

# What Makes a School Christian?

## The "Other Teachers" at SDA Schools

By John G. Kerbs

**W**hat makes a school Christian? The adults who work there, most students would say. Bible classes, chapel services, and weeks of prayer make an essential contribution, but alumni almost invariably cite student-adult contacts beyond the classroom as most significant among their memories of the "Christianness" of the school they attended. This being true, it is extremely important to look at how people are selected to fill these role-model positions.

This article will focus on a segment of school personnel whose continued Christian influence sometimes appears to be in ques-

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tion. In recent years we have heard increasing concern about the selection of personnel for Seventh-day Adventist institutions. Candidates for teaching and administrative positions are closely scrutinized to

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determine whether they will function as good examples for young people. Unfortunately, the same standard is not always applied when workers are selected for school industries, cafeterias, and laundries, as well as maintenance, custodial, and grounds departments. In order for students to learn the values of efficiency, cooperation, punctuality, and diligence, their work supervisors must be models of honesty, fairness, purity, and Christian love.

Some of my best school memories center on work assignments under the guidance of kind, caring, consistent Christians. While I was working as a janitor at Sacramento Junior Academy, I failed to close a window the night before a rain-

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storm. Although Mr. Anderson, my work supervisor, expressed concern at my oversight, he also laughed at the results of the down-pour and then proceeded to help me mop up the water.

Mr. Purdy at Lodi Academy once had me excused from school to accompany him on an exciting all-day trip to a huge war surplus outlet to get school supplies and equipment. As we drove, he visited with me and occasionally shared a spiritual admonition.

At La Sierra College I recall Mr. Ferguson's worship periods on Sunday morning when I reported in to mow lawns. I also recall the kind way he insisted that I slow down and not run the mower to death! The visible pain and grief he expressed when a tragic tree-falling accident took a student's life

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habits that she had developed, such as not doing her homework.

Jan was allowed to choose where to begin. She decided to tackle reading homework first. With her parents' help, Jan set up a schedule for each afternoon. First she would play outside for awhile, do her chores, then complete her reading homework. She would not be allowed to watch TV until her homework was completed. Jan's father was to make sure that the environment was conducive to study.

The next morning Mrs. Smith would grade Jan's homework. If it was 80 percent accurate, she earned a reward—working with a friend for part of the afternoon. This was something Jan wanted very much. She knew, however, that if she did not fulfill her part of the contract she would have to go to another teacher's room to complete her homework during the afternoon.

Mrs. Smith rewarded only behavior she wanted strengthened, ignoring undesirable behavior to make it less appealing. She gave Jan intangible rewards as well, praising her for good work, and smiling whenever she "caught" Jan working. Mrs. Smith recognized that criticism actually draws attention to negative behavior, thus strengthening it. Therefore, she usually avoided comment when Jan did not meet her goals.

In the beginning, Mrs. Smith selected only one academic area for attention. As time went on, she required an entire week's reading homework to be completed correctly in exchange for a larger reward. As Jan's interests changed, the rewards also had to be changed. Eventually, Jan completed all homework for three-week periods in order to earn crafts for the entire classroom to do.

Since she was aware that human beings are not perfect, Mrs. Smith built in a way for Jan to skip homework occasionally. After Jan had completed her homework on time for two weeks, she received a "homework pass." Jan could use the pass anytime she wanted to spend an evening without homework. This allowed Jan to choose when a free evening would be most

beneficial to her weekly plans.

Mrs. Smith found that Jan's parents were very helpful in a general supportive role as well as at specific tasks. Jan's mother often rewarded her for taking responsibility by taking her on a shopping trip. This helped strengthen responsible behavior at home too.

An adaptation of this program continued throughout the rest of that school year. In fact, it was so

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**Schools designed for average-achieving students that do not provide for the gifted, learning disabled, or mildly retarded child foster feelings of inferiority and contribute to underachievement.**

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successful with Jan that Mrs. Smith used its principles as the basis for a classroom-wide program the following year.

### Summary

How can teachers motivate their students? Probably the best way is by being accepting, respecting, and genuinely caring. As Dr. Clyde Narramore said, "We are wasting our time unless we first establish the good relationship that causes the one we're trying to motivate to want to heed what we are saying."<sup>3</sup>

This accepting and caring attitude, coupled with a program that teaches students to organize and persevere, will help ensure that underachieving students learn how to succeed in the classroom. □

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### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> James J. Gallagher, *Teaching the Gifted Child* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975), p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> Joanne Rand Whitmore, *Giftedness, Conflict, and Underachievement* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1980), pp. 192, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Clyde M. Narramore, *How to Motivate People* (Rosemead, Calif.: Narramore Christian Foundation, 1975), p. 6.

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showed me that here was a man who had adopted us as his children.

These men considered the world of work as much a part of Christian education as the Bible class. They knew they were in "the Lord's work." Their education and training may have differed from that of the classroom teacher, but not their dedication, character, or commitment.

Recently school janitor George Brand passed away at the age of 91. At his funeral service it was reported that he considered himself a Christian educator. And so he was. Person after person recalled, during the service and in private conversations that followed, that here was a person who throughout his years as a custodian in Adventist schools, truly reflected the love, joy, peace, and patience of Christ.

I recall his friendly relationships with all of us students when I attended college. However, I was rather surprised that, 30 years later, we instantly recognized each other as old friends when I became principal of the school where he was employed. At Loma Linda Academy, until just before his 90th birthday, he faithfully cleaned the gym floor, cheerfully picking up and laundering dirty towels.

Until the end I considered this prayerful Christian man my superior in the same sense that the pharaoh of Egypt recognized that Jacob's long years of walking with God made him a saint and patriarch superior to kings and princes. As Jacob blessed pharaoh, so George blessed my life and those of all his colleagues.

With such a powerful influence emanating from the work stations of our campuses, we must not carelessly hire workers for these areas. Teaching, preaching, and even supervising may not be everyone's assignment, but on a Christian campus every worker should communicate visible concern for the

present and eternal interests of each student.

Complaints have reached church headquarters of swearing, drinking, and intimate fraternizing between married supervisors and students of the opposite sex. Carelessness in church attendance and Sabbath observance, and crude and tasteless behavior and conversation by employees and supervisors at school industries and departments have also been alleged. If teachers, administrators, or pastors were guilty of these indiscretions, such behavior would not be considered acceptable. How can we allow lower standards for other employees who share the responsibility for shaping young lives?

In hiring what we sometimes call support personnel, should we not consider more than good management skills, craftsmanship, and the ability to get the work done? Should we not carefully check their character references, including calling their pastor to verify a faithful relationship to the church?

When we interview maintenance and industry workers, we should require as clear a statement of Christian commitment and mission as we do from teachers. Since these workers have a special opportunity and responsibility to show students how Christianity translates into practical life, we must expect such employees to uphold the highest Christian standards.

Recently Christian institutions have been accused of unnecessary discrimination when they require religious qualifications of those whose jobs are not strictly religious in nature. Adventist schools have traditionally asserted that religion is incorporated into every class and activity.

A 1984 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that good standing with the church is a *bona fide* occupational qualification for employment in a religious school. Likewise, the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that church institutions may use religion as a criterion when hiring employees.

Such decisions must, however, not be regarded as simply legal permission to discriminate. They

should be viewed rather as a recognition by intelligent judges that a school cannot be religious or Christian unless it is so *throughout*. These rulings affirm the absolute necessity of a school's choosing *only* workers who share the goals of that institution. In no other way can our schools expect to achieve their mission.

Let us as Adventist educators and administrators determine to keep our schools what they profess to be—Christian. This will require the application of high standards for selecting and supervising every person in every department of our schools. □

## NEW SDA READERS

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the selection but also meet the criteria established by the steering committee. And the art has to match the stories. If the story says that the man was sitting in his car at the gas station, the illustration mustn't show him standing inside the office!

Production includes constant vigilance to be certain that every individual from the editorial assistant who types manuscripts to the clerk who ships the finished books to SDA schools stays on schedule. Conversations with publishing personnel, designers, and artists were documented and records kept for future reference.

### Checking—Again and Again

Time-consuming details included the sheer number of times a story had to be read by every member of the editorial team as well as by the steering committee and consultants. The editors practically wore out a Xerox machine producing the thousands of pages necessary to supply copies to all the people who needed to read each story.

Each story was read initially to determine whether it should be included in the textbooks, reread and edited to be certain that it met the criteria, checked for readability and read again, checked for vocab-

ulary and read again, read by both the editorial staff and designer to determine appropriate illustration, typeset by the printer and read for errors that might have been introduced in the typesetting, placed on the appropriate page with illustrations and proofread again before the final printing.

Workbooks and Teacher's Editions had to be checked carefully for accuracy. Changing a single word in the Pupil Text (particularly if it was a vocabulary word) produced a domino effect, requiring revisions in every component, including testing materials.

An editor checked each component again after printing to be sure the art had been reproduced properly and to see if any errors had crept in.

This description shares a few of the "hidden ingredients" in the Life Series reading textbooks and enables the teacher to recognize the solid base of research and technology on which the series is based. Each task from the most sophisticated to the most mundane is an essential ingredient in the making of a reading series. □

## Legal Update A PRIMER ON NEGLIGENCE

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crucial point in recognizing when that duty is being breached. If teachers become knowledgeable about tort law and legal responsibility they will be better able to prevent lawsuits. But more important, they will become more conscious of their responsibility to ensure that classrooms are safe places for children.

A future column will offer some suggestions about preventing lawsuits based on negligence and intentional torts.—Mark K. Brooks. □

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### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *Alferoff vs. Casagrande*, 504 N.Y.S. 2d 719, 122 A.D. 2d 183.

<sup>2</sup> Restatement, Second, Torts, Section 282.

<sup>3</sup> 162 N.E. 99 (N.Y. 1928).