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Teaching Ideas That Work!

BY SANDRA BROOKS

“Me? Teach that class again this quarter? No way!” Sally exclaimed. “I can sum up those teenagers in two words: bored and sleepy.”

But was the problem bored, unmotivated kids or Sally’s teaching techniques? Sally may have been talking more about her teaching than about the class. Poor classroom participation is often due to one or more of the following problems:

- Lack of personal interest in youth,
- Insufficient parental support,

- Inadequate teacher preparation.

Let’s consider these problems and see what can be done to overcome them.

How to Show Personal Interest

Though the adolescent years are exciting, they are also filled with turbulence and confusion. Clinging to the security of childhood with one hand and reaching out to grasp adulthood with the other, youth experience inner conflicts they don’t understand. Immense changes in physical, hormonal, and

emotional makeup thrust them into adulthood—ready or not.

Feeling loved, accepted, and appreciated is the most urgent need among young people. A national youth worker reports, “I’ve asked youth all over this country about their greatest fear. From coast to coast their number one fear is that of never loving or being loved.”

Teenagers fear rejection from adults, but especially from peers. Trying to project a “super-cool” image, they feel anything but confident. They tend to

build walls around themselves that become protective barriers. Within these walls are hearts screaming for help. Teachers whose ears are trained to detect muffled screams can equip youth to understand and deal with problems.

You can be instrumental in helping to remove barriers that hinder a young person from giving and receiving love. One way to do this is to incorporate into your teaching plans an informal sharing time. Youth yearn to find someone who speaks their language and listens to what they have to say.

Since school and sports activities occupy a large portion of teenagers' time, encourage discussion in these areas. In which sports do your students participate? What are their best subjects? Their worst subjects? Are they members of clubs?

Hobbies and leisure activities are other topics of interest. Do they like to hike? Bicycle? Ski? Do they enjoy talking about cars?

Youth spend a good deal of time in front of the television and listening to music. Ask for critiques on TV programming and music albums. Scan the media for interesting news items. Stash away humorous stories of incidents pointing up the human side of life, and share these.

Pay attention to young people who seem withdrawn or shy, and try to involve them in conversation.

But I don't have time for this informal sharing, you may think. Allot a specified period of class time—perhaps five or ten minutes—then bring it to a close by saying, "Okay, let's move on to the lesson."

Allowing yourself to be vulnerable can help penetrate communication barriers. Without becoming preachy or condescending, share problems and anxieties you faced at their age. Tell how God has used difficult people and circumstances to help you mature. These glimpses into your experience encourage youth and show them that God can be trusted with their problems. Through your experiences they can begin learning to recognize God at work in their lives.

A third barrier breaker is teacher compassion and patience. Teachers who seek to project the image of Christ and His love never embarrass students, even the class clown. Classroom comedy is

usually a smokescreen for insecurity. Be gracious, but if the clowning persists, take the offender aside and talk privately about the love and concern you feel. The comedy may change to cooperation if a young person feels loved, accepted, and appreciated.

Teach your students how to pray for one another. Encourage them to be concerned about other people and their needs. Model this concern when you lead out in class prayer, calling each student by name. Something in each of us responds when we hear our names mentioned in someone else's prayer, and youth are no exception.

ing, if you practice the following principles:

- *Maintain close parent/teacher communication.* Good rapport with parents is the oil that lubricates the machinery of teaching, especially if a problem arises in the classroom. Whatever the problem—a bad attitude, a drastic change in personality, classroom discipline—a teacher can help parents and youth by spotting small problems and alerting parents before they become big ones.

- *Suggest that parents discuss the Bible at home.* Some parents feel ill-equipped to do this. Familiarize yourself with home devotional materials available

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How to Achieve Parental Support

Supportive parents magnify a teacher's effectiveness. Most parents are truly interested in their children's spiritual growth and development. You can help parents in their task of child-rearing, and they can, in turn, help you in teach-

through the denomination and other sources so that you can offer suggestions. The wide variety of study books and devotional guides are a boon to family Bible learning. By using these the family spends time in fun and interaction, and everybody learns, even Mom and Dad.

- *Encourage parents.* Through periodic parent/teacher meetings, let parents know they are not failing in their child-rearing responsibilities. Good teachers stress the positives in discussing their students' development and achievements. Too often society focuses on the negatives, particularly with youth. Try to avoid this imbalance by offering praise and encouragement first and then

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discussing the young person's needs. Your interest in their child forms a comradeship with parents that nurtures the adolescent's spiritual growth.

- *Express your appreciation.* Once a year, plan an appreciation dinner. Include youth and parents. As a crowning touch, have parents and youth present "I Appreciate You Because . . ." awards to one another. Each positive feeling discovered while searching for just the right expression of appreciation becomes a building block toward a stronger relationship between parents and youth.

How to Check Up on Yourself

Teachers play a vital role in helping youth achieve an active, growing life in Jesus Christ. Here are some checkpoints to help you rate how well you're doing in this area.

Check Your Motives

At frequent intervals make a list of reasons why you teach youth. Do you feel drawn to share Christ with them? Are you devoted to and concerned for young people and their spiritual lives? Is your teaching experience enjoyable or

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burdensome? What is the hardest/easiest part of the job? What do you hope to accomplish? What other reasons do you have for teaching?

Check Your Preparation

- *Make prayer the foundation.* Have you prayed for your students? Have you asked God to give you wisdom in lesson preparation? Have you asked Him to sensitize you to individual student needs? Do you always have prayer before beginning class sessions?

- *Be prepared.* Allowing God and His Word to work in you is necessary for your class preparation. Make liberal use of reference tools such as Bible commentaries, Bible encyclopedias, and

Bible dictionaries. Also, try using standard dictionaries and encyclopedias to expand on key words in Scripture passages. When discussing various concepts in science or social studies, look up and expand on the definition as it applies to spiritual life. If the topic for the day is light, study the characteristics of light and draw spiritual analogies from the content.

- *Sharpen your skills.* Attend leadership training classes and read training materials. Take those ideas and modify them to meet your class's personality and needs. Exchange ideas and experiences with other teachers. Recall outstanding teachers from your past and incorporate their methods into your teaching.

- *Let your personality and sense of humor shine through.* The Bible is filled with humor. Learn to spot it. Also, many humorous life experiences lend themselves well to biblical application. Nothing draws the attention and admiration of youth like an appropriate humorous story.

- *Be genuine.* Be the same person inside and outside the classroom. Show in-

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terest in students whenever and wherever you see them. They're longing for you to show them that the principles you teach in the classroom work in real life.

- *Maintain order.* It's paradoxical, but at the same time youth misbehave in the classroom, they yearn to be kept in line. Maintaining order in the classroom provides structure and security in their lives.

Check Your Message

Evaluate lessons weekly by asking yourself questions such as these:

- Did I prepare well by praying for God's leadership?
- Did I open the lesson with a strong, attention-getting story or question?
- Did I begin each class with prayer?

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- Did I include how-to's for practical application?
- Did I encourage student questions and observations?
- Did I wrap up the lesson with a summary statement that satisfied my

students and me?

- Did students seem interested or were they restless?
- Did I do the best I could?

Conclusion

Unlike Sally's experience, teaching youth can be satisfying. You hold the keys. Becoming personally involved with youth and their parents, and working in partnership with God to present a life-changing message can be exciting for you and your students. You can make Christ a reality in their lives as they prepare to enter adulthood. ✍

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