

The Effects of the SIM Christian Teacher Training Program on the Classroom Teaching-Learning Process

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the effects of the SIM-Niger teacher training program on the classroom teaching-learning process. SIM-Niger has invested a lot of time, energy, and resources (mainly financial) into the teacher training project. After several years of running this program, the question of effect legitimately rises to the surface. Are all the time, money, and energy making a difference in the classroom? This report attempts to answer that question.

The study is necessarily limited in that it is the result of a three-month study, using a relatively small number of teachers who were formally observed in class (N = 16) and a small number of school visits (N = 21). To assess the effects more accurately and thus increase the reliability of the results, the study would have to be a longitudinal one, conducted over a ten-year time span and with a much larger number of participants (where realistically N > 100). Although statistically the conclusions may not be warranted by the limitations of the study, yet the trends towards the results are indicative of change in teacher behaviour.

The History

In 2003-04 SIM-Niger decided to initiate an outreach program aimed at the children of Niger. The intent was to disciple the nation, beginning with the children—the future of Niger. The premise was that many Muslim families will send their children to private schools—even Christian ones—because in general, the learning achievement of students in private schools is far higher than those in the government schools. Through the children, families can be reached with the Gospel message; through the families, communities can be changed by the Good News; through the communities, a transformational impact can be made on the nation.

To have Biblically-based worldview education, there would need to be school buildings, teachers who would be trained in the Biblical worldview for education, and a curriculum that would reflect the Biblical worldview. SIM decided that to invest in people would have a stronger and longer lasting effect than either buildings or curriculum. Therefore a Christian education program was envisioned where teacher training according to a Biblically-based worldview would be of prime importance.

In 2004 Mr. Jim Vreugdenhil was invited by SIM-Niger to head up this project. In November, 2004 a speaking tour was organized by SIM and Mr Jim Vreugdenhil presented the case for Christian education to church groups in several communities from Niamey to Maradi. In July and August 2005, another speaking tour was organized with Mr Jim Vreugdenhil, Dr Ben Hegeman, and a number of teachers presenting the need for Christian Education through presentations, testimonials and

skits. More parents and church leaders were introduced to Biblically based Christian Education.

Jim designed a teacher training program in Christian education based on a Biblical worldview. The three courses he designed are called,

- *Contours of Christian Education*
- *Christian Perspectives on Education*
- *Curriculum: the Pathway to Learning*

Each course included 72 hours of in class study with a strong emphasis on a Biblically-based worldview. A brief description of these three courses can be found in Appendix 1 of this document.

In 2005 the first level course, *Contours of Christian Education*, was conducted in Niamey and in Maradi with a total of 52 teachers attending. Teachers were very excited and enthusiastic about this SIM initiative in Christian education and spread the word to other teachers. As a side effect, a group of teachers banded together to form an organization called *Cornerstone* through which to establish Christian schools.

In 2006 Jim taught the second level course, *Christian Perspectives on Education*, in both Niamey and Maradi while Mr. Ted and Mrs. Eleanor Vonk taught the *Contours of Christian Education* in both places. Besides the teachers from Niger, four teachers from Benin also attended.

In 2007 Ted & Eleanor again taught the *Contours* course in both Maradi and Niamey. At the same time, Jim taught the *Christian Perspectives on Education* course in Maradi and the third level course, *Curriculum: the Pathway to Learning* in Niamey. 44 teachers completed the program of three courses.

During this time, Miss Brigitte Pini, a long term SIM missionary, trained as a Kindergarten teacher in Switzerland, initiated a training program for Kindergarten teachers, emphasizing the same Biblical worldview basis. Brigitte designed a specific program for the teachers with a very practical, hands-on emphasis, reflecting a Froebel influence. Brigitte trained the teachers and helped communities establish Kindergarten classes in which the Biblical worldview would be the basis for the teaching-learning process.

In the meantime, SIM-Niger also encouraged the use of French-language teacher resources. SIM began the work of translating Dr. Greene's book, *Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education: a transforming vision* which will be published by ACSI, an international educational organization. ACSI also published *En classe avec Dieu*, a translation of Dr. Van Brummelen's book, *Walking with God in the Classroom*. These two books are being used extensively in the teacher training program. Megan Patterson, a Christian educator in Scotland who had served in Benin for many years, translated the many pages of course resource notes (over 1200 pages) into French.

In 2007 six indigenous teachers from Niger and two from Benin were designated as teacher-leaders and invited to attend further training sessions with Jim, with the intent that they would take over the teacher training courses in 2008 under Jim's supervision.

Because SIM-Niger invested a significant amount of time, energy, and financial resources into the teacher training program, SIM began to wonder about the effects of the training on the classroom teaching-learning process. Jim was invited back to Niger, and among other tasks, was asked to assess whether the results of the training could be evidenced in the classrooms. This report shares the results of that investigation.

The Process

To determine the effect of the Christian Teacher Training Process, it was decided that several methods should be used. These included school visits and discussions with directors/principals of schools, listening to teacher testimonials, and observing teachers in their classrooms. There could be no observed comparison of teacher behaviour before and after the Christian training program because classroom visits had not been conducted prior to teachers participating in the growth and development process. Any information about that would be obtained anecdotally from teachers and directors/principals. Several different kinds of schools were visited:

- government schools which claim to be secular (but which in practice have a strong Muslim influence),
- schools that are called Christian but have a mainly Muslim staff—these are either church or mission supported,
- private Christian schools that have only teachers that are professing Christians—these are either church or mission supported ,
- private Christian schools geared mainly to the needs of missionary children.

Teachers from all four kinds of schools had taken the SIM Christian Teacher Training Program. Classroom visits and teacher observations were conducted to assess whether the training had any effect on classroom teaching and learning, no matter what kind of school the course participants were in.

School designation	Number of schools
Government schools	5
Christian schools with some or mainly Muslim staff	11
Christian schools with only Christian teachers	4
Christian schools geared mainly for missionary children	1

The teachers that were formally observed in their classrooms had also taken some or all of the Christian teacher training courses:

Training in Christian education	Number of teachers
Kindergarten training with Brigitte Pini	2
Level 1 of the Christian teacher training program	1
Levels 1 & 2 of the Christian teacher training program	1
Levels 1-3 of the Christian teacher training program	12

The teacher observation rating scale

The Criteria

The criteria used in this report include:

- General observations:
 - a) Classroom environment (Physical),
 - b) Classroom atmosphere (Learning),
- Specific observations:
 - a) Relationship with students,
 - b) Christian perspective,
 - c) Methodology,
 - d) Creativity.

The Scale

In the rating:

- the range of 1-2 was deemed to be unacceptable, not demonstrating the criteria at all or demonstrating it at an inept level;
- the 3-4 range was used to designate an unacceptable level, demonstrating limited use of the criteria or using it in an ineffective manner;
- the range of 5-6 was deemed to be average, demonstrating the criteria at an acceptable and competent level;
- the 7-8 range was above average, demonstrating the criteria at a proficient level;
- the 9-10 range was used to designate expert use of the criteria, demonstrating its use as a tool for effective student learning.

Observation Techniques

The ratings were based on observations in the classroom, using several of the following observation tools:

- Global Survey,
- Verbal Interface
- On-task Analysis
- Interaction Analysis
- Focused Criteria Rating
- Questioning Techniques

Feedback

Teachers who were observed received only the information on the "Teacher Observation Feedback Form" (see Appendix 2) with positive, encouraging comments and suggestions. A rating scale was used for the comparative purposes used in this report.

The Rating Scale

Criteria	Rating									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Classroom environment (Physical)										
Classroom atmosphere (Learning)										
Relationship with students										
Christian perspective										
Methodology										
Creativity										

The Aggregate (School Rating)

The aggregate school rating was based on:

- in-classroom teacher observations,
- school visits,
- interviews,
- director and/or principal testimonials.

Summary of the investigation

The teachers who had received the training through the SIM Christian Teacher Training Project (Kindergarten through Lycee) were observed for demonstrations of the criteria (behaviours) in the Teacher Observation Feedback Form and the Teacher Observation Rating Scale. The checkmark (✓) indicates the level at which the criteria (behaviour) was observed.

Criteria	Rating									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Classroom environment (Physical)				✓						
Classroom atmosphere (Learning) Relationship with students							✓		✓	
Christian perspective						✓				
Methodology								✓		
Creativity								✓		

In comparison to the school and teachers who had not taken any of the training (K – Lycee) based on a Biblical worldview, the observed differences were significant:

School/classroom	Aggregate Rating									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Government schools - no teachers with Christian training			✓							
Christian schools - no teachers with Christian training				✓						
Classrooms staffed by teachers with SIM Christian training							✓			

Inferences and tentative conclusions

The direct observations of teachers in their classrooms gave clinical evidence to the anecdotal reports of the directors/principals and the personal testimonies of teachers themselves. The study found a significant difference in teacher behaviour after the teachers completed the SIM Teacher Training Program in Christian Education. Most of these teachers (but not all) demonstrated the desired criteria (behaviours) some or most of the time during the observed classroom lessons.

In general, the behaviour that was most affected by the Teacher Training Program in Christian Education was the relationship with students. Teachers demonstrated a more caring and respectful relationship with their students—indicative of recognizing that their students are image bearers of God. This changed behaviour was most noted in the tone of voice, the absence of the stick or whip, the monitoring of student work, the patient help given to individuals and groups, and the intentional interaction with students.

The second area that stood out was the difference in teaching methodology. Teachers who had completed most or all of the Teacher Training Program in Christian Education demonstrated a significantly greater competency in teaching methodology. This was indicated by the use of questions, a higher degree of interaction with the students, a greater variety of teaching strategies including group discussions, the use of manipulatives, and some cooperative learning activities.

The area that was of greatest interest in this study was that of Christian perspective—which also had the greatest range on the scale of demonstrated criteria. Some teachers clearly exhibited a Christian perspective while others did not demonstrate it even when the lesson provided opportunities to do so. For those who did exhibit it, there was a genuine desire to show to the students that the Creator-God reveals Himself through the structures of His creation, leading to a response of awe and adoration. The teachers who displayed Christian perspective did so as a natural part of the lesson, not as an added moral application. Learning how to demonstrate this characteristic was evidenced. However, more practical work and follow-up on how to implement a Christian perspective would be beneficial. That will enable teachers to more concretely display in their lessons the reality that this is our Father's world and that His glory is demonstrated in the creation—the creation that provides the content for the school subjects.

Has the SIM Teacher Training Program in Christian Education been worthwhile? Has it done what SIM expected it to do? The full effects cannot be realized in such a short time frame, but there is significant evidence that the teacher growth and development in Christian education is beginning to have a significant impact on the teaching-learning process—which in turn will affect the students' hearts and minds and lives.

We praise God for the SIM initiative and pray that the work in Christian education, through focussing on teacher training, will have a transforming influence on the generation of children who represent the future of Niger.

Recommendations

1. Professional development

That a Christian Education Committee be established with responsibilities for a program of professional development growth opportunities that could include:

- The continuation of the Teacher Training Program in Christian Education (the 3 courses listed in Appendix 1) taught by the team of trained national Teacher-Leaders;

- “How to” seminars (3 to 5 days each) to demonstrate the implementation of Christian perspective, e.g.: “How to teach science, based on a Christian approach to teaching science;” and “How to give concrete expression to Biblical values in an integrated Kindergarten unit (such as foods or transportation);”
- One-day professional development workshops to network and to share the struggles and successes in teaching Christianly.

2. Professional resources

That a resource centre and/or professional library be set up to provide teachers with books and other resources, focussing especially on practical examples of teaching Christianly. (NOTE: Brigitte Pini is already working on such a resource centre for Kindergarten materials.)

3. Research

That further research be conducted:

- On the academic standing and achievement of the various schools and school systems;
- On teachers in Niger who are Christians: where they are teaching, their training, their needs, how they can support and encourage each other, etc.

4. Teachers College

That a Christian Teacher training Centre (Ecole Normale) be established in Niger to:

- Provide training for pre-service teachers;
- Assist in the professional growth and development of in-service teachers in Niger

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CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW SEMINARS FOR AFRICA

What is Christian education? This series of seminars is designed to explore this topic and enable educators to grow in their understanding of the Biblical foundations and their impact on the teaching/learning process. If all creation exists to demonstrate the glory of God, then how does our education do that? If creation is revelatory of the Creator, what is the Lord saying to the students in their study of the various subject areas?

The intent with this series of seminars is to train teachers and principals to become Christian educational leaders. The goal is to lead Christian educators to become teacher leaders and teacher trainers.

The Biblical worldview teaching consists of a series of 3 seminars, each designed as a 10-day course of up to 8 hours per day. However, the seminars can be adjusted to meet local situations, needs, and time constraints.

1. *Contours of Christian Education*

- Key Resource: *Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education* by Albert Greene (draft copies of the French version are available)
- Focus is on the key elements of a Biblical worldview for education so that the next generation, by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, will see the mighty acts of God and respond with love and adoration:
 - God-consciousness: Biblical themes of Creation, Fall, Redemption, & Renewal
 - Metaphysics: 6 creation principles
 - Epistemology: 5 principles of knowledge
 - Anthropology: 4 key human relationships as image bearers
 - Biblical Values: Love, Truth, Righteousness, Reconciliation, Awe, etc.
- Purpose of education: training for Christian discipleship in every area of life
- Teaching methodologies & strategies are explored and practiced
- The learner as an image bearer of God

2. *Christian Perspectives on Teaching and Learning*

- Key Resource: *Walking with God in the Classroom* by Harro Van Brummelen (French version is: *En classe avec Dieu*)
- A review of the key elements of a Christian worldview:
 - See course 1 above

- Focus is on the meaning restored to school subjects so that the next generation will begin to comprehend the story of God and his people, see their own place and task in that story, and respond with loving and obedient commitment to Him
 - What is Christian perspective?
 - Christian perspectives on the subject areas that deal with the law - controlled aspects of the creation structure: mathematics, sciences (physical, chemical, earth, and life science),
 - Christian perspectives on the subject areas that deal with the normed aspects of the creation structure: language, social, history, geography, economics, art & music
- Application to teaching and learning
 - instructional designs
 - lesson planning
- Ways of knowing—ways of learning

3. Curriculum: The Pathway to Learning

- Key Resource: *Steppingstones to Curriculum* by Harro Van Brummelen
- A review of the key elements of a Biblical worldview :
 - See course 1 above
- Focus is on the nature of Christian curriculum as the pathway to learning so that by exploring the creation, students will hear what the Creator is revealing to them and they will respond to Him with obedient and loving service:
 - understanding curriculum: structure & design
 - curriculum priorities: what do we really want to teach?
 - shaping the curriculum
 - teaching the curriculum
 - assessing student learning
- Applications to curriculum work
 - writing new curriculum
 - revising existing curriculum
 - adapting curriculum into a new framework
- Practice in curriculum (re)development using a Biblical worldview framework
 - redesigning a curriculum unit
 - restructuring lessons & lesson planning
- Major project: producing a curriculum unit of study

APPENDIX 2

TEACHER OBSERVATION FEEDBACK FORM

Name of teacher:

Name of school:

Grade level:

Subject/Lesson

Date:

General observations:

c) Classroom environment (Physical)

d) Classroom atmosphere (Learning)

Specific observations:

e) Relationship with students:

f) Christian perspective:

g) Methodology:

h) Creativity:

Comments:

Suggestions: