



# *Creating Peaceable Schools:* **Instructional and Management**

BY ELVIN GABRIEL

**T**oo many young people are caught up in conflicts every day that they do not know how to manage—teasing, jealousy, bigotry, and physical aggression. Juvenile delinquency and violence are symptoms of youths' inability to manage conflict in their lives<sup>1</sup> and evidence of the effects of sin on our planet. These problem behaviors may be categorized as: (1) aggressive (such as hitting, pulling hair, kicking, pushing, using abusive language); (2) physically disruptive (such as smashing, damaging, or defacing objects; throw-

ing things; physically annoying other pupils); (3) socially disruptive (such as screaming, running away, exhibiting temper tantrums); and (4) authority challenging (such as refusing to carry out requests, exhibiting defiant nonverbal behavior, using pejorative language).<sup>2</sup> Sexual harassment, bullying, robbery, aggravated assault, rape, and murder are some of the most serious problem behaviors exhibited by students. These conflicts disrupt the teaching-learning process and threaten the physical, social, spiritual, and emotional well-being of students, school staff, and the wider community.

Student misbehaviors, which are endemic in schools worldwide, have been a source of grave concern to educators, community leaders, parents, and students. The magnitude and pervasiveness of such problem behaviors threaten to compromise the essential core values of education and lifelong learning, i.e., discipline, self-control, citizenship, caring, service, civic responsibility, peace, integrity, harmony, justice, fairness, godliness, and professional competence.

### Teachers' Role

Teachers are strategically positioned to effect the behavioral and attitudinal changes needed for students to become productive members of society. What steps can they take to imbue their students with the essential human qualities of respect, cooperation, honesty, tolerance, self-control, moral fortitude, spiritual growth, obedience, social development, freedom, and responsibility? It is only through the creation and maintenance of peaceable learning environments and the influence of the Spirit of God that these qualities will be exhibited. Classroom disruptions and/or misbehaviors cannot survive in an environment where peace is nurtured and embraced, and where teachers and students are committed to becoming more Christlike.

The classroom is the place where students gain the knowledge and skills needed to resolve conflicts creatively. It is also where the majority of conflicts will be resolved. The peaceable classroom is thus the unit block of the peaceable school.<sup>3</sup>

### Creating a Caring Classroom Community

A caring classroom community is based on the following interdependent qualities:

1. **Cooperation.** Children learn to work together and to trust, help, and share.
2. **Communication.** Children learn to observe carefully, communicate accurately, and listen sensitively.
3. **Tolerance.** Children learn to respect and appreciate people's differences, and to understand prejudice and its effects.

4. **Positive Emotional Expression.** Children learn to express feelings, particularly anger and frustration, in ways that are not aggressive or destructive, and learn self-control.

5. **Conflict Resolution.** Children learn how to respond creatively to conflict in the context of a supportive, caring community.<sup>4</sup>

Three other qualities are integral to a caring classroom community:

1. **Love.** Children learn to love each other and to demonstrate kindness, compassion, and courtesy.
2. **Unconditional Positive Regard.** Children learn ways to

show appreciation for other people, regardless of racial, religious, ethnic, physical, moral, and cognitive differences.

3. **Empathy.** Children develop a deep sensitivity to the feelings and experiences of their peers and others.

Because teachers spend many hours each week with students, they can play a significant role in creating learning environments, and communities, that are relatively free of disruptions and violent confrontations. Through instruction, precept, and example, teachers can motivate students to exhibit behaviors and attitudes that will prepare them for global citizenship. However, building a learning climate that engenders peace and harmony requires intentionality on the part of the teacher.

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### Teacher Intentionality

An important quality of effective teachers is *intentionality*, which means doing things for a reason or a purpose. Intentional teachers continually focus on the outcomes of learning that are critical to student success, and act in ways that help ensure those outcomes.<sup>5</sup> They use a variety of instructional materials to help students achieve "all sorts of cognitive objectives, from knowledge to application to creativity, . . . [A]t the same time children are learning important affective objectives such as love of learning, respect for others, and personal responsibility."<sup>6</sup>

Intentional teachers understand that decisions about the instructional process must be made before, during, and after teaching. Before entering the classroom, they make decisions about long-term and short-term goals, formulate instructional strategies, collect relevant materials, and plan for assessment and evaluation.

### Classroom Instruction

In the classroom, intentional teachers use instructional strategies that are likely to accomplish the desired learning outcomes. These strategies may include communication, leadership, motivation, discipline, and/or management. Their "after teaching" process focuses on assessing the effectiveness of teaching strategies, evaluating the extent to which the goals have been achieved, and re-evaluating student achievement and readiness for new topics.<sup>7</sup>

Intentional teachers are motivated by the belief that what they do makes a difference in the lives of the children they teach. They are more likely to "put forth consistent effort, to persist in the face of obstacles, and to keep trying relentlessly until every student succeeds."<sup>8</sup> The following eight dimensions are important to the development of teacher efficacy:

# Approaches

1. **A sense of personal accomplishment.** The teacher perceives his or her work as meaningful and important.

2. **Positive expectations for student behavior and achievement.** The teacher expects students to progress and achieve goals appropriate to their abilities.

3. **Personal responsibility for student learning.** The teacher does not blame others for problems in the classroom, and shows a willingness to examine his or her performance.

4. **Strategies for achieving objectives.** The teacher plans for student learning, sets goals for himself or herself, and identifies strategies to achieve them.

5. **Positive affect.** The teacher feels optimistic about teaching, about himself or herself, and about students.

6. **Sense of control.** The teacher believes that he or she can influence students' academic and personal growth.

7. **Sense of common teacher/student goals.** The teacher develops a joint venture with students to accomplish goals.

8. **Democratic decision making.** The teacher involves students in making decisions about learning goals and strategies.<sup>9</sup>

Intentional teachers are always seeking ways to enhance their professional growth and development through continu-

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ing education, joining and participating in professional organizations, research, extensive reading, and article publication. They understand the importance of developing and implementing a philosophy of education that informs instructional behaviors and practices. They utilize their talents, pedagogical training, creative skills, and leadership abilities in creating and developing peace education initiatives, and models for schools and communities.

## Peace Education

Peace education is a process of reducing or eliminating conflicts, disruptions, and violent confrontations in homes, schools, churches, and communities through nonviolent and humane actions. A primary objective of peace education is the creation of caring communities in which people learn and apply the skills needed to live harmoniously. Conflict resolution is an important component of peace education, during which both parties express their points of view, voice their interests, and find mutually acceptable solutions. Conflict-resolution programs teach people new skills that enable them to deal with conflict in nonviolent ways.<sup>10</sup> The skills and strategies of conflict resolution are also the skills of peacemaking and reflect the attributes of the "Prince of Peace."

Conflict resolution and peacemaking can be viewed as responsibilities in creating and maintaining a democratic



society. When children peacefully express their concerns and seek resolutions to problems that take into account common interests, they not only promote the value of human dignity and self-esteem, they also advance democracy.<sup>11</sup>

Four common strategies that can be implemented in the conflict-resolution process are:

- *Peer Mediation.* Specially trained student mediators assist their peers in resolving conflicts, with the goal of reducing the use of traditional disciplinary measures such as suspension, detention, and expulsion, and increasing the use of effective problem-solving techniques. As a result, less teacher-initiated discipline is required, and school climate is enhanced.

- *Process Curriculum.* This approach emphasizes the role of teachers who devote time—whether through a separate course, a distinct curriculum, or a daily lesson—to highlighting the necessary skills and problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. Students, teachers, and administrators are taught appropriate negotiation techniques to achieve goals and resolve disputes.

- *Peaceable Classroom.* This component focuses on integrating conflict resolution into the curriculum and into classroom management. Teachers are shown how to help students practice cooperation, appreciation of diversity, and caring and effective communication.

- *Peaceable School.* This program incorporates the previous three approaches, with the emphasis on creating schools in which appropriate conflict resolution has been adopted by each member of the school community, from the crossing guard to the principal. This creates a climate that challenges youth and adults to believe and act on the conviction that a diverse, nonviolent society is a realistic goal.<sup>12</sup>

The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) has been at the forefront of peace education for many years. Its primary purpose is to promote "the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth, and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level."<sup>13</sup> Schools that embrace this purpose should adhere to the following tenets:



1. Function as “zones of peace,” where children are safe from conflict in the community.

2. Uphold children’s basic rights as enumerated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

3. Develop a climate within the school or other learning environments that models peaceful and rights-respected behavior in the relationships between all members of the school community: teachers, administrators, other staff, parents, and children.

4. Demonstrate the principles of equality and non-discrimination in administrative policies and practices.

5. Draw on the knowledge of peace-building that already exists in the community, including conflict-resolution techniques that are effective, non-violent, and rooted in the local culture.

6. Handle conflicts—whether between children or between children and adults—in a non-violent manner that respects the rights and dignity of all involved.

7. Integrate an understanding on peace, human rights, social justice, and global issues throughout the curriculum whenever possible.

8. Provide a forum for the explicit discussion of the values of peace and social justice.

9. Use teaching and learning methods that promote participation, cooperation, problem-solving, and respect for differences.

10. Allow opportunities for children to practice peacemaking, both in the educational setting and in the wider community.

11. Provide opportunities for continuous reflection by and professional development of all educators in relation to issues of peace, justice, and rights.<sup>14</sup>

The building of human relationships is central to the foundational elements of peace education. At home, in school, and within the community, children and youth are constantly learning about relationships, if not in a measured, thoughtful, and systematic manner, then in a haphazard, careless, and injurious way. The peace curriculum “must teach the children and youth not only the causes of conflict, violence and war, and the ways of preventing and resolving them, but also the dynamics of love, unity, and peace at individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and universal levels.”<sup>15</sup>

### Effective Peace Education Programs

Peaceable classrooms and schools can be created and maintained only if teachers implement sound instructional and classroom-management skills. Teaching becomes ineffective in a chaotic environment, thereby compromising the learn-



ing process. Such environments engender hostility, disrespect, stress, violence, fear, and intimidation. The most effective teachers demonstrate their passion and enthusiasm for their profession by presenting the subject matter in innovative and creative ways, maintaining students’ attention, motivating them toward excellence, and utilizing programs that engender meaningful relational interactions among students and teachers. Such teachers create a learning community in which

each child is accepted, respected, recognized, valued, and loved.

The following four programs have been used successfully to reduce or ameliorate students’ misbehaviors and disruptions, and increase prosocial and interpersonal behaviors: (1) Jacob Kounin’s preventive discipline model; (2) the TAB Project; (3) school-based mentoring; and (4) Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies.

### Preventive Discipline

The Jacob Kounin model of preventive discipline incorporates proactive approaches for managing classroom misbehaviors. It emphasizes preventing disruptions, rather than finding ways to deal with them once they occur. These approaches are:

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1. **With-it-ness**—Teachers communicate by their behavior that they know what the students are doing. Skilled teachers are able to “think on their feet” to prevent or defuse possible problems in the classroom, whereas poorly trained and equipped teachers often make mistakes that lead to disruptions. Examples include waiting too long to respond to misbehavior, thereby allowing a minor problem to escalate into a major one; blaming the wrong individuals for misbehaviors; and shouting or screaming when the situation calls for a more measured response.<sup>16</sup>

2. **Overlapping**—the teacher’s ability to deal with multiple situations concurrently, without breaking the pace of classroom activities. A good example of overlapping occurs when two students are conversing while the teacher is presenting a lesson. Rather than call attention to the students, the teacher

walks slowly toward them, while continuing the presentation. The students will most likely stop talking.<sup>17</sup>

**3. Smoothness and Momentum**—the ability of the teacher to handle transitions in a way that does not interfere with the pace and quality of classroom activities. Classroom discipline problems increase when the teacher begins to wander for no apparent reason, repeats and reviews material that is understood, pauses to think about his or her next move or to prepare materials, or interrupts the lesson to deal with issues that could have been postponed.<sup>18</sup>

**4. The Ripple Effect**—the tendency for the teacher's behavior to affect students toward whom the behavior is not directed.<sup>19</sup> When the teacher corrects one student's misbehavior, this can motivate other students to engage in the desirable behavior.

Successful implementation of Kounin's model of preventive discipline depends on educators' ability to master the science of teaching, which requires advanced training in classroom discipline and management, behavior modification, instructional and methodological processes, theories of learning and motivation, human development, and conflict resolution.

### **The Taming Acting-out Behavior (TAB) Project**

Another preventative discipline program, Taming Acting-out Behavior (TAB), has been very effective in reducing the incidence of misbehaviors in classrooms and schools. This program was created in the early 1990s by Dr. Lenore Brantley, a Seventh-day Adventist educator and licensed counseling clinician, in response to requests from an elementary school principal and a youth service counselor who were concerned about an increase in undesirable behaviors in local schools. The TAB project uses small-group and whole-class interaction to encourage students to solve conflicts peacefully. It uses classroom teachers, along with trained counselors and counselors-in-training, to create opportunities for elementary students to express their concerns, to role-play, and to develop personal methods for problem solving.<sup>20</sup> The program has been successfully implemented in schools in England, the United States, and Jamaica.

The primary objective of the program is to teach children to recognize and understand their emotions, put them into perspective, and deal with them appropriately. Participants learn skills that will make them more successful at home, at school, and in the community. Five behaviors are targeted in the program: (1) put-downs; (2) disruptions; (3) disrespect for teachers; (4) disrespect for property; and (5) lack of cooperation. Lesson plans have been prepared for each of the targeted behaviors. The 30 TAB group sessions run for approximately



10-12 weeks. The teachers employ checklists to measure students' behaviors in the five targeted areas prior to the group activities. At the end of the sessions, the same checklist is used to assess changes in behavior.<sup>21</sup>

The lesson plans in the TAB project handbook can be used in the classroom and in small groups, and are categorized according to grade level (K-3; 4-6; and 7-8). Some of the themes covered are: "Cooperation," "Putdowns," "Teacher Disrespect," "Disruptions," and "Disrespect of Property." These plans can be easily implemented by teachers or counselors.<sup>22</sup>

The TAB project helps elementary and middle school children find acceptable and meaningful ways to work together with teachers and peers.

It provides them with the tools to regulate their feelings through role-playing, mediation, introspection, and self-talking exercises.

### **School-Based Mentoring**

School-based mentoring programs have achieved great success in addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of students who are at serious risk for serious emotional and behavioral disorders. These programs generally have four characteristics:

- Teachers or other school personnel refer students who could benefit from adult friendship and support;
- Mentors commit to meeting with mentees for an hour a week throughout the school year;
- Mentors meet one on one with the students at specific times during the school day.
- While mentors and students may spend some time on school work, they also engage in other activities (such as playing sports and games, exploring the Internet, doing artwork, writing stories, eating lunch together, talking) that helps build a strong relationship.<sup>23</sup>

The primary goal of school-based mentoring is to help students recognize their talents and gifts, enhance their skills, and achieve their potential. These goals can be accomplished by enhancing or improving mentees' (1) academic performance (usually as defined by grades or standardized test scores); (2) feelings of scholastic competence and confidence; (3) relations with peers, teachers, and other school personnel; (4) attendance and classroom participation as well as homework completion; (5) access to other school resources (such as the library or computer lab); and (6) reducing classroom disruptions, fighting, and other negative behavior.<sup>24</sup> The following five stages capture the essence of the mentoring process:

**1. Helping the mentee grow.** During this nurturing process, the mentor establishes himself or herself as a role model.

The mentor talks about his or her values, supporting them with consistent actions; engages the mentee in discussions about right and wrong conduct and attitudes; and motivates the mentee to practice appropriate behaviors. Perhaps the most important achievement of this stage is for the mentor to assist the mentee in making a strong commitment to the future by setting realistic and attainable goals.<sup>25</sup>



**2. Expanding opportunities for the mentee.** During this stage, the mentor reinforces his or her commitment to assist the mentee in accomplishing long-term goals by enlisting the support of significant others in the mentee's environment, i.e., parents, teachers, counselors, community and religious leaders, and other people who can play a significant role in the mentee's development.<sup>26</sup>

**3. Learning together.** The mentor at this stage recognizes that he or she is making a difference in the life of the mentee, and that he or she is also learning and gaining a new perspective on the dynamics of the relationship. The mentor and mentee become partners in the learning process.<sup>27</sup>

**4. Investing in the future of the mentee.** This may involve the mentor sharing his or her knowledge and values in order to cooperatively create opportunities for the mentee's success. Meaningful collaboration and involvement with the mentee's and mentor's families are critical to the success of the mentoring process at this stage.<sup>28</sup> In a Christian school, the mentor and mentee may discuss moral values, pray together, and attend worship or church services together.

**5. Trusting each other.** Trust is extremely important to the success of a mentoring relationship. Gradually, the mentor and mentee negotiate and renegotiate agreements, ground rules, and boundaries. During this phase, the mentor and mentee test and evaluate the strength of their relationship. Mentors say that this stage is when they begin to feel that they and the mentees will be friends forever.<sup>29</sup>

In designing and implementing school-based mentoring programs, planners must consider the following: how students' needs and program goals will be achieved; the criteria and qualifications for those who wish to serve as mentors; the guidelines for referring students who require more specialized interventions, the size and scope of the program, the facilities and services available, the funding needs of the program; the timeline for implementation, the staff members responsible for operating the program, the role of principals and teachers, the various legal and liability issues, evaluation of the program, and the role of parents.<sup>30</sup>

## **PATHS**

"Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies" (PATHS), a school-based intervention developed by Drs. Carol Kusche

and Mark Greenberg, seeks to develop emotional competence in children. This model has been used in schools in the United States, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Great Britain, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Norway. It contains 131 lessons that supplement the regular curriculum, and is divided into three main units:

### **1. Readiness and Self-Control.** This unit is designed

for kindergarteners and 1st graders, as well as for children with communication or developmental delays and/or serious behavior problems. It includes a series of 12 structured lessons (one volume) that focus on the development of self-control.

**2. Feelings and Relationships.** This unit contains 56 lessons (three volumes) that focus on the development of emotional and interpersonal understanding. Students are taught

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to recognize the cues that can help them identify their own feelings, as well as the feelings of others, and how to use this information to make better decisions.

**3. Interpersonal Problem-Solving.** This one-volume unit contains 33 lessons. It is generally used with 3rd or 4th grade. Using this and other previous units, students learn to use the 11 steps to effective problem-solving, including implementation and evaluation of the chosen solution. Students internalize and generalize these strategies to help them acquire skills to solve real-life problems.<sup>31</sup>

Several clinical trials have compared PATHS students to matched control groups. The results indicated that this intervention can significantly increase children's ability to recognize and understand emotions, comprehend social problems, develop effective alternative solutions, and decrease the percentage of aggressive/violent solutions.<sup>32</sup>

## **Implications for Christian Education**

Christian schools are, by design, peaceable. Yet, this does not mean that there is no misbehavior or disruption in the



school environment, although in comparison with public schools, such behavior is relatively rare.

In large part, the reasons for the low incidence of behavioral problems in Christian schools is their commitment to a philosophy that promotes wholistic development, intellectual pursuits, high standards, obedience, self-control, faith, character development, obligations to society and to God, kindness, gentleness, hope, service in this world and for the world to come, prayer, truth, patience, peace, and unconditional love. These core values are important components of the blueprint/model of education that was developed by the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, and teachers must continually seek to integrate them into curricular and extracurricular programs.

However, having a good philosophical foundation is insufficient to stem the tide of wickedness, violence, and immorality that permeates society. The low incidence of violence and serious misbehaviors in Christian schools does not preclude the escalation of such problems. Teachers must continue to refine their classroom management and instructional skills through seminars, workshops, continuing-education projects, research, and writing. They must take the lead in working with principals, educational superintendents, church leaders, parents, students, and community members to establish a culture of peace in schools, churches, and communities. They must also seek to collaborate with other faith-based organizations that are deeply involved in peace activities in schools, homes, and communities. This provides a terrific opportunity for Christian teachers and students to integrate their faith with teaching and learning.

Christian schools must continue to model positive learning practices by (1) nurturing and ensuring environmental safety, (2) developing redemptive disciplinary strategies, and (3) requiring peace-building in-service training for school staff.<sup>33</sup> Peace initiatives during designated periods in the school year can be an effective way to promote activities that reinforce tolerance, respect, kindness, a sense of belonging, and love.

Christ, the Prince of Peace, expects us to demonstrate by creed and deed this important component of His character. Christian educators, in particular, must continually seek His wisdom as they work toward the transformation of learning communities into citadels where faith is strengthened, love is modeled, fellowship is encouraged, tolerance is practiced, and peace is nurtured. ✍



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