by referring him to a committee that will provide for him a scholarship or any other kind of assistance. Moreover recreation and recreational facilities are stressed in the program

(1) Baruch, Dorothy, W., op.cit., p. 148.

(2) Grant, Eva, op.cit., pp. 36-38.

of the P.T.A because of their contribution to the all-rounded development of the child(1).

The P.T.A, always striving for the welfare of the child, has promoted laws for protecting the children against employers and against juvenile delinquency and other evils along with laws for public education and for provision for further teacher training(2).

The health of the future citizen is another major concern of the P.T.A. That, explains the creation of the "Summer Round-up of the Children" which consists of a health check-up before school entrance. But, the P.T.A is furthermore most helpful in emergencies such as wars and epidemics and in promoting the interest of the community in world affairs. We have already seen how the P.T.A was recognized as an important organization in international affairs after World War II (3).

In a word, the parents and teachers in their association try all possible means in order "that children have the best possible conditions for growing up" (4).

(1) Culbert, Jane, F. The Visiting Teacher at Work.
The Commonwealth Fund Division of Publications, N.Y, 1930.
pp. 74-75.

(2) Grant, Eva, op.cit., p. 41.

(3) Ibid., pp. 44-45.

(4) Ibid., p. 41.

d. Cooperation of Teachers and Parents.

We have seen how useful a P.T.A can be, but, to reach to that point of having a well-organized association, there must be a close cooperation of parents and teachers.

In the old days, it was in the home that children got their education. Their parents were their teachers too. But, later on, with the changing world conditions, the home had to be supplemented by the school. Now, with the help of P.T.A's parents and teachers work together for the best good of the child (1).

Parents and teachers are brought together due to the vital common concern of both groups: the child. Yet, this cooperation is not an easy thing to be done because of the differences that arise between parents and teachers. It comes gradually, when the emotional barriers that separate them break down. If we are to have a friendly relationship between parents and teachers, there must be an understanding of parents' personalities and problems by the teachers and vice versa (2). Teachers accustomed to speak to children and dominate them, are not often aware that parents are adults and that they must be talked to as to equals. They are used to give all the information to the children but that cannot be done with adults. Parents need guidance from expert people, but having their own values

(1) Hymes, James, L., Effective Home-School Relations.
Prentice Hall, N.Y. 1953, pp. 1-2.

(2) Ibid., pp. 3-8.

and ideas, they do not like to be given all the answers; on the other hand, they must not have all the initiative because they do not know everything. Then, there must be a happy means; the teachers possessing training and experience help the parents who contribute themselves a lot, in their own way, by bringing their own life-experiences which are of a great help to the teachers (1).

This cooperation between parents and teachers is essential for the child. The home environment is most important in the first few years of early childhood where the child senses if he is accepted and loved. The attitudes and feelings cultivated at home will be unconsciously transferred to the school. A child who is not loved at home, or suffers from other evils such as separated parents or poverty, will react differently to the school situation than a child who comes from a home where security and love are existent. The parents' job then, is indeed a big one; the way they treat the child and the atmosphere they create for him at home will immediately be reflected in his behavior in school. On the other hand, the teachers' job is not a lesser one; they are the ones who are informed about the characteristics of the behavior of a child at different ages and so, they can discover the abnormal signs in the child's attitudes which are very often interpreted on the basis of the child's home background (2). Then, if the teacher realizes the importance of the

(1) Ibid., pp. 66-73.

(2) Hymes, James, L., A Child Development Point of View.
Prentice Hall, Inc, N.Y. 1955, pp. 7-15.

parent as a teacher in the home, and the parent in turn, comes to see the teacher as a human being who has also her own problems, those supposed rivals can become the best of friends and may cooperate in many ways. The parent needs the objective point of view of the teacher as well as the teacher must respect the parent's feelings for the child. "Closer cooperation" comes "through greater understanding of the individual parent and teacher and through greater understanding of their different but dependent roles" (1). Charlotte Del Solar in her study of parents and teachers gives us an important "qualitative difference" that exists between parents and teachers. Teachers tend to appreciate certain qualities of the child such as his intelligence, his gaiety, his friendliness; those qualities are also given credit by the parents, yet, it cannot be denied that the parent who lives constantly with the child has a closer personal interest due to common home experiences and relationships. Teachers come closer to parents when they give to the word education, its larger meaning: that is the consideration of the whole child and not only the instruction the child gets in school (2).

The answers to a questionnaire sent by the "National Parent-Teacher" -the magazine of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers- to the P.T.A members of the United States, give us a good picture of the present situation. The parents' attitude

(1) Grant, Eva, H., op.cit., pp. 11-12.

(2) Del Solar, Charlotte, Parents and Teachers View the Child. Teachers College, Columbia University, N.Y. 1949, p. 35.

toward P.T.A's is a favorable one. Almost all parents are eager to meet their children's teachers to talk about the children's needs. But some of the barriers that come in the way of parents' and teachers' cooperation, although insignificant in nature, create some of the misunderstandings that occur between parents and teachers. Some of these are: on the one hand the parents concentrate on their own child and do not consider that the teacher has got more than thirty-five children in her class; parents resent the teachers' ways and procedures without trying to understand the whole situation; on the other hand the teachers like the parents to come to them, yet they dislike the way these latter interfere sometimes to tell them what to do. On the whole, the questionnaire revealed a greater interest of parents on qualities that make for character than on the subjects taught, and an awareness of the needs of children although these are not always met in the proper way. Thus, parent education has brought some good results and is on the way to change some of the wrong attitudes that remain among teachers and parents (1).

Parent-teacher cooperation is possible if some of the prejudices of both parents and teachers are put aside. Through P.T.A's those parents aware of their problems are eager to come to group meetings to discuss them with competent people. In group meetings they come in contact with new people and talk freely among themselves some of their failures and successes.

(1) Grant, Eva, H., op.cit., pp.13-25.

These meetings may be at the same time an entertainment and a learning experience. Many devices are used in those meetings to bring variety. Sometimes facts are needed, so a lecture is most helpful; at other times facts can be acquired through research done by a group of parents themselves who come together, in what is called a panel, and give scientific information to the rest of the group. The symposium is another device of getting parents to speak for themselves. Films and small improvised plays, funny sheets and cartoons from time to time may bring suggestions and topics for discussion for future meetings. Parents come to play the big part and teachers interfere only to help parents, giving casually a suggestion or a counsel which may or may not be of use (1).

Common problems are discussed in group meetings; but what about the individual problems? Those are taken care of in individual conferences which can be either planned or casual. In a face-to-face conference, the teacher's job is more delicate; she must make the parent feel at home in order that the latter will confide his griefs and problems as if to a friend (2).

Friendly relationships may be built through home visits; the teacher comes to know more about the child's background: his likes and dislikes, his friends, toys and illnesses. Even if the parent is not eloquent you cannot help but get an impression

(1) Hymes, James, L., Effective Home-School Relations, op.cit., pp.90-12

(2) Baruch, Dorothy, op.cit., p. 39.

about the milieu in case you are sensitive enough (1).

The records of the child sent to the parents are another subject of interest between parents and teachers. In the past these reports consisted of grades that did not enlighten the parents much. Grades do not represent much if they are not put in a context; also the parents may interpret them differently. To-day, records are often written in a narrative form and say more about the academic progress and the aptitudes of the child in certain matters. The records are not only important to the parents but to the future teachers who will consider them as a basis for vocational guidance (2).

If there are plenty of opportunities of getting together, why should some prejudices on the part of parents and teachers -both interested in the welfare of the child- destroy this relationship which makes for well-adjusted children and consequently well-adjusted citizens. Peggy Jay in her book, Better Schools Now, stresses the same idea: "A child at school subconsciously wants his parents and his teachers to like each other. If he feels there is a conflict between his parents and the individual master or mistress at school, he will be unhappy, confused and subtly irritated" (3).

(1) Hymes, James, L., Effective Home-School Relations, op.cit., pp. 133-135.

(2) Wiles, Kimball, Teaching for Better Schools, Prentice Hall, Inc, N.Y. 1952, pp. 229-231.

(3) Alan, Stephen, op.cit., p. 488.

CHAPTER II

Some Parent-Teacher Activities in Lebanon.

When teachers sense the complexities of present family life and parents in turn, see the teachers as human beings and not merely as a source of information, then we may say that they can come to an agreement and cooperate for their common goal which is the welfare of the child. This is the kind of parents and teachers we need in Lebanon.

What is the present situation in Lebanon?

The information I am giving comes from interviews that I had with some principals of schools -public as well as private (1).

(1) American School for Girls.

Preparatory Section of the American University of Beirut.

British Lebanese Training College.

American Community School.

Tripoli Girls' School.

Sidon Girls' School.

Al-Ahlieh College.

Collège Protestant Français de Jeunes Filles.

Soeurs Franciscaïnes.

St. Therèse.

Collège de La Salle. (Frères)

Al Houda School.

Madrassat Ras Beirut Rasmieh el Banet.

The educated circle are well-acquainted with the P.T.A movement and some of the principals have even begun to invite parents to lectures and conferences, and at Homes where these latter come together and discuss matters about the children informally. All the principals interviewed, agreed that the home influence is of the utmost importance, especially in the first five years of age. A principal went so far as to say that the cooperation between parents and teachers is indispensable and in the Sidon Girls' School they have a Staff Committee on Parent-Teacher Relations. When we came to speak about close cooperation between parents and teachers, there was some hesitation as to bringing parents into the school. This cooperation, involves as we have previously seen, a good relationship and a deep understanding of the respective goals and personalities of parents and teachers; and this relationship does not exist very often in our country except in cases when the parents and teachers are old acquaintances.

In almost all the schools, there are no formal P.T.A meetings as found in American schools, but there are some parent-teacher activities. Some of the contacts between parents and teachers are business meetings taking place at

List of schools (continued)

Ecole Modèle.

Madrassat Ain Mraisseh el Banet.

Mrs. Juraidini's School.

the time of registration. All new students in the schools come accompanied by their parents on the first day of school. There are also some social meetings but they are not held regularly at a fixed date. The American School for Girls organizes many meetings of parents and teachers. The parents of some two or three classes of students are invited to a group meeting with teachers. Speakers are asked to come and give talks on topics such as "Adolescence" and "The way a girl behaves with her mother". In these meetings, of course, you do not have all parents attending but there is quite a good number who respond. At the end of the meeting or rather the lecture the parents take tea with the teachers and get acquainted.

The Preparatory Section of the American University of Beirut, is another school that tries hard to bring together parents and teachers. They have two or three meetings a year. The parents coming for the first time are taken into the regular classes of their children and meet with all the teachers that give courses to their children. The principal is present at these meetings which seem to be quite successful.

Other schools tried also to have some group meetings but they had to stop them due to several reasons and especially the amount of planning these meetings require. One of these is the Collège de La Salle. The principal of the school had a group meeting of parents and teachers in his school at the beginning of the year, but the meeting came out to be a failure

and although he is a fervent partisan to this idea of cooperation between parents and teachers, he had to stop the meetings he had planned to have for the rest of the year. It seems that this meeting did more harm than good, due to the ignorance of parents as to the value of the movement and its purposes.

In general, parents never go to the teachers for any advice; they come only in case they are asked to by the teachers themselves who call them for serious reasons such as matters of discipline, failure in school, and dirtiness.

The relationships of parents and teachers on the grounds of home-visiting are quite limited. Here the problems arise because of the teachers' lack of time or their lack of interest caused by poor salaries or also their teaching because there is not any other job available. In all the schools, visits are done in case of some serious illness of the child or some death in the family or also in very special problematic cases. Home-visiting is not a part of the teachers' job but a task to be done in extreme cases. The American School for Girls and the British Lebanese Training College carry home-visiting to a greater extent but priority is given to children that need it most. A principal reported that she had very few special cases in her school so, she did not see the need of home visits. Another principal still said that parents that expect you to come will never show you the real state of things.

The records which are another means of contacting

the parents are used in the schools. They are descriptive records; marks are always accompanied by remarks from the teacher who gives the course.

Some contacts can be reached in the private schools, but the situation is somewhat different in the governmental schools. The teachers and the students have to leave school at fixed hours, and so there is no opportunity of having even a teacher-pupil relationship. Teachers are kept at a distance; they are the authoritative people and the students are the ones who get the information. Yet parents are asked to come sometimes, but not as equals.

Compared to America, Lebanon is still at its very first steps; but we must not forget that the movement in America started some sixty years ago.

CHAPTER III

Factors Hindering the Development of P.T.A's in Lebanon.

All the principals of the schools in Lebanon recognize (1) the effectiveness of home-school relations, but what do they do about them? There are some who try to start the movement, but they are not always successful. Why?

If parents are to be brought to the school to share with the teachers the responsibility of the child's education, they must be prepared; that is, they have to be enlightened as to the importance and purposes of the P.T.A movement. The small talks that I had with parents showed that parents would like to know more about the school of their children and what the children learn in school. Parents are ready and eager to help, but they must be familiarized with educational aims and problems. Teachers should make the first step -since they are the ones who are trained- but they do not do it because they are not encouraged. The teaching profession is not given enough credit in Lebanon. Teachers that are overcrowded with work, have to get another job in order to make both ends meet, their salaries being quite poor. Sometimes, too, teachers are not even trained to be teachers and so they do not have the least idea as to guidance and child development point of view. The parents, moreover, do not think that the teacher is a human being and that she has got the same kind of home life problems they have;

(1) The principals of the schools I interviewed.

they blame the teacher in front of the child without knowing anything about the situation in school; they forget that all of us have our ups and downs; they have the idea that teachers are supernatural beings, knowing everything, and the smallest mistake takes proportions of tragedy.

Ignorance of the parents is, then, a major factor hindering the home-school relationship.

Also, every new idea takes time to be adopted by the people; this is especially true in Lebanon where traditions are very strong. You hear very often parents blame the teachers because the child does not have enough to do at home or you have others who take the opposite stand, blaming the teachers who overwhelm the child with homework.

Few are the parents who follow the education of their children step by step. The school is there to do it; it is not the job of the home. Parents criticize the schools for the way their children behave at home instead of criticizing themselves. Many parents think they finished with the whole worry of their children's education once they paid the school fees.

Religion is another major factor hindering parent-teacher relations in Lebanon. In fact there are so many religions practiced in this small part of the world that it is no wonder. The people are very fanatic and they do not see that, although

religions differ, the essence of the religious Faith is common to all of them. Moreover, religion must not be the basis of any relationship between the school and the home.

The population of the schools in Lebanon is a democratic one. In one school you can find a range of different social standings going from the very rich to the very poor. The economic situation of parents is often accompanied by an accordingly high or low education level and the education of parents does for all the difference.

In short, the hindrances to the development of P.T.A's in Lebanon are quite numerous, but this does not mean that they cannot be overcome. Through public education campaigns, and publications in colloquial Arabic, those prejudiced attitudes can be corrected, if not completely removed.

CONCLUSION

The picture of the present state of things in Lebanon is not very encouraging but does that mean that we must be discouraged and wait for the future to arrange the condition for us? Words and glowing theories have been and are continuously uttered, but what about some more practical initiative and action?

Parent education is very much needed along with proper training of teachers. Parents, in general, do not know much about the different changes that occur in the child's development at various age levels, and sometimes blinded by their affection, they make the child miserable and wish he were never born. You see very often, in Spring when the weather is becoming hotter, a child coming to school overloaded with clothes or at other times, dressed as if he were going to Church. Also, certain parents do not allow their children to play with other children in order to protect them from diseases and bad influences.

It is evident that parents need to be enlightened on the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual growth of the child in order to correct some of their wrong attitudes toward children. That is an opportunity for teachers to come in and help the parent, but as we saw previously, the teachers are either not trained or not interested or also lack the time due to overcrowded schedules. We tend to criticize the teachers but do the parents who are supposed to love their child, raise-

their small finger in order to support the teachers in their strike? The parents must have been the first to send a petition asking for a better treatment of teachers, but nothing happened.

In Lebanon we could have some two or three days per year devoted to conferences for educating the parents; small talks, now and then, in colloquial Arabic, lectures, publications and articles in newspapers would help them to see the whole matter of education including the school and the teachers. Tell the parents the truth about their attitudes and the results of those on the children and they will come to be more understanding. The child is precious to the parent, so if we stress the harm they are doing to the child the parents will immediately try to learn more and ask what to do at certain times. The teachers, in turn, having to do with cooperative parents will sacrifice their own time to get to some results. Once those two groups of people come to agree on the aims of education as "a guidance of activities in everyday living"(1), there will not exist any more rivalry and the way will be ready for cooperation.

Yet, we must not forget that even if parents and teachers are willing to cooperate, other factors come in the way such

(1) Reavis, W.C., Pierce, Paul.R., Stullken, E.H., Smith, B.L., op.cit., p.541.

as the administration of the school and the national force of the government. Certain teachers may be of the pioneer type and may try to start a movement in favour of childhood, but what about the majority of those individuals who labour all day long only to receive insufficient remuneration? Will they be able to bring security to the children when they themselves are insecure?

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