

## **HELPING STUDENTS TO ATTAIN SELF-CONTROL: THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER**

Paul Buschenhofen

### **Abstract**

The Christian educator teaching in a Christian school has the goals of reconciling fallen individuals to God and one another and restoring the image of God in them (Knight, 1998:229). These goals have profound implications for how these educators view their students, their own roles and the curriculum they teach. Furthermore, central to this issue is the need for their students to attain the self-discipline and self-control they need to consciously choose the path of uniting their will with the will of their Saviour. This self-control cannot be obtained merely in response to the word or will of their teacher. It is only by teachers modelling, selecting and emphasising Bible-based techniques and Christian values within the totality of their relationship with their students, that they can best help them in developing the Christ-like character traits of responsibility and self-discipline.

An important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between teachers discipline techniques and student responsibility and self-discipline, is the research of Ramon Lewis. Lewis found that more responsible classes are associated with teachers who are less abusive and punishment oriented, while teachers who use more punishment, more aggressive techniques such as yelling in anger and class detentions, promote more misbehaviour and less responsibility in their students. The findings of related research studies are compatible with those of Ramon Lewis.

...These research outcomes find their ultimate meaning in the example of Jesus, the Master Teacher, who, by building caring relationships with His students , helped them discover both their personal needs and that better way which can only be gained through self-discipline and responsibility based on an internalisation of the principles, relationships and values of a God of love.

The Christian teacher is in the fortunate position of being able to draw on the resources of current research as well as the exemplary teaching style of

Jesus, in developing his / her own techniques to assist students in the vital goal of attaining a lifestyle (both inside and outside the classroom) of responsible action and self-control.

## **Introduction**

From the apprehensive and fearful student teacher entering the classroom for the first time in the unaccustomed role as facilitator, rather than as recipient, of learning, to the confident, and perhaps somewhat jaded, experienced educator, the inculcation of self-control in the students under their care has always been a goal of the highest priority. There is not a teacher in the world who does not believe that students who are able to exercise self-control will not only learn more effectively, but will also exhibit a character trait that will play a major role in their future happiness and success. Teacher education programmes reflect this need, while education departmental and institutional policies lay down guidelines and procedures which attempt to maximize the development of a climate in the classrooms under their jurisdiction that facilitate the attainment of self-control and a sense of responsibility in the characters of their students.

But something has gone wrong. Many of us would concur with Holmes (1987: 4) that we face a generation of students for whom much in life has lost its meaning, for whom morality has lost its moorings, for whom education has lost its attraction. School for many of these students has become a prison: a place where they don't want to be, where they are sentenced to twelve years of -- in their perception -- irrelevant, boring and hard labour, and from which they emerge disillusioned, discouraged and unprepared to face the world and its pressures. Is it any wonder, then, that, in spite of all the personal and institutional good will in the world, there has been a marked deterioration in students' values and classroom behaviour (Lickona, 1996, Bennett, 1998; Houston, 1998)? And an increasing number of newspaper articles reporting and sensationalising student violence in schools are grist for the mill of public perception that discipline and responsibility in the classroom are continuing to deteriorate. As a consequence, the teaching profession is becoming a less and less popular option for young job

seekers, while many old hands at the teaching game suffer from burnout and heightened levels of stress.

However, it need not be so. Barry and King (1998: 425, 426) tell the true story of a young Australian student teacher who, in spite of not having completed her teacher training, took a break from study and travelled to the United Kingdom. After some weeks she ran out of money, so she approached the local education authority for any form of teaching work. After an interview the student teacher was placed in a class that had had four teachers in six weeks. In spite of her initial misgivings, the student teacher took the class and over a period of weeks she was able to improve the classroom situation beyond all expectations. The so-called tough kids from a tough London area were now learning within a learning climate that was positive, within which the students exercised self-control, and that was conducive to good learning. Both the education authority and the school administration were laudatory in their evaluation of this young teacher, and begged her to stay. However, she decided to return to Australia to complete her teaching degree.

### **Caring vs Controlling Approaches to Teaching**

So, what made the difference between this student teacher joining her disillusioned classroom teacher predecessors and sticking it out to make a positive difference in the classroom? According to Barry and King (1998: 571) it was the fact that she had adopted all the rudiments of a caring approach to management.

In elucidating on the caring approach to management, Barry and King contrast this approach to the controlling approach (1998: 569, 570), an approach that has its roots in Skinner's (1968) behaviour modification approaches, and more recent variations such as Canter and Canter's (1992) assertive discipline approach. These approaches emphasise teacher control in the establishment of most, if not all, aspects of the learning environment, including helping students to attain self-control and a sense of responsibility. Such teacher control includes:

- ◆ the use of rewards
- ◆ a belief that compliance is more valuable than initiative

- ◆ an imposing of teacher requirements for order without taking much account of what students need for learning
- ◆ discipline being mandated rather than developed

Obedience, according to the advocates of the controlling approach, is a vital component within this approach, as it engenders efficiency in classroom functioning and provides boundaries for student behaviour. Associated with this belief is the expectation that students will eventually internalise the teacher control toward forms of self-control. However, in a classroom climate where adversarial relationships usually prevail between teachers and students, the outcomes are much more likely to be blind obedience, regimentation in thinking, and coercion.

Furthermore, there is also a kind of paradox inherent in such a school situation. For example, as educators we need to ask ourselves, how can contemporary curriculum directions that emphasise problem-solving, critical thinking, student-centred learning and self-regulated learning, be implemented in classrooms where the management system is characterised by compliance, obedience and student discipline that involves the providing of rewards and consequences to students. The discomfort that such a misalliance between instructional expectations and requirements for teachers, and the ongoing management practices for students in so many classrooms, has created, would, Barry and King argue, call for a reappraisal of a non-controlling, caring approach to classroom management, an approach that has at its heart the ideas of caring, self-discipline, democracy and empowerment. The essence in such a caring approach is the promotion of responsibility, rather than the promotion of obedience. Students take on significant responsibility for the operation of a classroom if they are involved directly in the management processes necessary for creating a warm, caring learning environment. At the same time, students are helped to develop their own self-control and self-discipline, which lead to responsible action both within and outside the classroom.

The major focus of such a caring approach appears to be the positive teaching stance and attitude adopted by teachers toward their students. Barry and King (1998: 570) cite Noddings (1992) who, in concurring with Fenstermacher s (2001) view that teachers need to provide an

appropriate model for their students, emphasises the fact that students will respond in like kind to their teachers who see their students as unique, competent, loving and caring human beings. Clearly, the quality of the interpersonal relationship between teachers and their students is of crucial importance here.

When students recognise that their teachers care about them, take time with them, laugh with them, value them and enhance their self-worth, then the quality of this relationship will be conducive to a caring approach to classroom management that will result in the students learning to act responsibly and with self-control as they share and participate with their teachers, in the aim of achieving their goals.

### **The Responsibility of Christian Teachers**

If instilling self-control within students in a secular education system serves the purely temporal purposes of preparing them to become good citizens (Rothstein, 2000: 419), the Christian educator teaching in a Christian school has the more far-reaching goals of reconciling fallen individuals to God and one another and restoring the image of God in them (Knight, 1998: 229). Fundamental to the restoration of the image of God in their students is the realization by their teacher that people are not merely automatons whose actions are determined purely by their genetic makeup and environmental stimuli, but are human beings who have been offered the gift of the Holy Spirit who is willing to help them displace their negative natural tendencies with Christ-like characters. The means to this end, then, is for the teacher to impose Christian discipline, not in the form of externally imposed control, but in the form of leading the students to the place where they can make their own decisions without continually being coaxed, directed, and/or forced by a powerful authority, the aim of which is, self-control rather than control by others (Knight, 1998: 230). This, according to Holmes (1987: 16), is a sacred trust which teachers, if they are serious about educating the whole person and encouraging disciplined learning and the quest for excellence, must not abrogate.

What kind of discipline strategies, then, are at the teacher's disposal which would lead students to exercise the self-control which will enable

them to think reflectively and to make meaningful choices with regard to their own development of a Christian character? I would like to introduce two lines of thought at this stage which may enable us to glean at least a glimmer of a solution to this important question: the research of Ramon Lewis and the example of Jesus.

### **The Research of Ramon Lewis (Lewis, 2004)**

Ramon Lewis is an Associate Professor at Australia's La Trobe University School of Educational Studies. For over 20 years, Dr. Lewis has specialised in the area of classroom management, with particular emphasis on the relationship between classroom discipline and student responsibility.

Lewis agrees with Knight about the potency of discipline in being able to influence student responsibility (Knight, 1994: 230; Lewis, 2004). Therefore, in order to see how discipline styles associate with greater levels of responsibility in students, Lewis carried out an investigation in twenty-one primary schools and twenty-one secondary schools in Victoria, Australia. About 600 teachers and 4,000 six, seven, nine and eleven year students reported on the sort of classroom discipline offered to students, and students' level of responsibility and misbehaviour. Across primary and secondary schools, the findings were very similar.

Student responsibility was assessed by having students rate how often they engaged in a range of responsible and irresponsible classroom behaviours. The behaviours related to protecting or negating students' and teachers' rights associated with learning, emotional and physical safety, and property. The proportion of students misbehaving in the classes conducted by the teacher whose discipline they were describing was also noted.

To assess discipline techniques, students indicated the extent to which their teachers used each of the following discipline strategies:

1. Offering hints and non-directional descriptions of unacceptable behaviour

2. Talking with students to discuss the impact of their behaviour on others
3. Involving students in classroom discipline decision-making
4. Recognising the appropriate behaviour of individual students or the class
5. Punishing students who misbehave and increasing the level of punishment if resistance is met
6. Abusing students rights, for example by yelling

The most important findings concern the relationship between student responsibility and discipline. More responsible classes are associated with teachers who are less abusive and punishment oriented and who are seen as more likely to discuss misbehaviour with their students, involve students in decision-making, hint when students misbehave and recognise appropriate student behaviour. In other words, the greater use of strategies like discussion, recognition, hinting and involvement result in less student misbehaviour and more responsibility while the greater use of punishment, aggressive techniques like yelling in anger and class detentions associated with fewer inclusive techniques promotes more misbehaviour and less responsibility in students.

However, in his analysis and discussion on these findings, Lewis posits the idea that the chicken or the egg situation may well apply here: does the teachers behaviour influence their students responsibility, or vice versa (Lewis, 2004)? If the students behave respectfully and exercise self-discipline, there is obviously no need for teachers to use aggressive techniques as their authority is not challenged. And because responsible students can be trusted and do praiseworthy things, teachers are more likely to give them a voice, involve them in discussions and decision-making processes, and laud their behaviour.

On the other hand, when students exercise a lack of self-discipline and responsibility, teachers may respond with frustration and anger, because they feel confronted and shamed by their inability to influence their students to behave responsibly and respectfully. And, as Glasser (1977) argues, teachers who are angry or upset may not be interested in, or even capable of, acting reasonably or fairly towards students who are both unreasonable and unfair. They may not wish, or be able, to make the effort to deal reasonably and rationally with such students in order to encourage the students to tell their version of the reasons for their behaviour, and through this process to try to get them to acknowledge that their behaviour is unreasonable, and therefore should change for the better. If that is, indeed, the case, Lewis's data clearly shows that such discipline strategies are problematic: at best they are limited in their usefulness, while at worst they are counterproductive.

### **Related Research**

It should be noted that the novice teacher is especially vulnerable to succumbing to the temptation to use controlling, teacher-centred techniques when things go wrong in the classroom. Armed with a theoretical understanding of, and a genuine commitment to implement, learner-centred instruction, he/she will soon discover that such an approach, while educationally sound, is not the panacea for all discipline problems. When they feel that giving control to the students (see Brown, 2001: 46) results in an increase in such problems, the tendency by those who are lacking in both experience and confidence is to revert to the questionable time-honoured technique of controlling, and thereby improving, their students' behaviour through a behaviouristic set of rewards and punishments. It is, indeed, ironic that the valuable character trait of self-control, which the teachers would so dearly like to inculcate in their students, is, in fact, denied those students by the teachers themselves failing to exercise this virtue.

In fact, there is a plethora of education research studies (for example Metzger, 2002; Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff, 2000; Ryan and Patrick, 2001) which clearly indicate that using inclusive strategies such as talking with students about the impact of their behaviour on others,

and involving them in classroom decision-making, is really the only effective way of helping students to attain self-control. The use of aggressive disciplinary techniques has no place in a classroom that aims to produce responsible students.

When a classroom is run on children's self-control and natural motivation, emphasis is on learning and being part of the environment, not on rewards and other external re-enforcers that take away from the essentials of school. A considerable amount of research has been conducted to determine which factors encourage intrinsic motivation and thus lead to students exercising self-control and autonomy in a classroom(see [http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/-jimbo.RIBARY\\_Folder.htm](http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/-jimbo.RIBARY_Folder.htm)).

Valas and Sovik (1993), for example, conducted a study of the effect of teaching style on students' intrinsic motivation and self-control. They found that there was a direct and significant correlation between the extent the teachers exercised control and their students' intrinsic motivation and ability to exercise responsible self-control.

Strong et al (1995) expanded on Valas and Sovik's (1993) research by exploring four issues which are essential to meeting children's motivational needs: promoting success, arousing curiosity, allowing originality and encouraging relationships. Success can be developed by clearly defining what success is, valuing it in the classroom, and helping children see how they can attain it. Curiosity can be aroused by making sure that lessons offer fragmented or contradictory information, which puts children in an active role by solving the unknown; in addition, meaningful issues also awaken curiosity. Originality can be promoted by allowing many opportunities for students to express autonomy. Finally, by encouraging relationships, children's innate need for interpersonal involvement is fostered. The authors found that when factors like these are included in a classroom, children are naturally involved, exercise self-control and their intrinsic motivation is heightened.

Other scholars have found that the curriculum itself plays a valuable role in maintaining children's natural interest in school and thus developing their self-control. Middleton (1995), for example, found that a child will assess an activity's motivational value by determining if intrinsic interest exists and if his/her sense of autonomy will be

strengthened. Perceived fun, arousal, and control interact to influence a child's interpretation of an academic activity as intrinsically worthwhile. Arousal is achieved through challenge, curiosity and fantasy, while an optimal control level is obtained when a child perceives free choice in the activity and the task itself is challenging, but not too difficult. In a related study, Matthews (1991) found that those children whose self-control was facilitated by their teacher, and thus were able to exercise more control in regard to decision-making and the general functioning of school, had higher intrinsic motivation in reading, social studies and science.

Establishing a caring, co-operative learning environment is essential to fostering self-control in students. When children feel safe, the need for extrinsic rewards and punishments is eliminated (Brandt, 1995). By being encouraged to take risks, be independent thinkers, and exercise self-control, a classroom community can be developed in which children interact successfully for the sake of maintaining a harmonious classroom. With this in mind, Peterson (1992) describes the elements that are essential to creating a caring classroom. Some of the areas he discusses include celebrations, rituals, and empowering students with self-control. He says: that

the primary goal at the beginning of a new year or term is to lead students to come together, form a group. And be there for one another. At first students are concerned foremost with their own welfare. It is by establishing values of caring and trust in the classroom social ties and interest in one another's welfare come into existence (Peterson, 1992:16).

It is these underlying values, which Peterson discusses that become the backbone of a classroom filled with students who are able to exercise self-control, and are not dependent on a reward system, which overlooks the intrinsic value in being a contributing community member.

Such research is, furthermore, supported by studies by cognitive psychologists,(see, for example Hunt, 1971) who have researched the importance of people making their own decisions about what to think, say, feel or do. Our self-image is determined by us being able to make

our own decisions, rather than by being pressured to merely react to others. The ability to make one's own choices leads to a high degree of motivation and self-control. This has significant classroom implications. When teachers enable their students to exercise autonomy in making choices and decisions, they are facilitating the fulfilment of a fundamental need in their students. Constantly having decisions made for them leads to a decrease in motivation, and a considerable weakening of self-control due to lack of opportunity in exercising it.

There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence to support the notion that many teachers rely to a large extent on the provision of extrinsic rewards for their students as a means of control and motivation. However, it is essential that the very nature of extrinsic rewards should be addressed. By promising a reward for behaving in a desired way, the teacher is essentially controlling his or her students by tempting them with external factors that do not even relate to the task itself. Kohn (1993: 784) explains that, in the classroom, it is a way of doing things to children rather than working with them. This view of classroom management disregards a child's ability to think and reason on his / her own, not allowing them the chance to develop self-control or independent thinking. He makes the persuasive argument that these skills are just as important as reading and maths. And it has been found that apart from self-control and independent thinking, qualities such as creativity and cognitive reasoning are also diminished when students are working for a reward, as opposed to the task on hand (Lepper & Greene, 1978). Every teacher would do well to take cognizance of such findings. While there is clearly a place for some extrinsic rewards in the classroom, teachers would do well to be aware of their consequences.

Last, but certainly not least, Lewis, citing Fenstermacher (2001), makes the point that the best way to create responsible or well-mannered students is to ensure that they are around responsible teachers. Modelling such behaviour on the part of the teacher is, indeed, a powerful and persuasive motivator for students to reflect characteristics of responsibility and self-control in their own lives.

## **Biblical Examples of Teaching Methodology Leading to the Students Attainment of Self-control**

The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, provides us with many pointers and examples of the kind of teaching that enables students to attain self-control. While both temporal and cultural distance place the details of these examples squarely in the realm of sacred history, its principles are instructive and illuminate the best that current research has to offer on this topic. We would do well to heed the messages of Scripture.

The Old Testament provides us with a goldmine of examples of teaching methods and their effects on students. As Knight (1998: 232) observes, the educational environment of ancient Israel was structured to provide lifelong learning experiences from birth to death through holidays, sabbatical years, worship, historic memorials, the arts, home instruction, public and private reading of the Torah, and a host of other devices. This was, indeed, holistic education in which a variety of teachers cared for the intellectual, spiritual, social and physical needs of the children. A wonderful example of the outcome of such education is found in the life of Moses. Placed in the care of his mother in his infancy by Pharaoh's daughter, he learned well the lessons of self-discipline and responsibility in his early years, which served him so well in later life. It was only through a carefully and prayerfully nurtured development of self-control that Moses was able to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (Hebrews 11:25, NIV).

The techniques employed by the various educational influences which made such an exemplary individual out of the youthful Moses, complement beautifully the caring approach advocated by Barry and King. Furthermore, giving students a voice, according to Lewis, helps students attain the self-control and responsibility needed to make their educational experience meaningful and relevant. In fact, it was this voice which caused the children of ancient Israel's education system to articulate their curiosity about what they were learning: What does this ceremony mean to you? (Exodus 12:26, NIV), What does this mean? (Exodus 13:14, NIV) and What is the meaning of the

stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you? (Deuteronomy 13:14, NIV). And it was not a matter of if, but of when the children would find this voice. *When* (emphasis mine) your children ask you (Exodus 12:26, NIV) as precursor to each of the above questions, is the confident prediction of Moses, himself a product of the techniques he was espousing.

If examples from the Old Testament through light on God's ideals for teaching His children, then the example of Jesus, the Master Teacher, illuminate even more brightly the principles which we as teachers are to follow when deciding on implementing the kinds of teaching and discipline strategies in our classrooms. It is remarkable indeed that two thousand years ago the methods that Jesus used to instil self-control and responsible living in His hearers complement beautifully the findings of the latest educational research as exemplified by the conclusions drawn by Lewis (2004). Lewis found that teachers will have greatest success in helping students gain self-control and a sense of responsibility if they:

1. Are not abuse or punishment oriented
2. Discuss misbehaviour with their students
3. Involve their students in decision-making
4. Hint when students misbehave
5. Recognise appropriate behaviour

I shall discuss each of these findings as they are exemplified by Jesus.

*Teachers should not be abuse or punishment orientated*

In sharp contrast to the punitive attitude of the Pharisees of His day, Jesus exhibited love and compassion towards the people. Nowhere is this illustrated more beautifully than in His relationship with those who were labelled as having received, or deserving, God's punishment: the

oppressed, the sick and the ethnic outcasts. The four gospels are filled with examples of Jesus resisting societal pressure to punish the wrongdoers and the hopeless. Instead, He freely socialised with them and, rather than condemning them, He displayed a positive attitude towards them and lifted their self-esteem. When, for example, a group of self-righteous and vindictive Pharisees dragged a woman they had caught engaging in an illicit sex act, to him for judgement, Jesus, after subtly pointing out the murky personal lives of her accusers, told the woman that He would not condemn her and advised her to leave your life of sin (John 8:11, NIV).

Knight (1998: 235), in emphasising the crucial importance of the attitude of teachers toward their students, observes:

People sensed that Jesus respected them as individuals and that He saw hope for each of them. That realisation, in turn, motivated them to devote their lives to better ends. His hope and trust in them inspired them to new and more worthwhile lives. He utilized the positive power of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

We, as teachers, would do well to follow the example of Jesus in this regard. The use of abuse, anger and punishment as strategies for instilling self-control and a sense of responsibility in our students are problematic at best and counterproductive at worst. Children's minds are impressionable, and the use of such strategies will likely have the unintended consequences of becoming learned behaviours.

#### *Teachers should discuss misbehaviour with their students*

Some of Jesus' most enlightening and insightful lessons for us as teachers came in His responses to His detractors who attempted to trap Him and put Him on the spot. Jesus did not gloss over inappropriate behaviour, but He placed it in the perspective of redemption and restoring people to the image of God. That was the case in His dealing with the adulterous woman, and it was also His response when the Pharisees asked Him whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason (Matthew 19:3 NIV). In His response, Jesus clearly

explained the reasons why easy divorce is entirely inappropriate, and what God's ideal in marriage is. Even though the Pharisees who tested Him may have been (or probably were) guilty of this sin, He did not condemn them in spite of their negative and aggressive attitude towards Him. One need only read the disciples' response in Mathew 19:10 to be convinced that Jesus' discussion of this topic with them and the Pharisees was both thought-provoking and pointed them towards God's ideal.

As Jesus clearly illustrated with this example, the discussion of inappropriate behaviour, without condemning individuals, can be a powerful force for good. While the Pharisees may not have learnt their lesson (they never had any intention to learn), the disciples did. Once again, Knight (1998: 235,236) sums up Jesus' strategy of discussing inappropriate behaviour:

[Jesus] met sin head-on. He did so, however, in a way that indicated that He was against sin while being for sinners. His hearers sensed the love He had for them, and because He cared about them, they began to care about themselves. That made them responsive to His teaching and teaching methods. The manner in which Jesus related to His students is an object lesson from which all can profit and one which, if practiced, will help modern teachers draw out and develop the very best in their pupils.

### *Teachers should involve students in decision-making*

Jesus entered this world to set people free from the bondage of sin and from the restrictive and oppressive mind-slavery perpetuated by the Pharisees. The response that He desired (and still desires) is a love response, a response that is based not on fear or pressure, but on the informed decision of each individual as they respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the beauty of His character. When Jesus told many of His parables, for example, He left it to His hearers to draw their own conclusions. One need look no further than to the time when Jesus told His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 — 37) after which He left the decision about who is one's neighbour, to His listeners. And throughout the gospels Jesus makes it clear that He wants us to

make our own decisions to follow Him. He does not desire coerced loyalty: the decision by the disciples, John the Baptist and Zacchaeus to follow Jesus, often at the risk of their lives, was theirs and theirs alone. Likewise, the decision by Judas Iscariot, the Pharisees and the rich young ruler to reject Jesus was theirs also.

If we teachers want to bring out the best in our students, if we want compliance from them that comes from the heart, if we want discipline from them from them that is not imposed but freely offered, students must be given the freedom in the classroom to make the right decisions. And by modelling a caring attitude and responsible behaviour, the teacher is in a powerful position to engender decision-making skills in their students that will lead them to exhibiting acceptable behaviour based on self-control and a sense of responsibility.

*Teachers should hint when students misbehave*

Jesus was, indeed, a master at avoiding hurting and condemning His listeners, yet at the same time ensuring that, without loss of face or self-esteem, they clearly recognised the unacceptable nature of their misbehaviour. For instances of this strategy one need look no further than the way He dealt with the misbehaviour of the Samaritan woman and Martha.

In the case of the Samaritan woman, the fact that Jesus said matter of factly that the man you now have is not your husband (John 8:18, NIV) lead her to look beyond the guilt and shame of her own misbehaviour to enthusiastically proclaiming to her fellow Samaritans that Jesus is the Saviour of the world (John 8:42, NIV). An incident that had the potential to cause the listener to look inward with sadness and possibly bitterness has, because of Jesus sensitive indirect reference to her immoral life, resulted in outward focus not only towards her newfound Saviour, but also towards her fellow human beings.

Jesus dealt in a similar fashion with Martha when He visited her and her sister's home. When Martha complained of her sister Mary's unwillingness to help her with the preparation of the meal instead of listening to Jesus, He replied simply, you are worried about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better

and it will not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41,42, NIV). As with the previous example, the subtle and sensitive hint about wrong priorities, led the listener to draw closer to her Saviour. Somewhat later, after the sisters had sent word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus was sick, it was Martha, not Mary, who rushed out to meet Jesus before he had even arrived at their house. And it was Martha who, in response to Jesus query, declared her belief in Jesus as the Son of God (John 11:3-27). Jesus innocuous and sensitive hint about unacceptable behaviour had once again resulted in eternal outcomes.

These examples clearly illustrate the fact that sensitive hinting at unacceptable behaviour is a Jesus-ordained method of dealing with fragile emotions and personalities whose self-esteem needs to be lifted. Young people in the classroom are at a stage in their lives where the nature of their relationships with their teachers can either lead them on a path towards irresponsible behaviour both at school and in later life or towards a life of fulfilment and happiness based on self-control and self-discipline. It would serve all teachers well to follow the example of Jesus in this regard.

#### *Teachers should recognise appropriate behaviour*

We are all of inestimable worth to Jesus, so much so that He considered it worthwhile to deny much of His divinity and die on the cross so that we, if we choose, might be saved. He often went to great lengths to confirm the value of His children, especially those whose value was denied by their fellow human beings. One of these was Mary Magdalene.

Mary, a reformed prostitute, was the uninvited guest at a dinner party at the home of Simon, a Pharisee. To the consternation of Simon and the others, Mary anointed Jesus feet with her tears and perfume as an expression of love and gratitude towards her Saviour. In response to thoughts and rumblings about the inappropriateness of Mary s actions and Jesus response to those actions, Jesus gave a powerful and persuasive affirmation of the woman s behaviour (Luke 8:44-48) as a love expression of a sinner whose sins have been forgiven. After that Mary s faith in, and love for, her Saviour remained strong.

We all know from personal experience, anecdotal evidence and research that the recognition and affirmation of appropriate behaviour is a powerful motivating force. Even Jesus appreciated being thanked for His acts of mercy (see Luke 17:1-17). Students in the classroom are no different. It is entirely appropriate, even necessary, for teachers to recognise, affirm, praise and encourage appropriate behaviour. This will lead to students acting responsibly and exercising self-control.

While a note of caution has already been sounded earlier in this paper in regard to the use of extrinsic rewards, it is fitting that it be repeated within the context of Jesus dealing with people: affirmation and recognition of appropriate behaviour is fundamentally different from giving concrete rewards for such behaviour. The former lifts a person's self-esteem and promotes one's psychological well-being; the latter tends to fulfil the receiver's short-term gratification. Jesus' rewards were, and are, of eternal consequences. May we all emulate the Master Teacher when motivating our students to attain self-control.

## **Conclusion**

An approach to classroom management that is based on biblical principles and reflects current research, will provide the most effective teaching strategies that facilitate the attainment of self-control in students. It is not a guarantee for success in all cases (even Jesus' listeners often failed to reach their potential) because in the final analysis a sense of responsibility and self-control cannot be attained by individuals — both young people *and* adults — who are determined to act without, or with little, consideration for others. However the application of the principles found in the Bible (especially in the four gospels), together with the techniques based on current educational research, can go a long way towards assisting Christian teachers in one of their most important aims: helping their students to attain self-control.

## Works Cited

Barry, K., and L. King  
1998 *Beginning Teaching and Beyond* (Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed).

Bennett, W.  
1998 The Place to Harvest Patriots , *School Administrator* 55 (5): 38-40.

Brandt, R.  
1995 Punished by Rewards? , A Conversation with Alfie Kohn, *Educational Leadership* 53: 13-16.

Brown, H.D.  
2001 *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn).

Canter, L., and M. Canter  
1992 *Assertive Discipline: Positive Behaviour Management for Today's Classroom* (Santa Monica, CA: Lee Canter & Associates).

Fenstermacher, G.D.  
2001 On the Concept of Manner and its Visibility in Teaching Practice , *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33(6): 639-53.

Glasser, W.  
1997 A New Look at School Failure and School Success , *Phi Delta Kappan* 78 (8): 597-602.

Holmes, A.F.  
1987 *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans, rev. edn).

Houston, P.D.  
1998 The Centrality of Character Education , *School Administrator* 55(5): 6-8.

Hunt, J.McV.  
1971 Toward a History of Intrinsic Motivation , in H.I. Day, D.E. Berlyne, and D.E. Hunt (eds.), *Intrinsic Motivation: A New Direction in Education* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

Knight, G.R.

1998 *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn).

Kohn, A.

1993 Rewards Versus Learning: A Response to Paul Chance , *Phi Delta Kappan* 74: 783-787.

Lepper, M., and D. Greene

1978 *The Hidden Costs of Rewards* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum).

Lewis, R.

2004 Helping Teachers Help Students Act Responsibility , Retrieved 11 May 2006, [<http://www.acer.edu.au/workshops/documents/>]

Lickona, T.

1996 Teaching Respect and Responsibility: Reclaiming Children and Youth , *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Problems* 5(3): 143-51.

Matthews, D.

1991 The Effects of School Environment on Intrinsic Motivation of Middle-school Children , *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development* 30: 30-36.

Metzger, M.

2002 Learning to Discipline , *Phi Delta Kappan* 84(1): 77-84.

Middleton, J.

1995 A Study of Intrinsic Motivation in the Mathematics Classroom: A Personal Constructs Approach , *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 26: 254-279.

Peterson, R.

1992 *Life in a Crowded Place* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann).

Roeser, R.W., T.S. Eccles, and A.J. Sameroff

2000 School as a Context of Early Adolescents Academic and Social-emotional Development: a Summary of the Research Findings , *The Elementary School Teacher* 11(5): 443-71.

Rothstein, T.

2000 Teaching Respect and Responsibility: Reclaiming Children and Youth *Journal of Educational and Behavioural Problems* 5(3): 143-51.

Ryan, K., and H. Patrick

2001 The Classroom Social Environment and Changes in Adolescents Motivation and Engagement in the Middle School , *American Educational Research Journal* 38(2): 437-60.

Skinner, B.

1960 *The Technology of Teaching* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, Division of Meredith Corporation).

Strong, R., H. Silver, and A. Robinson

1995 What do Students Want (and What Really Motivates Them)? *Educational Leadership* 53: 8-12.

Valas, S., and N. Sovik

1993 Variables Affecting Students Intrinsic Motivation for School Mathematics; Two Empirical Studies Based on Deci and Ryan s Theory on Motivation , *Learning and Instruction* 3: 281-298.

[http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/~jimbo/RIBARY\\_Folder.htm](http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/~jimbo/RIBARY_Folder.htm)

### **About the Author**

Paul Buschenhofen, PhD, is currently serving as the Programme Coordinator for graduate studies, TESOL, in Mission College. He has been a teacher in Australia, China, Papua New Guinea, East Timor, and Thailand.