

Institute For Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**CONVEYING CHRIST IN THE CLASSROOM:
TEACHERS' ATTITUDES
AND BEHAVIOR**

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Prepared for the
International Faith and Learning Seminar
held at
Spicer Memorial College
Pune, India - November 3-15, 1996

**272-96 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

INTRODUCTION

Classroom teachers are either consciously or subconsciously influenced by the culture, traditions, and practices of the places where they teach. Sire says, “What we do and what our society does affects who we are and what we think.”¹ Adventist teachers are not free from these influences. Native culture and traditions often are so ingrained that teachers not only refuse to change but strongly resist any proposed change connected to teacher’s attitudes toward teacher-student relationships in the classroom. People are servants to native culture and practices. Hence Plato advised to flee from the oppression of practice.²

One teacher once said to me, “I keep religion distinctly separate from my class room. The class room is for knowledge and not for religion.” This teacher’s view indicates a lack of belief in educational goals which includes not only the epistemological areas but also the metaphysical and axiological areas.

Education means more than knowledge and facts. The goal of education is to assist students to prepare for actual life and motivate them to become lifetime learners.³ Education means a vision, mission, philosophy, and habits. Education is not limited to the four walls of a classroom. “Adventist vision assumes that the teacher has a philosophy of education that is universal in breadth. . . . The teacher’s philosophy recognizes God as the all-knowing, all-wise, all powerful.”⁴

It is faith, world view, and beliefs that engender philosophy and values. Philosophy and values interact with one another and thus produce attitudes. These attitudes are the foundations for behavior and relationship between a teacher and students in a classroom. (See figure 1 on page 2)

Faith, world view, and beliefs influence teachers’ philosophy and values. It is the attitudes that will influence teacher’s behavior and language in a class room. Shahnaz Kibriya reminisces about her school days in a convent and writes, “Even today if I close my eyes I can have a vivid imagination of the whole picture . . . the affection of the teachers will always remain evergreen in my memory. These memories create such emotions in me that even at this age, I wish I could go back to those days.”⁵

What a silent witness the convent teachers bore to this student. It was the teachers’ faith, world-view, and beliefs that affected their values and philosophy which in turn influenced their attitudes and their behavior in the classroom.

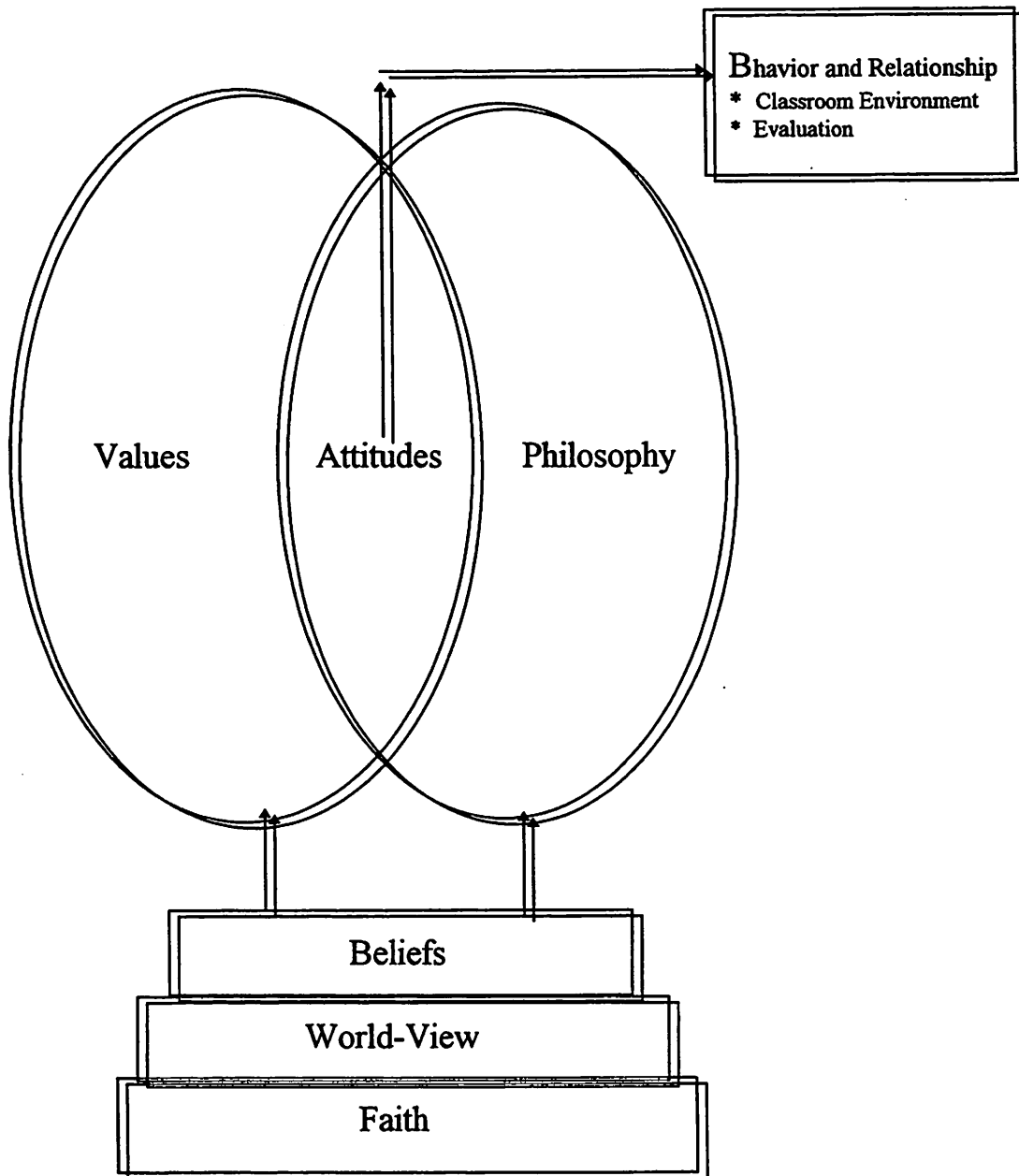


Figure 1

Faith is the foundation of a teacher's world view. The world view engenders beliefs. Beliefs in turn influence a person's philosophy and values. Philosophy and values interact with each other and yield the observable attitudes. Attitudes in turn affect teacher's behavior and relationship with students in the classroom.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Why is the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church spending millions of dollars annually to support more than 5000 schools, colleges, and universities when less costly or free government education is available? There are other pressing needs in the Church. How can the Church justify its investment?

One of the objectives of SDA educational institutions is to witness for Christ. Therefore, this study is designed to discuss the ways one can convey Christ in a classroom. The study is delimited to (1) conveying Jesus by teacher's attitudes toward students and (2) conveying Jesus by teacher's behavior and relationship in the classroom.

The purposes guiding the study are (1) to establish the importance of integrating faith and learning in the classroom situation, (2) to emphasize the role of a teacher in conveying Jesus to students in the classroom verbally and nonverbally, and (3) to emphasize the importance of instilling the Seventh-day Adventist values in the minds of students.

CONVEYING JESUS BY TEACHER'S ATTITUDES TOWARD STUDENTS

The discussion dwells on positive attitudes which enable teachers to share Jesus with students in the classroom. An attitude is defined as being the mental make up of a person which exerts a specific control over an individual's actions and conducts toward other people, objects, and situations.⁶ An attitude is composed of the thinking process, emotions, and actions. Attitudes and actions are twin sisters. One affects the other like the body and the mind. It is because "attitudes are intrinsic parts of a persons' [obvious] personality."⁷ Attitudes are mental and covert while actions are overt and apparent. Hence Holms says, "The most important single factor in the teacher is the attitude. . ."⁸

The attitude of a person, however, is dependent upon the philosophy and values of a particular individual. A philosophy is defined as being "the critical evaluation of all the facts of experience."⁹ Philosophy is a system of beliefs. Value is defined as being "ideals, standards, moral code, and code of ethics."¹⁰ Something of value to a society or a person may not be of value to another society or a person. For example, more than one wife at the same time is not acceptable code of ethics to a Christian society while there are societies which allow more than one wife at the same time. Hence faith, world view, and beliefs are very important for developing philosophy and

values. Interaction of philosophy and values are critical for attitudes. Attitudes are deciding factors for outward actions which we normally call behavior. The paradigm below explains this idea.

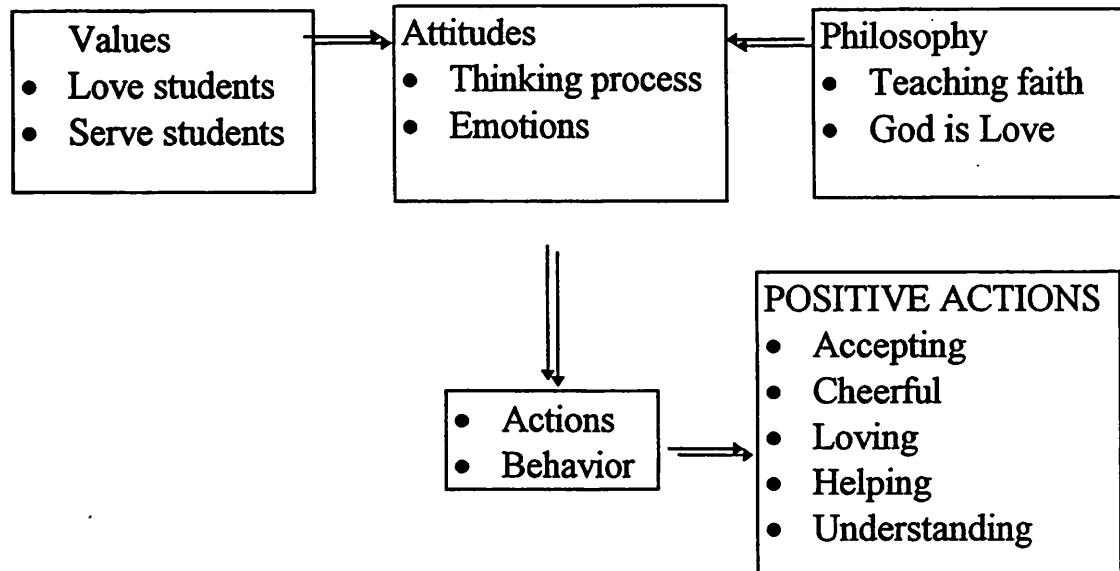


Figure 2

Values are critically evaluated by philosophy one holds before framing a mental attitude. Mental attitudes exert strong influence on how a teacher acts or behaves toward a student. A positive attitudes express itself in an action that is accepting students as they are, being cheerful, loving, helping, and understanding. Caring or accepting, cheerful, loving, helping, and understanding attitudes will nonverbally convey Jesus in a classroom.

An Accepting Attitude

It was Christ's acceptance of the adulterous woman that won her for God. When the Samaritan woman, a lifetime prostitute, came to Jacob's well Jesus did not neglect her. Jesus did not judge her social status or her character but sought the opportunity to transform her character. As a result Jesus did win her for God. It was Jesus' attitude of acceptance that transformed people. With Jesus, there was no partiality, no differences in social status or position, and no discrimination. Every one was equal. A teacher's work is similar to that of Jesus.

An accepting attitude may be defined as the willingness of a teacher to accept students with their weaknesses and strengths. An attitude of

acceptance is nothing but a teacher's willingness to assist students in their struggle with class work. Acceptance is patiently teaching students when they do not understand the subject matter. Acceptance means neither being irritated nor uttering discouraging words that will demoralize a student. An accepting attitude is continually supporting students to keep working hard at their school work. It is being "flexible enough for the young people to come and receive help and support"¹¹ when they need it.

Acceptance means building a close relationship with students. Jesus walked and mingled as one with his disciples. "He [Jesus] gave the advantage of His own companionship. Through personal association He impressed Himself upon these chosen collaborators."¹² By accepting students who need love and care, teachers can unconsciously witness for Christ in a classroom.

A Cheerful Attitude

A cheerful attitude is a mental make up that can help witness for Jesus. Cheerfulness, like a contagious disease, spreads from one person to another. A cheerful atmosphere in a classroom serves as a catalyst to relax students and thus prepare them for lessons.

Cheerful attitude is a biblical injunction. Cheerfulness is a value that a teacher wants to impart to students. Only by modeling a cheerful attitude a teacher may communicate this value. A sunny and high-spirited appearance of a teacher inspires students. A teacher may tell decent and acceptable (not silly) jokes in the classroom. Being acceptably humorous can lighten a heavy, gloomy, dismal situation.

Many a time outside concerns adversely affect a teacher's lively and meaningful presentations. No outside anxiety should be brought to the classroom. A depressed looking appearance has a negative influence on learning. A teacher's dress, countenance, words, and actions need to communicate optimistic, lively, cheery, gay, sparkling, and sunny messages. A cheerful attitude shall draw students close to the teacher and may want to know what makes the teacher different. That will open up an opportunity to convey Jesus to students.

One who truly believes in Christ is ever happy and satisfied. The disciples and apostles are proof of this. Paul and Silas sang when they were in a prison. It is not the position that makes one happy but it is one's disposition that makes him happy. Cheerfulness, unselfishness, and gratitude are the marvelous life-giving power and teachers are to show these qualities in their life.¹³ Cheerfulness is one of the ways teachers can convey Christ to their students.

A Loving Attitude

Another way to witness for Jesus is by showing a loving attitude. Nothing is a substitute for a loving attitude. In Bangladesh there are two opposing schools of thought. Should teachers show love or censure when their students make mistakes? Generally, in Bangladesh, discipline means physical punishment. Discipline has never been considered as disciplining. Teachers forget that they can censure erring students with love. Small acts of love is as aromatic as flowers and it binds hearts together. Love and kindness will achieve more than censure. Consideration for others is true and enduring education which broadens the sympathies and encourages universal kindness.¹⁴

Love that fastens is the bedrock of genuine scholarship; rudeness that hurts is greatly harmful to the process of a learning atmosphere.¹⁵ Being kind and loving is a value that Jesus upheld. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love" (John 15:9). Ability can not take the place of love. Love is more essential in the classroom than the work of teaching and learning itself.¹⁶

Love means doing something for a person which he does not deserve. It is putting a hand on the shoulder of a student when he commits mistake and saying, "My child, I forgive. Do not repeat it again. Next time you will have to bear the consequences of your own behavior. You should take responsibility for your own deeds."

Love means playing with students. It is showing a trust and confidence in them. It is displaying genuine interest in students. It is modeling to them the love of God. It is leading them step by step to the loving, caring, kind, and all embracing God—the creator, sustainer and the provider. The kind and loving attitude is assisting students through their difficulties rather than criticizing and mocking them or being harsh or rough to them.

Love and kindness is realizing that students "need the personal sharing of ourselves in their lives to help them understand their choices."¹⁷ Love resists condemning students because they did not come up to the teacher's ideal. It is not criticizing "others, conjecturing as to their motives, and passing judgment upon them."¹⁸

A Helping Attitude

A helping attitude is a value. Teachers can silently witness for Jesus by being helpful. The world is self-centered. People know only self, not others. In this world of selfishness, teachers may witness to their students by being

selfless and helpful to them. Students will see the difference and will have confidence in teachers. Teachers do not have to tell about their God. Students will search for the teachers' God. Like Philip, the students will say, "shew us the Father" (John 14:8).

Jesus wanted to instill in the mind of the disciples the helping attitude when he said, "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (Matt. 5:41). "Christ was an example to all the human family, He was . . . helpful in the home."¹⁹

A helping attitude means diligently assisting students who are slow learners. A helping attitude is talking to parents about the student's progression and recession in studies. It means guiding a student and counseling him/her from time to time. A helping attitude is showing interest in the student; asking the student, "what can I do for you." A helping attitude is being a friend to a student. A helping attitude means leading students to see the importance of honoring God by wearing a neat, healthful, appropriate and becoming dress.²⁰ A helping attitude is persuading students to obey classroom and school rules. Instead of being irritated or offended when students do not meet expectations, teachers help students to meet the expectations of the school and the teacher.

An Understanding Attitude

An understanding attitude is another value that will help us witness in a classroom. An understanding attitude means being sympathetic with those students who are weak in study. It is being compassionate, appreciative, sensitive and perceptive to the needs of a student. How is the attitude of understanding communicated to students? Understanding is communicated by not getting provoked, not thinking evil, but bearing and enduring all things (1 Cor. 13). Showing an understanding attitude to a student means "concentration for worthy ends"²¹ not on corrupt and deceitful things. It is showing interest in a person, not only on what is taught.

One way to share Jesus with students is teachers' understanding attitudes. Students will wonder what makes teachers what they are. Students will desire this value of teachers. It is a silent witness for Christ without verbally referring to His name.

CONVEYING JESUS BY A TEACHER'S BEHAVIOR AND RELATIONSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM

Behavior is composed of different overt actions of a person. Behavior reveals a person's intrinsic philosophy, values, attitudes, and habits. Behavior also has a reference to a person's attitudes and how one acts, reacts, works, and responds to different situations, people, objects, and things.²² Behavior in this paper is defined as **what a person does in a certain situation**. A person's behavior reveals what he truly is. People observe every individual. This is why Paul said, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

How a teacher behaves and relates in the classroom conveys Jesus to students. Teacher's behavior and his/her relationship with students impacts the learning situation in the classroom. Therefore, a teacher needs to consider his behavior and relationship with students to positively influence for Jesus. Because behavior and relationship is exhibited in the classroom, this section covers (1) classroom environment, and (2) student evaluation—testing and grading. Please see Figure 3.

Classroom Environment

The classroom environment created by classroom management reveals a person's philosophy and values. God is a God of order not of disorder. "Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). The neatness and tidiness of a classroom reveals a person's esthetic value. An unorganized and messy classroom does not witness for the Lord. A positive and appealing classroom environment does create the environment for learning.

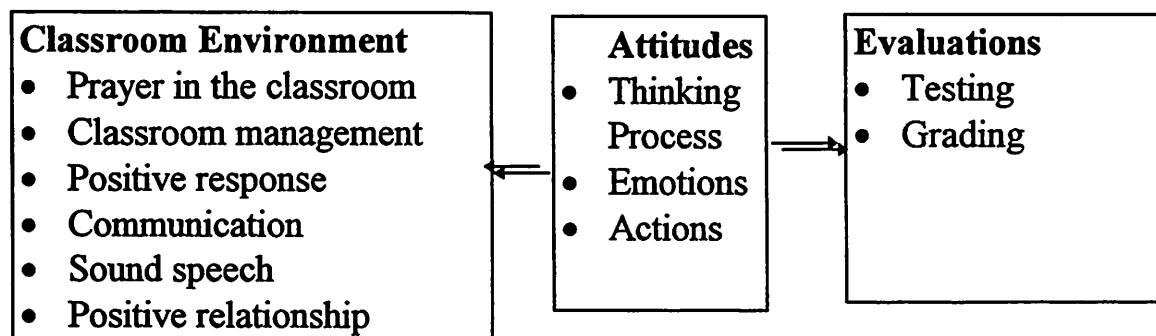


Figure 3

It is the attitude that influences classroom environment and the evaluation procedures in the classroom. Thus behavior and relationship, the fruit of attitudes, affect classroom environment and student evaluation.

The question is, what type of classroom environment will reveal God's love for students? There are two traditional ways of managing classrooms — reward and punishment. People are moving away from the tradition— reward and punishment, because it leaves students at the bottom-most rung of development. Authoritarian and coercive approaches may be used to manage the classroom but this destroys self-discipline and responsibility.²³

One purpose of classroom management is “to instill an intrinsic motivation to do the right thing, so students will behave in a socially responsible way because they want to—not out of fear.”²⁴ Involving students in making rules for classroom management intrinsically motivates them to own those rules. Students value and own those rules which they made. Let students also decide the commensurate consequences for breaching rules and regulations. When rules and consequences are determined together with students, the teacher needs to be consistent in always following them through.²⁵ However, while disciplining one need not to break the will but shape the will. “To direct the child's development without hindering it [the will] by undue control should be the study of both parent and teacher. Too much management is as bad as too little. The effort to ‘break the will’ is a terrible mistake.”²⁶

The discussion on the classroom environment covers (1) prayer in the classroom, (2) classroom management, (3) positive response to problem-creators, (4) communication, (5) sound speech, and (6) positive relationship with students.

Prayer in the classroom. Prayer in the classroom is a witness to students about God in whom teachers believe. Prayer is a value that teachers want to impart to their students. Experienced, educated, and mature persons need to show God's love toward students by exemplifying it in the classroom. Students need to hear of the benefits received from prayers. So mention some of the benefits received through prayers. Prayer is a silent witness to those students who do not believe in God. Prayer is a fortress against unbelief.

However, the question is, what kind of prayer should a teacher offer? Should a prayer be a prayer of wishes, thanks, praise, or requests? Prayer may include all, some, or one of these categories. A teacher needs to watch that prayers do not become mere forms but have a meaning to students. A teacher may ask students if they have prayer requests or anything they want

to praise God for. The teacher may mention incidences of direct answers to prayer and then pray a prayer of thanks and praise.

When should a prayer be offered? Should the prayer be offered in the beginning of the class, at the end of the class, at the middle of the class, or once in whole day? At times, I feel prayer is an unwanted element in the classroom and yet must be offered. I appreciate one AIIAS professor's way of prayer in the class. He reads a text at the beginning of the class. Then briefly and appropriately he comments on the text and prays. This professor always inspired me.

There need not be any fixed time for prayer. Students may hate prayer if and when it becomes a mere form and routine without meaning. The objective of prayer in the class is to inspire students to love and believe in prayer. Prayer may be offered anytime during the class. We do not have to close our eyes and fold our hands to pray. After presenting certain facts, a teacher may ask students, "should we not thank God for this knowledge?" Then wait for student response. This is how a teacher can practice his faith in the classroom situation.

Classroom management. Should a teacher's management in the classroom be inflexible or flexible, free or regimented, conventional or progressive, student-centered or teacher-centered, conservative or liberal, authoritarian or permissive?

The Christ-centered classroom management is none of the above mentioned styles but a servant-leadership management style in the classroom. Servant-leadership behavior is outlined in Matthew 20:27-28. It says, "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." This is the service-oriented or servant-leadership behavior. Servant-leadership classroom management means student-centered management. Servant-leadership behavior means not lording "over God's heritage and command everything around them."²⁷ Servant-leadership classroom management creates respect for the teacher, students, and for the school. When the teacher is Christ-centered teacher, rules and regulations and administration of those rules reflect the servant-leadership management styles in the classroom. The servant-leadership management in the classroom creates the environment for concentration and learning.

Positive response to problem-creators. Positive responses towards problem-creators reveal teacher's inner values originated from genuine love for God. It is easy to love the lovable but what about the unlovable? White writes, "Let the teacher remember that it is the most unfortunate, those who

have a disagreeable temperament, who are rough, stubborn, sullen, that most need love, compassion, and help. Those who most try our patience most need our love.”²⁸

Teachers sometimes say that students should be treated as they deserve. This attitude is normal and natural to humanity. What would happen to the humanity if Christ treated as the human race deserved? The very existence would be no where. All would be dead “for the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

One student hurt a teacher. The discipline committee met to decide what could be done to the student. The hurt teacher’s emotions were very much affected. That was normal. He was not an angel or a supernatural being. The demand of the teacher and some of the committee members was that the discipline should be commensurate to the seriousness of the act the student performed. The discipline committee decided to expel the student since this was the highest penalty considered by the institution. However, the affected teacher and some of the committee members were not happy with only expulsion. In addition to expulsion they wanted to apply the rule of Moses—“eye for eye and tooth for tooth.” The boy must be physically hurt and be given a minimum of 10 lashes. The disciplinary committee had to inflict the boy with 10 lashes to satisfy the group.

Feelings, emotions, reputations, and anger get on the way to silent witnessing. When a teacher becomes interested in the salvation of students, the teacher “ceases to mind the little differences that so often arise in association with one another.”²⁹

How important it is to respond positively to those students who create problems for teachers in order to rightly reflect what Christ did on the cross. Jesus forgave the thief on the cross and prayed to the Father to forgive the crucifiers. Jesus is the teachers’ model and teachers need to follow His example. One way to convey Jesus is to live the life that forgets self, considers others and controls the irritability.

Communication. “Communicate to students that their ideas and feelings are understood and accepted.”³⁰ One of my daughters once asked me a startling question. “Daddy, what has happened to you? Why are you different from what you have been before?” I was embarrassed by the question. I realized that I was nonverbally communicating a different lifestyle to my children than they expected from me. Similarly, students watch teachers. Teachers constantly communicate verbally and nonverbally. These communication may be positive or negative.

Communication demands active listening. Christ-centered behavior includes active listening. Active listening minimizes many problems in the classroom. Active listening helps teachers to discover the ownership of the problem and help students with problems. Only when teachers listen actively can they be sensitive to the needs of students.

Respecting students and being sensitive to their needs. Christ-centered behavior in a classroom includes being sensitive and sympathetic to the needs of a student. Respecting “the opinions of others [students] as worthy of respect”³¹ is important to teach this value. Respect begets respect. Respecting students’ opinions will increase students’ respect for the teacher. Therefore, a wise teacher will reason with students instead of imposing opinions on them. Give them alternatives to choose from and bear the consequences of their own behavior. Was not God using this method when he said, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God” (Deut. 11:26-28). If teachers want to teach self-discipline, independence, and responsibility, they will lead students step by step to shape the will rather than breaking it.

Sound speech. A teacher’s language in the classroom is very crucial in conveying Jesus to students. Thus, Paul advises Titus, “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: . . . sound speech, that cannot be condemned . . .” (Titus 2:1,8). The wise man, Solomon said, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21).

The teacher’s language can lead students either to death or life. Paul further said to Titus, “In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works [language]; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility” (Titus 2:7). White says, “God’s word condemns also the use of those meaningless phrases and expletives that border on profanity. It condemns the deceptive compliments, the evasions of truth, the exaggerations, the misrepresentations in trade, that are current in society and in the business world.”³² Jesus said, “Let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one” (Matt. 5:37).

Positive relationship with students. A good teacher-student relationship helps students to learn better. When the relationship between a teacher and a student is positive there is less erosion and loss in learning. A good teacher-student relationship is crucial for a positive influence on students in character development. Shahnaz Kibriya regrets that the teacher-student relationship in English Medium Schools in Bangladesh is

deteriorating. The attitudes of teachers toward students have changed. Teachers seldom care about their attitudes toward students, and their words and behavior with pupils.³³

Because a positive relationship is lacking, the teachers' positive influence on students is minimized. Therefore, crucial to conveying Jesus in a classroom is a pleasant and a cordial teacher-student relationship. Gordon and Burch say:

The quality of the teacher-learner relationship is crucial if teachers are to be effective in teaching anything—any kind of subject matter, any 'content,' any skills, any values or beliefs. Latin, Greek, history, math, English composition, literature, mechanical drawing, or chemistry—all can be made interesting and exciting to young people by a teacher who has learned how to create a relationship with students in which the needs of the teacher are respected by the students and the needs of the students are respected by the teacher.³⁴

Good relationship includes considering students as friends. A good teacher-student relationship proves the charitable and genuine interest of the teacher in students. A good teacher-student relationship helps students over the rough places and wins them to Jesus. God values such relationship.³⁵

Student Evaluation

Student evaluation is important. Evaluation shows where one stands as a teacher and a student in terms of expectations in the realm of teaching and learning situation. Student evaluation means teacher evaluation. If students fail, teachers fail. Students fail because teachers failed to make them understand what they taught or teachers failed to motivate students to learn the desired information.

Testing Students. The purpose of testing and measurement is to evaluate students' learning of the materials taught according to the objectives set at the beginning of the school session. If the materials taught are learned then the teacher has achieved the goals. If that is the case, then, examinations can be based on the objectives and let students know that questions will be made according to the objectives. That will inspire them to read the materials they need to master.

Examinations should be "fun," positive, and pleasant not a trying occasion. Ellen White writes, "The examinations also are a trying ordeal for pupils . . . Many a promising student has suffered severe illness, perhaps

death, as the result of the effort and excitement of such occasions. Parents and teachers should be on their guard against these dangers.”³⁶

The purpose of questions should be to make students interpretative, critical, and creative thinkers. There is no reason for deceptiveness in making the examination questions. The purpose is not to fail or fool students by tricky questions but to motivate students to learn. Questions need to be clear, concise, and understandable.

Grading. A teacher should have written criteria for grading tests and examinations. These criteria should be clearly explained to students. Students should be able to say teachers have been just with them. Tests and evaluation methods should reveal God’s love and care for students and not distort God’s love. Salvation is for all who are willing to accept Christ’s offer of grace. Teachers may show same grace to students who are slow learners. Teachers may let failing students rewrite examinations so that they may also pass. Teachers may assign projects to those students who failed the examination, then guide and help the students to complete the project so that they may learn how to write a project paper. This will mean an extra work for a teacher. Such an attitude of teacher will silently witness for Jesus.

CONCLUSION

“By every teacher in our schools the only true God is to be uplifted, . . . If this had always been done, students lost to the cause of God would now be missionaries.”³⁷ A successful teacher functions as a coach who ignites interest, instructs, helps, corrects, and inspires. A successful teacher does not exhibit power. A successful teacher works to improve each student. A successful teacher avoids discriminations, biases, and factions but deals with all fairly and equally. A successful teacher suppresses his own ego and gives credit where credit is due. A successful teacher advocates personal and corporate growth.³⁸

When the values of a teacher and that of a student collide in a classroom, teacher’s patience, and understanding attitudes help students see the superiority of teacher’s values. Students compare between their values and teacher’s values and thus choose the better one. Joshua let the children of Israel choose between two values when he said, “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). Joshua

was kind, caring, loving, understanding, and tactful with the people. "No man or woman is fitted for the work of teaching who is fretful, impatient, arbitrary, or dictatorial."³⁹

A teacher's silent witness in a classroom is based on behavior and relationship with students which are the fruits of attitudes as shaped by the interaction between values and philosophy. A teacher's philosophy and values, on the other hand, are the results of faith, world-view and beliefs which are generated from cultures and traditions of the society where a teacher lives.

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