

Practical Guidelines for **CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE**

BY WILLIAM H. GREEN AND PREMA GAIKWAD

To plan an important trip, you would need to answer a number of questions: How long will it take to get to my destination? How far is it? What kinds of transportation are available? Who is going with me? and so forth. Answering these types of questions is often more important than the actual route chosen. The same is true of decisions about classroom discipline. What guidelines should one consider when planning for the very difficult but important lifelong professional journey?

This article will suggest six guidelines: knowing the purpose of discipline, making the connection between instruction and behavior, developing a repertoire of models, teaching social skills, planning the first two weeks of school, and applying the 90-9-1 formula. Though not exhaustive, the guidelines come from years of study and practice. But first a definition.

Defining Discipline

What is discipline? How does it relate to teaching? The root word for *discipline* is the Latin word *discara*, which means "to learn." The word *disciple* comes from the same root. A disciple follows a teacher in order to learn from him or her. Transferring that idea to the classroom, students learn to behave by watching and imitating the teacher.

When they think about discipline, teachers tend to focus on misbehavior. As we have seen above, the concept of discipline is much broader than this. It deals with learning in general, and is taught largely by modeling and example. Nevertheless, dealing with misbehavior is important for both the student and the teacher. Therefore, this article will focus

on preventing and correcting misbehavior in the classroom.

Knowing the Purpose of Discipline

The central guideline for teachers can be expressed in these questions: What is the purpose of this discipline? What outcome do you want? In a secular setting the

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answer often is this: We want an orderly environment so that learning can take place.

However, the purpose of discipline is not just to promote a safe and orderly environment, but also to teach self-control. This fits in well with the biblical model as well as behavioral theory. But

the purpose of discipline goes beyond self-control to conversion and *God-control*. This perspective is uniquely Christian and quite different from the secular view. While this offers a serious challenge for Christian teachers, they have the advantage of being able to call on divine help.

Thus, whatever we do as Christian teachers needs to be seen in the context of our overall aim. Ask yourself, Will my example or will this practice assist my students in the conversion experience? Will it encourage them to allow God to control their thoughts and behavior?

Making the Connection Between Good Instruction and Good Behavior

There is a connection between good teaching and good discipline.¹ The teacher should have a repertoire of instructional models and use them appropriately. This means matching the model to the content being taught, the developmental level of the student, and the desired learning outcome. Following these guidelines should prevent many discipline problems. The wider the instructional repertoire, the more student needs will be met, and the less need there will be for corrective discipline.

Cooperative Learning

Certain classroom instructional models tend to reduce discipline problems. Cooperative learning is one such model. Johnson and Johnson, Slavin, and Kagan offer some useful models for cooperative learning.² The more elaborate models produce personal, academic, as well as social gains for students.

Some compelling biblical examples utilize cooperative learning principles. Christ often worked with groups. He sent the disciples out two-by-two. Paul also often worked with a team in his missionary endeavors. The idea that we are responsible not only for our own behavior but, to some extent, the behavior of those close to us is a principle derived from the Bible.

Brain-compatible Models

Brain-compatible learning methods have become popular recently.³ Much writing and some research has shown the practical use of these concepts.⁴ One such model of instruction is Susan Kovalik's Integrated

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Thematic Instruction (ITI). ITI seeks to build a classroom environment that matches the way children learn.

Many classroom practices, according to Kovalik,⁵ are inimical to learning or at least do not take advantage of the ways children learn best. ITI takes advantage of cooperative learning and is a good umbrella for other instructional models as well.

Several specific practices advocated by ITI aim to prevent discipline problems and promote personal and social growth. Two such practices are MegaSkills⁶ and Standards to Live By.⁷ The 10 MegaSkills are values, attitudes, and behaviors that determine a child's achievements (see sidebar). Standards to Live By (see sidebar) are a set of expectations that help students learn to take responsibility for their behavior. MegaSkills and Standards to Live By can be posted in the classroom where the teacher and students can refer to them each day. Teachers will sometimes select a particular MegaSkill or Standard to Live By for the week and work on it daily. The principles thus outlined fit well with Christian ideals.

Developing a Repertoire

Teachers should develop a repertoire of instructional models in order to better meet the needs of students and to promote specific learning outcomes. The same is true of discipline strategies. Because a variety of discipline models is available, teachers should be able to find several models that match their personality and philosophy, and that produce the desired outcomes. Different models stress different aspects of social and/or personal behavior. Charles⁸ lists eight different models that teachers can use. (See page 4 for a more complete description.)

Teaching Social Skills

Perhaps more now than in the past, teachers need to directly instruct students in the

skills they need to get along with others. One can do this by using MegaSkills and Standards to Live By as part of ongoing classroom instruction. Johnson and Johnson's version of cooperative learning⁹ discusses how to directly teach the social skills students need in order to learn cooperatively. The Johnsons' T-chart¹⁰ (see sidebar on page 11) describes one such way. Both schools and businesses are finding this approach helpful with students and employees who have not learned how to get along with their peers.

Behaviorists also have devised methods to teach and assess social skills.¹¹ Teachers can find methodological guidance to help them teach social skills to students, an area that seems more necessary today than in the past.

Planning the First Two Weeks of School

The first two weeks of school are critical to the success of the entire school year. Much of the recent work in classroom management is built on this idea. The research base has come largely from studies conducted by a group at the University of

MEGASKILLS

- 1. Confidence:** feeling able to do it
- 2. Motivation:** wanting to do it
- 3. Effort:** being willing to work hard
- 4. Responsibility:** doing what's right
- 5. Initiative:** moving into action
- 6. Perseverance:** completing what you start
- 7. Caring:** showing concern for others
- 8. Teamwork:** working with others
- 9. Common Sense:** using good judgment
- 10. Problem Solving:** putting what you know and what you can do into action

STANDARDS TO LIVE BY

**No Put Downs
Active Listening
Trust
Truth
Doing Your Best**

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students. (Incidentally, his book is an excellent resource for teachers. It lists 42 major problem behaviors and suggests specific steps teachers can take to overcome those problems.)

Applying the 90-9-1 Formula

In preventing and correcting misbehavior, the 90-9-1 formula can be a helpful guide for teachers. For about 90 percent of the students, whole classroom techniques or methods usually solve or prevent problems from occurring or continuing to occur. These methods include setting expectations for group behavior, establishing routines, and reinforcing helpful social skills. For about nine percent of the students, group and classroom processes don't work adequately. Individual techniques are needed. These include one-to-one talks with students, verbal routines, and written contracts to correct specific behaviors.

In some cases neither group nor individual teacher-directed techniques work. About one to five percent of students need help from other professionals. In some classes the percentage is higher than in others. Even with the best classroom strategies and individualized practices, certain children will need assistance from professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, and social workers. Teachers need to be reassured that it is normal to require outside assistance with some problems.

One way to provide this help is to set up child study teams. This multidisciplinary approach to problem solving uses psychologists, nurses, social workers, special-education teachers, and regular

Texas at Austin.¹²

The Texas group and others have developed specific steps or guidelines for teachers to follow when planning the first two weeks of school. Sprick,¹³ for example, lists seven steps used in planning the first two weeks. He believes the first day offers the opportunity to make the most important impression possible for the teacher.

Sprick's guidelines for planning for the first two weeks of school include the following seven steps:

1. List all types of classroom activities.
2. For each activity, imagine how you would like students to behave.
3. Design classroom rules.
4. Design consequences for severe misbehavior.

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means "to learn."*

5. Design a grading system that encourages motivation and participation.

6. Design routines for assigning and collecting in-class assignments and homework.

7. Prepare activities for the first day of class.

Sprick also presents a five-step plan for the first 10 minutes of class to help teachers make a positive impression on the

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T-charts

A T-chart, according to the Johnsons, can be used to teach social skills. The teacher should list the skills he or she wishes students to master. There are dozens of possibilities, such as encouraging other group members, taking turns, sharing materials, criticizing ideas rather than people, and so forth. The Johnsons suggest the following steps to construct a T-chart:

1. Write the name of the skill to be learned and practiced and draw a large T underneath.
2. Title the left side of the T “Looks Like” and the right side of the T “Sounds Like.”
3. On the left side write a number of behaviors that illustrate the skill. On the right side write a number of phrases that put the skill into practice.
4. Have all students practice “Looks Like” and “Sounds Like” several times before the lesson is conducted.

A T-chart for teaching social skills might look like this:

Encouraging

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Thumbs up	“What is your idea?”
Pat on back	“I had not thought of that.”
Shake hands	“Good idea!”
	“That helps.”
	“That’s interesting.”

teachers at each school—even at small schools. (See page 27 for additional information.)

Summary

Some of the guidelines discussed above are more specific and therefore more useful in the immediate context of the classroom. Planning for the first two weeks in school, for example, is one guideline that can help

every teacher. Directly teaching social skills is another practical strategy that produces quick results. Others are longer range and less specific. Developing a repertoire of teaching and discipline models takes time and effort, but is well worth the work.

Realizing that there are some problems teachers can’t solve even when they have done their very best should be comforting—but it also means that teachers will need to seek assistance from others.

In summary, the purpose of discipline in Adventist schools needs to guide the development and choice of strategies and models. This is an awesome responsibility, but the journey and the destination are well worth the effort. ✍

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