

The Impact of Witnessing Training on Middle School Students

by

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Abstract

Witnessing, or sharing the gospel message, is an essential task for Christians to learn and practice, especially as more Americans do not believe in God. Witnessing training is usually designed for adults, and this study attempted to teach eighth-grade students to share their faith. Teachers can teach middle school students lessons that include why people love their neighbors and conversational skills like listening, asking questions, and other verbal and non-verbal techniques. Students also practiced sharing their faith with each other using storytelling techniques. The results indicated that practicing faith-sharing conversations increased confidence and encourages students to practice more faith-sharing situations. The lessons learned include how students approached these lessons and made them their own, as communication habits and techniques are individual. While this project used Bible storytelling, other approaches could include apologetics and using memory work and hymns to share faith. Christian teachers should strive to create communication cultures in their classrooms around the Word of God.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Identify the Issue

In 2020, the United States saw Christian church membership fall below 50 percent for the first time. Since Americans tend to exaggerate worship habits and church attendance, that number of 50 percent is also probably much higher than reality.¹ While other non-Christian religions have grown in recent decades, the most troubling statistic is that over 30 percent of Millennials and Generation Z members, all people born from 1981 on, have no religious preference.² All people need the gospel message, but the number of people in the world who have not heard the message of the gospel continues to grow. And now, for the first time in United States' history, there is a majority of people in the United States who do not regularly hear the gospel or believe in God. The present reality of American religious life makes sharing the gospel vitally important.

There is nothing more important than the gospel message. Romans 1:16-17 (NIV) calls the gospel "the power of salvation to everyone who believes" and reveals the righteousness of God that comes to people by faith. The gospel message tells the world that all people are saved from their sins by Jesus' death on the cross. The gospel tells all people that Jesus rose from the dead to bring resurrection and eternal life to all who believe in him. This important message is what Christians share out of love and thankfulness to God for the blessings God gives. Jesus commanded his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" in Matthew 28:19 and "to be his witnesses" in Acts 1:8.

¹ Joe Carter, "Don't Blame the Pandemic for Low Church Attendance" The Gospel Coalition, 2022. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-attendance-pandemic/>

² Jeffery Jones, "US Church Membership Falls Below Majority for the First Time," Gallup, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>

Importance of the Project:

Most Christians know they are to share the gospel. A 2018 Lutheran Hour-Barna study shows that over 70 percent of Christians know they should share the gospel, but 76 percent of Christians do not or are unwilling to share their faith with others. Despite 65 percent of Christian millennials knowing they should share the gospel, most Christians have less than five religious conversations every year.³ Similar numbers exist for American teenagers. A 2019 Religion in Schools survey showed that only 24 percent of Christian teens in public schools invite others to services or other church events. Around half of teens are uncomfortable sharing their Christian faith in any capacity while in a public school.⁴ Christian teens worry about the need to fit in with their peers. These teens also worry about how their Christian faith will be received by their friends, especially in light of the world's culture and beliefs. Teens are worried about the need to fit in and the changing beliefs of the world around them. Yet, even the early teenage years are prime for reaching out with the gospel. Teenagers are often more open to new thoughts and beliefs outside their home and often spend time with their friends, some of whom do not believe in God.⁵ All Christians, even young Christians, can share their faith with those who are around them.

Motivated by Christ's love, Christians know they are to share the gospel message. Teachers have taught their students in our Lutheran schools to tell others about Jesus as a way they can reflect their Christian faith. Most students eagerly answer that they can share the gospel as an application to most Bible lessons. How do we take these words and put them into action?

³ Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age* (Barna Group, 2018), 71

⁴ Pew Research Center, "For a Lot of American Teens, Religion Is a Regular Part of the Public School Day" October 3, 2019, 33

⁵ Katie Alford, "Teaching Listening as a Form of Empathy Building." *Voices from the Middle* 29, no. 1 (2021) 36.

What strategies can our schools use to encourage students to share their faith? There are many ways Christians can share their faith, but this project will encourage students to love those God has put in their life, practice listening and conversational skills, and finally, lead people to Jesus by sharing Bible stories with each other. Students will be taught these useful tools to prayerfully take them from words to actions, and hopefully, share their faith when the opportunity arises.

Project Goal

This project looked at the training needed to build up strong Christian witnesses. I have attempted to answer the question: *What is the impact of witnessing training on middle school students?* I first examined initial student perceptions of witnessing. Then, I trained students in conversational witnessing techniques, emphasizing telling Bible stories as a method students could use. Finally, I compared students' attitudes from the beginning of the training to its conclusion to see the impact the training had on students. The training included teaching and reinforcing the reason for loving all people. Students learned how to have conversations with others. Then, students reflected on their own techniques and skills after practicing sharing their faith.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

I designed this project to teach witnessing skills so young Christians can share their faith with their family and friends. As one looks at the literature surrounding witnessing, one can easily see how some aspects of witnessing have stayed the same. For example, Christians want to follow God's plan and design for faith sharing. The world needs a Savior from sin. However, much has changed in the world's culture in the last few decades. Changes in person-to-person connections, a lack of in-person communication, and culture have changed to make formal witnessing training necessary.

Witnessing: What has stayed the same

There are some aspects of witnessing literature that remain the same. The first is that the Bible is the foundation of our Christian witness. The Bible also provides examples of how to share the gospel with others. Jesus shows how he stops and takes time with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), and Nicodemus (John 3). Jesus took the time to talk, listen, and answer people's questions.

Other guidance God gives includes letting others see the good lives Christians live due to their faith in Jesus. Matthew 5:16 says to "let your lights shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." By living lives differently from the world, Christians open up opportunities to share their faith. While unbelievers may see the works Christians do, Christians still need to share the gospel message, the good news of forgiveness for all sinners. Romans 1:16 reminds Christians to say with the apostle Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." God calls Christians to be ready to give answers to people who question them about their faith, yet do it

gently and respectfully (1 Pet 3:15). Christians can find joy in loving all people and reflect God's love with their friends. And, when afraid to share their faith, Christians are reminded that God is with them always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:20). Christians strive to follow biblical principles as they share their faith.

Sin is as prevalent in this world today as it has always been. Since the world is sinful, there is always a need for witnessing. While there is no set pattern to the dates of witnessing literature in WELS, times of national upheaval seem to drive witnessing efforts. The 1960s, 1990s, and late 2010s spoke about the need to teach Biblical truths in a changing and godless society faithfully. In 1985, Pastor Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn wrote *Let Your Light Shine: An Evangelism Training Program for Those Who Want to Share the Gospel*. In it, Kurtzahn highlights the need for Christians to share the gospel out of love for God and his message of salvation. As the world prepared to enter the new Millennium, Paul Kelm in 1997 reiterated the same arguments. As long as there is sin in the world, there will always be a need to share the gospel because all people need to hear the message of forgiveness and salvation.

There are many methods to reach others of the gospel, and some of them have become popular. In the mid-2010s, groups like Answers in Genesis and the Institute of Creation Research strongly emphasized apologetics in the area of science and the Bible. While there is value to other witnessing programs or other organizations, caution needs to be taken to ensure that proper Christian doctrine is taught. Some of these endorse decision theology, the idea that a listener needs to accept Jesus into their hearts. The apostle Paul wrote that “no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).”

The final aspect that remains the same is the excuses Christians use. Kurtzahn gives typical misconceptions and excuses, such as "this is the pastor's job" or "I don't have the gift of

speaking."⁶ Kelm listed fears, such as "I'll sound weird" or "I don't know what to say."⁷ The 2017 Barna Study listed unpreparedness, hurting friendships, and not knowing what to say as barriers to sharing the gospel. Since these fears continue despite training, understanding what my students feel about witnessing is important for this project.

Witnessing Training for Youth

In 1997, Pastor Michael Geiger researched and documented two WELS area Lutheran high schools that trained students to witness. Titled "Evangelism is Not Just For Adults," Geiger spoke about how both Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee and St. Croix Lutheran High School in West St. Paul, Minnesota, used an evangelism program called "Talk About the Savior (TAS)." TAS was taught to students with a greater interest in evangelism with positive success. The reasons students struggled in 1997 are the same as today, "I can't do that... I don't know what to do... I don't know what to say."⁸ But, training seems to help. Wisconsin Lutheran High School religion teacher Pastor John Ibisch said, "we need to create opportunities for kids to talk about Jesus in a safe environment."⁹ For most students, the safe environment was a classroom. In addition, Northwestern Publishing House, the publishing arm of the WELS, published a unit of their Christlight curriculum titled *What Do I Say, Lord?* This unit was geared for seventh and eighth graders and provided opportunities to talk to others about Jesus in various scenarios. Although Northwestern Publishing House still prints this book as of 2022, there is a new edition of Christlight, leaving that series dated.

⁶ Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn, "Let Your Light Shine! An Evangelism Training Program for Those Who Want to Share the Savior with Others," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, 9-10 (1985)

⁷ Paul E. Kelm, "Equipping the Believers for Evangelism," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, 5 (1997)

⁸ Michael Geiger, "Evangelism is Not Just For Adults," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, 3 (1997).

⁹ Geiger, 3

There is a need for more study of witnessing training for the church's youth. There are little to no training programs currently available for middle school students in the area of witnessing. One of this project's goals is to build on Geiger's look at witnessing in 1997. Geiger's project studied high schools using a popular program in the 1990s and measured its use in various settings. I designed this project to teach eighth-grade students witnessing strategies so they can also talk about the Savior with others.

Witnessing: What has changed since 1997

While nothing has changed in the Christian's witness because there is still sin and a Savior, much has changed in the world since Geiger's look at Christian witnessing training in 1997. Cell phones connect teens by text, social media, and video chats. While technology's advances have had significant benefits for the world's connectedness, the in-person conversation has suffered. Sherry Turkle's 2015 book, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, spoke about technology's damage to in-person conversation. Technology has damaged friendships, mental health, and the development of empathy. Instead of developing meaningful friendships, people now develop mere connections with more people. Celeste Headlee's 2017 book *We Need to Talk* took Turkle's call to reclaim conversation to action by giving both the reasoning behind, and further directions on skills both listeners and speakers need to develop to have conversations that matter.

An easy way to have conversations that matter and counteract the effects of technology involves showing empathy. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's shoes. The number of self-help books and articles demonstrates the need to develop this skill. Self-help gurus Stephen and Sean Covey listed empathy, developed within a conversation, as one of the *7 Skills of a Highly Effective Teen* in 1998. Psychologists Michelle Skeen and Sean McKay provide help

and advice in empathy to teens struggling with communication. A 2021 issue of *Voices from the Middle*, the middle-school journal of the National Council for the Teachers of English, highlighted empathy development within the language arts classroom. Katie Alford, author of "Listening as a Form of Empathy," says that most middle school students are ready to engage in deeper, more meaningful relationships outside their homes. As middle school students grow and develop, they need to practice loving others through conversing with different people.¹⁰

Both Turkle and Headlee highlight the lack of modeling that young people now receive from adults in having a proper conversation. Palmer says listening and speaking are “the most fundamental skills for success.”¹¹ Adults need to teach young people how to have serious conversations with one another. Educational resources have followed suit. 2010's Common Core State Standards placed a greater emphasis on listening, speaking, and conversations. Ways to better teach conversations in academic settings come from Jeff Zwiers' and Marie Crawford's book, *Academic Conversations* (2011), and Palmer's 2014 book *Teaching the Core Skills of Listening and Speaking*.

Students today are more connected by technology than in 1997. Teachers cannot take for granted that students know how to have a formal conversation with another person. That is why learning how to have a conversation is vital for this study. If knowing what to say is one concern teens have when it comes to sharing the gospel, knowing how to say it is also important. I will emphasize the conversational skills of listening and speaking to help build these essential skills.

Witnessing: Recent Evangelism Programs

Recent evangelism programs also note the role of conversation-making and the challenges it may bring in the digital age. In 1997, Kelm wrote that Christians could and should

¹⁰ Alford, 36.

¹¹ Erik Palmer, *Teaching the Core Skills of Listening and Speaking*, (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2014), 9.

be prepared for invitation outreach and relational witnessing. Invitation outreach is inviting someone to church and promoting events. Kelm calls relational witnessing the most natural way of evangelism because Christians share the gospel with friends, workplace associates, relatives, and neighbors in relational witnessing.¹² Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor and founder of Dwelling 1:14, Greg Finke, focuses on neighborhood evangelism and everyday witnessing. Conversation with others leads to a relationship, which allows the Christian to pray with these friends. Finke further outlines his plan in his books *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary* (2014) and *Joining Jesus: Show Me How* (2017). Completed in conjunction with the 2017 Barna study on evangelism, Don Everts provides a more formal plan in his "Spiritual Conversation Curve."¹³ By showing love to others and by building relationships, Christians use the gospel to lead unbelievers to Christ. Although conversational skills are still needed, Christine Dillon takes a different approach. Her plan involves knowing a series of rehearsed Bible stories that can be told when talking with others. All of these programs involve relational witnessing, getting to know people, and using what you know about them to reach out with the love of God.

The WELS Commission on Evangelism has also created evangelism resources with conversations in mind. A brief look at the Congregational Services website shows a module entitled *Everyone Outreach* designed to make churches more willing to evangelize. The newest program, *Let's Go: Love, Listen, and Lead*, is closely related. Where *Everyone Outreach* is designed to look at a congregation's outreach culture, *Let's Go* is training for individual

¹² Kelm, 9.

¹³ Don Everts, *The Reluctant Witness: Discovering the Delight of Spiritual Conversations*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019) 140.

Christians to better reach out with the gospel. The outline *Let's Go* uses includes the words love, listen, and lead, which will be the outline for the lessons this project taught.

As churches look to create a welcoming environment in their churches and witness their faith in the community, teenagers can be an active part of that work. This project seeks to combine the sinful world's need for a Christian witness, conversational training, and the effectiveness of a program to accomplish its stated goal.

Conclusion

There is still much to study in the area of conversational witnessing. In the spirit of Geiger's 1997 study of WELS high schools' witnessing training, this study will see the impact of witnessing training on eighth-grade students growing up in a vastly different era from the one previously studied. In 1997, Pastor John Ibisch, a religion teacher at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, said, "When kids get comfortable sharing their faith at a younger age, it may be easier to share their faith when communication is tougher in the teenage years."¹⁴ This project brought the witnessing training down to a younger age. Since the impact of technology is so prevalent in these middle-schoolers' lives, I will place a greater emphasis on conversational skills, empathy-building reflections, and what to say.

¹⁴ Geiger, 2.

Chapter III: Implementation

This project attempted to demonstrate the impact of training middle school students to share their faith has in their lives. To do this, students spent fourteen consecutive school days learning how to love those God has put in their lives, practicing listening skills and conversing with each other, and, finally, utilizing biblical storytelling as a means to share their faith. This project followed the outline in the recent WELS Bible Study series entitled *Let's Go*. *Let's Go* is designed to train Christians to love their neighbors, actively listen to others, and lead others to Jesus. Since *Let's Go* was initially designed for adult Bible Study groups, I modified many activities to fit eighth-grade students.

I taught this project to thirty-one eighth-grade students spread between two different homerooms, 8A and 8B. On two days a week, both homerooms are together for instruction. There are eighteen males and thirteen females in the class. Twelve students (39 percent) are WELS members, and most of the remaining students go to other area churches of various denominations. One student is new to the faith. All eighth-grade students have a Bible study class two days a week and have catechism instruction with a pastor for two additional days. I taught the lessons associated with this project for fourteen consecutive school days. Most of the classes took place in the morning, in periods that were forty minutes long. Each day or group of days listed includes the activity taught, the results of the activity from student journals, and a brief reflection on the day. Appendix A has a list of the lessons, objectives, and assessments split up by day.

Day 1: Introduction

I designed the first day of instruction to get students thinking about their role in sharing the gospel message. The students reviewed Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8, which speak about

bringing the gospel message to the world. Then, I asked students why they would want to share their faith. I displayed a statistic from a 2019 study on religion in the classroom that said that only 25 percent of Christian high school students are comfortable sharing their faith, which includes everything from an individual only wearing a religious symbol to having faith conversations with others.¹⁵ Finally, I had the students respond in their journals to three questions. The questions were:

1. Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?
2. On a scale of one to five, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?
3. What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?

Students used the promise of heaven or the torment of hell to drive their responses to the first question. Students seemed to be willing to share their faith with people they know, because they do not want someone they love to go to hell. Overall, student responses to the second question were interesting. Most students gave themselves a score of two or three out of five in terms of confidence in sharing their faith. For more information, see the table on page 32. Interestingly, most of their reasoning involved their personalities. Some have no fear of talking to others, and others keep to themselves. The third question featured a great variety in responses, but there were definite themes. These themes involved being made fun of, losing friends, and a lack of acceptance by their peers.

Days 2-3: Love

The students spent these days discussing and learning how to show love to others. I first shared some of their responses to the previous day's journal questions with the students. I did this to show why Christians need to be the best friends they can be so that when the time is right to

¹⁵ Pew Research Center, 33

share the Christian faith, they know they can talk about it with their friends. We then studied 1 John 4:7-21, which explains why Christians love others. Christians love each other because God loved us first. We then talked about how we show love to others. Student responses included: showing respect, offering hospitality, giving encouragement and compliments, demonstrating true honesty, and listening to others.

Then, we looked at the idea of being present in a conversation and relationship. I presented Stephen Covey's comparison between a bank account and relationships.¹⁶ As people deposit money into a bank, people also have to put something into a relationship. Students responded to "What do you deposit into a relationship?" with answers such as time, conversation, trust, and humor. Similarly, people make withdrawals from bank accounts, and people also make withdrawals from relationships. Students said lying, gossiping and sharing secret information, and not spending time together are ways relationships are damaged. Both classes said relationships come down to trust.

The students' final activity in class was playing "Have I Ever." Students raised their hands when I displayed conversational issues on the screen. The issues came from Turkle's book *Reclaiming Conversation* and featured these statements:

- I tried to have a conversation, and someone was distracted doing other work.
- I had a hard time knowing what to say in a conversation or what questions to ask.
- I talked about a serious topic, and the person you were talking with only gave advice.
- Instead of listening, I thought about what I wanted to say or talk about.
- I randomly changed the conversation about what I wanted to talk about.
- I looked at my phone during a conversation to get out of it.
- I spent time with a friend, and they were on their phone the whole time.

¹⁶ Sean Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (New York: Fireside, 1998) 131-142.

- I spent time with a friend, and I was on my phone the whole time.

Most students had either done these themselves or knew of someone who did. As students talked about people who do these actions that cause a lack of presentness, there was much discussion. Some students even remarked how rude people are when they make these conversational errors. But, most students did say they were guilty of doing these issues too.

To reflect, students responded to these three questions in their journal:

1. What are some ways you can specifically show love to others?
2. How "present" are you with people in conversations?
3. What can you do to improve being present with others?

Most of the student answers for question one are listed above. Most students thought they did an average job of being present with others, but most did say they needed to work on being better listeners. Some also mentioned that they needed to work on showing that they care more than they act. Showing love is important in any witnessing situation. The listener needs to see and hear that Christians are different in how they interact and live their lives. 1 Peter 2:12 encourages Christians to “live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” As Christians show love, it leads to further conversations which, prayerfully, leads nonbelievers to Jesus.

Days 4-6: The Power of Listening and Asking Questions

Students then engaged with activities designed to determine their listening habits and skills. I created these lessons to show how necessary listening skills are. Students first brainstormed a list of essential practices good listeners have. Both homerooms said eye contact, body posture, and not being distracted were qualities of solid listening. Students also mentioned giving feedback, such as asking questions, nodding heads, and repeating the speakers' ideas.

Students also brainstormed the attitudes it takes to have an effective conversation. Students said it takes humility, patience, gentleness, attentiveness, and understanding to have a good conversation. I asked students which of these skills they needed to improve. Eleven (35 percent) students said they needed to stop zoning out, stop being distracted, and "actually really listen." In terms of what they needed to do to improve it, some said they needed to stop daydreaming so much, think about what others were saying, and ask better questions.

The class then discussed the Stephen Covey quote, "seek first to understand, then to be understood," to better look at the role of listening.¹⁷ To reinforce this idea, students then looked at a series of Bible passages (Appendix C) that also talk about the importance of listening. Proverbs especially explained the need to listen. Students then applied this lesson by thinking of the best listeners they knew. While responses were broad, some students replied with friends, parents, and even their dog or a wall. Most of their reasoning was similar, as all of these good listeners listen quietly, show love, and do not interrupt.

Asking good questions is also an essential job while learning communication skills. Day five featured a lesson on the similarities and differences between open and closed questions. A closed question is a question that has a limited number of responses, such as yes or no. The answers to closed questions can also be factual, one where the answer does not change. An open question is a question used to cause the listener to reflect and get them to talk more by using starting words such as why or what. The answers to open questions can be different by the day, as the answer can depend on the listener's mood or thoughts. Open questions spark reflection, not just retrieval of information. On day five, students completed two *Quizizz* activities on their Chromebooks to see how well they could identify open and closed questions. *Quizizz* is an online assessment tool that allows students to compete against each other in timed quizzes. The

¹⁷ Covey, 165

questions from both quizzes got students talking about open and closed questions. Assessment of open question usage occurred throughout the unit. The average score on both quizzes was near 80% for both homerooms.

On day six, students watched half of the Answers in Genesis' *Demolishing Strongholds* video episode nine, titled "Simple Tools for Brain Surgery." *Demolishing Strongholds* is a Bible study video series recorded from a teen conference held in 2007. Students watched the video to give a greater background and give them some question examples they could use in their conversations. Longtime speaker and founder of the Worldview Academy, a Christian Apologetics high school ministry, Bill Jack presented four questions that people can use for "simple brain surgery" in order to get people to talk and explain what they mean. The four questions were "What do you mean by that?" "How do you know what you are saying is true?" "What difference does it make?" and "What if you are wrong?"¹⁸ Students discussed the usefulness of knowing these questions and used them in later conversations. Bill Jack says that these questions open up conversations with an atheist but claims that these questions can end conversations because the atheist will not have a good answer for these questions. Jack's goal seems to be winning a conversation and proving an atheist wrong rather than using a loving approach. Finally, students previewed their first roleplay activity by brainstorming answers to "Why do you believe in God?" Students brainstormed their answers by writing down their initial responses to the question. Then, they were encouraged to practice saying their answer aloud at home.

¹⁸ Bill Jack, "Simple Tools for Brain Surgery, Part I." March 17-19 2007. The Creation Museum, Petersburg, KY. 21:36, DVD, from *Demolishing Strongholds* Youth Conference.

Days 7-9: Listening and Speaking Practice

On days seven and eight, students practiced listening and speaking to one another in a classroom environment. Two days featured lessons from *Let's Go*, a witness training program developed by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Commission on Evangelism. Through videos and Bible studies, *Let's Go* participants are trained to love, listen, and lead people to Jesus, with the goal to go out and share their faith. Day seven featured a short clip from "Listen, Lesson Two" about the Columbo Approach, which is all about asking questions in a kind and non-confrontational way. Students wrote the questions down in their journals and referenced them throughout the training.

On day eight, students in groups of three had a simulated conversation in which one student had to ask another, "Why do you believe in God?" The second student responded and took part in the conversation. The third student was to observe, listen, and help the conversation move forward in case a participant did not know what to say. The student groups rotated through this pattern, with all three students spending time in each role. The conversations took approximately three minutes before the listeners, speakers, and observers switched roles. Students then responded to these questions in their journal:

1. How did it feel to write and practice your response to 'Why do you believe in God?' Explain.
2. What questions did you use while listening?
3. Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?

Students worked on active listening on days eight and nine. To do this, students watched the first eighteen minutes of *Let's Go*, "Listen, Lesson Three." This video, led by Martin Luther College communication professor Dr. Mark Paustian, featured an active listening skills practice.

Paustian taught and had two helpers demonstrate skills such as using facial expressions and eye contact, back-channeling, content paraphrases, reflecting feelings, and asking open questions. As a class, we practiced the skills the video presented after they were taught.

While most students made excellent eye contact and facial expressions, other skills needed practice. Some students naturally back-channel or use short, verbal cues to tell speakers that they are listening to them. Most others tried to insert them when appropriate. Content paraphrasing, where listeners briefly repeat what was said, seemed a little more prevalent in their conversations. Reflection of feeling, where listeners accurately ask and identify the speaker's feelings, proved most challenging for them to use. Lastly, our work with questions on days four through five seemed to make asking questions easier for the students in their conversations, so I heard many questions.

After reflecting on the first lesson in this series, I did not think splitting up the recorded conversation for each section worked well, so we spent another day reviewing skills and then finished the video. Students then had full-length conversations with different students to try out all of these skills in a more realistic setting. The full-length conversations seemed to go better than the broken-up ones.

Following these days of activities, students reflected on these questions:

1. How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?
2. What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?
3. What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?

For question one, six students wrote that the activity was awkward for them. For question two, ten students said the best thing about listening was the stories their friends were telling.

Anecdotally, it was interesting for me to see students hold long, sustained conversations. I

thought that there was no way students would go beyond a five-minute conversation, but some students went on so long that I had to end their conversations early to move the class forward in the lesson. Those students mentioned how they learned facts about their classmates they did not know before and were genuinely interested in learning more. The third question's responses still had not changed throughout the unit. Students still say they need to work on "not getting bored" and "keeping my attention" during conversations. Three students mentioned working on eye contact and facial expressions, while two did say that their content paraphrasing needed work.

Days 10-12: Storytelling Preparation

Students learned why they share the gospel. Then, they practiced speaking and listening skills while they conversed with one another. Days ten through twelve focused on what Christians could say as they share their faith. For these students, I chose that they would tell Bible stories because they had been hearing and learning Bible stories for most of their lives.

I introduced the topic of sharing Bible Stories on day ten. The students first identified what "Good News" meant to them to introduce them to the subject.¹⁹ "Good News" is the gospel, the saving work of Jesus Christ. The students then read Bible passages that speak about the good news and how Christians are to bring that good news to others. The final passage studied was Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Students then watched *Let's Go*: "Lead, Lesson 1." This section, led by Pastor Samuel Degner of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, encouraged Christians to share Bible stories if they do not know what to say. Other options included using the Apostles' Creed and favorite passages or hymns. After the end of that video section, students brainstormed a list of Bible stories that they could tell others about the good news of salvation. Finally, they finished watching the video as

¹⁹ This activity was adapted from *Let's Go*, Lead, Lesson 1.

Degner shared the story of Peter, which encourages Christians to share the gospel despite sins they committed in the past.

Day eleven featured a review of the previous class period's lesson and emphasized that the whole purpose of witnessing is to lead the listener to Jesus. Then, I taught students tips to tell successful stories through a Google Slides presentation. I utilized Pastor Sam Chan's acronym, SAM, to help them. SAM stands for Simple, Accurate, and Memorable.²⁰ To cap off the lesson, I told the story of the Old Testament prophet Nathan, who used a story to bring about repentance in King David (2 Sam 12:1-25). I asked students to listen for parts of SAM that I tried to utilize in my storytelling. For example, I did not use the names of Bathsheba and Uriah, although the students knew whom I was referencing. I also tried to use volume and effective pauses to make the story memorable. Since they knew the story, I asked my students how accurate my account was. I then gave students about ten minutes to choose and prepare their Bible stories. Students were to use their Bibles and other online tools to help them simply and accurately tell their stories. I told students to complete their stories as an assignment, but most finished in under five minutes, while a few took the whole time and brought their journals home.

Day twelve was a practice day for telling their stories. Since I thought the students were overconfident in their preparation, I created a modified proficiency scale and rubric for students to score themselves (Appendix 4).²¹ Students ranked their level of preparedness at the beginning of class and continued after each round of activities. Students first had to share their Bible stories aloud while facing a wall. Students were timed only to see how long their stories were to determine if they should add or remove parts of their stories. Most students finished within three

²⁰ Sam Chan, "Evangelism in a Skeptical World Video Study, Session 11: Story-Telling the Gospel." (Zondervan. January 3, 2018.) Youtube Video 25:10. <https://youtu.be/qEPQabRc44>

²¹ Robert J. Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching* (Solution Tree Press: Bloomington, IN) 2017, 14.

and four minutes, but two students spoke for almost seven minutes each. After speaking to the wall, students returned to their seats and took about eight minutes to revise their work. Although most students wrote that they felt very prepared before the initial round of sharing, almost all of them reworked sections of their story, and most of their writing got longer. Students then shared their stories with a member of the other class. The pairs spread around the gym to create enough room and distance for all fifteen groups. Most groups took around seven minutes to complete both of their sharing activities. Students filled in the last part of their proficiency scale when they finished.

Day 13: Final Round of Storytelling

The final day of instruction featured students sharing their prepared stories in groups. I chose the groups, and just as on day seven, one person in the group spoke, one listened, and the third observed the conversation. Additionally, students recorded their Bible stories and conversations using FlipGrid, an online educational tool that safely records videos and uploads them to a secure site. Student groups were assigned different locations around the school building to record, and I walked between them, giving help as necessary. Students chose their own stories, and they told stories such as the Bronze Snake, David and Goliath, Daniel and the Lion's Den, and the parables of the Prodigal Son and Lost Sheep. Students effectively told their stories accurately. The stories featured many details. Some of the stories did not necessarily lead people to Jesus, although they usually gave a good lesson or path to forgiveness.

When they completed speaking, listening, and observing, the students reflected on their storytelling. They answered these questions in their journal:

1. How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?
2. How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?

The word most commonly used to answer the first question was "awkward." After viewing the videos of their conversations, I would agree that awkward may have been a good word to describe some of their discussions. Much of the awkwardness came from the situations students came up with to tell their stories. For example, one was an out-of-work piano player, another group ate a fake meal, and others used unnecessary props. In some cases, the listener was spending more time acting and responding to the situation instead of asking questions. The stories, overall, were told well. If the groups had worked together initially, and cooperatively planned the situations their stories would go with, the listener could have been better prepared to ask questions and have a more authentic conversation.

In answering the second question, students felt better listening to each other. Students who felt nervous or did not think their story went well realized that everyone was in the same situation. Likewise, students felt encouraged by listening to someone else tell Bible stories. Listeners remarked that others' stories helped them think through other stories they could have told. One student wrote, "It was pretty cool to be able to hear how others interpreted the Bible stories and how they shared them." Some students remarked how it was good to act like a skeptic, as it helped prepare them for authentic conversations.

Day 13: Project Conclusion

Later on day thirteen, students reflected on these three questions in their journals.

1. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?
2. What worries or questions do you still have?
3. What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?

After teaching the lessons on conversational witnessing, there was a slight uptick in the results from the initial question. Seven students jumped from level two to three, eight jumped from three to four, and four said they went up two points. Four students kept their scores the same (two fives and two threes), and one student went downward, from a five to a four. Most students said they still feel nervous about sharing their faith and having conversations with others, but ten students did say they felt more prepared or more comfortable than when they started. Most of the students' worries and concerns were nervousness, losing friends or social status, or not telling the story well. These fears did not change much since the first lesson. I did not expect the fears to change because most Christians have these same fears as they share their faith. Keeping the classroom as a safe space to practice and doing it with friends relieved these fears.

The most important lessons students learned included listening. Fifteen students mentioned listening in their responses, either as a skill they felt was most meaningful or as a skill they needed to work on more. Others specified active listening skills, such as asking questions, knowing how and when to react, and communicating with confidence. Two students stated that it was impactful to practice witnessing in realistic situations and conversations. The best way to know how they would react in these situations is to practice the skills despite their awkwardness at the time. Preparation, other students noted, was key to their success in these activities.

Over the last thirteen lessons, students learned how to love those God put into their life, listened actively and attentively in conversations, and learned how to ask questions. Students also discovered and practiced storytelling as a way to share their faith. Students' statements seem to indicate that the training did help them feel more confident and better prepared to share their faith.

Chapter IV: Reflective Essay

Introduction

By completing this project, I sought to discover the impact of witnessing training on middle school students. My primary motivation for completing a project like this is the fact that Christians know that they should share the gospel, but many do not know how or where to begin. I am blessed to serve in a career where talking about God is what I do daily. As the United States becomes increasingly unchurched, the need for Christian witnesses from all ages and vocations will increase. More and more discussions about Jesus' death and resurrection will need to happen. People need to know the hope they have in Christ. The Apostle Peter says, "Always be

prepared to give an answer for the reason for the hope that you have but to do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15)." I pray that my students share their faith and witness it to everyone they meet.

Students learned to love their neighbors, have meaningful conversations, and lead others to Jesus in this project. Students learned that they love their neighbors because God loves their neighbors. Loving your neighbors means spending time together, showing respect, and real authentic listening. Students discussed the benefits of meaningful conversations and practiced the skills needed to perform them, including asking questions. Finally, students learned what to say to lead someone to Jesus by practicing telling Bible stories to one another.

Conclusions

The impact of witnessing training on the students was very positive, especially in the area of witnessing confidence. Students were able to complete these witnessing tasks, and 83 percent of students surveyed thought they were more confident than when they started the activities. While confidence is hard to measure, students reported being more aware of why Christians share their faith and how important it is that they also share their faith. The tables below show the initial scores from day one, the ending scores from day thirteen, and the changes between them. Witnessing confidence was self-graded using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being no confidence and a 5 having the highest confidence.

Table 1: Before and After Confidence Scores

	Before Studying Witnessing (Day 1)	After Studying Witnessing (Day 13)
1 (no confidence)	2	
2	9	
3 (average)	12	11

4		11
5 (highest confidence)	3	4

Table 2: Change in scores from before the training to after the training.

Change in Scores	Number of responses
2 to 3	4
3 to 4	6
1 to 3	2
2 to 4	2
3 to 5	2
Same	5
5 to 4	1

Note: Four students missed substantial time during the unit and missed the majority of the activities. While thirty-one students were taught portions of the unit, only twenty-seven were there enough to complete the majority of the activities.

As one can see above, almost every student grew in witnessing confidence due to this study. The students who ranked themselves at the bottom before studying witnessing rose one to two places at the conclusion. There are no students in the lowest two tiers at the conclusion. Six students rose two places higher. As noted in the literature review, Christians are more apt to share their faith if they feel more confident doing it.

A fascinating part of this study was the student responses. At the beginning of this study, students shared what they were most worried about when sharing their faith. I broke the students' concerns into three categories: what they should say, how to say it, and the consequences of sharing their faith. The consequences of sharing their Christian faith were their biggest fear.

Students shared that they were most concerned with losing a friendship and being judged by others. Being made fun of for their faith was another concern for these eighth graders. These concerns are not shocking, as friendships, social status, and fitting in are essential to eighth-grade students. In general, no person wants to feel dumb or get proved wrong. The reasons why these young Christians do not share their faith are similar to the reasons all Christians hesitate to share their faith. These fears are enough to stop anyone from sharing their faith, but being prepared seemed to help students feel more confident despite their fears. Student Z commented, "Honestly, there still will always be the want to stay cool in my environment so that can sometimes stop me. Overall, I feel better and more prepared." Student J said, "I still feel nervous about what people will think of me but now that I have practical [experience], I feel much more confident."

The second-largest concern students shared involved not knowing what to say. Students were concerned about not knowing what to say and saying the wrong things. Some students worried about whether they would know how to answer questions. The work in this project hopefully gave students something to say. Student H commented after his work, "I have learned to be more prepared now. This training did help me to use Bible stories and more specific verses in the Bible." Other students agreed with Student H. Five other students wanted more practice in different situations to be even more prepared. The recommendations section below will speak more about this.

The third major concern students shared was more about how they would share the gospel. Some people do not like talking or communicating with others. A few students shared that talking with people gives them anxiety. These students worry about stutters, awkwardness, and freezing up when people talk to them. Moses, the great Israelite leader of the Exodus who worried about his speaking ability, comes to mind (Exod 4:10). But perhaps this is the

uniqueness of communication. God blessed each student with different personalities, ways of communicating, and various gifts and talents (Ps 139:13-15). Each of these gifts is essential in the church, and God can use these gifts to lead others to Him (1 Cor 12:4-11). This project allowed each student to develop their skills. Students approached the witnessing activities in ways that showed their God-given personalities. Some students were comfortable sitting quietly and asking questions, while others were fine sharing Bible stories, and others turned their stories into a chance to debate. Each student's approach fit their personality.

Perhaps the most critical question moving forward is: When these young Christians find themselves in a situation where they can share their faith, will they? Of course, there is no way to answer this question in this study. My prayer is that students continue to grow in God's Word and in communication skills so they can share their faith boldly and confidently when the opportunities arise.

Recommendations

I would state two significant recommendations as a result of this study. The first is to create opportunities for students to talk about their faith. The second recommendation is to design and create a youth-focused witnessing curriculum that follows proper Christian doctrine. There would be opportunities to explore and practice other witnessing techniques within that curriculum, such as apologetics. I pray that students grow in witnessing abilities and confidence through these recommendations.

The first recommendation is to create as many opportunities as possible for students to talk about their faith. Michael Geiger quotes longtime Wisconsin Lutheran High School Pastor John Ibsch, who says "when kids get comfortable sharing their faith at a younger age, it may be easier to share their faith when communication is tougher in the teenage years."²² Creating these

²² Geiger, 3

opportunities will help create an environment where people naturally share faith. In addition, students need to have ample practice sharing their faith to feel confident enough to do it when it comes time to share it. But, as current research shows, many students do not have the conversational skills to carry out a long conversation, which means that our students need to learn and practice conversational skills in school.

Listening and speaking is an integral part of eighth-grade language arts instruction. The Common Core State Standards for language arts, adopted by the Minnesota Department of Education in 2010, feature sections on speaking and listening. Listening and speaking are essential skills for future educational settings, relationships, and jobs. Students need instruction in specific conversational skills, and everyone has different needs. Coming up with activities that directly teach each skill and provide better practice will be helpful for all.

As students learn how to converse, they can apply these new skills within their Bible lessons. One of the easiest and best ways to prepare students to witness is to give them ample opportunities to talk about their faith. Therefore, pastors and teachers should think about integrating conversational witnessing into their Bible and Catechism classes. Teachers are already assigning memory work, hymns, Bible stories, and Catechism lessons. These lessons and assignments are valuable tools Christians use to share their faith. For example, students could practice saying memory work passages to each other and briefly discuss what the passage means. Or, students could roleplay scenarios as they study the commandments in Catechism class that explore what you could say to someone dealing with a particular sin. By practicing sharing their faith aloud, students could help build a Bible communication culture in their lives that they could apply in many different situations. Since classroom faith-sharing opportunities are designed to be

low pressure and done in a familiar and safe space, students can develop the skills and confidence here before taking it out to the world.

Another place to give students ample practice sharing their faith would be with other groups of people. To start, students could practice with other people they know. While the students practiced sharing their faith in the classroom with their friends and classmates, other people could help in the same process. For example, students could practice witnessing their faith with their grandparents during Grandparents Day. My students could share Bible stories with younger students during the eighth grade "Buddies Time" that my school has. In both of these situations, there is a reciprocal effect. First graders could talk about faith with eighth graders, too, encouraging younger kids to talk about Jesus. Since these events occur within a school setting, it would be easy to practice and provide additional support. Not only would the students benefit from more practice, but think of how the grandparents or younger students would love to hear someone they know talk about Jesus and the gospel message.

Another application to this first recommendation could involve short-term mission opportunities. Many high schools and churches offer mission trips as an opportunity for teens to serve God and other communities. While there are many different opportunities to serve in many different areas on a mission trip, teens on a mission trip will often need to talk to somebody. Therefore, during mission trip training sessions, conversational witnessing training should be a requirement. Learning how to have conversations and giving students more practice sharing their faith could make these experiences more effective. I think of how valuable this training would have been for me as I spent time going door to door, inviting people to church when I was their age. Daily debriefing meetings, where students talk and analyze their conversations during the day, could also be part of the mission trip experience. Perhaps most importantly, this type of

on-the-field training gets students outside of the classroom and into the community in an impactful way. Trip participants get feedback on how well their conversations and witness went in real-time and authentic situations. Trip leaders train and support these young Christians to witness their faith.

The second recommendation is to create resources to make witnessing more accessible for younger Christians. These resources could involve conversational witnessing, real-life scenario-based training, and even apologetics training. I believe eighth grade is an important time to teach a unit like this because students are going off to high school. Not all students are going to Christian high schools, where their faith will be challenged in many different ways. For example, although Student B felt more confident witnessing after the training, she still worried about other situations. "I think I just want to know what to say in other situations, too." Other students echoed the same thoughts.

One resource teachers can currently use from Northwestern Publishing House, the publishing arm of the WELS, is titled "What do I say, Lord?" Published in 1997 and designed for seventh and eighth graders, "What do I say, Lord?" helps develop student responses to different scenarios. Lesson titles include "What do I say, Lord, when people don't trust in Jesus as their Savior?" or "What do I say, Lord, when someone puts me down for my faith?" Students are encouraged to act out scenarios and roleplay what they could say. Examples include what you say when "a drunk driver has killed the student's sister" or "I used to believe in God, but ever since Dad left, I can't believe there's anyone up there who loves me."²³ With their focus on knowing what to say and loving those God has placed in your life, these studies could be helpful

²³ James Witt, *What Do I Say, Lord Teachers Guide* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997). 34.

foundations for teachers wanting to integrate conversational witnessing into their classes. The one piece these lessons are missing is straightforward instruction in conversational skills practice. Otherwise, the book's scenarios would help generate good discussion and thoughtful skills practice. Some modernization will be necessary. While the lessons within it are everyday life situations, there are current topics that the curriculum could address. Topics dealing with sexual identity or the authority of Scripture are some examples.

While beneficial, "What do I say, Lord" is not a formal witnessing curriculum since it is missing critical conversational training. Witnessing training programs needs to be designed with young Christians in mind. WELS' *Let's Go* program served as the outline for this project. The videos and activities are well done, thorough, and professional in their presentation. The videos, led by experts, made teaching the classes easy. One did not need to be a witnessing or conversation expert to implement these activities. The modeling of conversations was beneficial because it would be hard for a teacher to show what students should be practicing by themselves. Since this is a new program, teachers would also find the videos helpful to see what they should be teaching and how conversations could be taught and assessed. Despite all the positives, *Let's Go* was not designed for middle-school students. While the class watched segments of the videos and I adapted the lessons for eighth-grade students, the lessons and videos did not always engage the students.

Nothing like the *Let's Go* series, with its well-thought-out videos and lesson plans, exists for middle school students, especially in our Lutheran schools. One program does exist on Right Now Media, titled "God Talk." It is a youth leadership training course in witnessing from a group based out of New Zealand. "God Talk's" videos are brief, their lessons designed for students, and it trains many of the principles *Let's Go* does. However, most videos teach students to end with a

"give your life to Christ" altar call. Since the altar call appears in most of these videos, these videos are unusable for the Lutheran school classroom. The focus of any witness needs to be what God has done for all people, the gospel message of sin, grace, and a Savior,

The curriculum also could be adaptable to fit different witnessing techniques. There are many different ways to share faith. For example, I taught students to have conversations and share their faith by telling planned Bible stories. Instead of telling stories, students could talk with each other through God's Great Exchange, a witnessing plan developed by the WELS in the mid-1980s. In the God's Great Exchange plan, Christians talk about how Jesus exchanged his perfect life for our sinful lives through pictures. Students could work together to research other religions and practice sharing the truth of Christianity with them or share what they believe about Christmas and Easter with them. Instead of being told they should invite non-Christian friends to church, students could practice doing it within the classroom. There are so many activities and lessons a witnessing curriculum could have, but it does not need to be time-intensive. The curriculum's activities could vary after teaching how to have conversations, making it perfect for multi-age classrooms.

Students also showed interest in apologetics-based witnessing techniques. Apologetics, the art and science of defending faith using logic and argument, could also be an excellent addition to a witnessing curriculum. Instruction expert Robert Marzano places generating and defending claims and errors in reasoning as two of the 43 elements of effective teaching.²⁴ In addition to its benefits as a way to share faith, teachers can use faith-sharing and apologetics scenarios to assess knowledge in science, social studies, and other classes. Apologetics curriculums are also easier to find. Within Lutheranism, Concordia Publishing House publishes a 52 lesson apologetics curriculum for schools and Catechism instruction. Other experts, such as

²⁴ Marzano, 49-51

former Answers in Genesis speakers Jason Lisle and Bill Jack, also use logical reasoning to defend their claims. Both Lisle and Jack also have books and training videos available.

Developing a communication culture in Bible classes does not need to be complicated, but it will take a different mindset and approach than has been done in the past. Could students speak and talk about their faith instead of continually writing answers? I know they could. Increased competence in Christian conversation will benefit our students as they share their faith in the future. Through this training, I pray the words of the hymn "Hark the Voice of Jesus Crying" show themselves in students' lives:

“If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked
With the Judgement's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children
To the Savior's waiting arms.”²⁵

²⁵ *Christian Worship* Hymn 745, 2021.

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Appendix I: Conversational Witnessing Unit Plan

Day	Lesson Objectives and Direction	Assessment Journal Prompts
1	<p>Introduction to the Witnessing Unit Gauge the student’s initial thoughts about witnessing and sharing their faith.</p>	<p>Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?</p> <p>What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?</p>
2	<p>Love the People God Put in Your Life <i>Objective: The student will clarify how to love people who don’t believe the same thing you do.</i></p> <p>Love One Another: 1 John 4:7-21 <i>Why do we love one another?</i> <i>What are some ways we can show we love others?</i> <i>(Brainstorm a list)</i></p>	<p>What are some ways you specifically can show love to others?</p>
3	<p>Building Relationships Take Time <i>Objective: The student will explain what being “present” in a conversation means.</i></p> <p>Sean Covey’s “Relationship Bank Account” idea.²⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss these questions: ● How do you add to it? 	<p>How “present” are you with people in conversations?</p> <p>What can you do to improve being present with others?</p>

²⁶ Covey, 131-144

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you harm your relationships with others? <p>Define “Being Present” in a conversation. Look at biblical examples of Jesus being present.</p>	
4	<p>The Power of Listening <i>Objective: The student will identify good listeners and begin to think about their own listening skills.</i></p> <p>Ask: What skills does good listening require? (Brainstorm a list of responses) What attitudes does good listening require? (Brainstorm a list of responses)²⁷</p> <p>Discuss the role of listening- “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”</p> <p>Have students look up Bible passages that talk about listening and discuss what these verses show about listening. (Proverbs; James; etc.)</p>	<p>Who is the best listener you have ever known? What made them a good listener?</p> <p>What are the biggest challenges you face when listening? How can you improve them?</p>
5	<p>Open Questions <i>Objective: The student will identify and practice using open questions.</i></p> <p>Discuss Journal from last time. Introduce idea of open questions. Generate a list of question openers.²⁸</p> <p><i>Assessment: Open Questions Activity (Kahoot, Quizizz, or I create)</i></p>	<p>Brainstorm your answer to this question: Why do you believe in God anyway?²⁹</p>
6	<p>Roleplay asking types of Questions <i>Objective: The student will practice sharing their faith by answering the question: “Why do you believe in God anyway?”</i></p>	<p>After roleplay activity: How did it feel to say your response to “Why do you believe in God anyway?”</p>

²⁷ Jeffrey Zwiers and Marie Crawford, *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings* (Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, ME 2011) 41-44

²⁸ Palmer, 92

²⁹ Zwiers, 47

	<p>What stops people from sharing their faith with others? What stops people from having conversations with others?</p> <p><i>Let's Go: Listen, Lesson 2, Video segment 3 (The Columbo Approach) (8 minutes) (Have students fill out sections about the 3 types of questions)</i></p> <p>Practice asking these questions to another student acting like they don't believe in God, who asks the question: "Why do you believe in God anyway?"</p> <p><i>Assessment: Teacher observation and written work</i></p>	<p>What questions did you use while listening? Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?</p> <p>Brainstorm a real life story you want to tell.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Roleplay Listening Skills <i>Objective: The student will view and practice habits of good listening.</i></p> <p>View: Let's Go: Listen, Lesson 3 (whole video) Watch the conversation roleplay the video presents. Practice the "behaviors of listening" with partners as described in the video. Pause after each listening section to work in pairs. <i>Assessment: Teacher observation</i></p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>Roleplay Listening Skills <i>Objective: The student will view and practice habits of good listening.</i> Finish the lesson from Day 7. <i>Assessment: Teacher observation</i></p>	<p>How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?</p> <p>What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?</p> <p>What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Introduce Bible stories as a way to witness <i>Objective: The student will write and practice telling a Bible story.</i></p> <p>Share journal responses from the previous lesson. Watch the entirety of "Let's Go: Lead, Lesson 1"</p> <p>Brainstorm Bible lessons that you could use to lead people to Jesus.</p>	<p>What are some Bible stories you could use to talk to someone about Jesus?</p>

10	<p>Work on Bible Stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss what the purpose of telling Bible stories are • Work on keeping the story simple to understand • Work on using the story to lead someone to Jesus. <p><i>Assessment: Student written work, observation, and teacher discussion</i></p>	Write your Bible story in the journal.
11	<p>Work on Bible Stories</p> <p>Repeat Day 10. Collaborate with the teacher and other students.</p>	Finish writing the Bible story in the journal.
12	<p>Share Bible Stories with classmates in groups</p> <p><i>Assessment: Teacher observation or video recording</i></p>	<p>How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?</p> <p>How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?</p>
13	<p>Final Journal Entry</p>	<p>Read your first thoughts on witnessing from lesson 1.</p> <p>On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?</p> <p>What worries or questions do you still have?</p> <p>What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?</p>

Appendix II: Conversational Witnessing Journal Questions

After Day 1:

1. Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?
2. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?
3. What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?

After Day 2:

4. What are some ways you specifically can show love to others?

After Day 3:

5. How “present” are you with people in conversations?
6. What can you do to improve being present with others?

After Day 4:

7. Who is the best listener you have ever known? What made them a good listener?
8. What are the biggest challenges you face when listening? How can you improve them?

After Day 6: After the roleplay activity-

9. How did it feel to say your response to “Why do you believe in God anyway?”
10. What questions did you use while listening? Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?

After Day 8:

11. How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?
12. What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?
13. What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?

After Day 12:

14. How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?
15. How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?

After Day 13 (Conclusion) Read your first thoughts on witnessing from lesson 1.

16. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?
17. What worries or questions do you still have?
18. What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?

Appendix III: Listening Bible Passages

Proverbs 15:28

The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Proverbs 17:27-28

Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise, when he closes his lips he is deemed intelligent.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

Proverbs 18:13

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Proverbs 15:23

To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!

James 1:19-20

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.

What are the important lessons these passages are teaching us about listening?

Appendix IV: Sharing Bible Stories Proficiency Scale

Before I do any preparation today, I feel like my Bible Story is (circle one)

Not prepared Sort of prepared Mostly prepared Totally Prepared

As I practiced telling my Bible Story by myself to the wall:

It went _____ long. (Check stopwatch on board)

I feel like my Bible Story is (circle one)

Not prepared Sort of prepared Mostly prepared Totally Prepared

Feel free to take a few minutes to look at your Bible Story and better prepare yourself. Feel free to talk to a wall again, if there is time.

As I practiced telling my Bible Story to another person from the other class:

It went _____ long. (Check stopwatch on board)

I feel like my Bible Story is (circle one)

Not prepared Sort of prepared Mostly prepared Totally Prepared

After telling the Bible Story to a partner, What can I do to better prepare myself for the final activity tomorrow?

Appendix V: Student H Journal**After Day 1:**

19. Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?

I want others to know and believe the Gospel and law. Know and believe Jesus died for you. God also said Go and make disciples of all nations.

20. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

3 because I am shy and I don't want to be persecuted and bullied, but I also want others to hear the good news and believe it.

21. What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?

Persecution and embarrassment.

After Day 2:

22. What are some ways you specifically can show love to others?

Do a good deed: help them carry books, comfort them. Submit to your friendship. Trust them. Be honest to them. Tell how God loves you (and comforts you). Respect, encourage, hang out. Care for them.

After Day 3:

23. How “present” are you with people in conversations?

I am present during conversations, I listen to them, but sometimes I get confused on what they are saying so I zone out. Or, I might be in a hurry or stressed or homework so I only focus on that and not the person talking to me.

24. What can you do to improve being present with others?

Look them in the eyes and ask questions. When I am busy and someone tries to start a conversation, I could say in 1 minute or stop what I was working on.

After Day 4:

25. Who is the best listener you have ever known? What made them a good listener?

My father. He is understanding, he asked questions. He is a salesman. Eye contact.

26. What are the biggest challenges you face when listening? How can you improve them?

I need to ask more questions so I understand.

After Day 6: After the roleplay activity-

27. How did it feel to say your response to “Why do you believe in God anyway?”

I felt more prepared because I practiced.

28. What questions did you use while listening? Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?

How do you know? Theory of evolution is based on a theory of men. What if you are wrong? Help me understand this? Makes them question themselves.

After Day 8:

29. How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?

A bit weird, because I was forced to.

30. What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?

I got to learn something that I never knew. I get to know what the person has gone through.

31. What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?

Content paraphrase: I sometimes do it.

After Day 12:

32. How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?

I felt a bit embarrassed. I stuttered a lot and I did better the day before.

33. How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?

It was interesting how they approached the Bible story. It was different than I would do it.

After Day 13 (Conclusion) Read your first thoughts on witnessing from lesson 1.

34. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

3. I still stutter, but I have learned to be more prepared now. This training did help me: to use Bible stories and to use more specific verses in the Bible.

35. What worries or questions do you still have?

I worry when I stutter.

36. What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?

To share the news and don't keep the good news to yourself. I want to learn when to use a certain Bible story.

Appendix VI: Student J Journal

After Day 1:

1. Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?

For me personally, hell terrifies me in the way it is described. It makes me anxious to at so many people are headed that way. I want to get to heaven and see people there because of the seed I planted in their heart.

2. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

2. I struggle a lot with other people's beliefs of me and I'm scared of judgment. I don't want to lose any friendships or have a bad reputation. I also have doubts about my own faith so it can be hard to tell others that they need to believe it.

3. What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?

Cheer is the only place where I am not surrounded by Christian friends. There are many people that are hard-core Atheists including coaches and the gym owner. Sharing my faith could get me into serious trouble or even kicked out of the gym. Cheer is really important to me and I don't want to lose it.

After Day 2:

4. What are some ways you specifically can show love to others?

One of the most important ways people can show love is to check in and really listen to your friends. People can be great at hiding pain behind smiles. Regularly check in on your friend's mental health and just let them rant to you. This builds trust and sharing burdens can be so freeing. And if someone shares something with you, keep it to yourself. Don't break their trust and make them feel stupid for talking to you.

After Day 3:

5. How "present" are you with people in conversations?

I tend to be present in many conversations but struggle with what to say. I want to show people that I really care about their feelings but I always sound dry because I don't know what to say. Obviously, I'm not present in every conversation and I have work to do on that.

6. What can you do to improve being present with others?

One thing that I think I should do more is be the one to reach out. People can have a hard time opening up without an invitation to. If they do open up then I will really listen and let them rant.

After Day 4:

7. Who is the best listener you have ever known? What made them a good listener?

My two YTH leaders Hannah and Julia are amazing listeners. They always let me come to them, give me their full attention even in the busiest rooms and make me feel loved at the end of every conversation.

8. What are the biggest challenges you face when listening? How can you improve them?

I struggle with thinking about what I'm gonna say during conversations. I need to not think as much about their opinion of my response and more about making them feel heard.

After Day 6: After the roleplay activity-

9. How did it feel to say your response to "Why do you believe in God anyway?"

I felt confident to explain that the Bible was the reason. But, when asked "How do you know if the Bible is true?" I was stuck. If the person doesn't believe in the Bible, it's hard to say, "The Bible is true because it says it is."

10. What questions did you use while listening? Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?

*Why do you believe in God? How do you know that's true?
They were effective in getting to find out the person's faith background but it was hard to get farther than "the Bible says."*

After Day 8:

11. How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?

It was a little uncomfortable at first because it was a little awkward and forced but when my person was practicing these skills, it made it better.

12. What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?

It feels great to be trusted. When you create an environment where people can open up to you it's

a great feeling.

13. What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?

I think being prepared going into it. I'm good at getting there once it's started but being fully prepared is not my best skill.

After Day 12:

14. How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?

I felt fairly confident after reading the section in the Bible. I think that my story went very well, but it was a little awkward.

15. How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?

I really enjoyed listening to other stories. It felt a little forced but it was interesting trying to see what a skeptic would say and think.

After Day 13 (Conclusion) Read your first thoughts on witnessing from lesson 1.

16. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

I still feel nervous about what people will think of me but now that I have practical [experience], I feel much more confident.

17. What worries or questions do you still have?

Losing the friendship, getting in trouble (sharing my beliefs at a place like cheer could get me in big trouble).

18. What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?

I learned about listening. It's easy to say "go share your faith" but it's not as focused on listening to the skeptics before sharing. There aren't any other things I need to learn about.

Appendix VII: Student K Journal**After Day 1:**

1. Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?

Because that's what God calls us to do, it's part of our purpose of being on earth.

2. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

Probably a 2 or 3, I've never really done it before and I'm not sure what to say.

3. What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?

Saying the wrong thing and being embarrassed, or just being ignored.

After Day 2:

4. What are some ways you specifically can show love to others?

I can listen to their conversations, help them when they need it and pray with and for them.

After Day 3:

5. How "present" are you with people in conversations?

I think that sometimes I could listen more in conversations, but it can be hard if they don't listen to what I have to say when I'm telling them something.

6. What can you do to improve being present with others?

I could turn my phone off and respond to the person talking to me. I could ask questions about their situation, give them advice on what to do and pray with/for them.

After Day 4:

7. Who is the best listener you have ever known? What made them a good listener?

Maybe my mom, she always listens when I'm talking to her, she responds and gives good advice.

8. What are the biggest challenges you face when listening? How can you improve them?

I think I could just respond better instead of saying mhm and yeah.

After Day 6: After the roleplay activity-

9. How did it feel to say your response to “Why do you believe in God anyway?”

I think it felt good to actually practice sharing my faith with people I know and am comfortable with. It was good to practice a realistic situation and what I would say.

10. What questions did you use while listening? Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?

I used: What do you mean? What difference does it make? How do you know? What if you're wrong?

After Day 8:

11. How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?

I feel more confident when I know people are listening and responding.

12. What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?

I enjoyed listening to stories and having conversations about them, and sharing my opinion.

13. What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?

Probably just making sure 100% of my attention is in the conversation and that I'm not zoning out.

After Day 12:

14. How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?

It felt pretty good, it was a little scary though. However, I felt prepared and I knew my story well.

15. How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?

It was good, I wasn't really sure what to say though.

After Day 13 (Conclusion) Read your first thoughts on witnessing from lesson 1.

16. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

I think I'm probably at a 4, maybe a three. I think there are definitely situations when I would have no idea what to say but I am more confident.

17. What worries or questions do you still have?

Like I said, I think there are more situations when I wouldn't know what to say.

18. What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?

I think it was important to just practice realistic situations and conversations. I think I would just want to learn what to say in other situations.

Appendix VIII: Student Z Journal

After Day 1:

1. Why do you want to share the Christian faith with others?

I want to share my faith with others so they do not suffer eternally in hell. I want them to have a chance to put their faith in Jesus. If I have an opportunity to share my faith, and I don't, and because of that someone dies without knowing Jesus that's on me.

2. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

At this point in my life I would say a 3. I used to be better at putting myself out there and sharing my faith, but as I got more insecure I have gotten worse. I want people to like me and sometimes I think about that before showing my faith.

3. What worries might hold you back from sharing your faith with others?

If I think my friendship is in danger because I am going to share my faith then I will hesitate. Or if I feel like I will get made fun of or ridiculed then I tend to be a lot more shy with my faith.

After Day 2:

4. What are some ways you specifically can show love to others?

Embrace them, show respect, offer hospitality without grumbling, give gifts, encouragement, check in and listen to them, show care, do things with them and spend time, acts of service, touch, honesty

After Day 3:

5. How "present" are you with people in conversations?

I think I am pretty present in most [of] my conversations. I just got a phone recently so I don't really get distracted by it, because I am so used to not having one. When there is a lot of time with someone I tend to have long deep conversations 1 on 1.

6. What can you do to improve being present with others?

I can cut distractions and really listen to what someone is saying instead of trying to speak first.

After Day 4:

7. Who is the best listener you have ever known? What made them a good listener?

When I needed to get things off my chest they were there for me. They listened carefully and were very engaged in the conversation. I felt heard and I was able to just trust them with the information.

8. What are the biggest challenges you face when listening? How can you improve them?

I often want to speak or say something without a ton of thought. I can listen before I speak and talk with care.

After Day 6: After the roleplay activity-

9. How did it feel to say your response to “Why do you believe in God anyway?”

I think it was good to be prepared and be confident in my answers. I think it is important to do this so we can be even more prepared for situations like these.

10. What questions did you use while listening? Which questions were effective in this situation? Why?

How do you know if you are right? Why do you believe in this? These questions helped me get to further know the person. I was also able to get a long thought out response by it.

After Day 8:

11. How did you feel while speaking during this activity? Why?

It felt like they were listening and it was engaging because they used good speaking skills.

12. What did you enjoy most while listening? Why?

I enjoyed their story, because it was thought out and entertaining.

13. What listening skills do you still need to work on the most? Why?

Listening to boring conversations. I tend to doze off during a boring lesson in school.

After Day 12:

14. How did it feel to say a Bible story to someone acting like a skeptic?

It was a little difficult explaining a story to someone with so many questions. Overall, it went well and it is good to talk to a skeptic.

15. How did it feel to listen to others share a Bible story?

It was great listening to someone else telling a Bible story while I am acting as a skeptic. As someone who didn't believe it was helpful to be explained to by someone.

After Day 13 (Conclusion) Read your first thoughts on witnessing from lesson 1.

16. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel about sharing your faith? Why?

Honestly I'd say after this I am about a 4. There still will always be the want to be cool in my environment so that can sometimes stop me. Overall, I feel better and I am more prepared to share my faith.

17. What worries or questions do you still have?

[Question left blank]

18. What are the most important lessons you learned about witnessing? What do you want to learn more about?

The most important lesson I'd say is to listen. If you want someone to change their mind then you need to hear them out. I would maybe like to learn what to say to specific groups of people.