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Lorna Van Gilst & Pat Kornelis

Editorship Changes Hands

Fifteen years ago CEJ board chairperson Henry Baron and CEJ editor Lillian V. Grissen asked me to consider editing this journal. I was a junior high language arts teacher in Ripon, California, and I had just announced to a friend that I could teach junior high forever—I loved the vibrancy of thirteen-year-olds. But edit a magazine? Not likely. I had enough stress in my life already, without adding publication deadlines.

That little seed of an idea wouldn't go away though, and I felt called to accept the challenge. A few months later a box of files and twenty-two previous volumes of Christian Educators Journals arrived at my door, along with the CEJ handbook. I worried at first about how to fill CEJ's pages with worthwhile print. Who would write all those articles? How would I locate the writers? Would anybody read CEJ? But I was convicted by the editorial policy statement that follows:

We want to demonstrate that our objectives and principles are identifiable as biblical principles or are consistent with them. To do less is to make our writings about education as secular as those in periodicals that our journal is designed to supplement.

Each member of the CEJ Board, the columnists, staff members, and many of you as readers have encouraged me and challenged me to articulate the role we possess as educators serving under the lordship of Christ—not as exclusive guardians of the gates, but as caring stewards with our hands in the soil. By God's

grace and certainly by the influence of CEJ, the past fifteen years have become years of growth for me as an educator and as an editor.

Much has changed in fifteen years. We developed a regular theme section for each issue. We added columns: Query, Second Glance, Tech Talk. Several columns ran their course successfully to completion: Principal's Perspectives, Teacher Profile, and the ever-popular Asylum. We made a giant step into desktop publishing. Now we've added spot color.

Personnel changes have occurred too. We added regional editors in order to strengthen representation from various areas. Columnists have changed. And in May the board selected a new chairperson, Ron Sjoerdsma, a wise and dedicated educator.

Now I want to introduce CEJ's newest member, Pat Kornelis. Pat will serve as CEJ's (interim) editor for the coming year. Pat, too, enjoys thirteen-year-olds. She currently teaches language arts and Bible at Sioux Center Christian School in Iowa. But she possesses a wide range of experience. She has also taught high school and college classes. Pat has directed plays and musicals, produced yearbooks, tutored international students, and written news releases.

Now Pat is asking the same questions I asked fifteen years ago: How shall I fill 36 pages with worthwhile print? Who will write all those articles? How will I find the writers? Will anybody read CEJ? Pat is also asking the most fundamental question of all: How can I be God's instrument in the realm of Christian education?

Meanwhile, I'll be asking how I can

be God's instrument in South America. I have been granted a Fulbright year to teach reading and writing and to conduct research in the English department at Universidad de los Andes in Mérida, Venezuela. The setting is far away from the security of covenantal Christian education.

This is a year of importance for me as a teacher, a year of clarifying my role as a citizen of God's kingdom—in a setting where I hear no discussions or read no studies centered on "God's good creation, the fall of humanity, redemption in Christ, and consecration to service." I don't find on my course evaluation forms the question "How well does this course demonstrate the instructor's Christian perspective?" Christian perspective is not the trademark of the university. Few of my co-workers talk about the lordship of Christ. They talk about excellence, about being the best, on the cutting edge.

The goal of excellence is not a distinguishing mark exclusive to Christian education—every school wants to claim excellence. But excellence also underlies selfish ambition, making a name for self. A sense of competition and self-importance pervades our work when we focus on scholarship rather than lordship.

Servanthood is the distinguishing mark. Servanthood, in Christ's name, must identify the biblical principles of our work. "By their fruit you will recognize them," says Jesus. Wherever we serve, let us be pure, peace-loving, full of good fruit, sowing in peace to raise a harvest of righteousness (Galatians 3:13-18). ■

The Dangers of a Christian School Education

by Bob Moore

Bob Moore is principal of Heritage Christian School in Lindsay, Ontario.

As a rookie Christian school teacher, I once boasted to a parent about how well behaved the students were. He caught me off guard by warning, "Don't be so smug. That's why IBM interviews first at Christian colleges, because their graduates won't challenge the corporate culture!" I have since come to agree that some Christian schools put students in danger of conforming at any cost, denying legitimate feelings, forming a corrupt view of God, and limiting their educational and career goals.

Dangers arise when well-meaning Christian school teachers try to force the acceptance of Christian values by using restrictive means while ignoring the personal feelings of students. The end is so lofty, it seems to justify denying personal and individual needs and using coercive means such as fear and guilt.

Controlling students by fear and guilt is common in all schools, but Christian school teachers sometimes add extra weight by referring to God's judgment. "What would God say if he were here?" is a rather presumptuous question on the teacher's part but deceptively effective for temporary control. Classroom devotions sometimes become an opportunity for reinforcing a teacher's control. Instead of honestly trying to develop a sense of worship and devotion, the teacher becomes a preacher haranguing the students for their naughtiness. This method very seldom works; the aggressive students become more rebellious because they sense the weakness of the teacher who is appealing

to a higher authority while the sensitive students draw further into themselves, away from the teacher and the Lord. Other staff members start to wonder why that class is wilder than the others when they are on the playground, and the reason is simple. Away from the preacher, these children have not learned any self-control. As the old proverb says, Give a dog a bad name and you get a bad dog. Fear and guilt have no place in the teacher's toolkit.

Scapegoating is another form of misplaced fear and guilt. Christians believe correctly that all of our sins have been loaded onto Jesus Christ and that he has carried those sins to the place of no return. Sometimes Christian school teachers and students incorrectly blame one student in the classroom or school for all of the sinful behavior in that community. Truthfully, if the trouble-maker were removed from the classroom, his or her "horns" would probably be suspended only for a while before eventually coming to rest on some other student whom the teacher and other students would want removed for the good of the community. The obvious danger is that students in Christian schools form the opinion that the evil in the class rests on someone else, "not on me," and that salvation comes from laying the penalty on that student instead of on God's Lamb. Scapegoating is a subtle form of idolatry, substituting a human invention for God's perfect plan.

If Christian teachers use guilt and fear to create and maintain a restrictive school atmosphere, some of the students will be in danger of denying the value of their own opinions, beliefs, and feelings. They are expected to express agreement with the

teacher even when they don't honestly agree. Commonly in Christian schools, you might hear something like, "Sit on the chair until you can say you're sorry." Of course, the child complies in order to get off the chair and thereby learns the lesson that conformity is more important than honesty.

Similarly, Christian teachers often ban the use of strong words such as "hate" and teach the students to deny rather than resolve their true feelings. Banning the word may create the appearance of a Christian atmosphere, but a truly Christian atmosphere will be achieved only when the students are taught how to handle the emotions that were vented in the word. Christian schools are in danger of teaching their students to pay lip-service to the Lord. Psychologist Donald Slot warns that "during their childhood, many sincere Christians began to store away or push aside from their minds any emotions and thoughts that contradicted the image they (were told) they should have. They gradually lost touch with many of their feelings and became superficial shells of people with a nice external spiritual image" (152).

What image of God is promoted by a Christian classroom or school that has turned dangerous? As J. B. Phillips so ably points out in his book *Your God Is Too Small*, children develop their concept of God by projecting their experiences of authority figures onto him. How Father, Mother, and Teacher treat the child will start to shape one's understanding of the Eternal Authority Figure. What messages do our students get about God when their concerns for personal safety are brushed aside by the teacher on yard duty? What

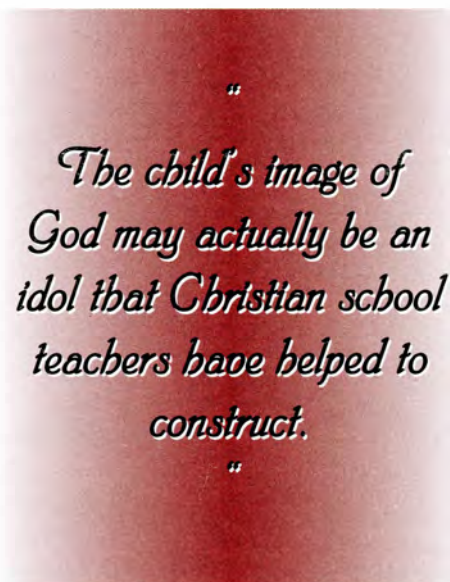
understanding of God do students derive from a teacher who is never pleased with them or with their work? Far from coming to love a God of grace, the students learn that they must earn the love of an insatiable Taskmaster. Parents of difficult students often complain that their Christian school teachers seem to hold a grudge. Students serve the detention or other penalty, but they never receive a kind word or the benefit of the doubt after that, and they suffer from the “give a dog a bad name and you get a bad dog” syndrome. Dangerously, such a syndrome shapes the child’s self-image, and also his or her image of God as an unforgiving, scowling old grouch. The child’s image of God may actually be an idol that the Christian school teachers have helped to construct.

Further dangers lie ahead as the Christian school and community send messages about educational and career goals. The pressure to conform to some ideal convinces many Christian school students to feel “called.” Many Christian young people believe that truly spiritual people go into full-time ministry. Students laboring under this misconception lose sight of personal goals and may have a hard time applying themselves to their studies. If they do apply themselves, it may be in the wrong direction. The area in which they are actually gifted is considered worldly and shunned. They go on to Christian post-secondary training and do poorly, or, even if their grades indicate “success,” they don’t fit the characteristics of their career choices.

Christian schools need not be dangerous places. Safe practices begin when we confess that heavenly ends do not justify

earthly means. As the apostle James warns, “Man’s [guilt and fear-inducing] anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:20 NIV). Surely God would not assign us the task of passing on the faith without making the appropriate tools available.

Christian schools need to allow for differences between individual personality types and even the different stages through



which personalities pass on the way to maturity. We must hire teachers who appreciate the differences among their students’ personalities and levels of sensitivity. What motivates a domineering student might destroy a compliant student. Insecure students are extra vulnerable to guilt and would rather deny their true feelings than be confronted by the teacher.

Students should be taught how to think for themselves and to politely question authority figures. All students need

room to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Some experts advise that we need to allow students to experience “safe rebellion.” Schools should avoid majoring in minor issues that cause no irreparable physical, emotional, or spiritual damage. We must prepare the students to make choices that give opportunity for healthy self-determination appropriate to the age level.

Christian schools don’t have to be, but sometimes become dangerous places, especially for compliant students who turn the teacher’s disapproval in on themselves. If they lose the courage to be themselves, develop an idolatrous image of God, or bury their talents, our students may graduate less able to respond to Jesus’ love and less able to serve in his kingdom. Christian school teachers have an awesome responsibility. Many of the dangers of our schools can be avoided if we remember that students have to know that the teacher cares before they care what the teacher knows!

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Net Worth

by Jen VanderBeek

Jen VanderBeek is a free-lance writer and a volunteer tutor at John Knox Christian School in Wyoming, Ontario.

Yesterday was report card day at our house, always an occasion to evaluate and look at our progress.

Overall, the kids did well. The oldest one did great in one course and okay in two others but will have to “move his stuff” in the fourth. The beautiful one did beautifully. The studious one earned excellent marks. And the cute little one is still wallowing in the joy of being told she’s wonderful.

Then there is the dreamer. He is the one who can relate interesting facts about nature and animals just-like-that. He is the one with a gift for friendship, who can connect with any kid. The class bully and the weakest “persecuted” one are his best buddies along with almost everyone else in the class. He is the one who can detect a hurting soul from a mile away and deliver a smile or a joke or even a hug at exactly the right moment. He is the one who likes to run and jump and kick the ball around—but would rather cheer than be on the team. He is the one who can look at a cloud and tell you which continent it most resembles.

He is a failure.

He told me so with tears streaming down his cheeks. He wants to quit school. He wants me to homeschool him.

He is ten years old.

He is living in a house with four siblings who live to ace the challenge.

He is not like them.

“Lucas, who is the best fisherman in our house?”

“Me.”

“And who is the best fort designer and builder in our family?”

“Me.”

So he has two report cards. One from school and one that he and I designed together.

No one gets extra perks for good grades in our house. Everyone is given a loud “yahoo” for getting the report card. We all celebrate report card time equally.

Even the “failures.”

Recently I spoke with a man who was labeled early in life as a failure. He hated school. Day after day he felt the message of his failure driven into his soul. Every question that he couldn’t answer. Every word that he couldn’t read. Every line that he had to write as a punishment amounted to the same dismal thrum, “I am a failure. I am a failure. I am a failure”. All the things he couldn’t do were recorded and his shortcomings were pronounced loudly. He forgot how to hear the praise for the things he could do. He lives his life now mostly unhappy with himself and always looking toward that inevitable negative report that will convince him anew that he is still a failure.

Is it too late for this man to learn that he gets full marks for singing to his infant daughter? For working hard day after day in the fields? For knowing the proper elements and mixtures and chemicals and timings to bring his crops to harvest? For being faithful to his God?

There are many areas in my life in which I am a total failure. Absolutely total. I told Lucas about some of those things and showed him my “report card” of life. He is looking at me in a funny way today. And he is smiling.

So this morning we are going bowling. I already know who is going to win. And I know it won’t be me. ■

Using the Freedom We Have

by Pam Adams

Pam Adams chairs the education department at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Many of you have read or have heard of the novel *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Interestingly, although this novel is a Newbery Award winner, it is reported by the American Library Association to be one of the three most challenged titles of 1995-1996.

While few disagree about the quality of the writing, some parents and teachers feel that this book raises issues that are too controversial for the classroom, and many dislike its intentionally ambiguous ending. Because of the issues raised and the need for reader involvement and interpretation, I find that *The Giver* is an excellent novel to use with my students who are preparing to be teachers. In so doing, my goal is to give elementary education majors an opportunity to participate in a literature discussion so that they will see its potential value for their own teaching. While listening to my students discuss *The Giver*, I recalled a similar discussion a few years ago about the same novel. It was the differing reactions to this novel that got me thinking about whether we, as Christian school educators, value and use the freedom we have in Christian schools.

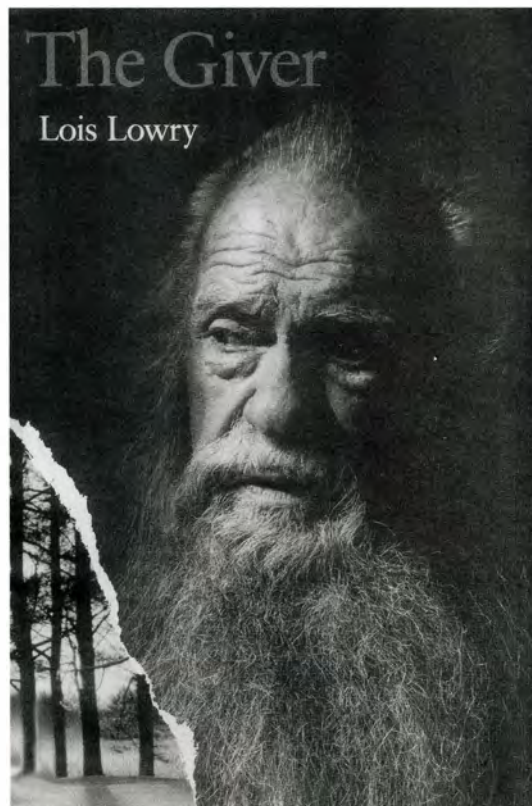
The Giver is a science fiction novel about a culture that has attempted to eliminate pain and unpleasantness by neutralizing differences and wiping out long-term cultural memories. The people live a well-organized, regulated, and efficient life that, at first glance, is somewhat attractive. Reading further, however, the reader real-

izes that pain has been eliminated at great costs. Life is lived in a world without color, love, music, and family attachments. The biological link in families is broken. Sexuality is eliminated. As soon as young people experience their first "stirrings," they, along with all the adult and adolescent community members, take a daily pill as an antidote. Marriages are arranged to achieve a balance of personalities. Children are conceived by birth mothers whose sole purpose is to breed the next generation. These children are taken from the birth mothers and placed in families, two children to a family, one boy and one girl. Once the children are grown, the parents have no reason to remain together, and thus they live the rest of their lives separately. In this neat, predictable society, old people and babies, those who do not meet the society standards for fitting in, are killed. In the book this process is euphemistically called "release." Jonas, the main character, horri-

fied by what he learns about the dark underside of this society, risks his life to change things by returning memories to the community. However, the reader never really knows whether he is successful.

I first read *The Giver* as part of a graduate course at a large midwestern university. All the students in the course were elementary teachers who were either currently teaching or had taught in public schools. I had read *The Giver* one weekend and, as with any powerful book, it kept seeping into my thoughts, exciting me with the prospect of the upcoming class discussion. I became very disappointed, however with the direction of the discussion that occurred.

Rather than discussing the theme of the novel or the author's craft in writing it, the teachers chose to center their discussion around whether or not they could use the novel in a classroom. These public school teachers seemed concerned both with protecting their students from strong topics and with



parental reaction to the book. The following quotations exemplify their comments:

I had a chance to talk with a sixth grade teacher today and asked her about it since it was on their list. She said she had tried to read it out loud but she and the class decided to put it down and that some people might want to finish it individually, but it was just too heavy a book. At this point I have not picked it back up for my class. I had read just one chapter and today I was trying to decide if the content was just too strong. Because I had kind of guessed about the release myself, but then they show what it really is, and you thought about all the people—it hits you strong.

I thought there were a lot of metaphysical things going on in here—this would be really hard to explain to a lot of parents I had, and you start thinking about that aspect. Is it worthwhile to do this battle for this week on literature? How would I justify this? There were just too many weak ends and you could spend a lot of time trying to explain to kids [concepts] that I don't think they are prepared to deal with.

It brings up a lot of issues—*ethanasia*, any number of issues—it opens up abortion to whatever. The awakenings [stirrings] would be controversial. . . .

While I was very disappointed in the discussion, at the same time I felt a little sorry for these teachers. While these public school teachers were fearful

of raising issues, I thought about our task as educators in Christian schools. Aren't we supposed to raise the big questions and disturb our students?

Remembering the discussion that took place, I assigned *The Giver* to be read by students in four sections of *Methods of Teaching Reading*. My undergraduates clearly enjoyed the book. Several students told me that they enjoyed the book so much that they had already discussed it in their dorm rooms. Because I became interested in the differing reactions to this book, I asked my students to do a free write on *The Giver* before we discussed it in class. I wanted to sample their first reactions, untainted by my own enthusiasm. The following

“
We as Christian educators have the freedom, as well as the responsibility, to deal with controversial issues and to read novels that challenge and expand our students' thinking.
”

are samples of representative comments:

I mean, this book really did make me think. I thought about abortion and issues like *ethanasia*. I really was struck by the concept of a “family.” I'm getting married, and the last thing I would want to do is apply for a husband.

The killing and heartlessness upset me. It made me think

about today how we decide we don't want a baby, and so a woman has an abortion without really knowing what she is asking for.

Being puzzled by the differing reactions, I asked my students if they would use the novel in their classrooms. Many said they would but would be hesitant if they taught in a public school. One student wrote, “I would not use this book unless I was in a Christian school where you could freely discuss the moral/ethical issues.” Was this the answer to the differing reactions? I would like to believe that it is.

While many public school educators see Christian schools as places where children are indoctrinated, the reality is that we as Christian educators have the freedom, as well as the responsibility, to deal with controversial issues and to read novels that challenge and expand our students' thinking. *The Giver* is an excellent novel for the Christian school classroom because it makes us question the societal status quo that puts convenience above what is biblical. The startling discovery that Jonas makes about his father and his role in the killing of innocent children is shocking, but it is far less shocking than the reality that takes place in abortion clinics each day in our country. *The Giver* is really a cautionary tale about what can happen when we don't question and challenge. While our students may not face the “brave new world” scenario depicted in the novel, they do face a more subtle siren song of conformity that is pounded into their senses from popular music, movies, television, and teen magazines. I agree with the public school teacher who said that *The Giver* is a “heavy” book, but don't our students need heavy books during these crucial worldview forming years? ■

Parent-Friendly Teaching

by Jerilyn Tyner

Jerilyn Tyner is an educator and freelance writer living in Arlington, Washington.

You are calmly wheeling your cart down the supermarket aisle. You stop, reach for a package of fat-free cookies, conscientiously studying the label for hidden calories. Suddenly, you hear a shrill, piping voice.

"Mom! There's my teacher, Miss Crabapple!" Coming toward you is dear little Mackenzie, agog with the revelation that teachers are human beings who consume groceries. Her mother is right behind, blushing nervously and wondering if you'll remember her from back-to-school night last September.

Ignoring your self-consciousness at having your name shouted out in front of the other shoppers, you drop the cookies into your basket and say, "Hello, Mackenzie. How are you, Mrs. Pearson?" Charmed by your friendliness, Mrs. Pearson quickly loses her initial reticence and chats happily about the weather, the price of food, her family and soon the inevitable question, "How is Mackenzie doing in school?" Before you know it, you are in the middle of a parent-teacher conference.

Not all conferences are pre-arranged formal meetings, nor do they always take place under ideal conditions. Any time the discussion turns to consultation on a serious matter, a conference is in progress. Although most teachers prefer to choose the time and place so they can prepare carefully to discuss concerns, the informal contacts can do much either to build up or

to tear down communication between school and home.

For example, if you respond to Mrs. Pearson's question about her daughter, "Oh, just fine," what will happen if Mackenzie gets a "C" on her report card next week? The mother may express surprise or displeasure.

"I thought the teacher said you were doing fine." Her expectation is that Mackenzie will have all A's.

"A teacher should plan to telephone each student's parents during the first six weeks of school."

You might have forestalled such a conclusion by saying, "I'm glad you are so interested in Mackenzie's achievement. Would you like to set a time to get together at school so we can talk?" In his seminars on *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey teaches the important concept of being "proactive." As teachers, our concern for building a posi-

tive rapport with parents should translate into actions. We should take the initiative, find ways to enhance communication, and respond instead of react.

All too often, parents are notified only when there is a problem at school. If you make positive contacts with parents initially, you can establish a better base of communication. A teacher should plan to telephone each student's parents during the first six weeks of school. A long conversation is not necessary or even advisable. Just say hello and let the parent know you are glad to have the student in your class. Ask whether there is anything she or he would like to tell you that would help you teach the child more effectively, and emphasize that you want to be available if they have questions throughout the year. You can keep a record of this and subsequent telephone contacts on a simple form listing the date, student name, person called, reason for call, and results.

Be the kind of teacher who welcomes parental visits and involvement. There are reasons for utilizing parents' expertise in decorating holiday cupcakes, sewing costumes for the play, and giving speeches during career week. Not only does their input enrich the curriculum and save you hours; it allows you to work together, building relationships, mutual respect, and trust. A further benefit is that the parent will have opportunity to observe his or her child interacting in the classroom and will gain a clearer picture of problems you, the teacher, must deal with daily.

Sometimes a parent will waylay you at a busy moment immediately before or

after school, wanting to discuss a problem. Don't feel you must respond to or resolve every problem on the spot. There's nothing wrong with stating honestly, "I'll need some time to think about what you've said. Could I call you later to discuss this?" Don't overlook the communication opportunities of mini-moments. Before and after school, you may have time for no more than a cheerful wave as the parent drops off or picks up the child. That in itself is positive communication.

Make yourself visible and accessible by attending as many school events as you can. Most parents feel comfortable approaching a teacher who has taken the time to bring her car to the drama club's car wash or has demonstrated interest in their child by coming to cheer his or her performance at a soccer game.

Wherever you encounter parents, take the initiative in communicating. Have something positive to say, and don't wait to be asked. Volunteer specific information: "Tom did a great job on his spelling test yesterday. Did he show you the paper?" or "We enjoyed hearing about Emily's new puppy. I'm glad she's feeling more comfortable about sharing in front of the group." These comments can be made whether the child is present or not, and are perceived as nurturing statements, not academic evaluations.

Occasionally, almost every teacher is thrown into an encounter with angry, upset parents. It's natural to feel threatened or angry yourself—the old flight or fight reaction. If your knees feel weak and your hands start sweating, that's "flight." If your

throat constricts and your fists tighten, that's "fight."

Keep communication open by responding instead of reacting. Realize, first of all, that parents need to be heard. (That's why they're yelling.) It probably took a good deal of courage for the parents to confront you, and what comes across as anger is probably just the energy needed to make themselves speak out.

Diffuse that energy by taking out a pen and paper. Say, "I'm glad you're bringing this to my attention. I want to make sure I understand the problem. Would you please repeat what you just said so I can jot it down." The fact that you are writing something down reassures the parent you are listening. Asking him or her to repeat what was said causes the person to evaluate and choose words more carefully. It also gives you space to consider your response. Continue to listen and take notes. Encourage the parent to talk by saying, "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about that?" Often, the first thing people say is not the problem, but active listening can lead you to the problem.

Do not leap to your own defense, contradict the parent, or take up side issues. The Bible says, "Agree with your adversary quickly." Make a statement such as, "I know that we both want Bryan to be successful in school. Let's talk about how we can help him." You can create a win/win situation by finding something you can agree upon and work from there.

Even if you are sure that the parent is wrong, don't slam him or her with an authoritarian attitude. "Come now and let

us reason together," is a more productive approach than, "Thus saith the teacher!" Because the Christian school exists to facilitate parents in fulfilling their God-given mandate to bring up the child in the nurture and discipline of the Lord, the importance of parent/teacher communication cannot be overemphasized. One reason parents choose a private Christian school is that they wish to be included in the educational process and informed regularly of their child's progress. Parents expect communication from the teacher, and if it does not take place in a positive fashion, their satisfaction and support of the school will diminish.

Communication is a godly skill. Hebrews 13:16 instructs us "but to do good and to communicate . . . for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (KJV). Not only does this Scripture remind us that communication is pleasing to God; it acknowledges that communication takes sacrificial effort. The teacher willing to make the sacrifice will reap the rewards of improved parent/teacher relationships. ■

A Little Child Shall Lead Them

by Anita Corrine Donihue

Anita Corrine Donihue is an educational assistant in special education and a freelance writer from Auburn, Washington.

This article was first published in November 1994 *Light and Life*.

Angela watched blond-haired Kevin from her special education classroom window. He kicked angrily at a pebble. It bounced across the school play area. He thrust his hands into his pockets and clenched his teeth.

"Oh no," she murmured. "Kevin's having another bad day. It seems he has such a hard time getting things to go right for him." Angela shook her head and continued to watch him. "If only I could help him realize what a good boy he is. He could accomplish much more if he simply had the confidence." Angela knew Kevin's second grade teacher, Jenny, had been trying to help him. Yet, so far Kevin appeared to have made little progress. It was recess. At the same time Kevin's class went to play, Angela took her special ed students out. Marcy, one of Angela's students, left with a look of uncertainty. Tight black ringlets haloed wide blue eyes and her shy smile.

Marcy obviously wanted to play; unsure and fearful, she didn't know how. Angela had tried time after time to help her use the playground equipment and play with the other children, but with no success.

"Please, Lord," Angela prayed. "Be with Marcy and the other kids. Help them make friends and really enjoy school." For several days the memory of Kevin's frustrated expression replayed in Angela's mind. She also turned Marcy's problems

over and over, trying to think of a solution.

At school, Angela and Jenny visited during a lunch break. Angela shared her concerns for her special ed kids, especially Marcy. "I wish I could find a way for my students to make more friends and play happily outside." Angela sat at the table, thoughtfully sipping her tea.

Jenny looked equally concerned. "If there's anything I can do to help, please let me know."

"Thanks, Jenny, I appreciate it," Angela replied.

That evening, after Angela had her devotions, a verse came to her: "A little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6, KJV).

She leaned back in her chair and smiled. "I haven't thought of that quotation for ages!" she recalled with surprise.

The next day at school she again met Jenny in the faculty room for lunch. "Jenny, would you be interested in having some of your students adopt my kids?"

Jenny's face lit up. "That's a great idea. Let's get on it right away. Perhaps our classes could get together for lunch a couple of times a week and even work out a buddy system at recess." Angela was thrilled.

The following Friday Angela visited Jenny's class while her class was in the library. She and Jenny wanted to discuss their new idea with the children. Angela talked with them about being friends with the special ed students. She explained how they could help friends feel important, care for them, and yet keep their friends' dignity intact.

Several children had questions about special ed kids.

"Can your kids read?" "Do they like to play games?" "Do they get hurt easily?"

"Why are some of them the way they are?" Angela answered each question thoughtfully; then she continued.

"Try thinking of these kids as you would a little brother or sister. They can't all do the things you are able to do, but they try very hard. These children are your age and need your help and appreciation.

"We have an idea, and we want to know what you think of it. We wonder if some of you would like to adopt these kids, to make them your friends. What do you think? Do we have any volunteers?" Several hands shot up. Kevin's was among them.

"Great!" Angela felt ecstatic. "Shall we start tomorrow?" Jenny nodded approvingly. Kevin grinned with excitement.

Soon the classes ate lunch together twice a week. The students from Jenny's room acted thrilled to have lunch buddies at their desks. Kevin raised his hand to have Marcy at his. Marcy sat down quietly, her gaze lowered to her lunch tray. Kevin helped open her milk and talked with her through lunch.

One day at recess Angela watched Kevin greet Marcy with a playful grin. She listened intently as he spoke. His knees bent just a little, supporting each of his hands. He peered into Marcy's shy, blue eyes. "Come on, Marcy, wanna walk the balance beam with me?" Angela prayed silently.

Marcy followed Kevin, holding tightly to his hand.

Day by day, little by little, Kevin coaxed Marcy into trying new things at recess. He taught her to play. Angela kept praying. After a few weeks, Marcy ran from Angela's side to Kevin across the

Seven Things Disabled Kids Want You to Know

Anita Corrine Donihu

This article was first printed
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playground. Her call rang out loud and clear. "Kewin!" she shouted in her delightfully childish voice and rushed to reach him.

Angela beamed. The two children climbed up the slide together, Kevin showing off a few inches ahead of Marcy. She giggled and quickly glided down after him. "One more time, Kewin," she squealed. "One more time."

They went again and again. Sometimes Kevin led, giving a "Yahoo," and sometimes Marcy led, black curls bouncing.

"Thank you, Lord," whispered Angela. "You are so wise. Thank you for those who care." Angela saw Kevin develop into a happier, self-confident little boy. Jenny also reported the difference. His grades improved as well as his behavior.

One day Kevin came to Angela at recess. "I'm sorry Marcy isn't as strong as me. I wish she could do everything I can. I said a prayer for her the other day. She's my friend, you know. She needs me. Do you think Marcy's like a secret little angel?"

"Yes, Kevin, I think she is." Angela blinked back her tears and thanked God for love shared twice by two wonderful children. ■

Disabled kids sense how we react to them. We may not say or do anything unkind, but they can tell how we feel. Although they're not always able to express themselves, they often understand more than they are given credit for. Thoughtless little things bother them: whispered remarks, snickers when things go wrong, being left out of school and church activities. Even someone's body language can hurt.

Here are some things disabled children would like you to know:

1. Accept me for who I am.

Don't be afraid to get to know me. I may be slow physically or mentally, but I'm good company when you give me a chance. Take time to enjoy me. I like being invited to go places and do things with friends, but I don't get invited very often.

2. Sometimes I need a friend.

I need a friend who can help me break down the barriers that isolate me from the rest of the world. I can't get places without help. For instance, when I have trouble reading, you could sit by me and read the lesson or sing the songs so I can hear the words.

3. Talk to me as you would any other person.

Don't speak to me in baby talk. I'm not an infant or a pet. At times, I may have difficulty and my speech may sound different, but I try to say the words right. Sometimes I talk by signing with my hands. When you talk, just slow down a bit.

4. Let me try to do my best.

I may take longer and need your patience, but I might surprise you. Don't do things for me. Ask me if I want help. I'm proud of my work, even if it isn't perfect. And please, don't go back and redo it.

5. Don't feel sorry for me.

I enjoy life and can make yours a little brighter, but only if you let me. If we respect each other, we can learn from each other.

6. Be patient when I mess up.

I sometimes say and do things that aren't appropriate. By carefully explaining things to me, you can help me learn proper social skills. Be understanding when things don't go well.

7. Know that I love God and he loves me.

I know the Lord doesn't love me more than others, but I do know he keeps me close to his heart. God placed me on earth for a reason. He knows all my imperfections, and best of all, he loves me just the way I am. Can you do the same?

Ownership: The Key to Student Writing

by Karen Orfitelli

Karen Orfitelli is a free-lance writer who teaches literature and writing classes at Cornerstone Christian School in Manchester, Connecticut.

"Mrs. O., I don't mean to be disrespectful, but will you please stop talking so we can write? I've got an idea I can't wait to get on paper!" The speaker? Ethan, my sullen, introverted student who, until this moment, had only grudgingly spoken when spoken to and showed no interest in exercising the enormous potential that lay buried beneath his oversize frame.

Today, however, for the first time, I watched Ethan come to life. He was sitting face-front, pen poised, and eager to begin his writing project. The reason for this transformation? His topic was a personal experience he cared about.

I had introduced my eighth graders to the concept of ownership in writing—writing about topics they knew and cared about instead of teacher-generated titles. Each student discovered a myriad of ideas, opinions, and experiences that were stories begging to be told. And once they unlocked the door to their creativity, writing topics and enthusiasm flowed faster than ever before!

Ownership in writing not only is the key to motivate student writing, but it allows students to discover God as the originator of creativity and life experiences. When students explore and then isolate different experiences they have had, they often discover God's purpose in allowing certain experiences in their lives. As the episodes they are writing about are thought through with the question "Where is God in your story?", students begin to look at their life experiences from a different perspective. Devotional writing can result from this focus, and during the past school year, five of my students have had devotionals published.

When students write about events they've experienced, they naturally add exciting details, a believable plot, and a satisfying resolution. Good writing surfaces instinctively when students feel strongly about their topics. During this process, our role as teachers becomes one of teaching appropriate writing techniques and guiding their God-given talents.

Teaching ownership is an easy and pleasant way to reshape negative attitudes about writing. Here are some key steps that have worked for me:

1. Introduce a different kind of writing.

At the beginning of the year when I announce that we will spend nearly half of our language arts periods each week writing, my new recruits usually stare blankly at me or groan out loud. Clearly, they feel it is torture to write for extended periods of time.

The fun begins when I explain that, in our writing class, they will choose the topics not me. And, I assure them that every single one of them has interesting, worthwhile stories to write about.

2. Fling open the doors.

Once I have their attention, I begin to tap into the wealth of ideas with leading questions: "David, tell me how you felt at Friday night's soccer game when you had to kick the penalty kick and the score was tied?" or "Casey, how did you feel on the first day of school last year when you moved from Kansas?" I encourage students to zero in on moments in their lives instead of events, and before long, they're teeming with ideas.

Inevitably there are a few who still mumble that their lives are "boring," and who claim that "nothing good ever happens to me." Yet, these students, too, can discover their stories; they just need a little extra prompting from the teacher.

"Courtney, you said nothing exciting ever happens to you, but I know that's not true. Tell us about the discussion you had with your carpool driver about the radio station she plays in the car." The class giggles as they think of their own experiences with adults and radio stations. A smile creeps over Courtney's face as she launches into a tirade about the "horrible country music" her carpool driver inflicts on her every morning. Courtney has an experience she can write about in vivid detail. When Courtney writes that piece, she discovers herself as a humorous writer!

Meanwhile, my discussion with Courtney sparks ideas in the others, and I encourage them to write down their ideas as they occur.

3. Share ideas.

After the students take a few minutes to write down every idea or experience they immediately can think of, we spend the next moments listening: "Dave, please share some of your ideas with the class," I'll encourage. Dave's ideas will kindle more ideas in the other students, who jot them down. Students are free to

pirate others' suggestions because each person's experiences are different. I've even had two students write about an experience they shared and took that opportunity to teach point-of-view to the class. The most interesting aspect of this portion of the lesson is that even many of the quiet students become eager to share their idea lists.

An unanticipated benefit to this exercise is that students now have a forum to communicate incidents in their lives that are meaningful to them (like winning a swimming medal during the summer or being chosen for an honor at camp), without bragging. Many of the students discover facets of each other's lives that give them common ground for friendships.

4. Get them started.

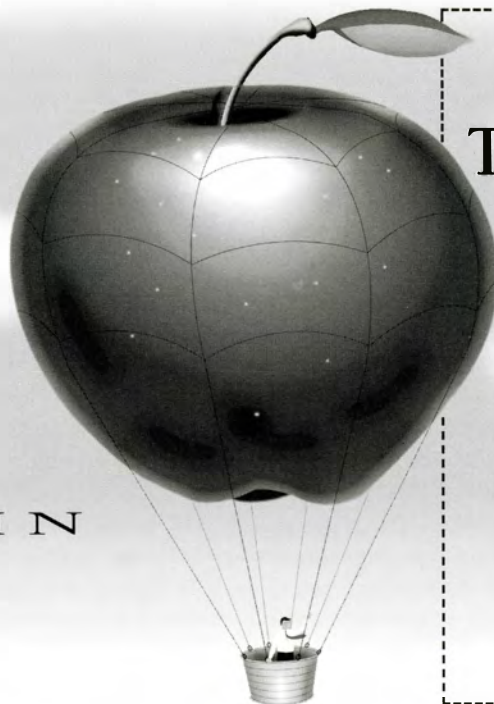
By our next class, the students are itching to write. To guide them, I spend a few minutes before each writing period teaching

an element of personal-experience writing.

I cover audience, leads, and point-of-view to begin with and add more topics as they are needed. When these techniques are given in bite-sized doses in the order the students can use them, they become helpful tools of writing, not irrelevant literary terms to be memorized for a test.

The concept of ownership of writing has been key for turning apathetic writers into enthusiastic writers. Try it. It's a surefire success! ■

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From Grammar to Functional Language Study

by Bette Van Dintner

Bette Van Dintner teaches English and debate at South Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Rei Noguchi seems to lead the current trend to “minimalize,” and in some school systems to completely eliminate the teaching of grammar. In his book *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*, he argues that students need to know only four basic grammatical concepts: the sentence, the subject of a sentence, the verb of a sentence, and a modifier in a sentence (especially at the beginning). These four elements, Noguchi argues, affect the more frequently and most highly-criticized stylistic errors: sentence boundary errors (fragments and run-ons), subject/verb agreement errors, incorrect verb forms, and incorrect punctuation of modifiers (21).

Noguchi’s book addresses thoroughly the failures of traditional grammar instruction and offers convincing rationale for the minimalist approach; however, his pendulum-swing response creates problems of its own.

First, students who know only minimal grammatical elements are handicapped in subsequent English language studies. The four basic concepts that Noguchi uses do not represent all of the concepts of English grammar that other teachers in other schools and colleges use. How can students learn from other teachers or from handbooks if they don’t recognize the terms used in discussion?

Noguchi does seem to acknowledge this limitation of his approach, claiming that his four concepts help students with most common stylistic errors. However, for too many students, most is not good enough. What about the less common errors? This approach not only limits the potential but also undermines the capabilities of students.

While I agree that traditional grammar instruction is not the pedagogy by which to significantly improve student writing, I do not conclude that, therefore, students are unable to learn English grammar. There is nothing un-learnable about the structure of the English language. Our teaching methods are likely flawed and our teaching models are limited, but our students are neither. As Noguchi himself correctly states, we all have an intuitive knowledge about the structure of our language, and this intuitive knowledge alone should tell us that language structure is learnable.

Second, minimalist grammar is not as minimal as it claims to be; it contains new concepts and intimidating terminology, not only for students to learn, but more important, for teachers to learn. For example, before I could teach Noguchi’s grammar, I would need to learn the following new concepts: tag questions, corresponding yes-no questions, tag-question counterparts, right and left sentence boundaries, negative contracted form, moved elements, and presentence modifiers. I realize also that I would have to rethink how I understand grammar before I could relate to Noguchi’s minimalistic operational definition of a subject: “the first noun or noun substitute that stands to the nearest right of the moved (or added to) word” (47). Most of the teachers in our schools have been raised on and think in terms of traditional grammar structure and terminology, and the minimalist texts are ironically overwhelming. Teachers don’t have the time, energy, or fortitude to take on a whole new paradigm for thinking about language. Replacing one paradigm with another is not a solution.

Furthermore, Noguchi’s minimalist grammar does not even actually replace the traditional grammar paradigm with a new grammar paradigm. Rather, it adds a new

paradigm onto the traditional paradigm, as evidenced by the frequent use of the traditional grammar terms in the discussions about minimalist grammar concepts. For example, he writes that “the basic problem of identifying presentence modifiers, or really separating them from the rest of the sentence, lies in the variety of forms they take. They can be a word, a phrase, or a clause.” (Note the traditional grammar terms.) Noguchi subsequently argues that students don’t need to know the concept of phrase and clause; however, if Noguchi needs to refer to traditional grammar concepts to talk about his grammar, then I am suspicious that ultimately students need traditional grammar concepts, too.

Finally, the minimalist approach to language confuses students by ignoring the most fundamental concept of learning theory: that learning is at its roots a search for structure and meaning. This concept is an especially important prerequisite for any study. How did God create us and how did he order the language that he gave us? All of us as students of God’s world are looking for the order of it, and then we are looking for how the pieces fit into the whole. If grammar instruction fails to present the overall structure, the big picture, then we as Christian teachers fail at a primary task, that of teaching young people about the order of God’s world.

I will add here an equally important prerequisite for choosing a teaching method: our pedagogy must always encourage students to learn more about God’s world, never making them feel incapable of learning. This concept is the compelling reason why, in spite of its concise, thorough, and impressively systematic format, we cannot use the traditional method of teaching grammar in our Christian classrooms. All of the research confirms what every English teacher has experienced in a

traditional English grammar classroom: while some students understand and even enjoy the abstraction of sentence analysis and diagramming, others not only fail to comprehend better the structure of their language, but more seriously, they learn to dislike grammar and learn to mistrust their own ability to learn and even appreciate language. Too often students fail to relate to traditional English grammar, construct walls of defensive behavior to protect themselves from the barrage of concepts that make them feel stupid and inept. Too many of our students disassociate themselves from grammar, from writing, and usually from all English courses the school offers. As a Christian teacher whose task it is to share God's creation and the marvels of our language with all students, I cannot use the discouraging traditional method of grammar instruction.

The Alternative: Structure and Function

An alternative to a minimalist and a traditional pedagogy of grammar is to take somewhat of a middle road between them.

First, the term "language study" is better than the term "grammar." The term grammar carries too many negative connotations, and furthermore, the term holds no metaphoric clue to its meaning. In contrast, the term "language study" is neutral on the intimidation scale and comes with a built-in clue as to its meaning. Second, teachers should show students the overall structure of our language so that students can learn about and then experiment with specific elements of the language. Third, as Noguchi argues, the method should use definitions of specific elements that are functional rather than scientific. Finally, the goal of any language study should be increased usage rather than abstract analysis.

One way to help students picture the overall structure of our language is to visually chart it. The accompanying chart includes the forty-three language elements that we use to communicate with each other, and it shows each element's relationship to the overall structure as well as to other elements. I see it as analogous to the

chemistry periodic chart of elements and to the artist's color wheel. Once students can visualize the overall structure of our language, they can explore various elements and experiment with each element's use, its specific characteristics, and its potential for precise communication.

The Elements of Our Language

(see figure below)

About nine weeks into an introductory writing course, I start a three- to four-week language study unit with the language elements chart. Students first memorize the names of the four sections and the number of elements in each. Once the students have a sense of the scope, they invariably ask, "Is that all there is? This isn't so bad." After students become familiar with the language chart, we study each element in terms of how it is used in writing situations. For example, when we get to adverbs, I teach them how adverbs function, I point out the "ly" cue in many adverbs, I suggest starting a sentence with an adverb, and I direct them to experiment,

<i>The Elements of Our Language</i>			
<u><i>Kinds of Words</i></u>	<u><i>Sentence Parts</i></u>	<u><i>*Clauses</i></u>	<u><i>Phrases</i></u>
1-Noun	1-Subject	1-Adverb	1-Prepositional
2-Adjective	2-Predicate	{ Reduced\elliptical }	2-Appositive
3-Adverb	3-Complements	2-Adjective	3-Verbal Gerund
4-Preposition	Predicate Adjective	Necessary	4-Verbal Infinitive
5-Interjection	Predicate Nominative	Unnecessary	5-Verbal Participial
6-Verb	Direct Object	3-Noun	6-Nominative Absolute
Action	{ Retained Object }		
Linking	{ Objective Complement }		
Helping	Indirect Object		
Verbal			
Infinitive			
Gerund			
Participle			
<i>Present tense</i>			
<i>Past tense</i>			
7-Conjunction			
Coordinating			
Correlative			
*Subordinating			
*Relative Pronoun			
Conjunctive Adverb			
8-Pronoun			
Demonstrative			
Interrogative			
Indefinite			
Personal			
Possessive			
Intensive			
Reflexive			
Relative			

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Language Study: A Functional Approach
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writing sentences that include adverbs.

As I review the function of each element, the students create a set of 3" x 5" flash cards, putting the language element on the front of the card and a sentence that uses the element on the back of the card. A follow-up assignment would be to write a narrative paragraph and include, for example, ten adverbs, demonstrating various placement possibilities. Another assignment would be to check handbooks and dictionaries and note how adverbs are explained. Another teaching method might be to play a game challenging students to write as many adverbs as they can think of in twenty seconds, or challenging them to state a different adverb for each letter of the alphabet. Eventually, a test would require the students to write sentences that include adverbs.

During the unit, we typically study four to six elements per day, the more difficult elements demanding more time and more experimentation. A favorite writing assignment is to write a paragraph to a parent, arguing for an extended curfew, purposefully using the four different kinds of conjunctions, each at least three times. (Even though I am only fifteen, I would like my curfew extended so that I can do the same social things that my friends do; moreover, I act responsibly, and you can trust me; neither do I misbehave in public, nor do my friends misbehave.)

Other activities include challenging students to reproduce the language elements chart by memory, assigning students to create a web or map of all of the language elements, and asking students to propose writing situations that would appropriately use the various language elements.

At our school, we teach the language unit in the ninth grade composition class, focusing mostly on the first two sections of the chart, Kinds of Words and Basic Sentence Parts. We then teach another language unit in tenth grade composition, this time focusing on the last two sections, Clauses and Phrases.

The goal of functional language study is not mastery as much as increased understanding and increased usage. We expect that, gradually, students will more purposefully choose language elements that help them communicate clearly. For some students this will mean that they use action

verbs rather than linking verbs, while for others it will mean that they discover the argumentative value of conjunctive adverbs.

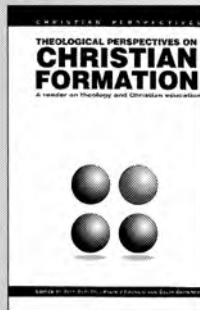
I remember one student who discovered the emphasis possible with the use of the correlative conjunctions *not only . . . but also*. This student used these words as the framework for so many expository essays that I finally had to advise a more sparing use; however, overuse and experimentation is a fine step toward language mastery, and playful experimentation with the

possibilities of our language is what learning language is all about. ■

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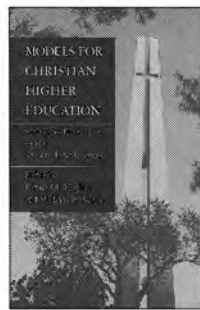
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Listen Up!

by Nancy Hoag

Nancy Hoag is an free-lance writer who lives in Bismarck, North Dakota.

"She has to ask questions," my grandmother would say. "That's how she learns." Then she'd give me a hug and I'd smell her perfume and soft white hair like the angel snow she nested the Christmas village in and I'd decide it wasn't true that I "never should have been born." Yes, I'd been warned not to ask foolish questions like "How do dogs bark? Why are buttercups yellow? What was the name of the first cow God made?" But when Grandma came to my rescue with the lace handkerchief she tucked into her pocketbook, I'd suddenly imagine I was someone of value and that maybe my questions weren't silly after all.

Silly can be an ugly word. Step on a child's "silly" questions and he'll believe he has no worth. We shouldn't find this difficult to understand: children really aren't so different from adults. Our sense of well-being is related to how we perceive ourselves, is it not? I was nearly fifty before I believed I am "fearfully and wonderfully made." I began believing because teachers and my grandmother said by their actions, "You're important. Your words have a right to be heard." I remember second grade when Miss Polenski invited me to help her design bulletin boards. I felt like an artist in Miss Polenski's class. In third grade, Mrs. Burgan let me help with Valentine's Day boxes and spelling bees, listened and responded to my never-ending "why's," and made me feel smart. My piano teacher told me she'd see me in

Carnegie Hall. I could have given a concert that very day! In a church, Mrs. Dickerson rewarded me with a crocheted cross for Scripture memorized. That cross still tells me someone thought I'd done something good.

Today, I also remember a Sunday morning when a boy was too short, a table too tall, a glass too full, a slippery floor . . .

"Can I help?" I asked, tugging my skirt up to kneel beside the child, trying not to wipe up red punch with my hem.

The little boy was surprised and so was I. He wasn't my responsibility but the expression on his face had called up old fears of my own and I knew he was wondering if he'd escape with his hide intact. But, when we had completed our clean-up, my new friend followed me around the fellowship hall talking about his baby sister, his missing tooth, his dog. And I felt blessed.

Several years later, I was teaching a child whose clothing might have been rejected by Goodwill. Embarrassed, she seldom played or talked. Not until she tried to hide holes in her socks did I break through her wall. I broke through because I had stringy holes in my socks too—holes I showed to Joyce. Within seconds, we were tugging our gym shoes on and laughing out loud. My young charge had decided she could trust me.

We communicate our interest in children by listening not only with our ears but with our actions—by commenting, asking questions, expressing pride in them. This morning I watched the neighbor next door. He had tied a length of rope to his van. He

was swinging it over, up, and around while his granddaughter jumped and laughed. He was laughing, too, and bending low and listening while his grandchild whispered in his ear.

The man next door is busy. He's finishing his home, has recently taken on a second vocation, travels. But, this morning, he "told" his granddaughter, "I have plenty of time for you." Today, I'm a grandmother and, to be honest, I'm not always excited about listening or participating. But then I remind myself each of us can make time for a child. Bend the knee, view the world of daffodils from a butterfly's point of view, study the universe through a short person's eyes. I remind myself how important it is to visit the school and the zoo, fingerpaint, bake cookies for classes, build roads in beach sand, don costumes when events call for such things. I remember my teachers and my grandmother. I hear them say, "You have worth, you're important to us." And I whisper myself a warning: "Today, another child needs to be heard. Listen up!" ■

Techno-Sparring



Ron Sjoerdsma

Ron Sjoerdsma teaches in the education department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

To a certain extent, Kate Wells found the general hubbub in the new Hillendale Christian Middle School computer lab disconcerting. She worried that the noise level in her seventh period “study hall” was too high for the easily distracted students, especially when Rosetta Perez’s computer started blaring “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad.” It turned out to be the theme song for a clever storytelling web site Rosey discovered while searching for information for her project about the Newbery Award. Rosey had been flustered but, with help from the room’s techno-whizzes, managed to turn the sound off quickly. And as frequently happened, the next several minutes were spent getting everyone back to individual projects. In spite of these sorts of interruptions, Kate recognized the relatively high intensity of on-task activity from most students.

The new lab’s arrangement of twenty-four stations around the outside of the room with a large work space in the center allowed her to see what each student had on the screen. Theoretically Kate could monitor all students’ work more easily than she could in the old lab with its standard rows of tables. Sometimes she wished she couldn’t see everything. On her way back to her desk from helping Rosey, her eyes were drawn to animated kissing lips on Chris Mennenga’s screen. He seemed embarrassed when she stopped, and he said, “I don’t know where that came from.” As Kate examined the page she discovered that “kissing lips” was an animated attention getter for some innocent product linked to an appropriate search page. Ultimately, this room arrangement meant that she and her students had easy access

to each other’s work, a concept that she supported theoretically—but the noise level!

Kate would again have to bring up to Helene Peters, her principal, the need for headphones for each computer, preferably without getting her eighth grade planning team involved this time. When Kate had made the request a few weeks earlier, Helene had suggested that she talk it over with her team and see what they thought. That was Helene’s way sometimes. When she wasn’t ready to make a decision, or perhaps in this case didn’t want to spend the money, she used the team-discuss-it-first method. And as usual the team had used up too much of its precious planning time discussing it.

Two weeks before, at their regularly scheduled Friday meeting, Kate, the team’s leader, had simply suggested that Helene wanted team support for buying headphones for the new computer lab. Perhaps, she suggested, before the regular curricular planning was tackled, they could get this out of the way.

Bill Hamilton, who subtly but regularly reminded Kate that his thirty-five years of math teaching had to count for something, had the first word: “When are we going to stop pouring money into this technology money pit? We must have thousands of dollars of equipment in storage that nobody uses.”

Jim Sooterma jumped in. “What? I suppose you want me to go back to using film strips just so we can say we are using all the equipment in the A.V. Room?”

Kate immediately regretted not having given a rationale or built her case first. The battle lines were familiar ones. Jim would always be her ally when it came to new technology. He had moved from skeptic to advocate in just one year to the extent that Kate was now having difficulty keeping up

with him. Bill, while recognizing a general need for getting kids familiar with computers, thought that teachers’ and students’ time was being wasted. And Sara, the team’s young science teacher, incongruously sided with Bill. Bill and Sara even appeared to be developing a friendship around their mutual distrust of educational technology. And so the sparring continued, with Bill throwing the next punch.

“Film strips. I’m glad you brought that up. You probably don’t remember you’ve been here ten years?”

“Eight.” Jim’s irritation was evident with one word.

“Well, if you’d been around in the seventies, you’d remember how this school spent all kinds of money on the latest synchronized film strip projectors, and then we had to have a slide-sync programmer so that the high school chapels could have multimedia shows. It was just crazy for a while. And now all that stuff sits on a dusty shelf. All I need is a good overhead projector.”

“We’re not talking about a huge dollar figure here. What are they going to cost us, Kate, fifteen bucks apiece?”

“I think we can get them for ten.” Kate was grateful that Jim didn’t bite on Bill’s overhead comment. The merits of overhead driven pedagogy had cost them much team planning time in the past.

Sara jumped in, “But that’s at least \$240 for the whole lab. It seems to me that we have other things we need to spend money on, too. Just yesterday Helene asked me to see what I could cut from my science lab budget. And don’t tell me that computer simulations work just as well for science labs. Wouldn’t it just be a whole lot simpler and cheaper to turn the sound off?”

“Let me try to explain why I think we need the headphones.” Kate knew she

should have been better prepared. "With the new lab arrangement, we have a fairly high noise level already, and lots of really good CD-ROMs and many web sites now have sound with them. As soon as someone hits a sound bite, everyone turns to look and—"

Sara cut her off, "But won't they all get used to it?"

It seems to me that my students are pretty good at tuning out noise during labs."

Kate's first thought was how much more assertive Sara was this year—probably good for her classroom management.

"I think this noise is a little different because it's not just your usual background noise. It's individual and attractive, sometimes annoying, and kids just seem to gravitate toward it." Kate immediately recognized her bad word choice. Bill pounced on it.

"That's been my point all along. This web stuff IS annoying, and not much is very useful. Don't forget, Kate, all the trouble you had with the neo-Nazi material last fall."

"Point made." Kate knew she had to give some ground.

Bill wasn't through. "I thought one reason we have this new lab set up this way is so that you can monitor what the kids are doing. If you give them headphones, how will you know what they are listening to? Maybe they'll bring in their own CDs, and then we'll have that problem." Bill paused for effect. "You all convinced me to at least try the Internet

last year, and I even found some okay information, but mostly just a lot of junk, certainly nothing I would use in my classroom. Just give me a good overhead projector and I'll teach

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

these kids

algebra."

Jim was calmer now but couldn't let the second reference to overhead projectors pass. "I like overheads too, but the Internet has really improved my social studies class; in fact, I've made some real-



ly cool transparencies from web material. I'll admit that I've spent time finding some of the things I use. But the Mayan unit I developed last year wouldn't have been nearly as good without

all the Internet support."

"You're right, it was pretty good." Sara's comment lacked any hint of enthusiasm. "But this is really beside the point. I think we all agree . . .," Sara hesitated and looked at Bill for support, ". . . I think we all agree that the Internet is not going away, and our students have to learn how

to use it well. Our students need to be trained to be smart and reflective

Christians in our culture. But do they really need headphones now? Maybe we should wait a few weeks to see if they get used to the noise. I really think they will."

The team really did have more important things to do that Friday afternoon, and so Kate had let Sara's comment stand. She would wait a few more weeks. Now as she listened to the beeps and squawks that fall afternoon, she noted that most students were engaged in their own screens except for an occasional giggle about someone else's noise. Maybe Sara was right. Kate wanted a community feeling while the students worked, and right now they seemed to have it.

A few seconds later, the relative tranquility was broken by an Elmer Fudd voice screaming "Crazy wabbit!" and the whole class turned to the source. Nathan apparently had hit the U.S. Postal Service's web site promoting their new Bugs Bunny stamp.

In a few seconds everyone was back to work. But "crazy wabbit" popped up a few more times in the next few minutes, and Kate felt she again had the ammunition she needed to go to Helene, and maybe her team as well, with her request. She'd rehearse her opening this time. She was determined that the lab's headphones would not become \$10 straws that broke the technology camel's back at Hillendale. ■

More Than Just Memories

by Alan Bandstra

Alan Bandstra teaches sixth grade at Sioux Center Christian School in Sioux Center, Iowa.

I traveled to Oskaloosa, Iowa, to attend the fiftieth anniversary celebration of my grade school. The visit was fun. I renewed some old acquaintances and reminisced about times gone by. The reunion also became a profound learning experience for me. Looking back, I have gained a new understanding of the way schools and teachers influence young lives.

It was a warm and humid late August day. After practicing with the alumni choir, I wandered outside to the playground for some fresh air. At the moment it was quiet, except for the buzzing of cicadas in the trees. I thought about how the playground would sound in just two days—noisy children everywhere, overflowing with the excitement a new school year brings.

It's strange how places and objects can bring back memories of events long forgotten. On the east border of the playground stood the row of trees that were now three times the size they had been when I had played there on my first day of kindergarten. It was there after my first recess that I had learned the meaning of "tardy." My friends and I had heard the buzzer, and we had seen other kids go inside, but we had been told to listen for the *bell*. That loud buzzer on the side of the school did not sound like a bell to us, so we went right on playing!

I was pleased to see that the old mighty maple still stands on the north end of the playground. Towering above houses and school buses, it continues to reign from its place by College Avenue. Every fall it turns the most brilliant hues of orange and red. A constant figure among changing staff, students, and styles, it has

seen fifty years of recesses, softball games, and school picnics. It has even outlived the classic three-story brick school building that once stood next to it.

To my delight, I found that most of the playground equipment I had played on was also still there. I walked past the old teeter-totters that were always coming off their hinges when children rode them roughly. One was off its hinges again. I put it back on. And there was the swing set. When I was little, it had seemed so tall. I had feared that one day I would surely swing too high and end up going over the top and coming down on the other side.

The slide had been installed when I was in second grade. What a year! The slide had a little tunnel at the top and two small hills in the middle. My friends and I would swing from the top bar to build speed, and then rocket ourselves down that slide. On a good turn, my bottom would only touch the tops of the two hills. The ride would culminate in a painful but thrilling bounce off the end and a dramatic rolling tumble in the gravel. As I looked at that slide, remembering the hours of fun it had unselfishly given us, I decided that one more ride for nostalgic purposes was too much to resist. I climbed the old chain ladder to the top and slid down. Two teenagers had stopped their basketball game to watch. They were laughing. Smiling back at them I shrugged my shoulders and walked back to the school building.

It was there that the memories of my teachers came to life. Walking through those rooms, I began to realize how much their lessons had played a role in shaping me—in both the lessons I was taught, and the lessons I had caught. I don't remember much about fourth grade social studies or sixth grade science. But having again

walked the halls of my grade school, I do recall the teachers, and it is to those teachers that I dedicate the rest of this article.

Mrs. Verhoef possessed a grandmother-like love for her students, and she spoke with the sweetest Dutch accent. Her warmth soothed our anxieties about beginning this thing called "school." Mrs. Verhoef made such a big deal out of our accomplishments. Once, when I made a picture of huge Goliath and tiny David, she held it up for the whole class to see. On another occasion, although I hadn't considered my nativity scene extraordinary, she praised it and hung it above the door.

Mrs. Nikel (or was it Miss Nikel? I could never remember!) was my first grade teacher. She could tell the stories of the Bible with passion. Today, as I picture Moses and Joshua, I still see them as she described them. And I remember the way she would squint her eyes and raise and lower her voice to convey the drama of the Bible. Because of Miss Nikel, I began to know God's Word with more than just my mind; I began to feel it with my emotions.

Mrs. Eekhoff was my second grade teacher. She taught me to love nature. I remember her excitement when the old maple next to the school turned bright orange that fall. Before second grade I had just taken colorful leaves and butterflies for granted. Mrs. Eekhoff's reactions to creation's beauty seen in that big tree and delicate butterflies instilled in me a sense of awe that could not have been accomplished through the most dynamic factual lessons about autumn and its miracles.

I remember thinking that my third grade teacher, Miss Schoolland, was so tall that she had to duck for doorways. I don't recall if this was actually true, but it might as well have been, for she generated great respect in her students.

Toward the beginning of the year I had left open the glue bottle Miss Schoolland had lent me, and the top had dried out so that the glue would not come from the bottle anymore. I had done this despite her warning not to let it happen. Fearing that she would be angry, I hid the bottle in the bottom of my desk and fretted until May about what my teacher would do if she found out. On the last day, she came walking down the rows to collect the glue bottles, and I knew there was no more delaying the inevitable. When her tall figure finally paused by my desk, I choked out the words, "It broke, Miss Schoolland."

"That's okay," she smiled, "We have more." Then she took the bottle and continued up the row. Miss Schoolland will probably never know the relief that I felt at that moment and afterward. I was not the terrible person I had believed myself to be. And through her forgiveness, I sensed something of the grace of God.

I liked Miss Griemann, even though she would not put up with mediocrity from her fourth graders. It was the last year that classes were held in the old mouse-infested brick building. Though Miss Griemann was firm, she knew how to laugh, and she displayed sincere pity for the rodents who met their demise in the traps behind the storage cabinet.

Back in the seventies Miss Van Beek was a pioneer in learning styles. She understood that fifth graders learn in a variety of ways. She was always drawing pictures on the board and getting us to make things of our own. In her classroom our creativity was given full vent. Miss Van Beek also stressed the importance of personal devotions, a habit which I began that year and have continued right up to the present.

I was not very fond of my sixth grade teacher. This is ironic, for I have now been teaching sixth grade for eight years. I remember vowing then that I would never become a teacher when I grew up. Miss Lubbers was one of the first to hold me

accountable for assignments I didn't turn in, and at twelve years of age I was as disorganized as they come. My history and science notes were scattered among three notebooks, and I stuffed unfinished worksheets under the front covers of my textbooks until their spines came apart. However, after she took away dozens of recesses, made calls to my parents, and finally threatened that I would be repeating sixth grade if I didn't find one particular workbook page, my old habits began to die.



Miss Lubbers left our school after that year. And for a long time I thought that I was surely the reason she left. She probably still shudders at the thought of my name. But without knowing it, she changed the course of my life. And if I ever see her again, I would like to thank her.

My junior high teachers continued to affect my life in the following two years. Mr. Vanden Berg's balance of humor and control made even the most boring subjects fun. Mr. Westra convinced me that with determination and a good attitude I could do just about anything. The dynamic speeches Miss Arends cooked up and delivered on the spur of the moment when we misbehaved were more than chewing-out sessions. They were lessons about life.

And many of her words are still with me today. When a classmate of ours died in eighth grade, Mr. Spoelstra grieved openly and made room for our emotions as well. He helped us understand what happens to people when they lose someone close.

The reunion at my grade school was good for me as a teacher. That night, after the final song was sung, the last slide was flashed, and the last stories had been told, I walked through the quiet parking lot to my car with a sense of awe. The degree to which my school and especially my teachers had shaped my life had never really occurred to me before that night.

To be honest, they had their weaknesses. I'm sure there were days when they were not as prepared as they would like to have been, when they missed details in their lesson plans or neglected final touches in room decorations. But their shortcomings were probably more evident to themselves than to us, their students.

What really shaped me into the person I am today came from my teachers themselves: the little things they said or did, tiny things that today they probably would not remember having said or done. Today I am who I am largely because of the way my teachers lived their lives before God.

Since my visit back to Oskaloosa Christian, I have been more thankful for the teachers God gave to me. And I work with a new sense of purpose about carrying on that task for the students God has placed in the seats of my classroom. ■

When the Talk Turns to Sex They Become Fundamentalists



Stefan Ulstein

Stefan Ulstein teaches media and English courses at Bellevue Christian Junior High School in Bellevue, Washington.

The editor of a Christian magazine I sometimes write for was inundated with angry letters over some article he had published. "Our readers," he sighed, "have a very well-developed worldview. They understand, better than many Christians, that all of life comes under the lordship of Christ, and that every area of human life is redeemed by his atonement. Except sex. If you mention sex they all revert to primitive fundamentalism."

His readers are not alone in this aberration. Recently, Seattle Pacific University offered a tenure-track contract to a highly regarded Christian scholar and poet, only to rescind the offer when an administrator happened upon one of his poems in the *Paris Review*. The subject was sex. The poet was promptly unhired and the whole embarrassing episode was aired in the mainstream press. The entire Christian community was written off as anti-sex by the larger community.

As a writer and film critic, I've stumbled into such tempests myself. I once reviewed Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* for a major Christian magazine. A large number of letter writers complained that I had not warned them of the nudity in the film. They were referring to two scenes of breast feeding. One writer complained that the toddler was too old to be nursed, even though nursing for several years is the practice in many countries. Oh, well. They also complained that the emperor was shown in bed (though under the covers)

with both his wife and his concubine. I thought that Bible readers would know what a concubine was. Did they think that kings had concubines for conversation?

As a high school teacher, I've come across this phenomenon of thoughtful, educated Christians turning "fundy" at the mention of sex year after year. Whether in a book or a film, mention of sex in any form is just a big taboo for a lot of Christians. Usually they trot out the same few verses to demonstrate that God has no truck with discussions of sex. The funny thing is, however, they don't have much to say about the wide variety of sexual themes in the Old Testament.

None of the books or films I teach come close to the scene where Lot's daughters get him drunk and sleep with him. There's no gang rape of concubines in our English curriculum, nor is there any hacking up of the corpse afterwards. Nobody offers his virgin daughters to a homosexual mob to save his guests. No protagonist is shown getting away with adultery and murder as King David does. Nor is there anything quite like the revenge Dinah's brothers exact on her defiler's family tricking the men into becoming circumcised and then slaughtering them "while they are still in pain," which strikes me as downright nasty, though not entirely undeserved.

One Christian writer commented that the only book in Christian bookstores that doesn't read as though it were written by a Christian is the Bible. The Bible doesn't have much in common with the sanitized portrayal of the world that some believers want to impose on film, television, and

print. Mark Twain once said that he was rendered shock proof regarding literature because as a lad he was not only encouraged, but forced to read the Bible.

If the Bible is really our model, then it should be clear that no subject is, in and of itself, off limits. Especially sex. The Bible spends a lot of time on sexual sin because, according to Jesus, we all fall short in that area. A recent survey indicated that 18 percent of women undergoing abortions identified themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians. A similarly high number were Catholic. Divorce is a huge problem, not just in the larger society, but in our churches as well. In most cases of divorce that I've seen, somebody is committing adultery. Often today, the order of pregnancy and marriage is a bit like the riddle of the chicken and the egg. Which came first? Ignoring these problems in the curriculum won't make them go away.

But in the Song of Solomon sexual love is exalted. Naturally, many believers try to make the breasts, thighs, and lips into asexual symbols. One preacher floated the idea that the beloved's breasts were the Old and New Testaments, and the cleavage was the inter-testamental period. He was a biblical literalist in most cases, but not in this one.

Christians like to say that the Bible is their model, but that doesn't seem to be the case if you look at it closely. The Bible is the Word of God, but it's also great literature. It's part of the canon, one of the foundational texts of western civilization. Certainly that's due in part to the elegance of its language, but it's also due to the way the Bible looks unflinchingly at the human



MEDIA EYE

condition. The world of the Old Testament was a wild, brutal place where concubinage, slavery, temple prostitution, and sexual assault were commonplace. The Scriptures record that world with clarity and honesty. Otherwise, we would not be able to learn from them.

I became a Christian at age eighteen, while in the Navy. My girlfriend had sent me a New Testament for my birthday, and, because I hadn't been raised in church, I simply read it like I would have read any other book. It was a good read and I finished it in a week or so. Then I got an Old Testament and read that. It was a bit harder going, but an average reader can get through a book in a day or two. When I finished reading the Old Testament, the New one was good news indeed. The case had been clearly made that we needed a Savior.

That message ought to be part of the criteria for selecting literature and films for Christian schools. Art ought to point to the need for Savior, not in a didactic or preachy way, but honestly. That's exactly what really great art does. It can't do otherwise if it is honest. The job of the Christian teacher is to explain that revelation to his or her students, to guide them through.

Too often the criteria for choosing curricula are based on what isn't in the book or film. If it lacks vulgar language, troublesome characters, and upsetting situations, then it will pass muster even if it merely sedates the students or worse, provides escape from the real issues of life. The Bible doesn't do that, and if more Christians actually read it, instead of just going over the same verses again and again, the church might go further toward being a light to the world.

Perhaps the reason that so many of us shy away from books and films that challenge and trouble us is that we don't truly believe that our faith is up to the challenge. So we sanitize everything and hope that somehow the message of the gospel will break through. The trouble is that the message is not the one Jesus preached.

Our students need to know that we aren't afraid of the world. When they leave our schools for college, the workplace, or the military, they need to know that they have the understanding and discernment to face whatever life throws at them. If we've presented a false world to them, we will only have done them a disservice. ■

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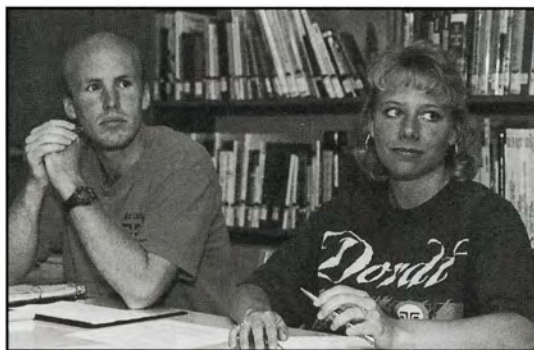
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Teaching Students to Enjoy and Glorify God: *The Ultimate Extreme Sport*



Jeff Fennema

Thinking **13** Thirteen

Jeff Fennema teaches eighth grade language arts at Timothy Christian Middle School in Elmhurst, Illinois.

My beloved ESPN television channel has quite recently undergone a makeover. Oh sure, I still get my fill of football, basketball, baseball, and hockey. The sardonic Sports Center anchors send me off to bed with a chuckle and new material for classroom trivia. Yet a phenomenon called extreme sports has burst onto my television set, and thus into my living room.

Instead of yacht races and Australian-rules football, I am now bombarded with sporting competitions that include rollerblading, skateboarding, bicycling—even sky surfing. The competitors perform dazzling tricks and stunts. It is easy to understand why these are referred to as extreme sports. This is life on the edge, taking extreme risks in search of the ultimate rush.

Many middle school students are fascinated with extreme sports. It seems a natural fit. Middle school students demonstrate extremes in their own lives. The same student who gave a moving testimony during chapel can be heard in the hallway making brutal comments about someone. A heart-wrenching prayer request about a mother just diagnosed with cancer can be immediately followed by another

prayer request concerning a bad hair cut. We witness the extremes daily, and we often respond by shaking our heads, rolling our eyes, or asking ourselves with great horror, “Was I ever like this?”

The first question and answer of the Westminster Confession of Faith encapsulates our purpose in life: “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” The middle school student’s desire to celebrate life, even to the extreme, can certainly fall under this precept. Motivation, however, is the key element: Is something done in worshipful response to God, or is it done for the purpose of self-satisfaction? What is the focus? God or self?

Christian middle school teachers guide their students in ways other middle school teachers cannot or will not. In activities that celebrate students and/or their achievements, Christian middle school teachers can redirect the praise and glory to the Creator, not the creation. Even activities that seem minor, such as homework or taking notes, fall under God’s reign. We have the privilege of showing our students that all activities are pleasing to God only when God is glorified through them. Otherwise they become self-indulgent exercises, as repulsive to God as Cain’s offering in Genesis.

What makes an activity God-glorifying? On the surface it appears that Cain

and Abel both brought the best of their efforts to God as offerings. God accepted Abel’s but rejected Cain’s. According to Hebrews 11:4, Abel’s inner conviction that this offering was a gift to God proved to be the defining element between the two brothers’ offerings. Likewise, two students may each write an essay for homework. One may have done so with the conviction that it was to glorify God, while the other may have written it simply as an exercise or even out of self-gratification. Both essays may be quite similar in theme and structure, yet only the first one is pleasing to God.

In some cases we teachers can easily identify activities that are only to the glory of God. During chapel one student may have her arms in the air as a sign of praise and worship as part of group singing. Another student may also have her arms in the air, but to mock the first student. Little clues such as looking to her friends, laughing, making a face, and general “look at me” body language help teachers identify the motivation.

In other situations we may find it difficult to discern student motivation. Two students turn in their math homework with all the problems correctly completed. One has done it as an act of worship to God; the other has done it because it was just homework. How do we know which is

Thinking 13 Thirteen



The EXTREME Sport

pleasing to God? We do not, and we may never know in these situations. What we are able to do, however, is to guide them toward God-glorifying activities through our daily contact.

Raising consciousness requires vigilance and patience. Helping students see God in their activities might prohibit us from moving through the curriculum as quickly as we may like. We must find and make time for promoting an awareness among students that all of life is worship. We must bathe each activity with the realization that God should be glorified in all our activities, even analyzing inertia, discussing the industrial revolution, or simply choosing the right word to describe something.

Keeping students' eyes focused upon God in all they do is part of our calling as Christian middle school teachers. As middle school students travel through this time of self-discovery, one of the most valuable gifts we can offer is the challenge to glorify God in everything they do: schoolwork, relationships, physical activities . . . yes, even in-line skating.

Teaching our students to enjoy and glorify God is the ultimate extreme sport. Extreme sports athletes exude a certain zest for life, a passion for what they do, a determination when engaged in something new or difficult. Christian middle school

teachers are not so different. Working with middle school students forces us to live life on the edge; it gets pretty crazy sometimes. Each day we must exert all our energy, and exhaustion becomes as routine as our morning cup of coffee. Skateboarding, rollerblading, and sky surfing do not even compare.

God blesses our efforts in granting glimpses of his ongoing work in students' lives. Teachers often have the opportunity to watch a student do something as praise to the Creator: receive an award, stand up for what is right, sing a song, analyze a problem, shoot a free-throw. And that is a bigger rush than any extreme sport can provide. ■



BOOK Reviews



Editor Steve J. Van Der Weele

Mary Pipher. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Ballantine Books. 1994. 304 pp. \$24.95 US; \$33.95 CAN.

Reviewed by Robert Otte, librarian at South Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

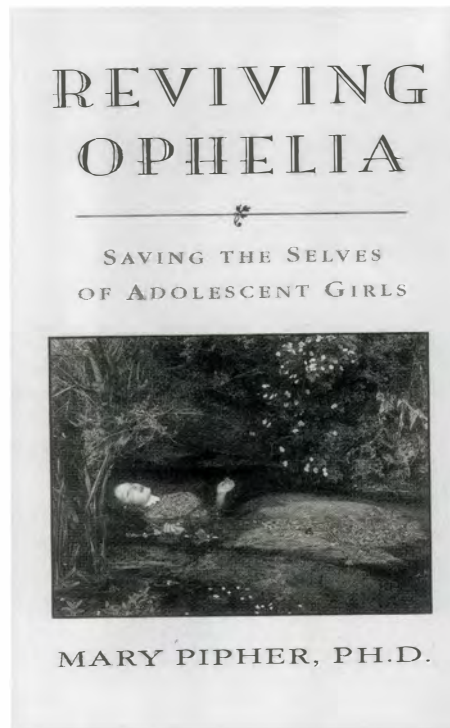
Women I have talked to say that *Reviving Ophelia* rings true. It articulates what they and, more likely, their daughters know from their experience and in their hearts. They know that most girls survive the hurricane of early adolescence, but they could be helped to survive easier if their leaders, their parents and teachers, could help them identify the "enemy" the culture that is pushing them down.

Middle schoolers have been described in many ways. Mentally, they are thinking concretely. Socially, they are moving away from their families. Emotionally, they are riding on a roller coaster. Physically, they are changing rapidly and becoming decidedly awkward. Spiritually, they are beginning to make their own decisions. That all may be true, but young adolescent girls are withstanding something else, says best-selling author Mary Pipher, something unexpected.

"Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down," she writes. *Reviving Ophelia*, the title pointing to the doomed young heroine of Shakespeare's Hamlet, is Pipher's attempt to share her thinking with parents, educators, health and mental health professionals—in short, with anyone who works for and with girls.

In an interview for *People*, Mary Pipher says about herself, "I'm a middle-class, middle-aged woman from the middle of the country. That's why people can relate to me." The clinical psychologist

from Beaver City, Nebraska, began to wonder why so many adolescent girls were in therapy and why their problems were becoming so much more severe. The more she thought about it and the more she studied it, the more she began to realize that today, "girls are living in a whole new world."



In the interview mentioned above, she elaborates: "Studies show that girls' math and science scores plummet. They lose optimism and resiliency, and they become more deferential, self-critical, depressed." Without using a lot of psychobabble, Pipher then builds her case. The middle school years can no longer be described as years of innocence. "Girls today are much more depressed. They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated culture." They are growing up in what Pipher bluntly calls a "girl-poisoning

culture." The point she so powerfully makes is that the problem is not so much within the girls themselves, or even in their families, as it is in the culture itself. Perhaps that outlook has made *Reviving Ophelia* a bestseller.

Pipher powerfully persuades by using numerous examples from her practice. She deals with the extremes in therapy—those with eating disorders, severe depression, and self-mutilated bodies, for example. But anyone working in middle schools today will find that at least some of their students exhibit many of the same symptoms, although maybe not as extreme as those in the case studies in the book. Pipher begins with a discussion of development issues—what happens to the physical, academic, and social selves of adolescent girls. She moves next to an analysis of the family today. Here she notes the distorted picture of the family young girls receive from the media, especially from television. She then proceeds to a study of the important roles mothers and fathers play in development. With all the stress the culture places on girls, she notes next that divorce can only exaggerate what is already painfully going on. She writes, "Divorce shatters many children." All of the above are amply illustrated by case studies from her practice.

In the second half of the book, Pipher moves to an analysis of specific problems: depression, anorexia and bulimia, drugs and alcohol, sex and violence. Again, in all these sections, Pipher provides vivid examples from her practice. Her book is not a lot of abstract theory but many concrete examples. Through it all, she builds her case. She uses her own life and that of her family to illustrate what life used to be like and to provide a contrast to the kind of world in which young adolescents find themselves today.

Not all is gloomy, however, as Pipher points out toward the end of the book: "Daughters can learn to recognize the forces that shape them and make conscious choices about what they will and won't endure." Girls need what she calls "awakening therapy," a consciousness-raising regarding what kind of culture they live in, as a new kind of self-defense.

Middle school teachers, counselors, and administrators will learn much from *Reviving Ophelia*. Time spent discussing this book at staff meetings or an in-service day would be well spent. Educators can learn much from Pipher's experiences concerning what skills and knowledge adolescents need in order to survive today's culture. All adults who work with middle schoolers will find a new understanding of what is happening to their students.

Perhaps, after reading the book, they will conclude, as Mary Pipher does, "I am more respectful of families and aware of the difficulties that they encounter when girls are in adolescence. I'm more focused on our mass culture and the damage it does to young women. I'm angrier. I'm more determined to help girls fight back and to work for cultural change."

George Barna. *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth*. Regal Books. 1995. 129 pp.
Reviewed by Robert Otte.

I would not have heard of *Generation Next* if the youth pastor of my church had not urged us to read it. He said it was the kind of book everyone who works with teenagers today should read. He was right.

Three groups will greatly benefit from reading Barna's analysis of current teenagers: those who work with teens in the church, those who work with them in schools, and parents. In other words, all

those who have an influence on teens, which certainly includes Christian school teachers, will benefit from Barna's outline of what today's teens feel, what they believe, and how they behave.

George Barna is the founder and president of Barna Research, a California marketing research company specializing in research for Christian churches and related organizations. In December of 1994 and January of 1995, his company conducted a nationwide twenty-five minute telephone survey among a random sample of teenagers. In all, 723 teens were interviewed, including kids of all age, economic, ethnic, and religious groups, enough of a variety to claim accuracy. Although much has been written describing subjective experiences of working with teens, surveys of this kind, the author rightly claims, "provide a relatively objective measure of conditions at a single point in time." This book, consequently, is loaded with statistics and charts, most of which readers will find fascinating. It is a book, then, to be read in spurts, perhaps, to allow for time to think about how the teens the reader knows compare to the data. Barna offers conclusions based on his research. While some may say that today's youth are little more than a bunch of disillusioned whiners, Barna concludes that today's teens have "an intensity and perspective about life which can be described by the following six "s" words: serious about life, stressed out, self-reliant, skeptical, highly spiritual, and survivors.

Occasionally Christian schools have conducted surveys to compare the lifestyles and attitudes of their students. Very often, the results have been less than pleasing and contrary to what was expected. Students in our Christian schools often turn out to be a lot like students in other kinds of schools. Barn's conclusion is near-

ly the same. Christian teens, at the same rate as their non-Christian peers, do the same volunteer work, cheat on tests, steal, have sexual intercourse, attempt suicide, and watch MTV. However, Barna does note some differences. Christian teens, for example, hold views of marriage and the family that are in keeping with biblical norms.

Toward the end of the book, Barna sums up how teens of the nineties think in his discussion of the fifteen "new rules that define and direct teenagers in the mid-1990s." For example, rule one is "Personal relationships count; institutions do not." The rules are too numerous to mention here, but they could be an important source of information for anyone working with teens today. Barna speaks directly in his "challenges to all who deal with teens" section:

Effective influencers of teens are those who remain abreast of current trends and conditions related to the teen world.

The media has characterized those who are sitting behind school desks today as "Generation X," with "X" being the unknown. Barna takes the mystery out of the media's characterization by giving an accurate, well-researched, honest, and useful portrait of "Generation Next." ■

Query



Marlene Dorhout

Marlene Dorhout teaches at Denver Christian Middle School in Denver, Colorado.

I have read about and seen student portfolios. Frankly, they don't seem much different from student notebooks or files. They keep all their work and turn it in. Why is this labeled a new approach to teaching today?

In some sense, the portfolio concept is not entirely new. Artists, musicians, and writers have used portfolios for years. Perhaps the difference is not apparent until the teacher practices this approach, following all the rules for assuring the process and product.

According to Regie Routman and Donna Maxim, (*The Council Chronicle*, NCTE: June 1997). "Portfolios include selections and reflections of work that represent what a student is able to do, what the student is working on, how the student is developing and changing over time, and what the student needs and wants to work on" (11). They view the "portfolios as powerful assessment tools that support other forms of evaluation (such as report cards, narratives, and standardized tests) by visibly detailing a student's strengths, learning progress, and the child's current and future needs." The portfolio is not a copout for correcting a student's work. It actually involves more work from the teacher and with the student but allows the student's abilities and weaknesses to be better assessed if properly managed by both parties.

An interesting suggestion accompa-

nied this article, recommending that teachers first create their own portfolios and share their own process and work with students. Routman and Maxim say, "Improving learning and teaching is at the heart of the portfolio process."

Kids today seem so selfish. They think most about what benefits them. Is this a reflection of their parents, of our school, or society in general? How can I counteract this in my classroom?

Probably all the mentioned sources have contributed. Many parents today seem to be very competitive, wanting the best and most for themselves. Such attitudes will rub off on their children. Society as a whole is self-centered. Robert Bly, in his book *Sibling Society*, contends that adolescence has been extended to the point that even the parents and teachers are still adolescents. For anyone who has taught adolescents, this concept is quite frightening.

Perhaps the lack of exposure and role models prevents children from seeing beyond themselves. Of course, not all parents, all teachers, or even all students are self-centered. Adults need to share the world, its beauty, and its needs with children and adolescents in order to help them understand stewardship. The classroom can be an excellent source for such learning. I believe that schools, especially Christian schools, should offer service learning as part of the curriculum.

Consideration for others should be the norm. I believe kids thrive academically,

socially, and spiritually in a trusting, caring environment. Every classroom has an atmosphere established by the teacher and practiced by the students. It will exist whether by neglect or by respect. Preferably a positive atmosphere prevails, with clear expectations and consequences outlined by the teacher as well as willing cooperation demonstrated by the students. Even if the home, society, and perhaps part of the educational system honors selfishness, the classroom can be a safe haven from the petty jealousies and rivalries that cause anxiety and insecurity.

Your concern demonstrates a willingness to try new approaches, to brainstorm with other teachers and with students. We are God's hands and feet and heart in the classroom and community. Students and teachers can counter the condescending acts of self-centered behavior by openly discussing and applying the sharing of "gifts," that is, abilities, possessions, privileges, accomplishments, and discoveries.

If responsibility creates self-esteem, then the lack of it possibly prevents self-esteem. Giving grades, attention, rewards, and recognition when not earned inflates students' self-centeredness but does not satisfy their need for self-worth. As teachers, we tend to recognize dotting parents more readily than we do enabling teachers. Our self-absorbed students, wrapped up in their own little worlds, need to risk moving beyond; they need opportunities for growth and interaction. They need to see and feel that they, too, can make a difference in God's world. ■

Reader Response

Appreciates Quality

I want to thank you for the high quality journal that the CEJ has become. I consistently find articles in each issue that are of high relevance to our school situation here at Unity Christian of Fulton, Illinois.

Keep up the good work!

Patrick De Jong,

Principal, Unity Christian School, Fulton, IL

The Age of Dinosaurs

Christians who believe that dinosaurs might have been on Noah's ark have the right to that belief. They also have the right to promote that belief, and many Christian publications are available for the advancement of such beliefs. Christian Educators Journal, however, should not be among those publications. CEJ no doubt regards itself as committed to the highest educational standards in science. It falls far short of high standards, however, when it publishes articles like "How Big Is a Dinosaur?" that suggest that there is scientific validity to the idea that humans and dinosaurs coexisted.

There is no current scientific evidence for that idea in spite of the fact that millions of Christians may think that there is. The abundant physical evidence pertaining to dinosaurs, thoroughly scrutinized and tested by thousands of qualified paleontologists and geologists, many of whom are Christians, indicates that dinosaurs lived and disappeared from the planet millions of years before the first humans showed up. An infallible Bible neither alters the abundant evidence found in rocks that pertains to the dinosaurs nor renders flood geology a viable scientific option. Flood geology is sheer, unsubstantiated speculation that was discredited by competent geologists two hundred years ago. We do a tremendous disservice to our students, our teachers, our school boards, our parents, our pastors, and the entire Christian community when we treat wishful thinking, no matter how pious, on a par with carefully tested scientific conclusions. Moreover, God is not honored when we distort the evidence in his creation to prop up what we think the Bible teaches.

Davis A. Young

Professor of Geology, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI

In the current issue (April 1997) of Christian Educators Journal the article "How Big Is a Dinosaur?" by Ron and Doris Schuchard communicates a view of Christian education that has little in common with your usual editorial stance.

The article gives the impression that it is an acceptable and supportable alternative to mainstream scholarly views to believe that dinosaurs and humans lived together on the earth, that dinosaurs did not evolve because nothing created evolves, that dinosaurs are depicted in prehistoric cave paintings, that dinosaurs were known to biblical writers after the flood and therefore must have been on the ark (except for those that could swim), and that the dinosaurs were made extinct by environmental changes which accompanied the post-diluvian new regime. This is utter and complete nonsense.

The article is written in service to a supposed distinction between "Creationist" and "Evolutionist" science, the former being identical to "Christian" scientific scholarship. Nothing heretofore published in CEJ

has led me to believe that its editors considered the difference between Christian and non-Christian scholarship to be so simply a matter of the facts.

Finally, Henry Morris and John Whitcomb's *The Genesis Flood* (1961) should be recommended to educators as a suitable resource for the study of exactly nothing, unless it is the history of the pseudo-scientific, pseudo-scholarly, Christian obscurantist movement known as Creationism.

Douglas A. Howard

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In dealing with the issue of homosexuality in the church the CEJ editors showed good judgment in presenting a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. The readers were in this way challenged to evaluate their own beliefs and prejudices. This same discernment, however, was completely lacking in dealing with the controversial subject of evolution. The article "How Big Is a Dinosaur?" presents the author's viewpoint as the only way a Christian can resolve the apparent conflicts in the creation/evolution debate. One can only assume the purpose of the article was to present this opinion, since the science in the article is sketchy and biased. The author repeatedly speaks for all Christians as if all Christians are in agreement: "For Christians, the Genesis account portrays *Christians who accept the Biblical view of creation and Christians who believe in Noah's flood understand.*"

As a high school biology teacher, I have students and parents with a wide variety of beliefs about Genesis. Since theologians cannot agree on the historical nature of Genesis, to propose a singular perspective on the creation/evolution debate is understandable for an individual but seems academically irresponsible for an educational journal. It is an individual's personal belief of Genesis, not the scientific evidences, that determine what they will or will not accept about the biological theories of evolution and origin of the species. In this light, the way individual students and Christians rectify the apparent conflicts between Genesis and evolution will be varied. I attempt to have my students reach their own conclusions and to view the beliefs of others with discernment and open-mindedness. I only wish the CEJ had presented other viewpoints to provide a forum for discussion and debate.

Daniel Vander Kooy

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