

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**TEACHING THROUGH EXAMPLE:
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Preliminaries

An approach to a topic like this should start with a few basic assumptions:

1. The setting is one of Christian education. The perspective is that of a teacher in a religious school. Therefore, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy will constitute the *deontological*¹ basis for shaping the discussion.
2. We need to recognize that the teacher and the teaching belong together. Their impact on students is worth studying.
3. The importance of the teacher in the teaching process seems never to be exhausted.

The main objectives of the research are:

1. To discover the tremendous importance and power of example in teaching;
2. To encourage teachers in mirroring with a growing clarity the supreme example of the great Teacher;
3. To motivate teachers to fertilize their influence and performances by integrating personal faith and teaching.

CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS: PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE

1. Terminology and definition

The main biblical terms for “example” are *τυπος* – *a die, a stamp or a scar, a shape, a statue, style or resemblance; a sampler, a model; instance, example, fashion, figure, form, manner, pattern, print; υποδειγμα* – *an exhibit for imitation or warning, specimen, adumbration, example, pattern; παραδειγματιζω* – *to show alongside, to expose to infamy, to make a public example, to put to an open shame; and δειγμα* – *a specimen (as shown), example.*²

In the context of our discussion, the term *example* could take on a composite meaning. *Δειγμα* means *model, pattern or a type* of something or Someone. *Υποδειγμα*, adds the idea of *resemblance*, looking both backwards and forwards: the teacher should be both a resemblance of someone else, and a

¹ A set of revealed criteria for moral judgments and decisions.

² James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville, TE: Crusade Bible Publishers), entries 5179, 5262, 3856 and 1164.

model for his or her³ students. This meaning is further enhanced by the concept of an *exhibit for imitation*. The dynamic connotation is that both teachers and students have to imitate a higher model, that of Christ. In this process, the teacher holds a mediator⁴ role. Further, παραδειγματιζω adds an extra dimension to the meaning of *example*. This is conveyed by the idea of *exposure*, even to the point of shame. That means *openness* with the risk of vulnerability, as well as openness for *the continual improving* of the resemblance. By way of definition, we could affirm that in the context of Christian education, the teacher is the medium through which Christ is shown to students, being a continually improving model set for imitation, in order to make a more definite impact in shaping their lives, attitudes, world-views and behavior.

2. Importance

One way to discover the importance of example in teaching comes from the perspective of *cognitive*, *affective* and *behavioral* categories. In recent years, the sciences of pedagogy have stressed increasingly the primacy of the *affective* dimension in teaching.⁵ The *cognitive* has its definite significance in the process, but the relational approach constitutes the main motivational factor in successful teaching. "Cognitive and affective growth merges together," says Blair.⁶ The affective however holds the key role in shaping behavior. Decisions are based on the affections of the heart, not on the dictates of the mind. People generally do what they *please*, even if it is wrong, rather than doing what they *know* is right.

A second way which shows the significance of example in teaching comes from the realm of communication. Specialists in the field, affirm that *the non-verbal message is much more powerful than the verbal one*. They say the non-verbal message represents up to 93% of the whole message, and it is made up by the tone of voice (39%) and the body language (54%). That leaves only 7% to be conveyed by verbal communication. The implication is simple: *the way* one speaks, not necessarily *what* he speaks, *the way* one behaves, not primarily what one teaches; those are the most powerful tools in communicating efficiently. Actually, one needs to use *all* three avenues for transmitting a full message, for a total impact. In the context of our discussion, the non-verbal message is covered by one's example.

A third way in unfolding the importance of example in teaching lies in the area of *informative* and *formative*. If we think of teaching primarily as

³ For the sake of simplicity, we will use in this research the masculine pronoun, to refer to both genders.

⁴ Not to be confused with the *soteriological* role of Christ. Rather, the teacher stands as a representative of God for students, in the same way as parents do for their children, up to a certain age.

⁵ Filip Stanciu, "Lectures in Psychology" (Bucharest: Theological Adventist Seminary, 1995).

⁶ Timothy R. Blair, *Emerging Patterns of Teaching: From Methods to Field Experiences* (Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company, 1988), p. 20.

communicating information, says Richards,⁷ it is natural and appropriate to conceive of a teacher as one who knows. But if teaching means much more than that, then the teacher's life-style, his example, is also meaningful. The *informative* side of teaching has to do with the transmission of social experience and cultural values, issues contained in the formal curriculum, but the *formative* side of it deals rather with the "reproductive, evaluative and creative attitudes".⁸ All those dimensions are to be found in the hidden curriculum. The axiological aspect of education has to do with promoting the values of truth, goodness and beauty. It is formative of attitudes, motivations, world views, spirit of co-operation, etc. As Paul exhorts his Christian followers, the Philippians, "whatever is noble ... whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable..." (chapter 4,8).⁹ Things like *true, noble, pure*, cannot be learned from books or courses. They are transmitted from person to person, and develop under the influence of example. "Whatever you learned, or received, or heard from me, or seen *in me* – put it into practice." (verse 9, emphasis supplied).

A fourth way to elicit the importance of example in teaching derives from the *modeling* versus *indoctrination* model. God's discipling method is modeling, rather than indoctrination, says Richards.¹⁰ If the teacher would have to do only with conveying knowledge, transmission of doctrine would suffice. For that end, books or the media would do the necessary job. Christian education however is concerned with much more. It has to do with shaping the whole person, his ideals, attitudes, and so on, and to that end one needs a model. This model is given first-hand in the parent, then in the Christian teacher. Motivation and attitudes are rather "caught" than "taught," from those with whom one feels a strong emotional bond.¹¹ One's influence should be not only intellectual, but personal and emotional as well.¹² *Walking together* and *discipleship* are the biblical concepts for modeling in the context of a relationship. If in the formal curriculum teachers give *knowledge* or *information*, through example, they give *themselves*. *Fellowship, empathy, sharing* and *sacrifice* are a few other concepts defining Christian education. The example of Christ is the fullest demonstration of the formative power one's shared life given in sacrifice is able to attain.

3. Characteristics

A good example is indispensable, because we shape world-views, inculcate motivation, mold Christian minds and characters, and form attitudes. All those dimensions cannot be successfully transmitted by precept only.

⁷ Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), p. 80.

⁸ Ana Gugiuman, etc., *Introducere în cercetarea pedagogică* (Chişinău: Editura Tehnică, 1993), p. 18.

⁹ All biblical quotations are from the *New International Version*.

¹⁰ Richards, p. 81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹² Blair, p. 1.

Students want to probe the results, to taste the fruit of the formal curriculum in the life of their educators.

Another reason why a good example is indispensable, has to do with the source of Christian education. Because Christian teaching is rooted in theology, not in behavioral sciences,¹³ it has to reflect the way God acted in human history. The Word was given not only in written form, but it became incarnate. It did not become doctrine, nor even theology, but flesh and blood. This was the highest manifestation of God's revelation to humanity. By His life, Christ became the perfect example for all people. That is why Paul urges his fellow Christians to be *living epistles*, written in flesh and blood by the Spirit of God. Paraphrasing the well known observation – the only Bible read by people today is the life of the believers” – we may affirm, that the only textbooks students study with the most interest, are the lives of their teachers.

The example constitutes a *proof*, or a *demonstration* for the validity of words used in teaching. “Nothing is more confusing for a teenager than inconsistency about moral and spiritual values highly esteemed by teachers but not lived by them. We need consistency! We have the responsibility to teach them our own convictions, not of others.”¹⁴ We cannot teach successfully what we do not live. How can a teacher “enjoin these necessary acquirements upon the class unless they have an example of punctuality, of neatness, composure, and order?”¹⁵

The example is almost *irresistible*. Bandura, Hoffman, Sears, Freud, McDonald, Walters, etc., have shown that observation of others does have a powerful impact on behavior.¹⁶ Actually, “the teacher may teach a little by what he says; he teaches more by what he *does*, but most by what he *is*.”¹⁷ The power of example cannot be emphasized enough. Christ had a contagious effect upon the people he taught, especially upon his disciples. Their impact on others was striking after having been with Him. People were wondering about the way they acted, and perceived that they were with Jesus. Both the disciples and those who followed their example were ready to give up even their lives for what they believed, and for Whom they trusted.

Speaking from a biblical perspective, Ellen White has a clear understanding about the *power* of example. A few references unfold its dynamics:

¹³ Richards, p. 81.

¹⁴ Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Teenager* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), pp. 105. 106.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Sabbath School Workers* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1938), p. 92.

¹⁶ Richards, p. 82.

¹⁷ C. B. Eavey, quoted in Harry B. Lowe, *Handbook for Sabbath School Teachers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), p. 11.

Divine truth exerts little influence upon the world, when it should exert much influence through our practice. The mere profession of religion abounds, but it has little weight. We may claim to be followers of Christ, we may claim to believe every truth in the Word of God; but this will do our neighbor no good unless our belief is carried into our daily life. Our profession may be as high as heaven, but it will save neither ourselves nor our fellow men unless we are Christians. *A right example will do more to benefit the world than all the profession.*¹⁸

In obeying the Savior's injunction, our *example will preach louder than words*. The highest display of the power of truth is seen when those who profess to believe it, give evidence of their faith by their works.¹⁹

The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is *the most convincing sermon that can be given in favor of Christianity*. Argument, even when unanswerable, may provoke only opposition; but a *godly example has a power that it is impossible wholly to resist.*²⁰

The power of a new life is compared in the Bible to *leaven, salt, and light* – some of the most powerful natural agents – as illustrations of Christian influence. By his traits of character, the teacher “is writing upon souls lessons that will be carried all through life.”²¹

Another characteristic of example is that of *wholeness*. Precept and example belong together, forming a unity, and they should be therefore integrated. The two are inseparably connected. Ellen White understood the composite nature of teaching when she wrote: “The teachers in our schools have a heavy responsibility to bear. They must be in words and character what they wish their students to become, men and women that fear God and work righteousness.”²² And again, “The teacher can gain the respect of his pupils in no other way than by revealing in his own character the principles which he seeks to teach them.”²³

One of the most startling demonstrations of the unity of word and deed is seen in the meaning of the Hebrew root דבר (*dbr*), when describing the activity of the Creator. The meaning of this verb carries both the idea of *saying* and *doing*. God's words have a perfect covering in His deeds. “For he spoke, and it come to be; he commanded and it stood firm.” (Psalms 33,9). Likewise, in Christian teaching word and deed must complement each other, and constitute a coherent whole. Without the right example, the whole Christian teaching will be not more than” a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lesson* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1941), p. 383, emphasis supplied.

¹⁹ Idem, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1940), p. 41, emphasis supplied.

²⁰ Idem, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 510, emphases supplied.

²¹ Idem, *Counsels to Parents, Teacher and Editors* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), p. 233.

²² Idem, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), pp. 47. 48.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

Moreover, the example takes *precedence* over academic activity. In Christian education, observes Andreassen, “the teacher, not the subject, plays the crucial role”, and he continues: “The quality of the Adventist college will be no better or worse than the quality of its teachers.”²⁴ Paul instructs his disciple Timothy by saying, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:16). Commenting on this text, Ellen White says: “‘Thyself’ needs the first attention... A godly example will tell more for the truth than the greatest eloquence, unaccompanied by a well-ordered life... ‘Take heed,’ first to yourself, and then to doctrine.”²⁵

Because of the tremendous importance and power of example, it is obvious that faith plays the primary role in teaching. “The habits and principles of a teacher should be considered of even greater importance than his literary qualifications.”²⁶ “Let the teachers lead the way in working among people, and others, uniting with them, will learn from their example. One example is worth more than many precepts.”²⁷ “*A pure life, the result of sound principles and right habits, should therefore be regarded as his [the teacher’s] most essential qualification.*”²⁸

4. Biblical examples

God teaches through precept and example. His “invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made”, that is, by natural revelation (Romans 1:19, 20). A greater revelation came later through the written Word, and finally all that was crowned in the life and teachings of Christ, the special and final revelation. All that God wanted mortals to know and see, was manifested in the Baby born in Bethlehem.

Christ also taught by precept and example. He was the embodiment of all that He taught. The parable about the two sons, reminds us of what it means to say and to do. Neither of them did the right thing. Instead, the third Son enters the picture, in telling this parable. He Himself was the perfect example of identity between words and deeds. He promised to do the will of God (Psalms 40:8), and He meant it, doing it thoroughly, “completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4), and praying: I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (chapter 13:15). In Christ’s life, instruction and example combined perfectly and became a sacrament!

²⁴ Niels-Erik Andreassen, “The Christian College Teacher,” *The Journal of Adventist Education*, No 56:4, p. 12.

²⁵ White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), pp. 104. 105.

²⁶ Idem, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TE: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), p. 19.

²⁷ Idem, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), p. 149.

²⁸ Idem, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 31, emphases supplied.

The life of Christ was even more powerful than his words, because He lived what He taught to others. There was no inconsistency between what He said and what He did. This must ever be an example of the...teacher. 'The teacher says it,' or 'The teacher does it,' is to the child an all-sufficient reason for action. The teacher, therefore, must lead the way toward the right standards, which he desires his pupils to reach. He must live the teaching.²⁹

The twelve disciples were with Jesus in the house, at the table, in the closet, in the field, by the mountain side, by the sea, walking, traveling and working together, sharing trials and hardships. "For them, the mission of Christ finally accomplished its purpose. Little by little His example and His lessons of self-abnegation molded their characters."³⁰

The Bible also teaches through precept and example! The Scriptures were given for our admonition, and almost all that was written is conveyed by means of stories about people. The main characters of the Old and New Testament were meant to be types or representatives of Christ. The Scriptures do not retain so much of their teachings as their examples. There lies the personal dimension of truth. "Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" – not of writings, or doctrines, or theories – but of examples! says Paul, "let us run with the perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

We should remember Moses, who was powerful in words and *deeds* (Hebrew 7:22), or Ezra, who "had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching" (chapter 7:10). Observance comes before teaching! Or we may take the case of the prophets. For those associated with the schools of the prophets, like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, teaching and life were interwoven. The "instructors were not only versed in divine truth, but had themselves enjoyed communication with God, and had received the special endowment of His Spirit."³¹ Their life was the embodiment of the truth they transmitted to students and people alike.

As for the writing prophets, although their words are mainly reported, what impresses us more are the characters behind the writings. Consider the case of Hosea. His whole life was an enactment of his message, an incarnation of God's unfailing love for His rebellious people. His example converged perfectly with the lessons he had to illustrate. The prophet's words were powerful because of his life, and his life was above reproach. This was true not only of Hosea, but generally of all the other prophets.

We could also take the case of Paul. He "carried with him the influence of his union with Christ. The fact that his own life exemplified the truth he

²⁹ General Conference, Sabbath School Department (*Teaching Teachers to Teach*, Nashville, TE: Southern Publishing Assn., 1949), p. 53.

³⁰ White, *Education*, pp. 93. 94.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

proclaimed, gave convincing power to his preaching. Here lies the power of truth."³² That is why Paul could say: "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1). "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on... forgetting what is behind and straining." (Philippians 3:12,13). Later, Paul instructs his disciple Timothy, to "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (verse 12).

5. Effects and risks

First, the example has a *tremendous influence* on students. Within the formal schooling system, the teacher is the most influential educational professional in terms of impact upon maturing young people, where adult and child worlds meet.³³ If the teacher is "the very personification of the truths which he teaches" his students "will accord him a *reverence* that will awe him, and they will *love* him because they are persuaded that this affection is genuine."³⁴ Teachers should take into consideration the *imitative faculty* of the students. They are quick to imitate what they behold in others, particularly in those who impress them. In this way, "the class becomes a *living mirror* in which the teacher may see himself reflected."³⁵ Having all these, he "will start off with the great advantage of a favorable impression on the pupils."³⁶

Second, the teacher's private life gives *authority* to his teaching.³⁷ If his authority is recognized and respected, it will lead to preventive classroom management.³⁸ It is always easier to prevent than to cure.

Third, each example will *sow for a harvest*, be it good or bad. By his example the teacher is writing upon souls lesson that will be carried all through life.³⁹ If the lessons are worthy, they will be carried through eternity as well. One's unconscious influence and example can be multiplied over hundreds and thousands.

Fourth, example will help students to *shape* their *world-views* much more readily. A Christian educator teaches more than a body of knowledge or a set of skills. He conveys a mode of relationship between the knower and the known, a way of being in the world. This way stays on with the students long after the

³² White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 510, 511.

³³ George Knight, *Philosophy and Education* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), p. 189.

³⁴ GC, *Teaching Teachers*, p. 51, emphases supplied.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53, emphasis supplied.

³⁶ Lowe, *Handbook*, p. 28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32, emphasis supplied.

³⁸ Blair, p. 40.

³⁹ White, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 233.

facts have faded from their minds.⁴⁰ The impression of a good example is permanent.

When there is disagreement between instruction and example, the results are devastating.

First, the development of Christian character in students is hindered. "The keen, active minds of the youth are quick to detect every defect of character, and they will copy defects far more readily than they will the graces of the Holy Spirit."⁴¹

Second, students become confused and feel betrayed, instead of being secure and cared for.

Third, Christian teachers can easily become partisans of the enemy and cause souls to be lost. "Those who profess to be Christians... and do not imitate the... Pattern, place themselves in the enemy's rank... Others take them as example, and by following them lose heaven."⁴²

Fourth, education becomes an empty enterprise. "Truth that it is not lived, that it is not imparted, loses its life giving power, its healing virtue. Its blessing can be retained only as it is shared."⁴³

Fifth, if the teacher has not learned his lessons from Jesus for the purpose of bringing those fully into his life, he cannot teach successfully.⁴⁴

Sixth, if teaching has no covering in the teacher's life, the very *raison d'être* of an Adventist school is undermined, and its mission remains unfulfilled.

APPLIED ASPECTS OF TEACHING THROUGH EXAMPLE

1. The perfect and imperfect example

A composite picture of Christ's life shows Him as the perfect example for a Christian teacher. The gospel of Luke, chapter 4, verse 32 affirms that people were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with power. Even His enemies recognized that "never man spoke like this Man" (John 7:46). As He "went out doing good" (Acts 10:38) every day's experience was an outpouring of

⁴⁰ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), p. 30.

⁴¹ White, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 232.

⁴² Idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), vol. 1, p. 276.

⁴³ Idem, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 184.

His life."⁴⁵ In Christ's life, word and deed, teaching and example were thoroughly interwoven. What He taught, He lived. "I have given you an example," He said to the disciples; "that you should do as I have done" ... Thus in His life, Christ's words had perfect illustration and support. Moreover, what He taught, He was. "His words were the expressions, not only of His own life experience, but also of His own character. Not only did He teach the truth, but also He was the truth. It was this that gave His teaching power."⁴⁶ "He who had stood in the councils of the Most High, who had dwelt in the innermost sanctuary of the Eternal, was the One chosen to reveal *in person* to humanity the knowledge of God."⁴⁷
Knowledge in person, what an idea!

Irrespective of how much a Christian teacher reflects the perfect Example, he is only human, and can never equal it. At his best, he is mirroring to a certain extent the Model, seeing "but a poor reflection as in a mirror" in a clouded, imperfect way, (1 Corinthians 13,12). He changes from glory to glory through a continual process. His whole life on earth will be marked by this progression. That means that at every step, he will remain imperfect. Like in sanctification, one is continually growing. If this is his lot, how can a Christian teacher teach through example without being himself perfect?

2. Learning from the Master Teacher

The gospel of Luke, chapter 6, verse 40, states that "a student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Here are a few suggestions of how to become like the Great Teacher.

Togetherness with Him. The people sensed that the disciples *walked together with Christ*. "A fundamental tenet of both psychology and sociology is that humankind is created for relationships, and in word and in deed, every teacher should represent the Master Teacher in his everyday life."⁴⁸ Growth takes place only in union with Christ. "It is only life that can beget life. He alone has life who is connected with the source of life, and only such can be a channel of light."⁴⁹

Continual growth. A Christian teacher must ever improve his life. Those who would be qualified to mold the character of the youth, must be learners in the school of Christ. There is time and space to grow for a whole life, and students will sense this. Unfortunately, they will detect burnout as well. "Every teacher should be a *daily learner* in the school of Christ, lest he lose the sense of what constitutes true physical, mental and moral *excellence*."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ White, *Education*, p. 80.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78. 79, emphases supplied.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73, emphasis supplied.

⁴⁸ GC, *Teaching Teachers*, p. 52.

⁴⁹ White, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Idem, *Fundamentals*, p. 525, emphases supplied.

Sharing experience and knowledge. “No one should place himself as a teacher of others who is not *constantly* working out his own salvation by *receiving and imparting* an all-round education.”⁵¹ Although a Christian teacher cannot be perfect in absolute sense, he who walks together with Christ will experience growth naturally and, imparting his life and experience with others (students and colleagues), he may be considered perfect at every stage of growth, in the same way as in sanctification.

3. Teaching while growing

It is not easy to grow, but it is even more difficult to initiate growth in others. How can a Christian teacher help students to grow?

One secret is to be found in growing together *in Christ*. For this end the teacher should *identify* himself with the student. One learns his likeness through seeing that likeness lived in others with whom he identifies.⁵² Identification with the students can take the form of *empathy*, of entering ones feelings and thoughts. An understanding of how students feel and think will help the teacher to identify with them, and to help them overcome the hindrances in growing.

Another secret of helping students to grow, has to do with the Christian teacher as a perpetual *learner*. Students need to detect the learner within the teacher. Teachers and students must grow together in knowledge and experience. Thus, growth is both easier and more enriching.

Yet another secret of fostering growth in students is to *point to the Christ* outside from the Christ inside. No one is fitted to teach the great mysteries of godliness till Christ is *formed within*, the hope of glory.⁵³ With his own heart warmed by the love of God, the Christian teacher will constantly uplift the Man of Calvary. Imbued with the Spirit of God, he will seek to fasten the attention of the students upon the heavenly Pattern.

Teaching through example carries a heavy responsibility. Os Guinness affirms that “knowledge is so tied to ethics that on the most important issues of life, knowing the good and doing the good are one and the same.”⁵⁴ This leads to the responsibility of knowledge.

⁵¹ White, *Fundamentals*, p. 525, emphasis supplied.

⁵² Richards, p. 84.

⁵³ White, *Fundamentals*, p. 525.

⁵⁴ James, W. Shire, *Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), p. 97.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A TEACHER THAT HAVE THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The purpose of this chapter is not to come up with a new list of traits or standards a teacher should attain in order to be successful. It is rather an attempt to see in a fresh way the irreducible characteristics needed for an Adventist teacher. To this end, a brainstorming through ideas various authors propose will be followed by a quick look to Ellen White's insights. Then the results of one survey in a local Adventist school will be added, and finally a biblical case study will crown the effort to establish the essential characteristics for teaching through example.

1. Brainstorming through various authors' proposals

The personal characteristics of a successful teacher as seen by various authors can be grouped in the following categories for the sake of simplicity:

Character: personal, saving relationship with Christ; harmony with the revealed will of God; born-again, consecrated member of the church; person of unquestionable loyalties, firm for principles; reverence for the sacred; his behavior reflects Christian ideals; consecration, devotion like eating and sleeping; genuine and sincere; patient and persistent.

Personality: warm and friendly, attractive; cheerful, has a sense of humor; alert, has an infectious enthusiasm, stimulating, encouraging; reasonably at peace with himself, emotionally stable and mature, self-forgetful; vulnerable – doesn't seem to be afraid of making mistakes; organized, likes life.

Social: sociable, interested in student's activities outside school, listens to the students, understanding, seeing things as students do; enjoys other people, praises or encourages, genuinely loves students, treats them with fairness and respect, allows them to feel at home in the classroom, communicating concern for, and knowing them both personally and academically, and communicating this interest to them; accepts feelings and helps to deal with them; finds alternatives to punishment, encourages autonomy, frees children from playing roles; democratic, tolerant and helpful in his relations with the students; understands the problems most often met by them in their work; provides for interaction and communication among group members, likes and respects students; develops team efficacy, and collegiality.

Academic: genuine interest for students – interested in the students not only in the subject; assumes personal responsibility for their progress, believes in their ability to grow; provides opportunities for students to learn both necessary content and inquiry abilities; praises, inspires students to think for themselves and to express their own ideas sincerely; leads his students to take responsibility and checks their progress; co-operative – accepts or uses

student's contributions, draws ideas from them; makes learning more like fun than work; often asks the students what they think about a new project, etc., and likes to give a choice of how to do the assignment; original, talks less and does more; provides differentiated instruction to meet the varied needs of all students; firm when needed, flexible when appropriate – why not try your way? Impartial; creative, imaginative, asks questions; knows subject well; high degree of effort and commitment, dedication; continues to be a learner and refines professional skills; enjoys and views teaching as the art of loving God's children.

2. The Christian teacher in Ellen White's writings

The essential traits of a Christian teacher as seen by Ellen White⁵⁵ include the following: man of God; divine empowerment, integrity, humility, reverence, inspiration, empathy, love for students, spirit of sacrifice, dignity, cheerfulness, enthusiasm, simplicity, willingness to learn (from others), and continual learner.

3. Survey from an Adventist school

A survey conducted in the Romanian Adventist Theological Seminary reveals the following areas of essential qualifications for an Adventist teacher:

1. Spiritual – 37%
2. Professional – 34%
3. Relational – 19%
4. Personal – 9%

As for the qualities wanted in teachers, the following were listed in the order given below:

1. *Spirituality* – first place, with 41%
2. *Competence* – second or third place, with 61%
3. *Dedication, understanding, or nearness* – second to fifth place, each with 23%
4. *Punctuality, openness, common sense and integrity* – on the next place, each from 12% to 10%

Thus, *spirituality, competence and relational abilities* are the top three qualities looked for in Adventist teachers.

4. Elisha: a biblical case study

First of all, Elisha was a *man of God*. That implies almost everything in mirroring the Christian character! It has to do with the “fruit” not the “fruits” of the Spirit (Galatians 5,22. 23). He valued spiritual things above everything else, desiring a double measure of Elisha's spirit. If God would give all teachers a

⁵⁵ In her works cited in bibliography.

double portion of that spirit, would they know how to use it? We could say that spirituality is first and foremost among the characteristics students would like to admire in a Christian teacher. His occupations and preoccupations give an insight into his spirituality, which in turn constitutes the edge of his effectiveness.

Second, Elisha was a *visionary*. He saw the unseen world. He lived having his thoughts fixed on the heavenly things, without dreaming or walking with his head in the sky! The unseen world was as real and as near for him as the physical one. To teach through example, one *must have, and transmit such a vision!*

Third, Elisha was *people oriented*. People of all classes, from kings and generals to women and students, came to him with their various problems. He never felt that he was too busy. He had time for people. His ministry was one of healing and solving people's manifold domestic and spiritual needs. A Christian teacher should focus on *people* rather than on *goals* or *problems*.

Fourth, Elisha had a high sense of the *practical*. He understood something about farming, tilling, building, traveling, children education, economy, house keeping, counseling, cooking, management, fishing, and so on. He never excused himself that this or that did not belong to his department. To be loved by students, a Christian teacher must prepare to be as helpful as possible in every field, and have down-to-earth pragmatism.

Conclusions

Teaching through example is the better part of Christian education and Adventist mission. The way a teacher plays the mediator role between the learner and the subject to be learned, conveys both "an *epistemology* and *ethic* to the student, both an approach to knowing and an approach to living."⁵⁶ Applying an important principle highlighted in Sabbath School teaching, we may affirm that Christian teaching is *some of what the teacher does and much of what the Holy Spirit does*.⁵⁷ A godly example should be considered *a gift, a miracle of God* in the life of the teacher. The work of the Spirit manifested primarily in the teacher's character and life, and secondarily in his actual teachings, is what education through example is all about.

While even a perfect example cannot always guarantee superlative results,⁵⁸ teaching separated from example will surely result in confusion and disaster. A negative influence, rooted in a blameworthy example will contradict

⁵⁶ Palmer, p. 29, emphases supplied.

⁵⁷ Donna Habenicht and Anne Bell, *How to Teach Children in Sabbath School* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1983), p. 16.

⁵⁸ See the case of Jesus; one should consider the freedom of will, and other factors as well.

all the high profession of faith, bewildering and frustrating the sincere student seeking for heavenly light. Souls will be lost because of the lack of a positive example. Adversely, "when every teacher shall forget self, and feel deep interest in the success and prosperity of his pupils, realizing that they are God's property, and that he must render an account for his influence upon their minds and characters, then we shall have a school in which angels will love to linger."

The irreducible personal qualifications of an Adventist teacher should always start and end with relational dimensions: unreserved dedication to God and unreserved dedication to the formation of young people. In between comes dedication to one's vocation, according to one's potential to serve. This dynamic capacity is continually growing by using it to the glory of God.

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