

Spirit-Compatible Instruction

Systematic Character Development

Christian schools in general, and Adventist schools in particular, exist to educate young people to be like Jesus, and yet many function as public schools except for the addition of a Bible class once per day. On the other hand schools which know how to really make a difference integrate faith and learning all day, every day, as called for by *Journey to Excellence*. One vital component for doing so is systematic and Spirit-led character development.

To ensure that character development is intentional, it is suggested that teachers brainstorm with other key figures a list of character traits which reflect a relationship with Jesus and the fruit of the Spirit. This list should include attributes such as patience, respect, perseverance, initiative, stewardship, courage, flexibility, organization, sense of humor, self control, punctuality (an indicator of respect), and active listening. The list may include as many as 20-25 character traits which should be simply defined. This list should be posted prominently throughout the school building and in every class where it can be seen and referred to frequently. (See sample “lightskills list” in banner format.)

The identified character traits should be the subject of a year-long bulletin board in each classroom. (A sample is provided.) Each week one of the character traits (sometimes referred to as “lightskills” because they enable students to let their “light” shine”, in the secular world, as “life skills”) and its definition is featured and posted on the bulletin board. Students’ attention is drawn to the trait of the week each morning at worship or class meeting time where they discuss situations which would benefit from the use of the trait, or people they know who are skilled in its use.

Throughout the day students are assisted to think about the application of all of the character traits as opportunities arise. For example, if a teacher observes a student picking up a piece of trash on the playground, the student is affirmed for using the trait of initiative or stewardship of the earth. If a student is not on task, rather than reprimanding him, the teacher simply asks him to describe what it would look like if he were using the trait of responsibility or effort. This requires the young person not only to mentally visualize what he should be doing, but to verbalize it as well. The teacher then simply suggests that he use the trait just described.

A particularly effective way of teaching lightskills to students through about fourth grade is “target talk.” Target talk has three elements: name the student who was observed using a lightskill, name the lightskill, and describe the behavior which modeled the lightskill. It would sound like this: “Katie, I noticed you using the lightskill of perseverance when it would have been easy to give up on completing that math problem.” Another example: “Mark, I see you using the lightskills of organization and punctuality to get to class prepared and on time.” When target talk is used consistently, students as young as kindergarten quickly learn the meanings of complex terms like initiative, integrity and perseverance because they are used in meaningful contexts. This approach is also very proactive and positive as it is used exclusively to identify desired or right behaviors and choices.

When reading literature, current events in the newspaper, or Bible stories, students are asked to think about what traits were used or should have been used and the impact on the outcome. Students may be asked at the beginning of the day to pray, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal one of these areas in which He would like to assist them to grow. They may be asked to self-evaluate periodically throughout the day or at the end of the day. It may be helpful, if appropriate, for teachers to share areas in which *they* have been convicted of the need to grow spiritually. Teachers and students praying for each other is a huge catalyst for the development of spiritual maturity.

When teaching students grades five and up it is helpful to introduce them to the levels or stages of moral development (adapted from Kohlberg; see sample poster). This helps them to understand that we can act from a variety of motives and that motives matter. It is important that students realize that genuine and lasting character development is truly the work of the Holy Spirit and not the result of legalistic thinking.

If a student is experiencing repeated failure in the use of important character traits, it may be useful to have her complete the accompanying “Light-Skill Action Plan” form which facilitates thinking about what went wrong and how it can be remedied. (Three different forms are provided to accommodate a range of developmental levels.) This is a form of discipline which puts the student in charge of finding a solution to his or her inappropriate behaviors, does so in a spiritual context, and is redemptive in nature. The concept that two forces, Christ and Satan, are striving to obtain our allegiance may be further driven home through discussion with the student and prayer asking for forgiveness. Help the student to see that, while other students may have been injured by her actions, additionally she was personally harmed and God was dishonored. Remind students of the unconditional love of God and that it is always His desire to restore them to union with Him.

Implementing a character development approach such as is described above requires of the teacher conscious habit-forming effort. Beautiful bulletin boards will have little or no effect if character development is not continually integrated throughout the school day. On the other hand, teachers enjoy a tremendous sense of satisfaction and partnership with the Holy Spirit when they learn to see, in virtually every behavior, an opportunity to develop Christian character.

Additional valuable resources related to character development can be found at the following websites, though these are not specifically Christian in nature:

www.kovalik.com/,

www.responsiveclassroom.org/

www.charactercenter.com/Adventures.htm#

www.charactereducation.com/

Lightskills List

Let your light shine!

Active Listening

Caring

Common Sense

Cooperation

Courage

Curiosity

Effort

Encouragement

Flexibility

Friendship

Generosity

Grace

Initiative

Integrity
Organization
Patience
Perseverance
Personal Best
Problem Solving
Punctuality
Resourcefulness
Respect
Responsibility
Self-Control
Sense of Humor
Stewardship
Truthfulness

My very best for Jesus!

Adapted from S. Kovalik and Associates

The following pages may be used to create a year-long bulletin board. Each page defines a specific lightskill. It is recommended that one lightskill definition be displayed and focused on each week. The bulletin board might have a heading such as "This Week's Lightskill Focus:"

Light-Skill of Active Listening

To listen, trying to understand
what the speaker needs me to
know

Light-Skill of Caring

To feel and show concern
for others

Light-Skill
of
Common Sense

To use good judgment

Light-Skill of Cooperation

To work together toward a
common goal or purpose

Light-Skill of Courage

To do the right thing even
when I am afraid

Light-Skill of Curiosity

To want to learn more about
my world and the people
and things in it

Light-Skill of Effort

To work hard

Light-Skill of Encouragement

To say and do things that will
build others up

Light-Skill of Flexibility

To be able to change my plans
or thinking if I need to

Light-Skill of Friendship

To make and keep a friend by
trusting and caring

Light-Skill of Generosity

To share my time and resources
with others in need

Light-Skill of Grace

To forgive others or give them what they do not deserve because Jesus has given me what I do not deserve

Light-Skill of Gratitude

To be thankful for what God
and others do for me

Light-Skill of Integrity

To do the right thing even when
I am not being supervised

Light-Skill of Organization

To keep things neat and in order
so I can be more efficient

Light-Skill of Patience

To wait calmly for someone
or something

Light-Skill of Perseverance

To keep working at something
that is hard for me

Light-Skill
of
Personal Best

To do my work neatly and
carefully to the best of
my ability

Light-Skill of Problem Solving

To find answers to difficult
problems or situations

Light-Skill of Punctuality

To plan ahead and act
according to my plan so that
I will be on time

Light-Skill of Resourcefulness

To find and creatively use what
is available to me

Light-Skill of Responsibility

To do what needs to be done
and admit when I have
done wrong

Light-Skill of Self- Control

To responsibly manage my
words and actions

Light-Skill of Sense of Humor

To laugh and be playful
without harming others

Light-Skill
of
Trust in God

To be confident that God
loves me and will take care
of my needs

Light-Skill of Truthfulness

To be honest about things and
feelings with others

Light-Skill of Respect

To be sensitive to the feelings,
needs, and property of others
and to demonstrate concern by
my actions

Light-Skill
of
Stewardship of the Earth

To use the earth's resources
wisely because they are a gift
from God

Light-Skill
of
Stewardship of Time

To use time wisely because it is
a gift from God

Light-Skill of Stewardship of Money

To use money wisely because it
is a gift from God

Stages of Moral Development

I do the right thing:

1. To avoid getting in trouble



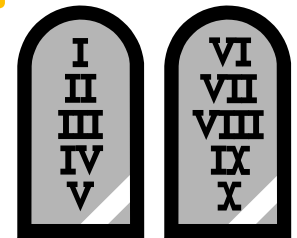
2. To get a reward



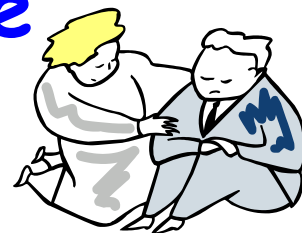
3. To please adults or to gain the approval of peers



4. To follow the rules



5. To be considerate of others



6. Because I have been changed by Jesus' love



Name _____

I did not use the light-skill of _____.

I hurt	To fix it I will

Jesus can help me if I

_____ ●

Name _____

I did not use the light-skill of _____.

I hurt	To fix it I will
I hurt	To fix it I will
I hurt	To fix it I will
I hurt	To fix it I will
I hurt	To fix it I will

Light-Skill Action Plan

Name _____

Date _____

I did not use the light-skill of _____.

Because I did not use this light-skill, the following people were hurt:

To repair the damage I have caused I will _____

I understand that the Holy Spirit can help me prevent the problem in the future if I am willing to listen and cooperate with Him.

- I have asked the Holy Spirit to help me.
- I would like someone to pray with me for the Holy Spirit's help.

student signature

date

Teaching Procedures:

In order to create a smooth-running classroom where students know what is expected of them and can be held accountable for their behavior, it is vital that specific procedures be systematically taught to all students. This is usually done at the beginning of the school year and may take two or more weeks to accomplish. Teachers who hesitate to commit this much time should be assured that the investment will pay richly in time saved throughout the school year.

Teachers generally have a variety of “non-negotiables” in terms of procedures. These should be carefully thought out in advance of the school year and written up in clear steps. When preparing written procedures for early elementary students, it is helpful to illustrate them (see sample). This can be done with clip art or by involving a talented volunteer. Other procedures can be developed as needed, involving students in the process. A procedure should be created any time an activity consistently results in frustration or inefficiency. Written procedures may be placed in plastic sleeves in a binder so that they may be referred to as needed or laminated and held together on a ring with a copy kept in each cooperative group.

Adults often assume that students have certain knowledge and behaviors which they may not actually have; therefore, once procedures have been written up, students must be systematically instructed in their use. This often requires modeling and role playing until all students understand what is expected and realize that nothing less will be accepted.

All procedural instruction should be done in a positive tone, and students should be affirmed whenever they are complying. When one or more students are observed not following a previously taught procedure, it is helpful to simply stop the activity and say, “I notice we are not following our procedure. Is there someone who knows what we need to do differently?” or “I notice we are not following the procedure. Who will get the procedure manual so we can review it?” Then allow students to practice what has just been described. Whenever a relapse occurs, students should be stopped and the procedure reviewed again. If one particular student persists in non-compliance, s/he should be dealt with individually (see Light-Skill Action Plan).

It is common at certain points in the school year for teachers to realize that they have gradually relaxed oversight of procedures and that the classroom is becoming increasingly chaotic. At this point the solution is to share this observation with students, review procedures and consistently communicate their importance.

A list of procedures to be created for the beginning of the school year follows. It is helpful to find creative, fun ways to provide instruction in these.

- Arrival (where personal belongings go, greeting adults and peers)
- Morning routine
- Introductions (etiquette and firm handshake)
- How to carry chairs safely
- Coming to circle
- Prayer
- Bathroom
- Hand-washing
- Compliments
- Water bottle
- Snack
- Lining up
- Walking in the hall
- Laps
- “Circling Up” (a procedure for getting kids gathered quickly when at recess or p.e.)
- Kinds of voices (thinking voice, partner voice, cooperative group voice, etc)

- Lunch
- Lunch clean-up
- Peace table (see description which follows)
- “Escape Place” (sometimes referred to as “Australia”; see description which follows)
- “Finished early” (what activities are appropriate when finished early with assignments)
- Procedures for use of any classroom materials (paper, scissors, crayons/markers, pencils, stapler, pencil sharpener, etc.)
- Rest time (kindergarten)
- Playground
- Fire drill
- Dismissal

Arrival Procedure

1. Neatly hang coat on coat hook.



2. Place backpack and lunch bag in cubby.



3. Greet your teacher.



4. Read the morning message.



5. Greet at least 3 friends.



6. Read and follow morning procedure.



Escape Place/Australia

At various points in our lives negative circumstances converge to stress or overwhelm. This is true for children as well as adults. Both experience and brain research reveal that it is nearly impossible to learn when distressed. Resolving a student's anguish is critical in order to facilitate his/her learning; therefore, it is recommended that a small area of the classroom be set aside as an "escape place". This should be a pleasant and comfortable area where a student may choose to go to get refocused.

Teachers, perhaps in consultation with their students, should use creativity to design the "escape place". It may be decorated with a theme, and should include comfortable seating. Other meaningful features might include calming music played through headphones, a framed picture of Jesus, stress balls, a portable "waterfall", a small fish tank with fish, a stuffed animal or pillows. It may be helpful to include a timer which would be used to help students monitor the amount of time spent there. The "escape place" should be located so as to provide as much privacy as possible while keeping the student within the teacher's view.

Elementary teachers may introduce the "escape place" by reading the book, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst. The book tells the story of a young boy who is experiencing one problem after another and, after each negative event, says that he is going to run away to Australia. For this reason, some teachers refer to the "escape place" as "Australia".

Procedures need to be clearly established and taught with regard to this area of the room and should include when it is appropriate to use it and how long a student may stay there, as well as how other students should relate to someone who goes there. When procedures have been clearly taught in a classroom characterized by respect, it is unusual for students to abuse the privilege. If it is felt that the area is being overused by a particular student, the teacher should try to understand the reasons behind the behavior and determine if it is appropriate to limit the number of visits to the area.

Under no circumstances should the "escape place" be used in a punitive way or as a "time out" location. To do so would undermine its purpose.

Resolution Station/Peace Table

Conflict between students is inevitable, but students can learn to resolve conflict in a manner that is consistent with Scripture and which helps to maintain a peaceful classroom. A “resolution station” or “peace table” procedure can be tremendously useful in accomplishing this goal.

The “resolution station” should be a small table or desk out of the direct view of most of the class but within the teacher’s view. There should be a small object such as a paper weight or large button kept on the table. This is used to indicate whose turn it is to talk. Students should be able to sit across from each other. Some teachers include a small white flag which a student may wave to indicate that adult help is needed to resolve the conflict.

For primary students the procedure for using the resolution station is scripted, and students must be taught the following dialogue or one which is similar. Modeling and role playing work well to accomplish this task.

When one student is offended or angry at another student, s/he should request that the other student go to the table with her/him. When both are seated, the script goes as follows:

Offended: (Picks up the paper weight or other object on the table) I felt (angry, sad, hurt) when you _____. (Passes the paper weight to the offender)
Offender: I’m sorry that I _____. Will you forgive me? (Passes the paper weight to the offended)
Offended: Yes, I will. (Passes the paper weight back to the offender)
Offender: Can we still be friends? (Passes the paper weight back to the offended)
Offended: Yes.
Offender initiates a handshake.

While the procedure sounds a bit trite when described as above, it somehow has tremendous power to resolve conflict if teachers require its use consistently and refuse to solve students’ problems for them. Role playing should be used, giving as many students as possible the opportunity to practice and memorize the script. Young students will enjoy the role playing which should begin between the teacher and a student until it is felt that two students are ready to demonstrate it well. It is helpful to introduce and teach it one day and then review and continue role playing the next.

Eventually a real conflict will arise between students. Depending on the seriousness of the conflict, it may be appropriate to ask the students involved for special permission for the class to observe since it is the first “real” use of the procedure. Requests for privacy should be respected, but often students will appreciate the opportunity to be “experts,” and this will help to hold them accountable for using the procedure well. If privacy is preferred, the class should provide it, but the teacher must be in the immediate area to ensure that the guidelines are followed. This supervision should be gradually faded as students become skilled at the procedure and recognize its power to resolve conflict. Students should be reminded of any steps they forget and affirmed for what they do well.

Disputes often occur over who will talk first. This is solved by establishing that the person who issued the request to go to the table is the first person to talk. An additional advantage of this rule is that it motivates students to initiate use of the procedure.

Occasionally a student will be taken to the table but will have a frame of mind which is not conducive to conflict resolution. This is often evident from body language such as folded arms, a frowning face, and a refusal to talk or make eye contact. A student in this state should not be allowed to hold the other “hostage,” so the teacher may simply say to the offended individual (in the hearing of the offender), “_____ is not quite ready to resolve the conflict now, so why don’t you go back to your work, and she will let you know when she is ready.” Meanwhile, the offender stays at the table.

Some conflicts involve several students. When this occurs, students should identify whom they have issues with and go to the table in various pair combinations until all are satisfied. This may require some teacher intervention.

Older students do not need to use such a rigidly scripted approach. Teaching the use of “I statements” will enable them to use their own language. It is, however, important that all students state specifically what they are sorry for. It is too easy to simply say, “I’m sorry”.

Some offenses are too great to be adequately resolved using only the “resolution station”. In such cases, the teacher may require, or the offended student may request, an “act of apology”. This may include some sort of restitution if property was damaged, a carefully crafted letter or card, or a friendship gesture which clearly communicates remorse. The offender may be isolated, if necessary, for the time it takes him/her to prepare the act of apology.

A key to ensuring the success of the “resolution station” is for the teacher to develop the habit of requiring students to take responsibility for resolving their own conflicts. When a student complains about an injustice, an effective response is, “And how would you like to take care of that?” This communicates the expectation that students will resolve their own issues rather than turning them over to an adult. If they say they don’t know, respond with, “Well, if that had been done to me I would take the person to the ‘resolution station’ to work it out.” Some individuals are highly averse to confrontation and will be disinclined to use the procedure, in which case, it is wise to support them in learning this important skill. The teacher could partner with the student in a role play to rehearse what she or he will say to the actual offender. This provides an opportunity to teach the young person to make eye contact and share feelings with greater confidence.

While the process initially requires a significant investment of time and energy, it pays big dividends throughout the rest of the year as students begin to solve their problems with minimal teacher involvement. Students should be assisted to understand that this procedure is Biblical and that many problems between adults would be prevented if they had learned how to use such a plan rather than “stuffing” their feelings or sharing the problem with people not involved.

Additional effective conflict resolution strategies and lesson plans with a Christian perspective are available on the web from Peacemaker Ministries at http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.aqKFLTOBIpH/b.958199/k.AFBE/Young_Peacemaker.htm.