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KW

Greetings from Keenan Institute, Goll Farm community, Liberia.

Most people mistakenly settled for the belief that human personality or behavior is determined by our biology. They speak of human personality as if it were innate or instinctive. However, as it is expressed in our Motto: "Those who do not know can know by learning," it is evident that nurture is far more important than nature. This does not deny whatever contribution our biology has to make in the development of our personality.

We believe that any healthy child can be shaped in countless personalities by cultural upbringing, social conditioning, learning or nurture. Our conviction came in the wake of the tremendous progress made by most of our students from the nearby villages who found themselves and their parents at the lowest rungs of the social, cultural, and economic ladders of our societies.

When these students first enter Keenan Institute, about five years ago, they appear as if vacuous, with no sign of any talents or potential.

But for the past five years of interaction with some of them, it became clear to us that many of them came from homes where they were negatively defined by their significant others or early caretakers--whether parents, guardians, peer groups, teachers who didn't know the power of words to shape our lives. This quickly reminds us of the words of Jesus to his followers in the gospel of John 6:63 when he said, "The words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Just as the word of God can germinate, take roots, and bear fruits, so are the words we speak to one another; they can bear fruit depending on whether they are positive or negative--positive words bear positive fruits and negative words bear negative fruits.

One of our female students intimated that her mother told her that "giving birth to you is my greatest regret. I hate to think that I have ever been pregnant for your useless father who abandoned me when you were still a fetus in my womb. You will be as useless as your father; you will amount to nothing; you are foolish and can never succeed in anything you do." When such negative words are pronounced by one's significant other, they are either consciously or unconsciously internalized and become the child's truth leaving a negative imprint at the deeper level of the his or her psyche. They become paralyzed, withdrawn, timid hemmed in and even reticent in answering questions in their various classes. Cumbered with emotional, psychological and social problems that weigh them down, they could not function in any area of life as if life deprived them of any talents or potentials. Our task therefore was not to see them as inherently insipid, dull, and academically or socially incapable of learning.

For those who believe that human personality or behavior is innate, and that nature has all the answer to human development, we are proud to repeat our motto that indeed nurture is far more important than nature, and that "Those who do not know can know by learning". We know that most of the world's greatest men and women were considered incapable of learning, but they surprised our world with their revolutionary thinking because of the environments and nurture. But as you look at the photos attached, you will see that their stories have changed and their negative truth has been replaced by positive ones.

The photos of the students playing with see-saw, swing, football, hide and see, or "John where are you?," indicate that even those who earlier seem vacuous, unlovable, or not good at all, are gradually beginning to see themselves as valuable and capable of contributing to the global society.

As George Herbert Mead's social theory suggests that "the social self is not there at birth; it develops," we are convinced that through our interactions with them and with one another in a positive way, their journey to self-acceptance and self-love is sure to succeed. The future that was bleak under the burden of negative projections is gradually being unveiled. We are highly grateful to you. This positive transformation in the lives of these disadvantaged Liberian children is the result of your unwavering commitment to provide them with the opportunities to experience the joy of life as they prepare themselves to face the future. We are also grateful to you for giving us the opportunity to fulfill our passion for education.

We are especially grateful to Charlie and Carol Radar who continue to provide daily nourishment through their feeding program, the TOGETHER WITH AFRICA COMMITTEE of St. Christopher's in Chatham for providing 50 scholarships for their learning, E. Christopher Cone who provided the funds for the playground and the construction of two apartments for staff, and the Chatham Rotary Club for all the support. Relhetta and I salute your able Rector Brian and his dear wife Diane under whose leadership this bilateral relationship is nurtured with benefit to young Liberians. We salute you all. May God Almighty continue to replenish your sources and guide every moment of your life.

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Prince/Relhetta

