How to Develop Violence-Prevention and Character-Intervention Education

As the bell rang, Jacob entered the reading room where Mrs. Williams' 3rd-grade class was meeting. Catching sight of Lamont, who was seated in "his" chair, Jacob boldly strolled over and dumped him on the floor. The class roared as Lamont and Jacob scuffled on the floor and threw several punches.

Mrs. Williams reacted quickly. Instructing her students to settle down, she struggled to separate the boys, then marched them to the principal's office.

Mrs. Williams returned to the reading room feeling disappointed that her special story event was ruined and that the entire class period had been wasted. She also felt frustrated at the lack of respect certain children repeatedly displayed toward her and other students. Mrs. Williams' pupils were also unhappy about their classmates' rowdiness, since they had to return to their regular classroom and missed the planned event. They all felt punished.

Can You Prevent This Type of Behavior?

To prevent this type of behavior, a number of

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teachers are using an approach referred to as character-driven education. They believe that helping children develop good characters can prevent classroom-management problems, support and strengthen lesson applications, reduce teacher and student stress, make schools safer, and create a bond between students and the community.

The Importance of Character Development

Ellen White wrote: "Character is not inherited. It cannot be bought. Moral excellence and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident. The most precious gifts are of no value unless they are improved. The formation of good character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them."[1]

Character education affirms ethical values as the highest goal, even above self-esteem. It establishes objectives and encourages youth to adopt them as basic life rules. The goal of Christian schools and ed-

ucators is to help students develop a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as their model in education, as well as in all other aspects of life. Good character results from and develops out of our relationship with Christ. The grace of Jesus Christ also enables educators to model good character to their students. (See Galatians 2:22-24; Ephesians 2:4-10; 6:13-18.[2])

Classroom management involves far more than disciplining unruly students. It requires the teaching of social skills and desired behaviors such as self-control, sharing, and co-operation. To achieve this, teachers can have students practice or role-play desired behaviors; teach new social skills using positive reinforcement; and help students learn to modify their behavior to suit the social situation.

How Can We Teach Character Development?

T. Lickona makes the following recommendations to teachers:

• Serve as a moral model and mentor;

• Develop a sense of unity and community in the classroom;

• Establish high academic accountability and compliance;

• Keep the development of student moral reasoning in mind when planning rules and consequences;

• Allow students to make decisions and take responsibility;

• Teach cooperative learning and conflict resolution skills;

• Discuss and debate moral dilemmas to enhance students' moral reasoning; and

• Use role models whom students admire as examples of good character.[3]

More ideas for character development training include teaching students how to respect one another's rights and use the principles of democracy when making classroom decisions.

Teachers and students should decide cooperatively on the guidelines for good behavior, a plan for putting them into practice, and ap-

Classroom management . . . requires the teaching of social skills and desired behaviors such as self-control, sharing, and cooperation.

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propriate penalties for breaking the rules. Teachers should describe the principles of good conduct and help students apply the rules.

Teachers can incorporate peer support into the school program by having children listen to and encourage other students who need help with reading or other subjects.

To get the community involved in character education, schools can create student competitions for community involvement that are appropriately rewarded and publicly recognized. Some schools pair student volunteers with older citizens who need help with yard work or simple household tasks, while other schools help community organizations provide for basic needs, such as collecting cold-weather clothing or food for the less fortunate.

Finally, teachers can encourage students to dream and to establish personal goals as they prepare to become contributing participants in society. Teachers can draw on their own inner vision to talk positively about students' futures, help them identify their strengths, and point them toward community voluntarism to try out their talents.

Organizations That Promote Character Development

Several organizations offer programs to assist with character development. Teachers can work with their administrative teams to find one that meets their school's unique needs.

The Character Education Partnership of Washington, D.C., suggests three principles of character education:

• Promote core ethical values (caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others) as the basis of good character.

• Conduct actions based upon ethical values.

• Develop an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach to character education that promotes core values in school life.[4]

You can visit the Character Education Partnership on the World

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Wide Web at http://www.character.org.

Another program, "The Honor Level System: Discipline by Design," by Budd Churchward, suggests 11 techniques for better classroom control and character development.[5] (See the box on this page.) You can visit Budd Churchward's World Wide Web site at: http://users.oal. com/churchward/hls/ HLS_ INTRO.HTML/.

A third program prepared by the Character Counts! Coalition seeks to strengthen moral development by teaching common ethical values. They have named these the "Six Pillars of Character," which they believe rise above differences in race, creed, politics, gender, and wealth. These values are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Members of the coalition form national partnerships of schools, communities, and human-service organizations, using the Six Pillars in their individual and joint programs to teach youth the principles of good character.[6]

The Character Counts! Coalition Web site can be found at http://www.charactercounts. org.

Necessary Supports for Character Education

A 1995 Michigan State University poll of 13,000 adolescents found that when an adult acts as a role model by displaying good character and spending time with young people, this can make a difference. Consistent adult involvement in the lives of youth can prevent problems such as irresponsible sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, suicide attempts, and vandalism.

To develop positive relationships with young people, adults need support from soci-

ety's institutions (schools, churches, and community groups and services) in order to network and coordinate programs that involve people of various ages, races, politics, and creeds.

A resource that discusses the role of adult mentors, which can help communities prevent school violence is the soon-to-be-released book, *Stop the Violence: Resource Guide to Safe Schools.* In it, Gary L. Hopkins, Director, Center for Prevention Research at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, shares his expertise in a chapter entitled, "The Role of the Community in Preventing School Violence."[7] According to Hopkins, "Young people need strong, enduring relationships with adults. A synthesis of the research reported suggests that this element, caring adults, can play a strong and critical role in protecting students—not only from involvement in violent acts—but may have far-reaching benefits even in the area of substance abuse and early sexual activity. It is likely that the effective programs and processes of the future will fall within the realm of effectively providing young people

with adults who care for them and who are willing to become an active participant in the lives of these needy youth."[8]

An online resource for educators and other child-development professionals to various program links for Adventist schools and colleges is under development by Paul Brantley of the Andrews University School of Education (see http://www.educ.andrews.edu/ CIRCLE/).

Schools as Communities

Students are positively affected by having a sense of community within their school. According to Bryk and Driscoll, communally organized schools have fewer student behavioral problems (class cutting, student absenteeism, etc.) than other schools. In addition, students with such connections had more academic interests, greater achievement gains, and lower dropout rates.[9]

Royal and Rossi found that students' sense of community was directly tied to their involvement in other school activities. Students who felt a sense of community at school had more positive attitudes toward school

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Budd Churchward's 11 Techniques for Better Classroom Control

- Focusing—The student's attention should be on you before the lesson begins.
- Direct Instruction—Communicate the lesson plan with a brief outline and time sequence.
- Monitoring—Move around the room in order to check, help, or direct your students' progress.
- Modeling—Be courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, in control, patient, and organized in your own behavior as an example to your students.
- Non-Verbal Cueing—Use cues to alert students to an important change.
- Environmental Control—Make your classroom visually interesting by providing places for quiet moments, hands-on activities, audio-visual equipment use, or reading enjoyment.
- Low-Profile Intervention—Anticipate problems to prevent misdirected behavior. Calm, controlled, and quiet intervention can avoid verbal outbursts from an upset student and can avoid making the student the center of attention.
- Assertive Discipline—Set limits mixed with praise for correct student behavior. Do not allow a student to interfere with individual or classroom learning.
- Assertive I-Messages—Give clear directions when confronting a misbehaving student. Explain exactly what is expected.
- Humanistic I-Messages—Tell the child what behavior he or she is doing; the effect it has on you; and how this makes you feel.
- Positive Discipline—Classroom rules should describe the behaviors you want instead of those you do not want. These are expectations of student behavior. Acknowledge good behavior and praise it. (From http://users.oal.com/churchward/hls/HLS_ INTRO.HTML/)

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TAB group leaders who made a research-based presentation on the results of the program at the American Counseling Association World Conference in Pennsylvania.

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A TAB student counselor (center) leads a group of students at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Teachers can incorporate peer support into the school program by having children listen to and encourage other students who need help with reading or other subjects.

and were less likely to cut classes or drop out of school.[10]

An Effective Model

TAB (Transforming Acting-out Behaviors) has been effective in encouraging character development and self-control among elementary students. To the children, TAB means Take a Break, since it lets them pause from their regular classroom routines to practice ways of forming positive behaviors. The program was created in the early 1990s in response to requests from an elementary school principal and a youth service counselor who had both seen a marked increase in undesirable behaviors at local schools. At that time, their community, which had one of the highest murder and single-parent rates in the United States, did not have counselors in any of its elementary schools.

To address this request, students pursuing Master's degrees in counseling at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, did a pilot study of small-group counseling at one elementary school during the 1992-1993 school year. Based on the success of the pilot, the program was expanded to 10 schools. Since then, TAB groups have been conducted in two to seven schools each year. The TAB program has been tested in cultural settings outside the U.S. (London, England; and Jamaica, West Indies).

Project TAB uses small-group and whole-class interaction to encourage students to solve their conflicts peaceably. The project uses classroom teachers, along with trained counselors and students, to create opportunities for elementary students to express their concerns, to role-play, and to develop personal methods for problem solving. The program is based on current knowledge of what improves human behavior, drawn from cooperative learning theory, multicultural education strategies, reinforcement theory, social learning theory, and cognitive theory.

Project TAB teaches children to recognize and understand their emotions, put them into perspective, and deal with them appropriately. They learn skills they can use to be more successful at home, at school, and in the community. The program targets five behaviors: put-downs, disruptions, disrespect for teachers and property, and lack of cooperation. A series of lesson plans deals effectively with each of the targeted behaviors. TAB can also be adapted for older students.

TAB groups run for approximately 10 to 12 weeks. Just before the groups begin, the classroom teachers measure each student's behavior in the five targeted areas, using a behavioral checklist. At the end of the sessions, the same checklist is used to assess changes in behavior. The group dynamic assumes that every group and classroom has well-behaved, model students. Under the guidance of teachers and counselors, these students can encourage positive behavior in disruptive students.

Because values such as respect, responsibility, and cooperation are taught in the TAB program, it can easily be integrated into the Adventist curriculum. TAB can become an avenue to godly living for children who incorporate the principles into their daily lives. As Proverbs 22 puts it: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (verse 6). This applies to the character development provided by Christian education as well as from the Christian principles taught in our homes and churches.

are suitable for use in small-group and whole-classroom settings by both classroom teachers and counselors. For information about the upcoming book or a brochure describing the program, contact Lenore Brantley, School of Education, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0100 or E-mail her at lenoreb@andrews.edu/. ✐

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The TAB peanut-candy-making activity.

A sample lesson plan developed specifically for Project TAB is called "Spin the Teacher." The classroom teacher sits in a swivel chair at the center of a circle of children. The chair is spun around. Whichever student the teacher faces when the chair stops has to tell one reason why he or she respects the teacher. The teacher then responds with a reason he or she likes having the student in the class.

After several spins, students are encouraged to discuss the activity: What does it mean to have respect for the teacher? Why should teachers be respected? When this lesson plan was first developed for use in a 7th- and 8th-grade classroom, the group leaders were amazed at some of the positive comments generated by the session. Students would say, "I didn't know my teacher liked me so much!" This created a stronger bond between teacher and student and improved classroom climate.

Another very popular TAB lesson plan that emphasizes cooperation is the peanut-candy-making activity. The students are given a recipe and ingredients for making a simple uncooked dessert. Each student has to add a different item to the mix. The exercise teaches students that if things are not mixed according to the recipe, or if students do not cooperate, no one would want to eat the end product. But if they do follow the directions and cooperate, they will be rewarded by having delicious candy to eat.

A book is being compiled that includes TAB lesson plans and other activities developed by Andrews University students. These