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THE ESSENTIAL STORY IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

With a teacher to tell the classroom story as it unfolds, students can be led to see their relationships with their peers as representative of Christ's body and revelatory of God's nature. - *Jeff Hall*

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Editorial

Pat Kornelis

The Power of Believing

My six-year-old daughter is a princess. I know this because I have visited her kingdom. As she plays with her stuffed animals and Barbies, she enters the magical and make-believe kingdom she calls "Ergensis" and commences to reign royally. She invents scenarios and stories that involve friends, brothers, and imaginary characters. When I eavesdrop on her imaginative play, I hear her creating a persona who is very real. She believes when she is in this world. It's make-believe, and yet it's not make-believe. When she becomes involved wholeheartedly in the story, then it is real.

Isn't that the way it ought to be for our students with Christ's story? Obviously the difference between my daughter's story and Christ's story is that Christ's story is real. But it is real for our students? Have they become so involved in the story, so absolutely absorbed, that it has become a key ingredient of their lives? Unfortunately, too often the story has become mundane, common. They've heard the bible stories so many times in grade school, in Sunday school, and in family devotions from the story Bible, that they stop thinking about it. They're just stories—interesting but unreal. Sometimes Christ's story seems unrelated to the facts studied in their classrooms. What does Christ's story have to do with algebra or grammar or poetry? Sometimes the story has become sullied by the absorption into modern culture. When we thoughtlessly censor or uncritically accept the influences of our society, what does that do to the story? Is Christ's story as real, as vibrant, and as exciting for our students as the kingdom of Ergensis is to my daughter?

As Christian educators we are called to the reconciling work of the kingdom of Christ. We must model in every aspect of education how Christ is present and is calling us to be part of the transformation of creation. I recall former teachers who modeled Christ's story for me. They were the teachers who made science and math more than facts, theorems and statistics. They were the teachers who revealed the interrelatedness of the subject area, creating a picture of the world in which every aspect was under the rule of Jesus Christ. They reveled in the awesomeness of God, in the order and magnificence of his creation. And they modeled for their students the necessity to trust in God and not in themselves. They expanded my vision of who my God is and they helped me to see how I fit into his story.

We have an awesome task before us. We can't be content to simply present the facts. The facts are meaningless without an understanding of the reconciling work of our Savior. We are working for the kingdom, and as laborers we need to model the story in ways that our students can see as real—ways in which they can become partners and characters in the story.

God's instruction to the people of Israel applies to educators as well as to parents: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut 6: 6-9). When we live the story, our children and students will join our voices in singing those simple words, "I love to tell the story because I know 'tis true. . . ." What joy as a parent and an educator to sing those words with my daughter, my princess. ■

Narrating God's Activity in Your Classroom

by Jeff Hall

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As a classroom teacher in a Christian school, I have often arrived at the conclusion of a lesson believing that the teaching would have sounded much the same in a secular school. Often it seems as though God is just an add-on, some icing on a cake that is the same regardless of religious perspective. The struggle is to recognize God's active involvement. A key to his work in classrooms is found in a full understanding of general revelation.

General revelation

For Reformed Christians, revelation has always been a key concept in epistemology. There is special revelation—Scripture and Jesus; and there is general revelation—seeing God through his creation. Often general revelation is summarized as "All truth is God's truth." This principle has been used to open the door to study literature, science, mathematics, and other subjects that have been discovered by people outside of the Christian faith. If God is revealed through his work, then even pagans can discover and create within norms that Christians can identify and acknowledge as God's handiwork.

Too often general revelation has been viewed as a somewhat passive display that points to a distant God. However, God actively reveals himself in his created works, and he actively mediates his creative acts through his people (Wolters 1996).

Narration

John Bolt in *The Christian Story and the Christian School* (1993) explores narrative as alternative knowing. He believes that God is telling a story through his people. This alternative knowing is a fuller sense of reality than is generally portrayed by western thought, which is dominated by the scientific method. This type of thinking is supported by theorists such as Kieran Egan (1986) who believe that narrative in the classroom allows students to supersede traditional ceilings of developmental psychologists such as Piaget (1969).

If storytelling in the classroom allows students to experience a fuller sense of knowledge, then perhaps it is a method for the Christian teacher to point to God's self-revelation in the learning process. The teacher can be seen as giving a story-context for the learning taking place. If we are the story that God tells (Bolt 1993), then some prophetic voice needs to speak clearly during the learning process. The teacher takes the role of adding the commentary that provides the context of meaning.

Think of the student on the playground who is alone at the basketball hoop and is narrating the play-by-play action. To a distant observer, the student simply dribbles the ball and shoots. However, to the observer who is close at hand, the drama of the moment is intensified by the self-announcing of the student. "Joe, the great walk-on basketball star, is dribbling down the court in the final seconds. The score is tied in this game, which is deciding the championship of the universe. Five, four, three, two—he shoots—one, BZZZZ. He makes it! He's a hero! What a man!"

Of course this narration is fictitious for the student, but it certainly adds a dimension to an otherwise mundane moment. In the same way a teacher can show the significance of mundane moments through thoughtful narration that points to an active Creator. Unlike the play-by-play at recess, this announcing will be true and will illuminate a lasting significance to the activities of life.

To illustrate an application of this suggestion, let us examine some possible themes that could be emphasized through teacher narration: patterns, mysteries, relationships, and special acts of God.

Creation—patterns and mysteries

Creation is full of the evidence of God. God reveals himself so plainly in creation that to turn from this recognition brings judgment (Romans 1). Creation is full of order and mystery. Certainly the patterns in creation call attention to a master planner. Even a casual observation of insects, plants, animals, weather, water, ecosystems, planets, stars, galaxies, and other aspects of nature invite us to stand in awe of seemingly limitless patterns and planning in God's creation. Despite the strong testimony of creation, curricula have perfected the craft of reductionism. Rather than standing in awe and wonder of a creation that challenges our comprehension, students are encouraged to place these multidimensional topics in two-dimensional boxes of labels, outlines, definitions, and diagrams. Simplistic explanations give the illusion of total understanding with no mystery outside the realm of discovery given sufficient time.

It is true that students should be given a sense of dominion and understanding of the created order. However, a flat-souled presentation of facts in isolation will only serve to cloak the Creator. To the astute Christian educator, the creation is a place to see God revealed. It is a place to learn about the artist through his artwork. The narration of a teacher during the study of any aspect of the creation should include a continual return to certain questions: "What does God reveal about himself here? What patterns do we see? What

seems to be beyond our understanding and shows the greatness of God?" The story of a loving Creator will unfold through his manifold works.

A teacher who teaches in this way will love learning and will be a model to students. Learning will no longer be a parade of factoids; it will be an exploration of the expressions of the Lord of life. The story weaves a meaningful theme of the knowing of the Creator through his work.

Relationships

God seems pleased to reveal himself through a series of relationships. Consider the interrelationships within the creation and the personal associations in the collective body of Christ as it is realized in the classroom. The philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1927) emphasized the organismic whole. The whole truly is greater than the sum of the parts. However, learning and classroom activities are so rooted in the traditions of analysis that parts are often studied in isolation from their meaningful contexts. The skillful teacher will use integral units of study to examine the contexts of topics that are often studied in isolation. The narration of the teacher will place math as a useful tool of stewardship for a class project; language as a tool of communicating the richness of life to others who will read essays in a literary publication or school newspaper; science as a useful set of understandings evidenced in everyday life. When the time is taken to place the particulars of academic study in contexts of meaning, motivation for learning is intrinsic. When students learn how to predict weather from the cloud formations of the day, they feel motivated to test their predictions beyond the confines of the unit of study. In seeing this part of creation with eyes of appreciation, the general revelation of the Creator is a natural part of the internalized narration of the student. He becomes more appreciative of the creation and the Creator. Even a rudimentary understanding of the relationship of water, air, and cloud relative to the predictability of the next day's weather makes for a person who can begin to stand in awe of the Creator.

Of course there are many ways relationships can be experienced throughout the curriculum. A literature unit focusing on a fine book, or an interdisciplinary unit of science or social studies, or secondary teachers who team teach a theme unit that crosses between their disciplines could provide a forum for narration of the relatedness of the parts of creation and an appreciation of the meaningful complexities that make wholes greater than the sum of their parts and point to an infinite Creator-Designer.

Human relationships also provide a forum to witness the handiwork of God when correctly understood and narrated. Certainly Paul writes of a group of believers as being the very body of Christ. Classrooms form such communities. Correctly nurtured, a classroom can become an interdependent community that manifests the attributes Paul describes. Alfie Kohn (1996) has many good suggestions in his monograph *Beyond Discipline*. Although teachers should not give up their authority, a certain sharing of the power and the control of the classroom allows students to begin to experience responsibilities and a sense of dominion for the community that is their own. With a teacher to tell the classroom story as it unfolds, students can be led to see their relationships with their peers as representative of Christ's body and revelatory of God's nature.

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Special Acts of God's Mercy

In Christian schools where prayer is a regular part of the day, some record of God's answers to prayer need to be kept. Part of the story of the classroom is necessary to remind the students and teacher that God cares for his people. One of my colleagues opens his college classes with intercessory prayer for the concerns students list. One semester, a student went to the trouble of recording all of the requests and the subsequent "answers." No one in the class was aware of the student's record-keeping. On the last day of class the student distributed copies of his list to the members of the class. The list told a story of God's providence. Although specific acts of God's mercy were certainly appreciated throughout the semester, this total list demonstrated the care of God for his people and provided a narration that was revelatory of God's character.

Call of Teaching

Simply put, the call of the teacher is to narrate classroom experience in a way that mysteries, relationships, and acts of God are noticed as being revelatory of the nature of God. Teachers have the opportunity to move a classroom from "covering material" to "experiencing the Creator through his work." God clearly and undeniably reveals himself. To relate to his creation and to miss him is to miss the point. Students and teachers can easily relax into a mundane repetition of materials without recognizing the profoundness of the Creator. However, the teacher who tells the story of God in her or his classroom prophetically changes the material into an instrument to be used of God. ■

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Forgetfulness in the Promised Land:
Scriptural Memory in a Land of (Educational) Milk and Honey

by Sylvia Keesmaat

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This article was originally given as an address at the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association Convention in October 1996.

The story of Christian education in North America is a varied one. Schools began in different locations in markedly different time periods in two rather different countries. But despite the differences, Christian educators struggle in various ways with the same underlying question: how do we maintain our vision? How do we continue to keep alive the goals and hope with which the Christian educational movement began? I want to reflect on that vision here in the context of the biblical story. In remembering that story, we can be renewed once again in telling and enacting our own story.

Remembering the story

Our remembering is rooted in the first part of the book of Deuteronomy. The people of Israel have been wandering in the wilderness for forty years and are now at the boundary of the promised land. Behind them is fatigue and struggle, uncertainty and fear. Before them lies a land of plenty, full of large cities that they did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that they did not acquire, wells that they did not dig, vineyards and olive groves that they did not plant (Deut. 6:10-11)—all of it a gift from Yahweh, their God. Behind them is the want of the wilderness, ahead of them the milk and honey of the promised land.

It is at this place of transition that there is a pause in the story for reflection and command. You see, Israel is about to enter an entirely new phase in its history. They are moving from a ragged bunch of wandering nomads, dependent upon Yahweh for every meal they eat, to a landed people, settled in a land where they will have food and wine in plenty, where they will be satisfied in all their wants. This is quite a change for this particular people. Remember that for the last forty years they have been wanderers. The majority of this people were born in the wilderness. Egypt was where their fathers and mothers had lived and were slaves. For the people at the boundary, wandering is all they have known.

So Israel is called to remember, to remember that the land is a gift of Yahweh, their God. Why are they called to remember? Because in the place of plenty the temptation is to forget that things haven't always been this way. It is easy to think that abundance in the land, given as gift, is actually something that we have attained. So Joshua says, "Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied [notice the creational language here: be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28); when all you have is multiplied (Deut. 8); the picture is one of creational abundance], then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God . . ."(Deut. 8:11-14). Again and again in Deuteronomy we find this call to remember.

They remember by recalling the story. Deuteronomy 8 continues by telling the story for the Israelites. They are called to remember the wilderness. They are called to remember the story of their slavery, of their hardship, of an arid wasteland, of a God who brought them out of Egypt, the land of oppression, and gave them plenty in the wilderness. This is what Israel is called not to forget. For in forgetting that they once were slaves and wanderers, the temptation is for Israel to fall into the same kind of oppression as Egypt. "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth . . ." (Deut. 8:14-18). Forgetting the story will cause them to think that they are the measure and creator of their own abundance.

Why story?

Why all this emphasis on story? Why does this story matter so much? Well, a story provides an alternative vision of reality. A story both describes the way things are and creates a new world. Stories call those who listen into new ways of being. Stories help to create the identity of those who listen. All of Israel's life was rooted in this story recalled and remembered. Even the law is most fundamentally rooted in story. When the children ask about the meaning of the statutes and the ordinances, Joshua says in Deuteronomy 6, they should be told the story. This is what makes it unique among ancient near-eastern legal codes. The festivals and feasts evoke the story of Israel's origins: Pentecost recalls the exodus itself, the feast of booths recalls the wilderness wanderings. The law as a whole evokes the story. For instance, Israel is called to free slaves every seventh year (Deut. 15:15), for they once were slaves, and to love the sojourner and alien, for

they once were sojourners and aliens (Deut. 10:19; Lev. 19:34). Similarly the poor must be cared for (24:12,14) and justice given (24:17,18) because Israel had been oppressed and denied justice. Israel's story grounds the law she is called to obey.

What kind of God?

But the story not only provides Israel with a vision of who they are and should be; it also provides them with a vision of who their God is. Listen to this passage from Deuteronomy 10: "the Lord your God . . . is not partial and takes no bribe, [the Lord] executes justice for the orphan and widow and . . . loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt . . . (Deut. 10:7-19) and so on.

God is one who takes no bribe, who executes justice, who loves the stranger, who rescues slaves and gives them a free land of their own, who takes a stiff-necked people and forgives them again and again and establishes them as God's chosen. The image of this God is what gives life to the alternative vision of reality that the Israelites are to recall. The life-giving character of their God is what they are in danger of losing if they forget the story, disobey the commandments and worship other gods. And it is either God's story or the story of idolatry. The choice for Israel is clear: remember the story, or fall to idols.

So this is a call to remember, then, as they move into the promised land. If Israel is to keep her identity as the people of Yahweh, they are called to remember the story of their beginnings in slavery and the land as a gift of their God; to obey the laws that show how to live the story; and to remember that the story and the laws show them how to image the God they worship, a God who gives them a way of living in the land which is not oppressive like Egypt, but which is an alternative reality of care for the sojourner, slave, orphan and widow.

The story of Christian schooling

Well, so what? What does this story have to do with us, twentieth century Christian school teachers and administrators? Well, while our story does not exactly parallel Israel's, there is much we can learn from it. Let me outline how the story of the Christian school movement resonates with the story of Israel.

When the Christian school movement began in North America, it did so with what many would consider few resources. By faith, parents and teachers set up places of learning with volunteer labor and contributions from those who often had very little themselves. And there were risks. Would the school actually be able to make it? Would this actually be recognized as a school by higher levels of education (more of a problem for the high schools when they started)? There were risks for individual families who struggled to make tuition payments. There was risk for the teachers, whose paychecks were always precarious. There was a risk that the whole enterprise might fail.

An alternative vision

Even though there were risks involved in starting Christian schools, they did not seem like huge risks because those starting the schools had a vision. A vision of an alternative reality. A vision of a world in which every inch of life, every academic subject, every artistic endeavour, every sporting activity, came under the redemptive and saving rule of Jesus Christ. This world belongs to God, not to big business, not to economic growth, not to rational science. So those who started the Christian schools proclaimed. This is why they sought to find places where their children could go to be educated in light of this vision. They wanted not to set up places of protection, but to set up schools where their children could learn an alternative view of reality so that, when they entered the work force or academics and became mothers and fathers, they would have a different way of being in the world: a way of being that images a creator God, an incarnate Savior, and a holy sustaining Spirit.

In order to teach such a vision the biblical story was foundational. Scripture set the measure for what it meant to learn about science and English and math and music. And this scriptural vision gave energy and momentum to the movement.

In a culture of decline

That was the vision of those who started the Christian school movement. But the larger cultural context was a key factor in the start of Christian schools. The community that started this movement was a small immigrant community living at the margins of a dominant society. The larger culture at that time was fairly stable. And so it provided, oddly, a solid environment in which to practice an alternative vision. It is easier to set up an antithesis between the Christian school system and the mainstream secular school system if there is something that is clearly recognizable as mainstream and secular.

Now, that cultural reality is no longer present. The stability of North American society is eroding. To use Leonard Cohen's words "things have started to slide, slide in all directions." Our culture is now characterized by plurality: different ethnic voices, different languages, different gender voices, different spiritual traditions, and different codes for morality. Such a situation provides new challenges and new temptations for the Christian school movement.

Most obviously, this changing cultural situation creates a precarious context for the Christian school community. Although it could be argued that precariousness is the middle name of this movement, we are generally used to

being marginal within a larger stable culture. Now, in some ways, the situation has been reversed: the Christian school movement has reached a fairly stable and well established place in North America.

Now, just as Israel faced the temptation of forgetting Yahweh once they were established in the land, so as an established movement, now in a disintegrating cultural context, the Christian school movement is also faced with temptations that could lead to unfaithfulness.

The temptation of stability

The first is the temptation of those who feel threatened by the cultural changes going on and who seek to hold on to some aspect of the culture for a measure of stability. When the culture starts to slide, the temptation is to attempt to maintain the center, to find a firm place to stand. This is the temptation of assimilation, the temptation to become part of the mainstream because there might be some security there. This is idolatry! Holding on to the mainstream means telling another story, a story that is not God's story. An example of this would be in the face of uncertain economic forecasts, high unemployment, and a competitive job market to say, "Christian education has to face reality. Business and science is where the world is at and where our culture is going. We need to train our students to be competitive in the new global economy and marketable in the technological marketplace. Only then can they have a secure future."

The problem with that kind of an argument is that it buys into the secular story on a number of levels. It assumes that education is for job training and security (what some have referred to as a job-driven education system). It accepts the story of secular culture that economics and technology are the primary shapers of world reality, an implicit assumption of which is that science and technology can solve all of our ills. In the end this vision of education will result in us worshipping before the gods of economics and science, which are, according to Bob Goudzwaard, two of the idols of our time.

The temptation of tribalism

But second, there is also the temptation to what is called tribalism. This is not a new temptation for those of us who grew up in a small ethnic community, but it is one that becomes stronger in times of cultural threat and decay. The temptation to fall into tribalism is the desire to be protectionist, to shield our children and our schools from what is happening in our culture. We must not withdraw into an us/them mentality and say, "Everything is 'going to hell in a hand basket' out there, but that's okay because in here everything is safe and secure; and if we keep our kids in here, they will be safe and secure too." Such an attitude, of course, also buys into the secular story: the radical individualism (though here it is the individualism of a whole community), which affirms each one for herself, each cultural group for itself, each ethnic voice for itself. The individualism of the modern world ends up in the tribalism of the pluralistic culture. In the end such protectionism—the desire to have Christian schools because then our children and we will be safe—is an idolatrous option as well.

> "It is easier to set up an antithesis between the Christian school system and the mainstream secular school system if there is something that is clearly recognizable as mainstream and secular. Now, that cultural reality is no longer present."

Both of these temptations are paths to idolatry most fundamentally because they forget the story not only of the Christian school movement but also of the Bible itself. As I mentioned earlier, the Christian school movement is by definition a precarious movement, a place of risk because it affirms that the place of trust is not anything that can be measured by our society's standards, but rather that the place of trust is God's gift and blessing, a gift we cannot control but can only wait on day by day anew in faith and hope.

That gift and blessing are described again and again in the biblical story as part of the alternative vision of reality the people of God are called to live out of. I want to tell parts of that story now.

A story of risk

In the face of the temptation to seek stability and security either in some aspect of our culture or within our own Christian community, the Bible has a thread of risk running through it from start to finish. Right from the start it is made clear to Israel that the only way to feel secure in the land is to remember that the land is a gift from Yahweh (Deut. 6:10-19; 8:11-18). Central to Israel's way of life were commands about Sabbath. Sabbath is important because it is a confession that we are not responsible for keeping our life on track or for getting all we need. It acknowledges that we can let go and God will take care of us. It is fundamentally about whom we place our trust in: in our own work or in the gift of God. Central also is the forgiving of debt, jubilee, the returning of land, and the freeing of slaves (Deut. 15:12-15; Lev. 25), all of which confess that life is a gift, that our constant work and management are not what brings financial security and abundance. We have to let go and receive the gift of God, let go of money (which is what slaves were too), of possessions, even of land. To live with radical trust is central to the law.

Israel, of course, as we do, found it difficult to live in this trust. The prophetic books portray much of Israel's disobedience before the exile as wanting security. That is why Israel wanted a monarchy and God grudgingly gave them one (1 Sam. 8). A king means a secure, real nation. Security is why Israel made alliances with the nations around when political situations became too tense (Isa. 39). And for seeking such security in places other than Yahweh, Israel was punished and again gifted in restoration from exile. Israel needed to learn again what it was to receive their life as a nation as a gift from God.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisaic attempt to make all of life holy and pure and worthy of God's return was again a radical attempt to control for security and to create a stability in Judaism. Jesus' message in response was do not be anxious, lend without expecting in return, when you throw a

feast invite those who cannot invite you back, forgive and forgive and forgive again (Matt. 6:25-34; 18:21-34; Luke 6:35; 12:22-34; 14:12-14). There is something incredibly risky about these gospel accounts, and in the end Jesus risked and lost even his very life in order to bring the reconciliation God wishes for the world. And then Jesus gave his followers this command: follow me. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

A story that looks outward

But there is also a strand within the biblical narrative that stands over against the temptation to protectionist tribalism, which can be present in our community. The start of the biblical story is a God who is the creator of the whole of the cosmos, who makes a covenant with the whole of creation after the flood in Genesis 9. So it is no surprise that the promise to Abraham is for the sake of the nations in Genesis 12, that Israel is called to bring justice to the nations and is called a covenant for and a light to the nations in Isaiah 42, that Jesus styles himself on the prophets who ministered to Gentiles (Luke 4) and that he spent much of his ministry including those people whom the religious establishment thought ought to be excluded. This very issue was at stake in the early Christian mission when the apostles met to consider whether to include the Gentiles: how could people of such dubious morality be admitted into the early Christian movement? We don't appreciate how radical the decision to include the Gentiles was in Acts 15 until we realize that Paul spends all of Romans and Galatians on the issue of Jewish-Gentile relations. The story ends with the radical redemption of the whole of the created order and a picture of the river of life with twelve trees on its banks. And the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2). At no point is this a narrow protectionist vision. It is always pointing outward for the sake of the world.

The story of a living God

But more than these themes, the Bible is also the story of a God whom we image. Our God delighted in the world God had created (see the refrain, "it is good" throughout Genesis 1), grieved over the evil of human hearts (Gen. 6:6), resolved to keep covenant with this earth (Gen. 9), suffered with his people in slavery (Exod. 2:23-25; 3:7), and dallied with them in the wilderness and grieved again over their faithlessness until in anger he gave them over to punishment (see Jer. 2:1-2; 3:19-25; Hos. 11). He forgave their sin and lovingly called a remnant (Hos. 11), finally came down to earth—God's very self in the form of a human being. He suffered and died for us, lives again yet still groans in the Spirit on our behalf (Romans 8:26). This delighting, grieving, forgiving, incarnate, groaning, living God is the one whom the story is most fundamentally about and is the one whom we are called to image.

A call

In the end, I guess that this article is really a call. A call and a plea to tell this story, be immersed in this story, tell it wherever you are walking and wherever you are sleeping. Be immersed in it every moment of every day (Deut. 6:7-9; 11:18-20). Be telling it to your students. Be reading the Bible, discovering it anew. Be saying to yourself, this is my story, my history, my God whom I follow. For this is the only way to face the challenges and temptations of being a movement that is successful and that has multiplied again and again. This is the way to stand firm in the face of the temptation to say, "See what our hands have done." We also need to immerse our students in this story so that they can feel the ebb and flow of it, can sense the struggle of God with Israel, of Jesus with Israel, and see how they are the struggle of God with the church and our world. We need to show in every subject how this God is present, how this calling is present, this risky ethic of radical love for the world which works for healing in brokenness and forgiveness in sinfulness. Then our classrooms will be places where the reconciliation of creation is not only taught but also modelled.

And in the midst of it all will be the reconciling Jesus, the faithful one who is always there in the precariousness, always sustaining, always saying, "You can live with the risk because I have lived in that risk and died for you in it and live again." In telling that story once more our vision will be renewed. ■

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The President's Visit

by David Koning

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"Hey. . .Harold," Arnie peeked his head through the fifth grade teacher's door and whispered, "The President's coming!" Instinctively, Harold shuffled the chaos on his desk into some semblance of order, anticipating Benjamin Chekin, the new board president making one of his frequent drop-in visits to Hartsville Christian School.

"Now?" Harold looked up at Arnie. "He usually comes during the day when the kids are here."

"Not that president! The big guy . . . you know, from Washington." A very confused Harold began stuffing ungraded journals into his desk drawers. He didn't really think that the President of the United States was actually coming to visit the school.

"Relax, would ya!" Arnie said. "The President is coming to town, not your classroom!" Arnie, the school's closet Democrat, was obviously excited.

"Oh." Harold stopped cleaning his desk top. "That's nice," he said with a blank look on his face. "Why's he coming here, anyway? There's only a handful of you . . . uh, . . . –he put his hand next to his mouth and whispered—you Democrats." He slowly looked around the empty room, past Bob, the grinning skeleton, to see if any of the conservative members of the constituency were lurking in the room to overhear this clandestine discussion.

"Are you going to take a personal day to go hear him, or is he speaking on a Saturday?" Harold was on a roll. "Did you want to borrow my fake nose and glasses?" He leaned back in his chair and laughed along with the chuckling art teacher.

"No!" Arnie was a man with a plan. "Listen to this, you goofball! We've known for a couple of weeks he was coming this Thursday. We figured he'd be appearing over at the university. You know, where all us liberal types hang out," he grinned.

"Right . . ."

"Well, I heard it on the radio. They just announced the place where he's going to speak. You're not going to believe it."

"Hartsville Christian?" Harold smirked.

"No, but close . . ." Arnie paused to let the suspense build. He measured his words for maximum impact on his Republican friend. "The guy on the radio said he'll be speaking at Oxbow Creek Park to promote his proposed environmental legislative package, specifically water quality." Satisfied that he had dropped the bombshell of the year, he paused to let the news sink in.

"Oxbow Creek!" Harold's chair squeaked as he sat forward. "Sheryl walks her science kids down there all the time!" It pleased Arnie that Harold was getting interested. "What an opportunity for the kids!"

"Yep," Arnie nodded smugly.

"Thursday, eh?"

"Right! The day after tomorrow. They said he's speaking at eleven o'clock."

"We wouldn't even need a bus."

"Nope. We could walk right over."

"What about—"

"Tickets? Got 'em already. Made a few phone calls. Talked to a friend who's a friend of a friend—you get the picture. I got seventy! I hafta pick 'em up by five."

"Don't forget we'll need to get—"

"Permission?" Arnie jumped in. "Talked to Feenstra already. He hedged a bit, but said if we could work it out with the others at this end of the hall, it would be okay. Then he mumbled something about good publicity or something like that." Harold rolled his eyes.

"We'll need to send a—"

"Note home?" Arnie held out a piece of paper. "Got it right here. What do you think? Kids will have to be quick—get it signed, bring it back Thursday morning. Then we're off to see the President!"

The two teachers talked for another half hour working out the details of the impromptu trip. Time was short. They didn't want to overlook a thing.

Harold and Arnie walked out the door to the parking lot, talking like two excited boys planning a campout in the back yard. Harold looked down the street toward Oxbow Creek Park, less than a half mile away. Harold opened the door of his blue '84 Corolla. "One more thing, Arn. What if we get—"

"Flack from parents?" Arnie anticipated the question. "I can't imagine anybody not seeing this as a great learning experience for the kids. Can you?" With that assessment the dynamic duo drove off.

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Wednesday morning the word spread about the plan to see the President. Teachers worked fast and hard to prepare the students for the big event the next day. Lessons about the branches of government and how laws are made were dusted off to prepare for the unexpected visit to the park. Follow-up lessons were written in order to use the experience to continue to prepare students to be "salt and light" outside of the walls of Hartsville Christian School.

Students speculated about what they might see and hear: "Will he come in a helicopter? Will he shake my hand? How

many people will be there? What about the Secret Service? I wonder where he's going to eat lunch? We could invite him to school for hot lunch. There's probably extra macaroni and cheese. Maybe we'll be on TV . . ."

The teachers reminded the students: "Listen to what he says about the issues. See what the police and Secret Service do. Pay attention to what he says. Notice the crowd's reaction. Afterward, read the newspaper and watch the news. Are they reporting it the way you saw it?" On and on it went in classes all day.

As expected, the learning experience began in earnest for students, but Harold's and Arnie's unexpected lesson began as well.

It happened after school. Harold was on his way to the workroom to make some copies of a news article. He went past the secretaries' desks. The office staff had gone home. He walked past Principal Al Feenstra's office and paused when he heard what he thought was a loud voice involved in a heated discussion.

"Cancel the trip! Aw, c'mon, Al!" It was Arnie's voice, almost shouting, from behind the principal's closed door. "That's ridiculous!" Harold seldom heard soft spoken Arnie raise his voice like that.

Feenstra responded with a quiet calm drone indistinguishable to Harold now shamelessly eavesdropping in the vestibule outside the office.

". . . but, I got tickets for all the kids . . ."

More droning followed. Harold pictured Al Feenstra quietly explaining his point of view with his low "official business" voice.

"Who complained? . . . supporting the liberals?! . . . It's an opportunity for our kids . . . for Pete's sake! . . ."

Harold, the eavesdropper, had no trouble understanding the gist of the conversation he was intercepting. He figured that somebody complained about the kids going to see the President. Al Feenstra, in order to avoid controversy with the constituency at all costs, simply canceled the trip. Enrollment was up a few students in spite of the exodus of the home schoolers last year. He wanted to keep it that way. In his mind, the way to keep families was to keep the parents happy, steer a middle course, keep doing what we've always done.

"Cancel the whole thing!? For how many?! . . . two complaints!?"

Harold began to pace as the one-sided snippets of the disturbing conversation shot through the closed door.

" . . . for the kids, Al . . ." Arnie pleaded. Harold groaned. He sounded defeated, then he heard Arnie's fist thud on Al's desk.

"Yes! Give it to him, Arn!" Harold shot a fist into the air, then quickly looked around to see who might be looking.

Harold was getting ready to do his part. He had the main points of his arguments ready: Christian's responsibility to respect those in authority . . . discerning the issues from a Christian point of view . . . being in the world . . . not to mention it's a great opportunity for students to see THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, FOR PETE'S SAKE!

Harold De Wit, mild mannered teacher, loosened his tie and calmly rolled up his sleeves. He knew now what needed to be done. Shedding his professional demeanor, he set his jaw and stalked toward the principal's office ready to kick in the door, if necessary, and come to the aid of his colleague for the good of his students. "Hang on, Arnie, the cavalry is coming," he said under his breath.

Harold stood facing the door. He took a deep breath and slowly reached out to knock. "Here goes," he mumbled. When he reached to tap on the door all he hit was air. Suddenly, he stood face-to-face with Al Feenstra who was opening the door to let Arnie out.

"Can I help you, Harold?" asked the principal.

Harold looked from the perspiring, red-faced Arnie to Al, looking as professional as ever in his blue blazer, and back to Arnie, standing behind the principal, shaking his head.

"No . . . uh . . . you're busy. It can wait." Harold turned, scratching his head, and walked off down the empty hall toward his classroom.

Arnie and the principal shook hands. Al Feenstra said, "Have a good trip tomorrow. Make sure you walk facing traffic. We certainly want our students to be safe." Arnie nodded and followed Harold.

"Huh?!" A puzzled Harold slowed down and let Arnie catch up. "What was that last scene all about? It sounded like we were done for."

"Eavesdropping, eh?"

Harold blushed.

Arnie continued, "The president called while we were 'discussing' the trip! He told Al that he thought it was a great idea!"

"THE President - The BIG guy?!"

"Nah . . . Benjamin Chekin, BOARD president." Arnie smiled.

"Oh, Harold? Wear your walking shoes tomorrow. We're going to see the President." ■

Teaching Biblical Conflict Resolution

by Dory Zinkand

Dory Zinkand teaches a combined first and second grade class at Christ Classical Christian School in Newark, Delaware.

"Mrs. Gates, Michael took my ruler and he won't give it back!"

"Michael, did you take Jonathon's ruler?"

"He said I could use it, but then he wouldn't let me!"

"But he was going to break it! He wasn't using it right!"

Judge Gates is seated on the bench while her students try their cases. As each casts blame on the other in an effort to win the verdict, the unwilling adjudicator wonders, "How did I get into this again?"

In my first and second grade classroom, I have found that teaching biblical principles of conflict resolution squelches the tattletale and reduces my involvement in student disputes. More important, the children grow in wisdom, faith, and maturity as they practice applying God's Word.

Principle: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you" (Matthew 18:15).

Tattletales may be motivated by vindictiveness or by a love of gossip. These unholy attitudes are frustrated by Jesus' instruction to speak to your brother alone when he has sinned.

My standard response to the tattletale is, "I don't want to hear gossip about Elizabeth. Shouldn't you talk to her about this?"

Of course there are situations that call for immediate adult intervention. But children can easily learn to recognize the difference between danger and ordinary disputes.

Principle: "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over" (Matthew 18:15).

The goal of conflict resolution is to restore a relationship broken by sin. In order to achieve reconciliation, we must approach one another in love. We must desire to extend forgiveness rather than to seek vengeance.

Principle: "But if he will not listen, take one or two others along . . ." (Matthew 18:16).

If a sincere attempt to settle a dispute has failed, we may then ask for help. But be careful! I will not listen to Mary's gossip about Jason and then call Jason in for a conference. I refuse to hear any details until all parties are present.

My students have learned to ask, "Mrs. Zinkand, will you please help me talk to Mercy about a problem?"

Principle: "Settle matters quickly with your adversary . . ." (Matthew 5:25).

We must be ready to repent and ask for forgiveness as soon as we realize we have offended someone.

Asking for forgiveness is more than saying, "I'm sorry," (which is only a description of our feelings). We say, "I was wrong to hit you. Please forgive me." This acknowledges sin, recognizes the value of the offended person, and makes restoration possible.

Principle: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

Christ does not hold grudges, pout, give us the cold shoulder or remind us again and again of sins he has forgiven. He restores us to loving fellowship with himself and covers our sins with his righteousness.

Children must understand that in forgiving a repentant friend, they have agreed to seek no further retribution and to set aside all bitterness. Forgiven sins may not be mentioned again.

I have found that applying these biblical principles prevents tattletaling, reduces prideful hostility, and demonstrates to my students the wisdom of God's Word. ■

Leading Children Through the Conflict-Resolution Process

Children may need help learning how to discuss a problem with a friend or sibling. I guide them using the following method. I try to remain a facilitator, rather than a judge, until they have had an opportunity to work through the process themselves.

Step 1: State the rules. Each child will have a chance to speak uninterrupted. They are expected to speak kindly and without false accusations. They must listen to one another and examine themselves for wrongdoing.

Step 2: The offended party is given an opportunity to state grievances, speaking directly to the offender, not to me.

Step 3: The other party is then given an opportunity to respond or state grievances.

Step 4: I ask the children to examine themselves. If they find any fault of their own, they are to admit it.

If the children are unable to see, or unwilling to confess their own sins, I will then take on the role of judge and render a verdict.

Step 5: Each child who has done wrong asks for forgiveness and, if necessary, makes restitution.

Step 6: Each offended child grants forgiveness. A clearly spoken statement, "I forgive you," is required.

Step 7: I try to encourage the children by explaining the blessings of the forgiveness and restoration that allow us to continue on in love for one another.

Children soon learn to handle

Teachers as Readers

by Arden Ruth Post

Arden Ruth Post is a professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"Long and Short, Fast and Slow, Good and Bad—these are some titles of the books my sixth graders created to combine a study of opposites with an authentic reading-writing activity," said Karen DeJong, middle school language arts teacher at Moline Christian School. "They patterned their books after Ups and Downs by Janet Stevens, a 1996 Caldecott Honor book. I find picture books useful in the middle school in many ways. With this one we were able to reinforce the concept of opposites, to practice our writing skills, and to provide an opportunity for oral reading and interaction with first graders when we read our books to them."

Karen is a member of the new Teachers as Readers (TaR) group we started at Calvin College for three specific purposes:

1. To encourage teachers, especially beginning teachers, to keep up with new literature for children and young adults.
2. To provide teaching ideas for books, including forms of literature response, such as writing, art, drama, music, and related reading, as well as instructionally sound ways of reinforcing reading/writing skills.
3. To assist beginning teachers with any classroom challenges they may face, give them opportunities to ask for help, and provide a mutually supportive, beneficial setting in which to share ideas and suggestions.

The group meets one evening a month for ninety minutes in a college classroom and consists of book discussion and teaching ideas, led by members, followed by a time of sharing anything that is on anyone's mind. While beginning teachers who had completed their teacher certification through Calvin College's education program within the last three years were targeted to receive an invitation to join, the group remained open to anyone with an interest in participating. Karen joined after reading an article about the TaR group in the Calvin alumni magazine, Spark. The group is conducted very informally. I schedule meetings, serve as facilitator, and obtain the books and "freebees" such as catalogs, posters, and bookmarks—which group members may select for their classrooms.

Why should teachers form book groups?

Teachers as Readers book groups were initiated by the Association of American Publishers in conjunction with the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the American Library Association, to help teachers encourage students to become lifelong readers. When teachers read, enjoy, and share quality literature with their students, they contribute to the rich, literate environment of their classrooms. Teachers as Readers groups enable teachers to explore their own literacy, share quality literature with colleagues, model lifelong reading pleasure to their students, gain experience and confidence in book discussion, and reflect upon their own personal experience with books. The ultimate result is enhanced teaching and learning. Teachers as Readers groups rekindle the love of literature and the sharing process that can result, first among teachers, and later among teachers and their students.

In a questionnaire response to evaluate our first year, TaR members of this charter group at Calvin wrote the following comments regarding the impact on their teaching:

"It has given us new books we might otherwise not have read."

"I have been reading more children's and young adult literature."

"I have ideas for using books in different lessons."

"Now I know about new literature, learned new teaching ideas, became more excited about literature, and, as a natural consequence, bought more books!"

Why should a college be involved?

Most Teachers as Readers groups occur at a local school or community level, but we saw the setting up of a group by our college's teacher education program as a unique way to serve our graduates and to fulfill our responsibilities to them.

Colleges and universities want and need to keep in touch with their graduates. Teacher education programs are required by NCATE, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, to provide assistance to graduates as an exten-

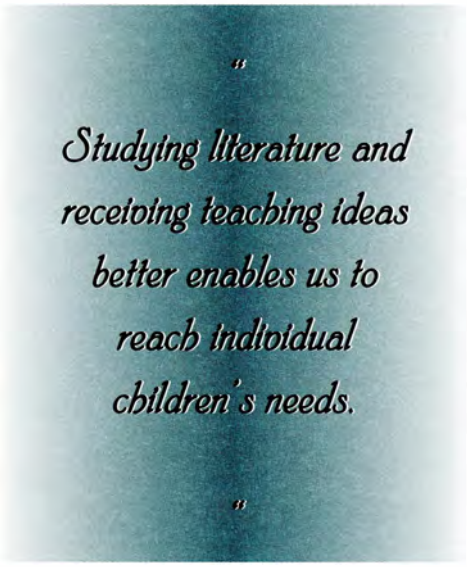
sion of their professional education program. According to NCATE (1995), we are "to provide collaborative relationships, programs, and projects with P-12 schools (20), and "to engage [with them] in dialogue about the design and delivery of instructional programs (25). Higher education faculty are to provide "education-related services at the local, state . . . levels in their areas of expertise and assignments" (NCATE, 25).

Many colleges and universities send questionnaires or surveys periodically to graduates to have them evaluate their preparation for teaching, These results are used to modify existing college-level programs but do not address the need for continuing service to graduates. The need to provide assistance goes beyond receiving feedback. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley has said, "All too often new teachers are on their own during the first two years of teaching." The needs of beginning teachers are evident from informal conversations, telephone calls to their previous professors, and the challenges of beginning teaching they report in their questionnaire/survey responses. Therefore, the Teachers as Readers group can provide an informal session in which beginning teachers can receive the assistance they desire. The multiple nature of the group, with its focus on literature and teaching ideas, appeals to a broader segment of teachers than those needing help, and thus brings in experienced teachers as well as those who may need help but are reluctant to ask or to attend a specific "help" group.

Arelis Diaz, a second-year bilingual teacher at a local public school, found herself in charge of the school's annual multicultural celebration. She asked TaR members for suggestions for presenters representing various ethnic groups, specifically needing someone to present on the Middle East and another to present on Native Americans. The group provided her names, and she later reported her successes to us.

A Christian learning community

Among the benefits TaR members mention is the opportunity the group provides to get together with other Christian teachers. Whether we teach in Christian or public schools, we all share the belief that each child is created in God's image with talents and abilities that we strive to develop. Studying literature and receiving teaching ideas better enable us to reach individual children's needs.



We view children holistically; that is, we see beyond their intellectual abilities to recognize them as whole persons whose physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development also concerns us. We believe that a holistic view of children corresponds with a holistic approach to teaching literacy. A holistic view of literacy as a complex process that involves listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a communication-centered environment is supported by the Teachers as Readers group, and our teaching ideas reflect these components of language arts.

We recognize language as a beautiful gift from God, given to us so that we may communicate with him and with the people he has placed in our lives. The chief end of language arts teaching, then, becomes the development of a child's communication abilities within a meaningful context, of which children's and young adult literature is a primary component.

Sometimes a Christian view of teaching entails examination of the suitability of particular literature for a Christian classroom. More often, however, we find ourselves discussing how we would handle a piece of literature in the Christian classroom, rather than trying to decide on censorship issues. Our group members who teach in public schools want to remain true to their personal beliefs and to deal with issues of good citizenship. We find ourselves wrestling with how to handle literature authentically, yet encouraging students to develop their own value system, which may contrast with those of the book characters.

Just as with the Christian life, we are finding that teaching, in general, and teaching literacy, in particular, present us with challenging issues that we benefit from discussing with supportive Christian friends. As one of our members wrote, 'What I like about the TaR group is making great friends who have the same interests, Christian backgrounds, morals, and values that I have." Not all of our members are from Calvin College. We have had teachers who graduated from Cedarville College and Cornerstone College as well as a professor from Grand Valley.

Diversity

What surprised us all is the variety of "different walks of life" we represent. The invitation letters to join a TaR group went to all graduates of the Calvin Teacher Education Program within the last few years. We did not attempt to determine those who were actually teaching at the elementary and middle school levels.

Those who joined the group represent a diversity of pursuits: homeschooling, preschool and daycare, special education,

elementary education, middle school, substituting (and hoping our members can suggest teaching leads), business (although still interested in children's literature), temporarily "retired" from teaching to raise a family, and one college professor, determined not to teach, but to facilitate.

What also surprised us was the degree of commonality we had. We were all interested in children and young adults, in literacy education, in children's and young adult literature, in interacting with other Christians, in furthering our ideas for classroom teaching, and in giving and receiving help for various education-related needs.

Other benefits

The TaR group provided opportunities for growth in other ways as well. Several beginning teachers asked for help with classroom management issues. Some wanted to discuss how to conduct whole class reading and the discussion of one book while others wanted help in setting up children's literature groups. Still others shared the various ways they had students respond to literature.

Christy Broekhuizen, a new bilingual teacher in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, appreciated the sharing of materials for Spanish-speaking children with Arelis Diaz, as well as learning about Arelis's own experience managing a bilingual program. Those in the group who were parents particularly enjoyed hearing from other parents how their own children reacted to certain books. Chris O'Brien, a homeschooling mother, used her ideas in her dual role as parent and teacher.

How to set up a group

A Teachers as Readers group requires minimum time for maximum benefit. It can be originated by any teacher or principal or person who invites a group of other individuals—for example, the other teachers in the school—to get together regularly to discuss a children's or young adult literature book. Many TaR groups also include one professional book for discussion per year. Times and dates of meetings are agreed upon by the group as are the books to be discussed.

For our first year we followed the 1995 and 1996 Newbery and Caldecott Award Winners and Honor Books and are now branching out to other books recommended by members. For example, Rachel Westra, a fan of Little House on the Prairie books, introduced us to a related series by Roger Lea MacBride, grandson of Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter, Rose. Rachel will lead us in a discussion of MacBride's Little House on Rocky Ridge in the fall. We also designated two of our meetings to have each member bring one or two books to recommend to others and relate how he or she used those books and for whom they would be recommended. We repeated these meetings this year with the following themes: our August meeting focused on fall, Columbus Day, and Thanksgiving; our November meeting focused on winter and holiday books.

Book discussion leaders are members who volunteer, but there is no requirement that everyone serve as a discussion leader at some time. Discussion leaders simply get the discussion going, often by asking, "What did you think of the book?" or by showing some things they have done with the book in their classrooms or with their own children.

Hand-outs are always popular with teachers. I, as the facilitator, have shared several with members, such as author profiles and articles from The Reading Teacher, teaching ideas relating to books, Children's Choices, Young Adult Choices, and Parent Choices booklists. Members have also brought their own hand-outs such as Kirsten's tall tales book for students to make and Karen's folktales unit (obtained from other teachers). We collected materials across grade levels and even shared things we thought would be of benefit to others even though the book they related to was not appropriate for their grades. For example, Cami Compagner, teacher of grade three at East Martin Christian, brought some great hand-outs of reading and writing suggestions for Two Moons by Sharon Creech, for members teaching upper elementary to middle school.

While some TaR groups meet in members' homes, we meet at Calvin College. Many groups meet in their schools, either before or after school. The aim is to focus on getting together and sharing rather than creating a situation in which one feels the hospitality demands of home visits.

Evaluation

We gave a questionnaire to our TaR members in the spring asking them about the benefits of participating in TaR and the impact upon classroom teaching.

The results were overwhelmingly positive. The encouragement to read more books, the teaching ideas, the assistance for classroom needs, and the "gathering together" were the main benefits members cited.

We have found the Teachers as Readers Group to be an excellent way to keep the love of children's and young adult literature alive in teachers, to provide a setting in which teaching ideas related to literature can be shared, and to provide a forum to help beginning teachers with any challenges they face and needs they have. Our Christian community of Teachers as Readers is alive and flourishing. Won't you consider creating your own? ■

Self-Esteem in the Sacred Story

by Perry L. Glanzer

Perry L. Glanzer is the education policy analyst at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In the classic movie *The Music Man* a traveling salesman named Professor Hill promises to teach some small-town school kids to play band instruments. He proposes a rather unusual method. By teaching the kids to use his "revolutionary" think system, he claims that the kids can skip the difficult task of learning how to read music. Under his tutelage, the children merely have to think about a musical piece and believe that they can play it, and they will soon be playing their instruments. Eventually, the townspeople discover the sad truth about Professor Hill's teaching method. It does not work. Spurred by their fury, they capture Professor Hill and prepare to tar and feather the scam artist.

Fortunately for Professor Hill, Marian the librarian comes to his rescue. She enlightens her fellow townsfolk about the good that came out of Hill's deceptive practices. After all, she observes, he gave the school children, particularly her little brother, self-esteem and a positive outlook on life. The townspeople are convinced. In the final scene, the school kids march down the street playing "Seventy-six Trombones" with style and gusto. Apparently, they were motivated to learn how to read music after they gained their new sense of confidence.

In the educational community, one finds a real-life controversy similar to that in *The Music Man*. Detractors of self-esteem programs argue that while American students feel good about their math abilities, they cannot match the South Korean students' test scores even though the Koreans do not feel good about their competence. Charles Sykes, author of the recent book, *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good about Themselves but Can't Read, Write or Add*, claims that "[a]mong educationists in the 1990s, self-esteem is an article of faith with almost limitless application" (Sykes, 48). He lampoons those who believe children should be taught that they are "wonders" or have "unconditional value" apart from their achievements or character (50). Self-esteem, he argues, must be based on one's performance.

In contrast, advocates of self-esteem respond that kids have to feel good about themselves before they achieve. Self-esteem teachings, they argue, are needed to encourage children to "have a positive view of themselves" and to believe that "they can do it." Only then will they have the confidence to reach high levels of achievement. Apparently, this group has a rather large following if one can gather anything from the numerous curriculum magazines hawking wares that promise to raise a child's self-esteem.

How should Christian educators handle the difficult subject of self-esteem? Do they need to take a side? I would contend that they should take both sides—and neither side. In one way, Christians should encourage teaching about self-esteem. The reason stems from the first act of the Christian narrative—creation. From this part of the story, we understand that all humans have worth and dignity because they are created by God and in God's image. The mentally or physically handicapped child and the highly talented student have worth, value, and dignity apart from what either can accomplish.

Furthermore, the Christian perspective does not discourage people from finding satisfaction when they properly reflect God's image by using the talents and abilities given to them. It is God who gives people capabilities to achieve things, exhibit creativity, or demonstrate good character. In fact, if the parable of the talents teaches us anything, it is that God gave us our talents to be used for sacred purposes. Therefore, Christians should encourage high achievement.

Secular proponents and critics of self-esteem curriculum often fail to pinpoint the underlying defect with either approach: the failure to teach self-esteem apart from the larger Christian story. As a result, one side wants to teach kids they are special and have intrinsic worth and dignity without referring to the Creator who made them special and gives them worth and dignity. Their other side wants to teach kids to gain self-esteem from their achievements without reference to the God who gave them the abilities and gifts. This sets kids up for the fall.

Children who fail to acknowledge God as the source of their worth, gifts, and talent may develop one of the major consequences of the Fall—pride. The consequences of such pride may have tragic results. A recently published psychological study subtitled "The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem" documented some of these effects. It analyzed studies on individuals who committed crimes or other acts of violence and aggression. The researchers found that they did not suffer from low self-esteem. Rather, they possessed an inflated belief in themselves. This belief in their

superiority caused them to meet threats to their self with violence. Such findings should not be new for Christians. Augustine noted a similar fault with pagan virtue in his work *City of God*. Nonbelievers who demonstrated virtues such as courage, he argued, would eventually have them corrupted by pride because they failed to acknowledge the God who graced them with these virtues.

Thus, while we want children to understand the dignity, worth, and gifting they have from God based upon creation, we also want them to have a sober view of themselves based on their capacity for sin. Self-esteem programs that teach children merely to think "happy thoughts" fail to reflect the biblical imperative that children need to think truthful and repentant thoughts as well.

Finally, children must be taught the truths of redemption if they are to avoid the pride of failing to acknowledge God as the dispenser of their worth and gifts. Through what Christ has done, one can be forgiven for denying or forgetting that our worth and gifts are from God. Furthermore, through Christ, we are again reminded of our worth in God's eyes because God sought to redeem us and adopt us as children.

The approach of most self-esteem curricula captures little of this redemptive process. For example, one curriculum that attempts to build a child's self-esteem uses a cognitive approach that focuses upon the need to change one's thoughts to alter one's behavior and feelings. It encourages children to believe "I can choose what I think." This approach shares a bare similarity to the Christian emphasis upon renewing our minds; however, Romans 12 talks about renewing our minds in light of the first eleven chapters, which describe God's creative and redemptive work. It's not merely thinking nice thoughts. It's remembering who we were created to be and how we have been redeemed.

Christian educators should rightfully take a critical look at contemporary approaches to building self-esteem. However, they should recognize that the solution is not to take a side in the fight over basing self-esteem on the inherent value and dignity of students or on their achievement. Deriving self-esteem from both sources can be embraced if they are both viewed from the overarching Christian narrative. Then children may learn to rejoice in their worth as well as in the One who has endowed them with it. ■

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Against Formal Grammar Instruction

by David Schelhaas

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Should we teach grammar? How and what should we teach if we do teach grammar? These are questions that English teachers have been debating for years. The debate still generates raised voices, pointed fingers, table pounding, and passionate sermonizing wherever two or three English teachers are gathered. It is a debate that I as an English teacher have been having with myself and others for over thirty years. As a way of contextualizing that debate, I will tell my own story as a grammar teacher.

After two years in the early 1960s at Dordt College, where my grammar instruction was traditional, I went to Calvin College to complete my English major. Upon graduating from Calvin, I went to teach high school English in northwest Iowa. Along with much literature and some composition, I taught grammar. I taught grammar as a separate discipline, apart from writing, and my primary mode of instruction was to have students do exercises involving the parts of speech, gerunds, participles, noun clauses, and most of the other words and concepts that are part of the study of traditional grammar. Teaching grammar in this way had the salutary effect of forcing me to learn traditional grammar more thoroughly. I was never sure, however, that the instruction benefited my students. After five years of teaching I went off to graduate school.

In 1970, with a master's degree in English education from Florida State University in hand, I took a teaching position at a Christian high school in western Michigan. My time spent at FSU had thoroughly armed me with the latest trends and most recent research in the various areas of the English curriculum, including the newest trends in the teaching of language and grammar. I had read (or tried to read) Noam Chomsky and Charles Fries. I had seen summaries of thirty years of research on the teaching of grammar in America's schools and was impressed by the overwhelming testimony it gave to the ineffectiveness of traditional grammar instruction.

Full of my newfound knowledge, I was determined to avoid the pitfalls of traditional grammar teaching in my new teaching position. But it didn't take much longer than a year for me to revise my thinking and return to the old ways of teaching traditional grammar. I really had no choice. You see, about eighty percent of the graduates of my school went on to college at Calvin, and at Calvin one thing characterized the freshman academic year more than anything else. It was the dreaded grammar (Grammar 1) test. (For years it was believed by students that the grammar test was the means that the college used to "weed out" those students unfit or unprepared for college.) I discovered that my success and value as an English teacher in my school and the school community would be determined to a large degree by how well my students did in the Calvin grammar test. So, back we went to the old textbook exercises. After all, since grammar was not tested in the context of writing, we did not teach it in the context of writing. It was taken as a matter of faith that the knowledge acquired in the formal study of grammar (if indeed knowledge was acquired) would carry over into a student's writing.

So, I made my grammar compromise—teaching some bits of usage in the context of writing but also teaching traditional grammar as a formal discipline to prepare my students for the Calvin test. Then, in 1989 I took a teaching position at Dordt College where as a significant part of my assignment I taught freshman grammar and composition courses and a senior methods course for English education majors. Now what was I going to do with grammar, especially as I taught those young people who soon would be teaching English in a junior or senior high school?

I must confess that for a number of years now I have limped along between two opinions, serving the grammar god of the traditionalists while paying homage to the research evidence that said formal grammar instruction had no carryover value for writing and speaking. Then, during the first part of the summer of 1997, I read the summaries of the research evidence using the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts* as my primary source. Once again I was convinced that all the evidence was against the idea that the teaching of formal grammar can improve writing and speaking. Summarizing the available evidence in 1959, Dr. John DeBoer, editor of *Elementary English*, wrote:

> The impressive fact is . . . that in all these studies, carried out in places and at times far removed from each other, often by highly experienced and disinterested investigators, the results have been consistently negative so far as the value of grammar in the improvement of language expression is concerned. Surely there is no justification in the available evidence for the great expenditure of time and effort still

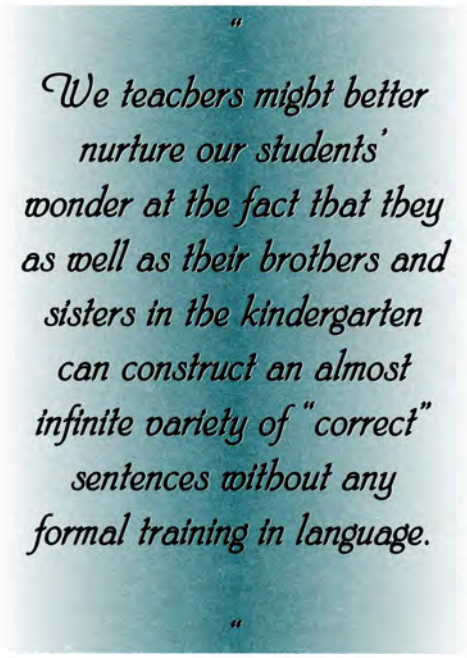
being devoted to formal grammar in American schools. ("Grammar" 417)

Writing in 1991, more than thirty years after DeBoer's summary, George Hillocs, Jr., and Michael W. Smith reach essentially the same conclusion as DeBoer, asking why grammar (Grammar 1) "retains such glamour when research over the past 90 years reveals not only that students do not learn it and are hostile toward it but that the study of grammar has no impact on writing" (600). Even a defender of grammar like Martha Kolln, the president of the Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar, says that it is time to leave the nineteenth-century descriptions of grammar (Grammar 1) behind and teach functional (Grammar 3) and rhetorical grammar instead (30).

A paragraph back I quoted Dr. John DeBoer on the negative value of formal grammar instruction on the improvement of language expression. I want now to take you back forty-six years to a dialogue between Dr. DeBoer and Dr. Henry Zylstra of Calvin College that occurred on the pages of *The Reformed Journal* in 1951.

Zylstra was an esteemed professor of English at Calvin at the time, often called upon to speak at Christian school conventions and write in church publications. He was, then, a man of considerable influence in Christian school circles. Even though Zylstra had died by the time I attended Calvin, his influence on me was profound. I went to Calvin carrying my mother's copy of *Testament of Vision*, a book in which had been collected the best of his essays on literature, language, teaching, and theology. After I graduated, that book was for many years my "Bible" whenever I encountered tough questions as a Christian English teacher.

DeBoer, who attended Calvin College for two years, was less well-known in Christian school circles—though he had taught English at Chicago Christian High for about ten years. But he was a widely respected scholar and teacher, quite influential in the larger arena of public education. A member of the faculty of the University of Illinois, DeBoer also served for a time as the president of the National Council of Teachers of English.



As I read the interchange between these two, I hear two Christian gentlemen, both committed to truth, both committed to their students, both passionate in their love of language, but each quite different in his understanding of how language works. The immediate cause of the disagreement between the two was Zylstra's assertion in the November 1951 *Reformed Journal* that the teaching of formal traditional grammar in our schools would improve students' writing and speaking. In a letter printed in the December 1951 *Reformed Journal* DeBoer challenged him on that point, stating:

> Professor Zylstra insists that speaking and writing can be improved by means of the teaching of formal grammar. All the evidence is against him. . . . In any case, Professor Zylstra offers no evidence for his own position other than his own assertion. The young man [referred to by Zylstra] who was illiterate in spite of his twelve years of English probably had grammar from the fourth grade on, but Professor Zylstra prescribes more of the same futile medicine. ("Concerning" 10)

But the disagreement between the two, as Zylstra notes, really goes back to the old prescriptive-descriptive controversy. DeBoer, the descriptivist, says that prevailing language practice rather than fixed rules or principles are what determine what is "right" and "wrong" in our language usage. In other words, current speech describes what is acceptable or unacceptable usage. Zylstra, the prescriptivist, insists that certain norms arrived at by logic or reason must be used to prescribe what is "right" and "wrong" in our language usage.

When DeBoer points out that the only way to account for the "changes that have occurred in the English language from the days of Beowulf to the present" ("Concerning" 9) is by the inductive method of the descriptivists, Zylstra responds by acknowledging that such things as correct diction, spelling, syntax, and punctuation are indeed subject to change. But he continues to insist upon the teaching of the unchanging principles of

language construction—"subject, predicate, complement and modifiers" (Grammar 1)—which were employed in Beowulf and are still operating today. Not only, says Zylstra, will knowledge of these principles help the student write correctly, but more significantly, this knowledge will help students realize that the rational and orderly nature of language is a manifestation of a God-imbued rationality in humans and order in the world.

Zylstra sees language as a rational expression of spiritual man. To be sure there is something natural about language as well, but it is "the rational or spiritual . . . aspect of it which is normative, definitive, and ideal" ("Reaffirmed" 168). In Zylstra's dualistic schema, the spiritual dimension exhibits itself as humans use reason. Thus, when we study language, we are not merely studying the way people talk, but "the truth of that reality which reason apprehends" ("Reaffirmed" 168). In other words, humans, endowed with Logos, with "god-like reason," are able to uncover the rational elements of language and use them to determine what should be normative in their use of language, the "truth" of that reality we call language. The kind of reason (inductive, I suppose) used by descriptivists to determine what is acceptable usage, according to Zylstra, is something completely different. It is part of the natural world and is therefore not god-like or spiritual. In fact, says Zylstra, if we reduce language to the merely natural, "we shall end up without the possibility of making our teaching Christian" ("Reaffirmed" 171).

Zylstra is certainly right to insist that there is something rational/logical about language, but he is wrong to imbue this "something" with a spiritual quality. The problem with his natural/spiritual dualism is that it places the natural—which includes the inductive methods of the language scientists—under the power of sin and disobedience and claims for the rational a spiritual and "god-like" quality. In doing this he, in effect, denies the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life, giving a certain kind of rational activity an aura of sacredness, and consigning other kinds of language activity to a secular domain that seems to be an unredeemed part of life.

I have an idea that if Zylstra had lived to read the work of Noam Chomsky and others in the area of language acquisition, he might have seen the normative aspect of language in a different light.

Though Chomsky is not a Christian and is not interested in claiming for humans certain God-given traits that distinguish them from animals, he does, nevertheless, argue convincingly that the study of human language brings us close to the "human essence"—those qualities that are unique to human beings.

Chomsky's research leads to the conclusion that "all human languages share deep-seated properties of organization and structure. These properties—these linguistic universals—can be plausibly assumed to be an innate mental endowment rather than the result of learning" (68). The first thing to note about this statement is that it asserts that human language is not, as the empiricist might say, simply "a collection of words, phrases, and sentences . . . acquired accidentally and extrinsically" (Chomsky 48). To say that languages all share "deep-seated properties of organization and structure" is to say that there is something "normative" and "ideal" about language. Second, this statement asserts that the knowledge of these linguistic universals is arrived at intuitively, apart from conscious learning. In fact, we discover them as children, having only small bits of information about the language and no direct instruction. The capacity to acquire language, then, Chomsky would call a "kind of latent structure in the human mind" (50); but as a Christian I would go a step farther and call it a creational structure.

So we can see that Chomsky, like Zylstra, believes that language is not simply acquired randomly and accidentally. Both Zylstra with his "unchanging principles" and Chomsky with his "linguistic universals" and "invariant structures" believe that something normative governs our use of language.

But unlike Zylstra, Chomsky does not believe that these linguistic universals need to be taught or can be taught, or that they can be used to determine whether who or whom is correct in a particular situation. Rather, he would say that young children have already grasped most of the "underlying ideal theory" that governs their language. Because they intuitively know this grammar (Grammar 2), they can generate sentences such as "He went to Sioux Center" but would never generate the construction: "To went Sioux Center he." And the children's knowledge of this deep structure of the language enables them to make far more sophisticated choices and constructions than these. P. Hartwell points out that most people are unable to cite rules for combining adjectives of age, nationality, and number in English, yet virtually all speakers can instantaneously arrange the following words in the natural order: French, the, young, girls, four (as cited in Hillocks and Smith 595). The point of this example is that we do not need to teach children the logic that governs the proper sequence of these words; they know the rules because the capacity for knowing them exists in their very being.

Nevertheless, we must teach children something to help them achieve surface correctness in their writing, to make the right choice between who and whom. Even a descriptivist like Dr. DeBoer would insist that "substandard" English exists and that one of the tasks of the English teacher is to "promote mastery of standard English" ("Grammar" 419). These standards, he would say, are derived from observation of common practice, not from "revealed principles which supersede the facts of observation by finite creatures" ("Concerning" 9). I think it is clear that he is correct.

Here are a few examples to illustrate his point:

1) When I was in "grammar school" I was taught to use the auxiliary verb "shall" with the first person personal pronoun ("I shall") and the verb "will" with the second and third personal pronouns ("you or he will"). The distinction I was taught as a child has disappeared from standard usage today.

2) DeBoer gives an example of "correct" pronoun usage in 1660 from George Fox in which Fox insists that "thou" is to be used only in the singular, and that anyone who uses "you" as a singular is "an Idiot and a Fool" ("Concerning" 10).

3) The professional writer and writing teacher William Zinsser, in his book *Writing Well*, uses this sentence: "Soon after you confront this matter of preserving your identity, another question will occur to you: 'Who am I writing for?'" (as cited in Williams 27). Here he chooses not only

to end a sentence with a preposition but to use the nominative form "who" as the object of the preposition "for".

4) The use of plural pronouns with certain singular indefinite pronoun antecedents ("Everyone brought their textbook to class") is considered acceptable usage by many publications today.

Whether or not you accept this as evidence for the descriptivists' point of view, the question of what to do with student papers that are full of non-standard usages remains. The research evidence against formal grammar instruction was overwhelming in 1951, and it is even more overwhelming today. Yet most Christian schools continue formal grammar instruction. In the past couple of months two of my former students, one a first-year teacher, one about to begin her first year of teaching English, have said, somewhat fretfully, "I'm teaching with this older teacher, and she is really committed to teaching traditional grammar. I'm a little concerned about what she will say if/when I teach grammar only in the context of writing." How do we explain the passionate faith in grammar so many English teachers have? It may be, as some say, a sort of superstitious faith, like the belief that cod liver oil will keep you healthy. Or, for some teachers, grammar may be something to teach that's neat and clean, with clearly defined right and wrong answers, something much more manageable than literature and composition.

In most instances, however, Christian school teachers teach traditional grammar as a separate discipline because that is the way they were taught. The central contention of this article is this: In spite of reams of evidence against it, traditional grammar is still usually taught at Christian Schools International (CSI) schools because most CSI English and language arts teachers have been trained at Calvin, Dordt, or another of the church-related colleges where traditional grammar is highly esteemed. And further, these teachers believe that the best way to prepare their students to attend one of those colleges is to give them a good dose of traditional grammar.

The influence of traditional prescriptive grammarians at the college level on generations of Christian school English teachers has been profound. One still hears echoes of Dr. Zylstra's argument about a God-imbued rationality and order in language. In a recent CEJ article Bette Van Dinther writes:

> 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 how the pieces fit into the whole. If grammar instruction fails to present the overall structure . . . then we as Christian teachers fail at a primary task, that of teaching young people about the order of God's world. (14)

My response to Van Dinther and others who use this argument is the same as that I have given to the Zylstra argument: You are right to insist that language has order but wrong to insist that this order needs to be taught or that the surface descriptions of language that we use illustrate orderliness. In fact, it limits our conception of God's orderliness. Order can be dynamic, moving, beyond our comprehension. We teachers might better nurture our students' wonder at the fact that they as well as their brothers and sisters in kindergarten can construct an almost infinite variety of "correct" sentences without any formal training in language. Certainly few things give greater testimony to the majesty of our Creator and the orderliness of his creation than this uniquely human ability to use language.

Another reason for teaching traditional grammar that I hear and have used myself is that I must do something to improve the surface correctness of my students' papers, and if I don't have the vocabulary of grammar (Grammar 1) with which to talk to them about writing, I am severely hampered in this endeavor. And so, in spite of the fact that most of my first-year college students have had six or seven years of grammar instruction, I have given them more of what DeBoer calls "the same futile instruction." We English teachers do this, I think, because we don't know what else to do. Teachers at all levels know that if their students cannot produce the surface correctness deemed appropriate for their grade level, they will be criticized by parents and by the teachers in the grades above them. They have heard the disparaging remarks,

Here are a few suggestions for the teaching of language that enhance surface correctness as well as sentence clarity and power. These suggestions are supported and warranted by research in language learning.

1. Teach grammar (Grammar 1 & 3) in the context of reading or writing.
2. Provide language experiences that are flexible enough to meet the needs of students with a wide range of language competencies.
3. Intersperse 10- 15-minute minilessons on grammar (Grammar 1) as you work on editing, proofreading, and sentence writing.
4. Teach certain punctuation and capitalization features in early elementary grades, as students exhibit the desire to use such correctly.
5. Introduce students to necessary grammatical terms (a minimal grammar) in late middle school and beyond, but do not make knowledge of terms a primary focus of instruction.
6. Teach certain usage principles inductively. For example, have students develop some guidelines for punctuating dialogue by looking carefully at the way quotation marks are used in dialogue by professional writers.
7. Have students read good literature, literature with interesting and challenging syntax.
8. Have students do lots of sentence combining and sentence imitation in middle school, junior high, senior high, and college.
9. Help students at the high school level identify the particular usages of their home or school dialect that deviate from the norm of the standard dialect.
10. Create a classroom environment which, by being risk free, encourages playfulness with language.
11. Have students do lots and lots of reading and writing and speaking.

"These students don't even use capital letters (or commas or apostrophes or complete sentences or whatever)!"

This concern over surface correctness is certainly legitimate. High school teachers know that colleges expect students to write with relatively few surface errors. College teachers know that employers want the people they hire to write error-free prose. Unfortunately, the antidote to surface errors is not a strong dose of traditional grammar instruction.

Is there an antidote? For the last twenty years, according to Martha Kolln, professionals in the NCTE have acted as if no antidote was needed, as if grammar did not exist, as if grammar instruction of any kind was irrelevant. This certainly is not my position. I do not claim to have all the answers, but I have included some suggestions about how to teach grammar in context, and I heartily recommend Constance Weaver's *Teaching Grammar in Context* as a valuable resource.

As much as anyone, I want my students to achieve surface correctness in their writing, but I do not believe formal grammar instruction will contribute to that achievement. Nevertheless, traditional formal grammar instruction maintains a powerful hold on our culture. For many people it is synonymous with the school subject "English." But it is time to kick the grammar habit. I say this with trepidation for I know how firmly people believe in grammar. I have good friends who, if they read this, will call me a heretic or a fool. Yet I am convinced that far too much school time, which could be spent writing or reading or studying language history or word etymologies or semantics or a hundred other interesting things, is spent studying traditional school grammar. As Christian teachers we need to redeem that time. ■

Three Ways I've Used the Word "Grammar"

Grammar 1. Traditional school grammar—the formal patterns and descriptions of the English language as they have been taught in American schools for over a hundred years.

Grammar 2. The deep structures of language—the structures that underlie the language we use in speaking and writing and which, according to Chomsky, we have an innate capacity to acquire. This grammar cannot be taught.

Grammar 3. Surface correctness—the error-free quality a manuscript has as it is measured against either the prescriptivist's unbreakable rules or the descriptivist's acceptable current usage. What we all want our essays to have.

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Projects to Challenge Thinking with Middle Level Students

by Berta den Haan

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One of the challenges of teaching middle level students is to foster their analytical and conceptual thinking, while keeping in mind that each student is at a different stage in that development. One way to meet this challenge is to have students work on individual projects with a lot of opportunity to interact, share, and work together. We worked on two such projects in grade seven during the past year.

In the first project students were asked to put together a literary theme folder. They were to choose a theme meaningful to them and select poetry and excerpts from prose writings reflecting the theme to include in their folder. They were asked to write responses to each of their selections, produce some original writing, and include an introduction explaining the theme and their reason for choosing it. Original art work and a professional looking cover were also part of the assignment.

Students spent many hours poring over magazines, favorite novels, and anthologies of short stories and poems to find excerpts that expressed their thoughts. They wrote and rewrote their own pieces until they were just right. They shared their work, conferenced, and helped each other. Topics ranged from a favorite pet to friendship, sports, emotions such as fear or love, and concepts such as peace.

Later in the school year, as part of a fine arts week, we worked on photo essays. We looked at back issues of *Life* magazine to see how professional photographers had conveyed their messages using photos. We looked at the styles of writing that accompanied the photos and examined the way in which everything was arranged. This was both a visual arts and a writing assignment. We brainstormed possible photo essay topics that were meaningful to seventh graders and discussed developing a theme and looking for connections. Again topics ranged from the very concrete to the more abstract.

Then, two days before spring vacation, we gave each student a twenty-seven-picture single-use camera and assigned them to take pictures during the break so that they could put together a photo essay the following week. For many students it was the first time they had had a camera of their own. With a few hints on the art of photography, students left for vacation, not even complaining that they had an assignment.

When students returned a week later, all cameras were collected, film developed, and pictures returned by the second morning. Excitement ran high as students examined and shared their pictures. Then came the difficult part: putting together a good photo essay—weeding out the bad pictures, seeing if the theme came through, selecting the best group of pictures, perhaps having another theme jump out, deciding on the most effective arrangement. Since teachers had also done the assignment, they were able to model some of the strategies. Everyone in the classroom was focused. Students tried various arrangements; they asked for each others' opinions; they even traded pictures. At times teachers stopped the work and asked students to share their thinking processes with the rest of the class. Themes ranged from loneliness to reflection, trust, pollution, dirt bikes, and special pets. During the next few days students moved between the classroom and the computer lab as they wrote and rewrote, arranged and rearranged their photo essays. By the middle of the next week more than fifty photo essays were on dis-

play in the classrooms and hallways.

In both of these projects all students were able to be successful. The themes that were chosen were meaningful to them and could be done at their own level. Learning took place for students in doing their own projects, but also in the interaction that was part of the workshop atmosphere in the classroom and in the sharing of the completed projects. Each project gave students choice and required the use of a variety of skills: reading, writing, and visual arts. Students were challenged to grow in their conceptual thinking. ■

Reflections

Melinda Steenbergen, Grade 7

When I walk through the woods I see:

Past a trail with sunlight dancing among the trees
to a goblin's grimace portrayed in a pond.

Into a sea of foam it goes and arrives by a tree
whose branches are mirrored in the bird's bath.

Leaving a photographer's image to dash
in a torrent down the rock surface.

There is a babbling brook that makes
its way through a tunnel amidst trailing ivy.

It is a path of water. It is beautiful.

Martian Mess

Ron Sjoerdsma

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The weekend had gone too quickly. Sara Voskamp wasn't sure exactly why. Weekends had always disappeared in her early months of teaching, but she was now midway through her third year and usually felt recharged and ready for Monday morning. But not this Monday morning.

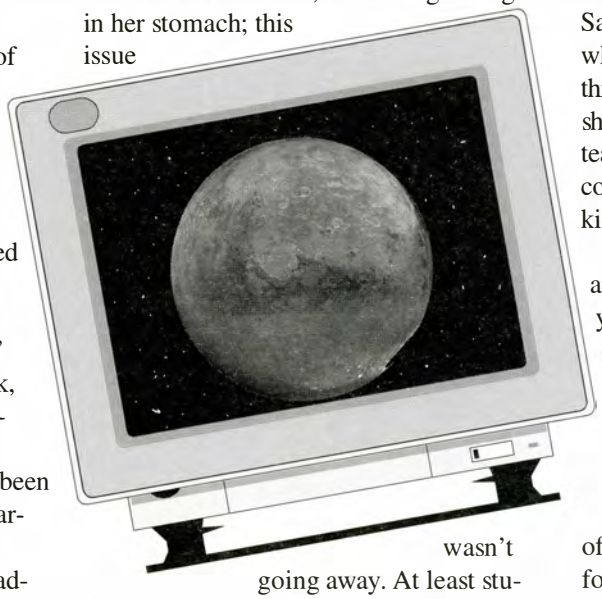
The demise of her weekend had begun with Jim Sooterma's remark after church Sunday morning. Generally, she spent little weekend time with the other Hillendale Christian eighth grade teachers, particularly on Sunday, but she'd gone to Grace Community, Jim's church, because Michele Gray was making profession of faith. Shelly had made it seem terribly important that she be there: "Please, Miss V., can you come?" So she had gone.

After church there had been a reception, and it was later, as she headed out into the stiff December wind, that Jim had called to her, " Sara! Wait up. How's my little Luddite this morning." She had turned quickly and yelled back, "Fine. Gotta run, sorry. See you tomorrow."

For the past two months, Jim had been annoying her with "little Luddite" apparently because she had supported Bill Hamilton's objection to purchasing headphones for the middle school's new computer lab. She'd never thought of herself as one who opposed technological change. In fact, computers had been a big part of her academic training, and just last summer she'd purchased a home computer—finally her budget could handle the payments.

"Luddite" bothered her because it seemed unfair. But as Sara had analyzed her feelings that Sunday afternoon, she realized that "my little" was the part that really stung. She did not belong to Jim in any way, and she was not the child "little" implied. Why did some people have to act so superior? Jim probably hadn't meant anything by it—just his way of trying to be friendly, just a personality thing. Should she confront him? That certainly wasn't her style. Maybe she could just politely say that the Luddite joke as a bit old. Was this something she wanted to share with Bill Hamilton? Did she want to encourage more fatherly advice from him? Kate Wells, the eighth grade team leader, was probably the best person to talk to, but she seemed a little distant since the headphones conflict.

For the rest of that Sunday and now as she made final hurried preparations for her first hour science class, she had a gnawing in her stomach; this issue wasn't going away. At least students would soon be coming to homeroom/first hour. She would lose this mood with their energy.



"Hey, Miss V. We going to the computer lab this morning?" Nathan Wells, Kate's son, was the first to arrive.

"Sure Nathan, after we do homeroom, and I turn back your Friday quizzes." Nathan grimaced. "I don't think I did so hot. I got mixed up again about the order of the planets." But then he brightened with, "I found some really cool stuff about Mars on the Internet this weekend. My mom helped a little."

"Great. I hope you haven't gotten too far ahead of everyone else." Sara immediately regretted that comment, but other students were arriving, particularly Shelly, who thanked her for being in her church on Sunday. While the conversation turned livelier, Sara's mood did not improve.

Later, in the computer lab, Sara made a special effort to check with Nathan once his classmates had settled into searching for current information to support their solar system papers.

"Let me see what you found." Sara tried to sound enthusiastic.

"Well, my mom got me started with some search thing. But I can't find it now." Sara resisted the urge to just show him what was likely to have been Kate's route through "Yahooligans," the search engine she mentioned frequently at their Friday team meetings. Sara's personal belief about computer lab use was that it had to teach kids to become independent.

"You might try the bookmarks. There are some search engines listed there that you might recognize. I'll come back and check a little later." As it turned out, so many students needed help that Sara forgot about Nathan until she heard the electronic throbbing of distinctive chords from Holst's "The Planets," more specifically "Mars, the Bringer of War." Nathan Wells had apparently found a Mars sound-enhanced site and boosted the volume; everyone had turned to his monitor, which was filled with a glowing photograph of the red planet.

Sara's first thought was that Kate Wells had surreptitiously reached into her classroom to reinforce her point about the need for headphones. But she pushed that thought aside, and grabbed the teachable moment. "So. Nice music, Nathan. You want to kill the volume a bit. Does anybody know the name of that music? Anyone have a guess?"

As Sara had expected, nobody did.

She asked everyone to turn to the middle of the room so she could tell the story of Gustav Holst as best she remembered it: the girls' school teacher, trombone player, and amateur astronomer who wrote "The Planets" while he was a British army band director during WWI.

Once everyone had returned to computer monitors, Sara focused on the specifics of the Mars web page Nathan had found. It appeared to have been created by a Mars fanatic who claimed to have created the "ultimate Mars exploration site;" however, there were apparently no links to the Pathfinder Mission that had generated so much Internet attention the previous summer and fall. She had hoped that the students who had chosen Mars for their projects would naturally stumble on the nasa.gov sites. They contained a wealth of accessible information including still pictures and video taken by the rover Sojourner. The site Nathan was currently reading seemed a little out-of-date, but accurate.

Later, several minutes after Nathan's first interruption, he was calling her back to his screen to look at some more amazing Mars material—this time without sound.

"This is going to be really good for my paper because this is all about how the government didn't really send the space ship to Mars. Look! This picture has a pop can in the back. So it really came from someplace on earth, but they just want us to think they are from Mars." Nathan was excited by his discovery and others around him were listening in.

Sara had to pull this together quickly. "Okay, Nathan, have you used your checklist?" A recent computer inservice had provided her with an Internet accuracy checklist that she had adapted for this project. She hadn't seen many students using the list, so she had another moment to make her point at least to the students around Nathan.

"Are you saying that this guy is making this up?"

"Well, that's what I'm asking you to check out. If you use the checklist, you should be able see if you're getting accurate information." Sara stayed with Nathan to see him grudgingly locate his checklist before she moved around to other students, encouraging them to do the same.

But in the back of her mind Sara was thinking about the story she would tell to the rest of her team about the student who found over 38,000 hits for his planet Mars search and the first ones he checked had been a little off the scientific path. Would she again be perceived as a technophobe? And Bill would probably say something like, "That's just why I don't want my students getting math content from the Internet; there's too much wacky stuff out there."

And then her wandering mind thought about the Mars/Venus pop psychology related to male and female relationships. Was that an explanation for her problem with Jim Sooterma? As first period ended, she decided to let it rest until the next team meeting on Friday. Maybe by that time she would have found her own path toward understanding Jim's Martian behavior. ■

Reference

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Thinking Critically about the Web

I love handing my students a computer-generated progress report because they rarely doubt its accuracy. Like them, I also tend to trust what my computer grading program prints out. I never check the math, and my students seem to accept what appears before them in print as mathematically sound. And unless I've made an error in recording a grade or creating the spreadsheet formula–and I sometimes do make mistakes that my more savvy students are starting to catch–the printout is accurate.

I'm afraid that my students also have accepted Internet information the same way. They read and print out Web contents on a regular basis, referring to an Internet article with the same confidence in its veracity as they have about a professional journal article. Unfortunately, Web information sites are rarely scrutinized by third parties the way refereed journals are. But I'm also hopeful about students' ability to critically analyze what they read on the Internet. I'm beginning to hear comments from them about the shear volume of trash they encounter when they do their electronic surfing for class assignments. This trash is distinct from pornography, which gets most of the press.

To counter this labyrinth of Web mishmash, teachers should encourage students to ask questions about the accuracy and quality of Internet resources. Marsha Tate and Jan Alexander (1996), both reference/instructional librarians, suggest five criteria by which students should scrutinize Web pages: authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency (is it current?), and coverage. Each criterion comes with several questions, but the critical questions are found in the accuracy category:

1. Is it clear who is sponsoring the page?
2. Is there a link to a page describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization?
3. Is there a way of verifying the legitimacy of the page's sponsor? That is, is there a phone number or postal address to contact for more information? (An email address is not enough to verify legitimacy.) (54)

The authors suggest that if questions 1 and 3 can't be answered "yes," the source has little value for a person's research.

One way that teachers might help students begin to see the need for critical analysis of Internet resources is to give them comparison/contrast activities in which two Web pages present contradictory information. Provide them with a set of criteria that will help them determine which page is likely to be the most trustworthy.

Media as a Corrective Lens

Stefan Ulstein

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

Our favorite desert island is just south of the San Juans in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Surrounded on all sides by high, jagged rock walls, it is connected by a small gravel spit about fifty yards long to a smaller, similarly inaccessible bird rookery. In the high clefts of the rocks the seagulls lay their eggs, while below them seals give birth to their pups on the big rocks by the surf. Our aluminum boat is really too small to be out there, but a larger boat can't slip through the narrow opening in the kelp beds, or negotiate the treacherous rocks of the lagoon on the lee of the gravel spit. It's shallow, and at high tide the spit is covered, exposing the lagoon to the pounding Pacific swells, but when the tide is low it's a calm haven for our little craft.

My wife and I had just run a gauntlet of frenzied seagulls to gather a bucket of mussels from the outermost edge of the bird rock. For some reason they only grow there. We were sunning ourselves by the lagoon. A seal and her pup, who was about the size of a beagle, swam thirty feet away at the edge of the lagoon, as curious as two dogs. The rest of the seals, who had belly-waddled into the surf at our first approach, had resigned themselves to a pink Norwegian and a brown Japanese invading their domain, and were again snoozing like middle-aged uncles after the Super Bowl. The seagulls, who had set up a henhouse racket and swooped so close that we could feel the breeze from their wings, were now confident that we had not come to eat their young. Everything was pretty much back to normal.

We had ridden the tail of the ebb tide out through the narrow slit of Cattle Pass, which separates Lopez and San Juan Islands, so that we could have the calm waters of slack tide to negotiate the reefs and open stretches to the island. When the tide is running, it's like a river after a heavy snow melt. There's no rowing if your motor breaks down, and the rip tide that backs up when the wind and tide try to go in opposite directions is rough, even on a big boat.

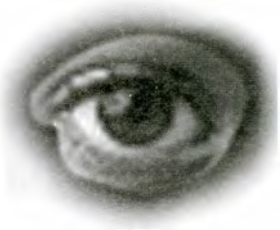
As we alternately dozed and thought about heading back, we heard a loud, WHOOSH! Then another. We stood up and saw a mile out to sea, a pack of Orcas hunting for salmon. There appeared to be a half dozen groups of three to six whales spread over a stretch of four or five miles,

We shoved off, fired up our trusty six-horse Johnson and headed for the middle of the Straits. I lifted the three-gallon gas tank to weigh the fuel. We could drift home on the flood tide if we had to, but to negotiate the tide rips now running through the reefs and surf of Cattle Pass we'd need to have power.

We kept two hundred yards away from the whales as they went about their business, not out of any fear of them, but to avoid joining the posse that follows them everywhere they go. The previous weekend had seen 108 boats of all sizes following a pod. It was a scorching day and one witness said he could see a blue-gray layer of boat exhaust floating a couple of feet above the water—right where the giants' blowholes took in air.

It wasn't always this way. Ten years ago we stumbled across a pod of forty-two whales right in front of our friends' cabin. Only one or two other boats passed by. We floated along with the Orcas for nearly two hours. At one point, a twenty-four-footer swam just under our boat and we could clearly see her eyes, the size of softballs. When she spouted we got wet. The whales seemed to pay less attention to us than we paid to driftwood floating by. They were in their assigned place in creation, doing what they were created to do.

I can remember being on Whidby Island thirty-five years ago when Namu, the first captured ki1ler whale, was being towed in a pen to Seattle. A television crew set up a dish to relay the signal back to the



MEDIA EYE

station. That was the beginning of the demystification of Orcas. From ravenous beasts of prey to *Free Willy*, they have undergone a complete transmogrification in the public mind. Who can forget the sight of Jacques Cousteau swimming with the previously feared beasts and learning to understand, appreciate, and possibly communicate with them? Last night I watched a news special about efforts to free a Puget Sound Orca from a marine park and return her to her pod. Keiku, the cetacean star of *Free Willy* has already been taken from his too-small, too-warm pen in Mexico to a place in Oregon where his health has improved. These creatures live a long lifespan —almost as long as that of humans; and if the captured whales are returned to the wild, we may learn something else about creation and our place in it. In the grand scheme of things the Orcas who were reduced to performing tricks for garishly-dressed tourists may have helped society grow into a greater understanding of their species.

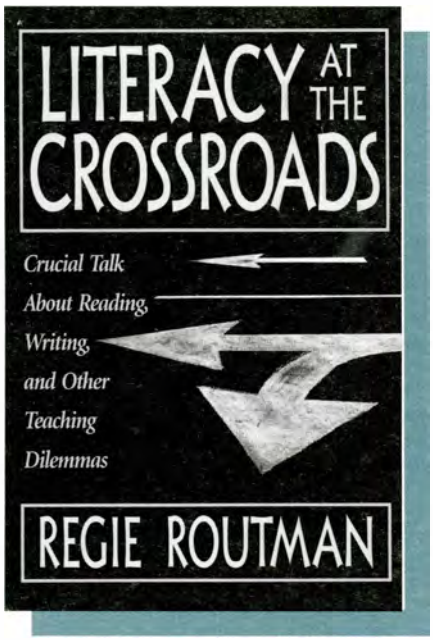
When I was a boy in Canada I fished for salmon with my grandfather, but I never saw a whale. Even a seal was an exotic sight. That's because people shot them on sight. They ate the fish, you see. Sea mammals learned to hide from humans. The rest were shot. Now the Orcas of Puget Sound are a huge tourist draw, and they don't seem to be the slightest bit interested in us. Other sea mammals like otters and sea lions have resumed a comfortable place in the rich waters of the sound. Once I was fishing near a seal rock and a newborn pup, it's placenta still attached, swam over to check me out. I petted it on its furry head before it swam back to its mother, climbed on her back and disappeared under the water.

My wife and I watched the Orcas disappear in the direction of Vancouver Island and headed for home. As we ran the tide rip through Cattle Pass, I had to laugh at the sight of two fat seals perched on a ragged, ship-killing rock that would soon be submerged. The current welled up on the rock and broke around it, dropping a foot into a churning, boiling whirlpool. As I nervously maneuvered my ridiculous aluminum boat past these two fatties, who could have plopped in and swum away, I thought about the reversal of fortunes. Now my wife and I were in danger. The seals were fine. No 30.06 would put a slug in their brains today. They gazed at us with only the mildest interest as we shot through the gap and were swept away by the current. To some extent, they can thank television for that. ■

BOOK Reviews

Editor Steve J. Van Der Weele

Regie Routman. *Literacy at the Crossroads: Crucial Talk About Reading, Writing and Other Teaching Dilemmas.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996, 222 pp., $19.50 (paper)
Reviewed by Pam Adams, associate professor of education at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.



Just a few years ago many teachers would have described themselves as being "whole language" supporters. Today, however, fewer teachers care to wear that label. Television shows such as *Nightline* and *20/20,* with their reports on the value of phonics instruction, along with the media attention given to the supposed failure of whole language in California, have given whole language a bad name. In her newest book, *Literacy at the Crossroads: Crucial Talk About Reading, Writing, and Other Teaching Dilemmas*, Regie Routman asks us to look more carefully at what whole language really stands for before rejecting it. Routman believes that many of the problems associated with whole language have come more from a misunderstanding of the concept than from the philosophy itself.

What I particularly like about this book is that although Regie Routman calls herself a whole language advocate, Routman does not sound like one. Too often whole language advocates act as though they are the keepers of the truth about literacy while the rest of us are at best ignorant and at worst part of a plot to make literacy learning disagreeable and difficult. Routman sounds more like the ever increasing number of literacy researchers and educators who say they support a balanced approach to literacy instruction. Advocates of a balanced approach realize that a neutral view of language learning is not appropriate for all students and that some students need direct instruction in phonics, grammar, and spelling.

Many Christian school teachers might smile a bit at this new evidence of the pendulum swing and state very honestly that they always believed in a balanced approach to literacy learning. A study I conducted several years ago on reading instruction suggests that this is true. Christian school teachers, whether from wisdom, tradition, or experience, do believe in a balanced approach. However, like public school educators, they are feeling pressure to upset this balance and to swing in the direction of the back-to-basics approach. This is particularly apparent in the area of phonics instruction. The problem with many intensive phonics programs is that not only do they teach you more than you ever need to know about phonics, but they steal precious classroom time from the reading of books. This is a concern I have heard several teachers express. Not only do teachers have to teach a separate phonics program; they must also follow a basal reading program and still find time for enjoying trade books. While all of these aspects of reading instruction can be components of an excellent reading program, they need to be balanced so that the greatest amount of time is given to what is most important—the reading and enjoyment of good literature.

In Chapter One, "Understanding the Backlash," Routman makes an excellent point that is often forgotten when phonics is the topic of debate. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test results show that the area in which U.S. students have the most problems with reading is critical thinking, not in decoding. U.S. schools seem to be doing an adequate job in teaching beginning reading but are failing to teach our students how to critically analyze and synthesize information from the more difficult texts students encounter in higher grades. When parents hear that U.S. students are not reading as well as they used to, they mistakenly believe that the problem is lack of phonics instruction.

Instituting more skill programs can take time away from reading challenging texts—a deprivation that is the real source of the reading problem. In Chapter Two, Routman addresses the failures of the literature-based framework adopted by California in the 1980s. Routman avoids a simple answer to the whys of the failure and helps the reader to see the many complicating factors that California educators deal with. These two chapters might be especially good to share with your school's education committee if they are considering intensifying skill instruction

in your school.

While on the surface these first two chapters seem to have a rather typical message of defending educators, Routman is actually much more perceptive and honest than that. Many whole language educators seem to be deaf to the protests of parents. Routman is not one of them. She doesn't just critique the press and the simple solutions they offer, but blames teachers as well. Routman criticizes the teachers who gain only a superficial understanding of whole language without truly understanding how children acquire literacy. Routman writes:

> . . . some educators have equated a child-centered, whole language classroom with not teaching explicitly. These educators believe if they set up the environment, establish a "community of learners," and do lots of reading and writing activities, learning will take place "naturally" and automatically. They immerse kids in wonderful literacy experiences but fail to provide adequate demonstrations and directed lessons and to hold students responsible for excellent work. (37)

Routman is to be commended for clarifying what children need to learn in order to read and write, while she appears to be unconcerned with how happy the whole language people may be with her statements. Besides the issue of phonics instruction, the following are just a few of the issues Routman deals with that I think are sometimes misunderstood by some whole language educators:

- Both the product and the process are important in writing.
- Writing conventions are important. While overemphasis on conventions can thwart creativity, writing conventions need to be taught, and students need to demonstrate these conventions in their writing.
- "Anything goes" in spelling is not acceptable. While one would expect invented spelling for words a young child has not encountered or studied, basic words and words that have been a part of the spelling program should be spelled conventionally.
- Grouping for instruction is necessary and beneficial. The needs and abilities of students are often best addressed in fluid, non-permanent groups.
- Teaching and valuing neat handwriting sends a message about our expectations of excellence.

Perhaps the best advice Routman has for teachers comes in the last chapter, in which she encourages teachers to write, read, reflect, and discuss among themselves. Next time you are appointed to an inservice planning committee, consider what Routman says in this chapter. Perhaps the best type of professional development is not a one-day workshop given by an "expert." Consider, instead, discussing a professional book such as *Literacy at the Crossroads*. ■

Query

Marlene Dorhout

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

As a teacher I find it hard enough to deal with IQ's let alone the current emphasis on EQ's. Isn't there anything that we can leave to the family to deal with anymore? I know that emotional development is important, but teachers aren't trained for half of what they are asked to do. Teachers right out of college aren't being instructed in any new way to deal with these aspects either. I question whether we are stepping beyond our boundaries as educators. Shouldn't we stick to what we know and make sure kids today get a good education?

Definitely, teachers are being asked to deal with more than academics today. Perhaps colleges haven't adequately prepared them. I suspect most parents are not prepared for what awaits them, either. Parents and teachers both want a good education for the kids, but approaches to providing a good education may have to be enhanced for students who are soon to enter the year 2000.

Your question finally prompted me to read the book *Emotional Intelligence.* (Bantam Books 1995) Until now, I thought this was another play for a best seller; maybe it is. But upon reading it, I found some interesting comments and valid assumptions. I share a few quotations as reflections and challenges of the role of emotions in learning and living.

According to Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, "Much evidence testifies that people who are emotionally adept . . . are at an advantage in any domain of life . . ." (36). He also cites a report from the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs that makes the following point:

[S]chool success is not predicted by a child's fund of facts or a precocious ability to read so much as by emotional and social measures: being self-assured and interested; knowing what kind of behavior is expected and how to rein in the impulse to misbehave; being able to wait, to follow directions, and to turn to teachers for help, and expressing needs while getting along with other children. (194)

For years these qualities were expected and demanded, but not always acquired; now they need to be nurtured. Ideally, parents would deal with these issues, but they aren't always equipped and do not have the advantage of seeing their kids in a classroom or playground setting. Isolation, rejection, and vicious behavior are more evident in schools where a broader social environment exists.

More work for teachers in nurturing the emotional qualities desired in students may eventually mean less work in terms of classroom and playground management. Together, committed teachers can produce an academic setting that exudes empathy, independence, friendliness, kindness, and respect.

Goleman admits, "This daunting task requires two major changes: that teachers go beyond their traditional mission and that people in the community become more involved with schools" (279).

I encourage inviting experts to discuss these issues at parent workshops and faculty meetings. Fast-changing technology and family structures have impacted kids today, and their needs will impact our profession in the twenty-first century. Yes, much is expected, but resources are available; and, for the kids' sake, we should utilize them.

I have a student who is always trying to trap me with his questions. I dread calling on him and have even tried to ignore him, but his insistence and disruption then cause more of a problem. I thought about talking to him privately, but I fear he then will realize he has succeeded in upsetting me. I don't want this to continue all year. What can I do?

Good humor and honesty in conducting your class are better antidotes to this type of game playing than ignoring the situation or culprit. I am very pleased you did not get trapped into the "one-upmanship" game that some teachers are tempted to do if irritated.

Before talking to this student in private, you might try confronting him the next time he asks an obvious entrapment question. Simply acknowledge that you think he knows already what you feel about a certain topic, but you are willing to reiterate your stance, hoping he will share his, as well. If he continues to harangue you, simply ask him to continue the discussion after school since it only involves the two of you. His motive might be attention or

power, neither appropriate for robbing class time. Nevertheless, remain respectful and sincere in your desire to settle this issue later.

You have now set an appointment, not based on his badgering or your insecurity, but on the need to resolve the questioning. Soon, however, you will discover why he does this in class. When meeting privately, stay in good humor and perhaps compliment him on his astute questioning abilities, even though they occupy too much of the class time. Hopefully, you both will gain a better appreciation for each other.

One of my students is a chronic complainer. I catch myself being sarcastic once in awhile because it is almost a joke to me and the rest of the class. She will find something wrong with every assignment and every activity we do. How can I curb this before I totally don't even care if I do anymore? I know for her sake and everyone else's I should do something.

I appreciate the fact that you want to do this for her sake, too. I realize this can be an annoying habit and that you could easily make her the brunt of your jokes. Stopping it before that happens is important for her and you. A sarcastic atmosphere may get a few laughs from some of the other students, but they also realize that they could be the target someday, too. Instead, you want to have an accepting, understanding attitude to create an open, safe classroom environment.

Without anything to complain about, she loses her attention-seeking. Remind her of what she is doing. If she realizes she does this, however, ask her to refrain from making the comment and put her complaint in writing so you can read and evaluate it without the class hearing it. For this trial period, she could even add a positive comment for every negative one she makes. Kindly correct her and then invite her to express her opinions to the class again when she has found a more acceptable way to express them. Reassure her that her critical observation could be a real contribution; valid complaints properly handled have a much better chance of being heard if not muddled by chronic nitpicking. Being labeled a negative thinker prevents classmates from hearing the really significant contributions she can make.

By doing this for her, you may increase more positive contributions to class, and you may allow her to save face and become more socially adept. ■

About Face

Jeff Femema

Thinking Thirteen

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

As 1997 winds to a close, we will see the media reflect upon the major events of the past calendar year. News organizations will produce their lists of important news stories of 1997. Many middle school teachers will do the same, discussing with their students the major current events of the past year.

One titillating episode in 1997 comes from the United States Air Force: the Lieutenant Kelly Flynn sex scandal. When critics of the U.S. military's policy on adultery denounced it as archaic and out of step with reality, one of my colleagues shed light upon the root of the argument. He said, "It sounds like one of our students saying, 'Everyone else is doing it.'" How often do we hear this line of justification with counseling middle school students regarding poor choices they have made?

This justification is not limited to young adults. Adam and Eve became instant experts in this line of reasoning when God confronted them about their sin. History is loaded with the "everyone else is doing it" mantra. Today we still see it as a prime motivator in our society: government, media, even our homes, churches, and schools.

The advantage middle school teachers possess is the opportunity to provide biblical instruction in this matter at a crucial period of development in their students' lives. During the middle school years young adults begin asking themselves, "What do I really believe, and why?" Approval by others (mainly peers) becomes a dominant factor in their thoughts, words, and actions. Left unchecked, these young adults will sinfully gravitate toward becoming people-pleasers, basing their identities upon what others think of them. When this occurs, the "everyone else is doing it" reply feeds the need for image maintenance, a focus on the surface appearance judged by others. Substance, of course, is neglected. After all, image is easier to maintain with flexible morals than with unpopular convictions of commendable inner quality and high-standard core motivation.

The U.S. military distinguishes behavioral expectations, separating certain acceptable conduct for civilians from acceptable conduct for its members. Our God operates in a similar manner with his people, albeit with a different set of standards. There exists a distinctness about what Christian's value that separates us from what the world values. We are set apart, and that includes our middle school students. Even if some of our students are not born again, we can still promote and facilitate an environment that recognizes and values God's command to be distinct people.

Christians are set apart simply because it pleases God. His desire for us is to desire him first, submitting ourselves to his perfect plan for us. It is far from an image spin-doctoring of cosmic proportions. Scripture tells us the world will think we're crazy when we follow God's will.

We must champion God's desire for his people to please him first, rather than others or oneself. Yet we must also strive to make this message relevant without compromising its truth. Biblical examples such as Samuel choosing David as king assist in this discussion about distinctiveness and image. The story of the man who thought he had kept all of the commandments but could not sell all he owned and follow Christ adds further to the dialogue. Daily we engage in battle against the messages offered to our students regarding distinctiveness and image: everyone else is doing it; image is everything. However, God has given us the sword of Scripture, which
provides us with practical examples of how we can live in our world.

We middle school teachers need to counter the "image over substance" philosophy at every possible opportunity. Because we work with impressionable students whose personalized, life-long values are being formed during these years, we must remain faithful in teaching, upholding, and modeling the standard of excellence given to us through Scripture. That is all we can do; the rest is up to God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The world without God will scramble to "save face," expending enormous amounts of energy toward image control. The biblically astute recognize that it is not about face, but about the heart and the Holy Spirit's haunting work within. The issues brought to the public forum through the U.S. Air Force sex scandal provide us with yet another opportunity to guide our middle school students in lives of character and integrity. Middle school students will one day become adults who, we hope, will value substance over image. It would be wonderful knowing that God somehow used us in this process. ■