

CONTRACTING

A Way to Increase Student Learning

By Dorothy Eaton Watts

How can one teacher meet the needs of 27 students in eight different grades? How can one person possibly write 400 lesson plans a week, to say nothing of teaching that many lessons? How can seatwork be balanced with lesson presentations so that everyone remains on task all the time? The answer is contracting.

A contract is an agreement between the teacher and the student or parent that something will be accomplished in a certain length of

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time. It may deal with goals, behavior, or work, and may be oral or written.

Over a number of years I have found contracts very successful in placing the responsibility for learning squarely on the shoulders of the students, where it belongs. Contracts make life much less frustrating for the teacher. Students stay on task all day, and learn more as a result. I found I suddenly had time to do everything that needed to be done. Teaching became a joy!

Goal-setting Contracts

Before the school year begins I visit each student's home and have the child sign goal-setting con-

For a number of years, Dorothy Eaton Watts taught church school. She is currently employed as the New Testament writer for the Family Bible Story series at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

tracts in the presence of the parents. I explain the importance of the student's taking responsibility for his or her own learning, and demonstrate how this will work in the classroom. I also sign a contract with the parents that spells out our

working relationship. This puts expectations out in the open so we know what to expect from each other.

In Stephen's goal-setting interview he decided that he wanted all A's on his report card. He agreed

that it was his responsibility to do all of his assignments on time and to redo anything with less than 90 percent accuracy. Stephen reached his goal.

Julie set a physical goal of getting rid of acne. She agreed to a program of exercise, good nutrition, rest, and cleanliness. She achieved the clear skin she wanted.

After one goal-setting session, Jennifer said, "This is absolutely inspiring!" When students begin to take charge of their lives they can really make things happen. Contracts invite children to act mature, and they respond with responsible behavior.

Behavior Contracts

A behavior contract states the problem and solution in writing. It is an agreement about how the student will behave in future situations and what will happen if he or she defaults. I often give several solutions and let the student pick the one he feels will benefit him the most.

Benji was in trouble for fighting. As I talked with him, he agreed that he had a bad temper and had a hard time controlling himself. From five possible solutions he chose the one that said, "I promise to behave like a Christian gentleman on the playground." We both signed the contract. A copy went to his parents and to the school board chairman. Benji lived up to his contract, and recess time was more fun for everyone.

The key to Benji's better behavior was his decision to change. Contracts enlist a person's will on the side of right. Maintaining control is no longer the teacher's job; it is the student's responsibility.

Daily Work Contracts

Each morning I put the contract for that day's work on each student's desk. Attached to it are any worksheets they need for the day. All lessons with teacher and individual assignments are listed. A circled T means that they must wait until the scheduled time for a group lesson presentation with the teacher. Students may choose the order in which to do other assignments. However, each student must complete everything on the

STUDENT CONTRACT

Scholastic Behavior I Choose

- Finish all contracts
- Hand work in on time
- Do work with 80% accuracy
- Do work with 90% accuracy
- Redo C, D, and F work
- Do neat work
- Ask for help when needed
- Learn to concentrate
- Do my own work. Do not cheat
- Take weekly contract home

Results I Expect to See

- All A's on report card
- A's and B's on report card
- I'll feel good about myself
- My parents will be proud
- My teacher will be pleased
- I will learn a lot
- I will get gold stars
- I will enjoy school
- I will be on Honor Roll

Social Behavior I Choose

- Have self-control
- Work quietly
- Do not disturb others
- Be kind and thoughtful
- Be polite
- Do not fight
- Be friends with all
- Do not call names
- Avoid trouble
- Obey all school rules
- Respect others' rights and property
- Respect and obey my teachers

Results I Expect to See

- I will not get into trouble
- I won't have to be punished
- I will be happy
- I will have many friends
- People won't get mad at me
- The principal will be happy
- My teacher will be pleased
- My parents will be happy
- I will have a good character
- My angel will write a good report
- Jesus will be pleased
- I will have a good name

Date _____ Signature _____

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contract that day. If work is not done before school closes, it becomes homework.

Students do not receive a new contract until the old one is finished. Each child must finish all 180 contracts for the year to be eligible for promotion. If a child is sick, he can know ahead of time what make-up he has to do. If students will be away for a long weekend,

they can work ahead on a contract, knowing that they will not fall behind on their school work.

I maintain two files of contracts. In each is a folder for every student in the room. As the children finish an assignment, they check it off on their contract, and file their completed work. Grades one and two show their work to the teacher and get a sticker before filing it.

At the end of the day I quickly grade the work in each student's file, putting the grade on the contract. The completed contract and assignments go into the file for graded work. At the end of the week I average the daily grades, place a weekly grade on Friday's contract, and enter the weekly grade in my grade book. (That gives me only nine grades to average at report time.) I staple together the contracts and assignments and

WEEKLY CONTRACT

Date _____ Name _____

	BIBLE	WRITING	SPELLING	MATH	ENGLISH
MONDAY					
TUESDAY					
WEDNESDAY					
THURSDAY					
FRIDAY					
WEEKLY AVERAGE					

NOTE TO PARENTS:

WEEKLY CONTRACT

Date _____ Name _____

	SCIENCE	SOCIAL ST.	READING	ART
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
WEEKLY AVERAGE				

NOTE TO PARENTS: Honor Roll _____ ICMM Club _____
Behind in work _____ Call Teacher _____

PARENT-TEACHER CONTRACT

What I expect of my child's teacher:

- ____ Will treat my child with love, respect, and fairness.
- ____ Will plan work to challenge my child.
- ____ Will make school a pleasant place.
- ____ Will plan work to fit the individual needs of my child.
- ____ Will be willing to help my child when he doesn't understand.
- ____ Will be understanding of my child's special needs.
- ____ Will communicate with me on a regular basis about my child's progress.
- ____ Will plan activities to strengthen Christian values for my child.
- ____ Will allow my child to move ahead at his own rate.
- ____ Will uphold the standards and doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- ____ Will be willing to look at all sides of a situation before making a judgment.
- ____ Will keep confidences about our child and family matters.

Date _____ Parent's Signature _____

I will do my best to live up to your ideals of what a Christian teacher should be.

Date _____ Teacher's Signature _____

STUDENT-TEACHER CONTRACT

1. My goals spiritually are _____

Therefore I agree to _____

2. My goals socially are _____

Therefore I agree to _____

3. My goals physically are to _____

Therefore I agree to _____

4. My goals mentally are to _____

Therefore I agree to _____

5. Further, I agree to abide by all the rules of the school, trying my best to make my school a better place because I am part of it. I will cooperate with my teacher, my parents, and my God as they try to help me become the kind of person I want to be.

Date _____ Signature _____

send them home each Monday as a weekly report card.

A chart near my desk shows

which children are up-to-date on their contracts. Gold stars show work done on time. Colored stars

show late work has been made up. Students with all gold stars for a two-week period receive an ICMM

competent persons I know is a miserable failure as a teacher because he cannot relate to people. He does not want to bother to learn who his students are or where they come from, either literally or figuratively. To him the subject is the only important thing. Consequently students dislike him and learn little from his classes.

Teachers who genuinely love and respect their students irrespective of color, race, background, sex, intelligence, or any other factor will find that they are always remembered as a good teacher. If, in addition, a teacher makes successful use of the other points listed above, he or she will find, as I have, that parents will send their children to his classroom even to the third generation! □

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help they need. When I am busy with others they know they should look at their picture contracts and find something that they can do on

their own such as work a puzzle, color a picture, look at a book, or feed the class pets. Using the contract system, first graders become quite independent by Christmas break.

When students finish their contracts for the day they have four choices. They may begin the next day's contract (You would be surprised at how many want to do that!), listen to a story tape, read, or work in one of the dozen or so learning centers.

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Weekly Work Contracts

As a rule primary students work best on a daily contract system while students in grades four and above handle a weekly contract without difficulty. Some junior high students can handle monthly

contracts. However, I have found that even older students find it simpler to start with a daily contract and work up to longer time periods.

History of Contracting

Contracting as a technique for individualizing was conceived by Helen Parkhurst based on ideas she gleaned from Edgar Swift, Frederic Burk, and Dr. Montessori. Her ideas were first tried in Dalton, Massachusetts in 1919. Known as the Dalton Plan, contracting soon found a place in thousands of schools around the world.

Popular during the 1920s, contracting went out of style, not to reemerge until the 1970s. Although contracts are used at the elementary level, most educational research in the 1980s has taken place at the secondary or college level.

Advantage of Contracting

Contracting has many advantages for both teacher and student:

For the Teacher . . .

Contracts do:

1. Free the teacher for more individualized time with students.
2. Allow the preparation of up-front presentations.
3. Transfer the responsibility for learning to the student.
4. Make it easier to individualize assignments.
5. Expedite reporting procedures.

Contracts do not:

1. Demand specialized training.
2. Require expensive equipment.

For the Student . . .

Contracts:

1. Help students take responsibility for their own education.
2. Enable students to regulate their work pace.
3. Give students more choices with timing and order of work.
4. Allow students to work independently.
5. Challenge students to seek answers in a variety of ways.
6. Teach students to work closely with the teacher in meeting their objectives.
7. Help students set reachable, yet challenging goals.

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the substantive culture that once gave us great art, great warriors, great statesmen, great religious leaders, and great educators. It does imply that both home and school need to cooperate to arrest the intellectual and spiritual malaise that pervades our society. Parents and educators need to inspire our youth to deeply regard the values we treasure, the life patterns that lead to significant living, and the vision that sees beyond personal or immediate gratification to the realizing of long-term and eternal objectives.

Bloom's work highlights the seriousness with which we need to take the Christian teacher's mission in education, its tremendous potential to shape the future for the better. To fail to see a well-defined system of values as important and necessary to the sacred work we share is to admit our own impoverishment, our urgent need to be renewed in mind and spirit.

While it may be futile to try to recover the past, we can affirm in our modern context those eternal principles that speak to deep-seated human need. We can captivate the imagination and passion of our youth and inspire them to be honest, noble, responsible, and courageous. We can work to overcome the abuse and exploitation of our neighbors by identifying and strengthening those principles and practices worthy of defending against accommodation or superficiality.—V.S.G.

8. Give students a clearer concept of the objectives of their learning.

9. Eliminate confusion about assignments.

Research Supports Contracting

1. Studies have shown that contract students have better attitudes toward study.

2. Grade-point averages are better for contract students and remain so for two years afterward.

3. Contract students learn to organize their work better than do noncontract students.

4. Contract students are better at research, identifying more nontraditional sources.

5. Contract students are more creative and innovative.

6. Contract students have improved oral and written communication.

7. Contract students spend more time on task.

Student and Parent Response

A student who moved to another school wrote: "I miss working with contracts. We can't do anything without the teacher's permission. I get my assignments done early and then I'm bored and have nothing to do."

A parent commented: "Ken is getting all A's again this year. He never tried to get good grades before he was in your class. You have taught him how to study, how to organize himself, and how to achieve." I didn't really do it; contracts did.

Another parent said, "I don't know what your secret is. Shelly had to work last summer to complete work she hadn't done during the year. Now she brings work home and finishes it every day. She used to hate school. Now she loves it." Contracts motivated her and kept her on task.

For me, contracting has been a key to successful multigrade teaching. □

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GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING—A CRITICAL NEED

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schools are small multigrade schools whose budgets cannot support even a part-time guidance person. The entire enrollment of SDA students in the Pacific Union (our largest NAD union) equals that of a small public school district in Los Angeles.

But perceptions of need also contribute to the problem. Adventists have traditionally believed themselves immune from many of the problems of society and public education, so we have not thought that we needed counselors. The upward mobility ethic of our church has sometimes fostered an excessive emphasis on academics at the expense of "frills" like guidance and counseling.

Even in SDA schools, students are sliding through some of their most productive years without learning basic skills to make meaningful academic choices and with little help in career planning. Students need to learn how to cope with feelings of low self-worth, peer pressure, and the stresses caused by divorce, death, and interpersonal problems. Growing up is not easy, and students need a trusted adult with whom they can feel safe to share concerns and confidences.

How to Begin

Since early intervention can help prevent small problems from reaching crisis proportions, a strong guidance program in elementary and junior academy years

can make a difference in the quality of life for our children.

A counselor should be available to handle "people problems" in every elementary and secondary school. Crisis intervention, group and individual counseling should be provided as needed on a daily and weekly basis.

Each conference could hire one or more counselors to travel to schools throughout its territory to assist teachers and students with guidance/counseling problems. These professionals could also hold workshops and in-service seminars for teachers. Such programs can help teachers to become skilled in meeting the needs of their students, and give them enough information to know when they should refer a problem to a psychologist or other professional.

Only four or five of the largest SDA elementary schools have counselors on their staffs, and about a third of NAD academies do not list anyone as assigned to do guidance counseling.

Training sessions might be held during holiday breaks, in the summer, or on weekday evenings. To avoid burdening teachers, they should receive release time during school hours to compensate for this time.

Each school should designate one staff member to coordinate the guidance service and act as a team leader to the staff. The person responsible for discipline should not participate in guidance functions.

In some cases, community professionals may be willing to contribute their time or charge a reduced fee to assist the school in dealing with counseling problems. For example, when an academy student in the Washington, D.C., suburbs discovered the dismembered body of her nephew, the