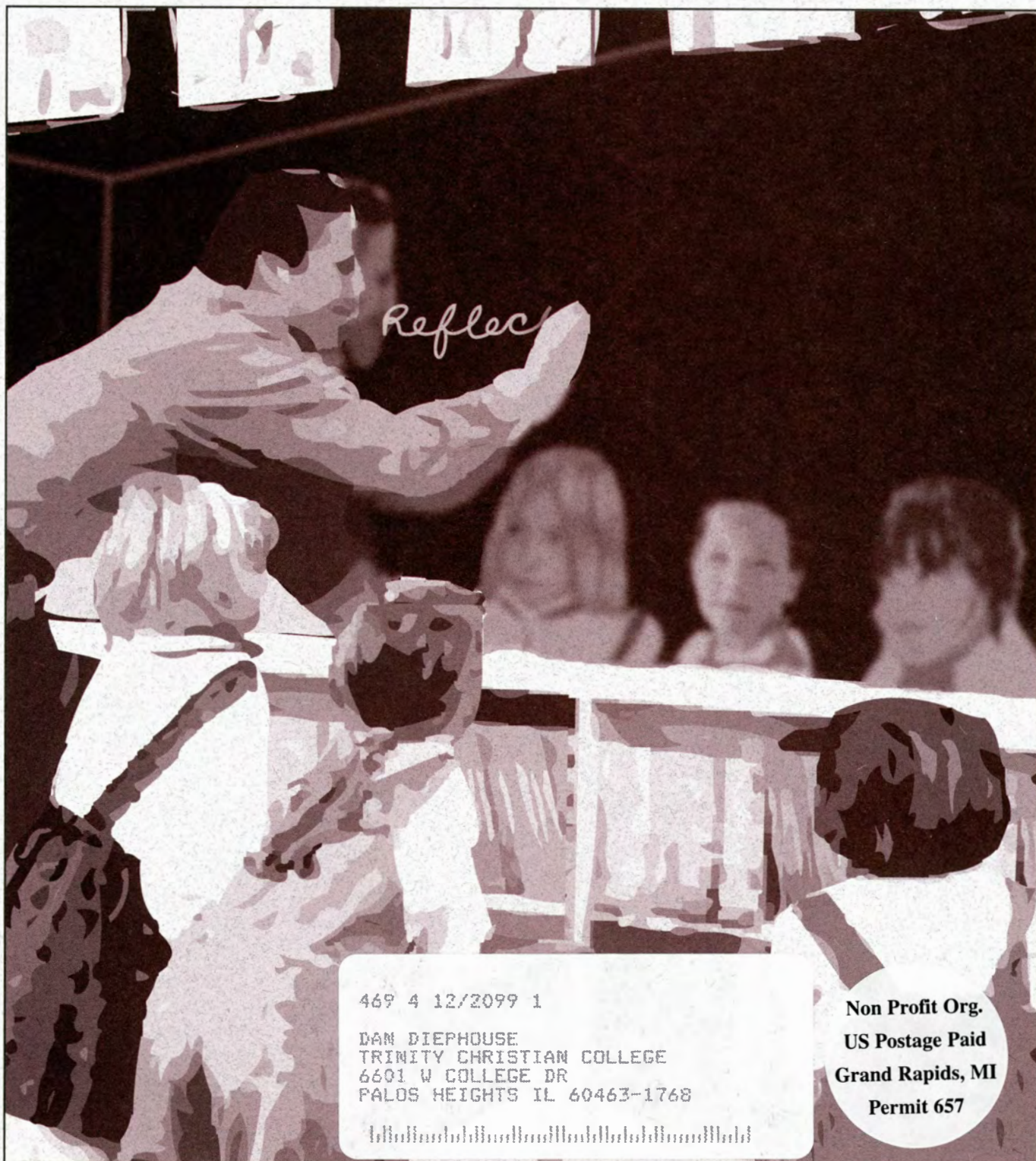


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Bert Witvoet

Nurturing the 'Satiabile Curtiosity of Your Students

If any of you teachers have even the tiniest of doubt about the value of reflective thinking for your students, I suggest you read Rudyard Kipling's *The Elephant's Child*. In it you will find a moving tale, complete with crocodile tears, of how a young elephant was constantly spanked by his relatives, including his tall aunt the Ostrich, his tall uncle the Giraffe, his broad aunt the Hippopotamus, and his hairy uncle the Baboon. Why was he constantly spanked? Because he was full of 'satiabile curtiosity' (sic). He constantly asked "why" questions in a most polite way, a sure sign of a reflective animal.

But what good does it do, you shout out, if by asking "why" questions you get spanked every time? I hear you! Good question, and I'm not even going to spank you for that.

Well, the Elephant's Child reaped a significant reward. You see, in the High and Far-off Times, the Elephant, O best beloved, had no trunk. But after the Elephant's Child went all the way to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, to ask the crocodile what he has for dinner, he came back with a stretched trunk, much like what elephants have today. It's a peculiar kind of evolution that took place, one that might pass the scrutiny of Reformed theologians.

Amazing rewards

How did that happen? (I apologize for not asking a "why" question here and hope you will not take it as a sign of my sliding into the pragmatistic approach of our technological age). The crocodile had lured the Elephant's Child close to his jaws so he could whisper the answer to his question, whereupon the crocodile grabbed a hold of his stubby nose. And if it hadn't been for the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake, who helped pull him loose by knotting himself in a double-clove-hitch round the Elephant's Child's hind legs, that might well have been the end of the Elephant's Child.

As it turned out, the Elephant's Child not only got loose, but his stubby trunk got stretched and stretched, and with that stretched trunk he could do all kinds of wonderful things, like picking fruit from a tree and playing trumpet. But the best reward of all was that he could use his trunk to spank all his relatives when he returned from his intellectual journey. So there are plenty of rewards awaiting those children of Adam and Eve who dare to demonstrate a 'satiabile curtiosity' in front of peers who, because they dislike eager beavers, may well bully them.

But will students have the opportunity to reflect when they are

already so busy? I am thinking of the discussion held by our Panel Dot Edu this month. Tim Hoeksema thinks so. He writes: "Reflection takes *time*, which is a commodity of great scarcity." But I can

just hear John Van Dyk interject: "While we surely should take time to reflect (and schools must make such time available to teachers), we must also develop our ability to reflect-in-the-situation, in the fast-paced nitty-gritty of busy classrooms. In such ways not only the practitioner becomes reflective, but his or her practice becomes reflective as well" (see his article on page 3).

Reflect all the time

Van Dyk argues for an integrated approach to reflection that finds echoes in the objection some have to the hymn "Take Time to Be Holy." We should be holy all the time, say staunchly Reformed believers. Johanna Campbell agrees. But she does think it important to set aside space for God in our busy schedule. And I suspect that a similar case can be made for reflection. The Elephant's Child asked questions all day while going about his business. That's like integrating your reflection into every square inch of your Kuyperian life. But at the same time he undertook a rather long journey, one which took him through Graham's Town, Kimberley, Khama's Country, east by north, until he finally came to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees (I remember seeing that great grey-green greasy river from an airplane when I crossed the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa some 12 years ago). If what the Elephant's Child did is not taking time to be reflective, I don't know what is.

It may spread

So it's both. Reflect as you go and take time to reflect. And that holds for both teachers and students. The latter may suffer abuse in the process, but they will get their turn once their noses get stretched far enough that they can approach life with discernment and not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine. Actually, the bullying may stop, as it did for the Elephant's Child. When his brothers and sisters also hurried off to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, to borrow new noses from the Crocodile, they changed as well. That's why you don't see any more elephants with stubby noses these days.

And best of all: nobody spanked anybody anymore. And that's what will happen in your classrooms, too, once you train your

charges to release the inquisitive nature with which they were born. (Just ask their mothers which word they used most when they were but two years old.) Once students get used to reflecting on this amazing world we live in, and start bursting with wonder and amazement, and sit up straight in their desk, eyes riveted on every word you scratch on the blackboard and ears hanging from your lips as you parcel out more and more knowledge, well, don't you think that God gets a lot more credit than he does now? Curiosity about God's creation is like a huge compliment to him. And don't you think that your job as a teacher will get so much easier?

On second thought

Well, maybe not easier, because now you have to answer all these penetrating questions that students will throw at you. And

who knows, they may upset your lesson plan with all this thirst for wisdom. Is there really enough time to start dreaming in your class? Maybe it's better to leave well enough alone. After all, it's not likely that in a rational and efficient universe you will encounter a Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake, who will help pull you loose by knotting himself in a double-clove-hitch round your hind legs. And it's just a silly story anyway, told by Rudyard Kipling, who was one of those Victorian writers who couldn't quite make up his mind about British imperialism. Although ... this spanking stuff probably rang true for him because he was bullied and teased a lot when he was young, and he carried the psychological scars for life.

No. Forget it. Let's just focus on cramming facts into our students. They need to be well adjusted to this statistically oriented culture. Besides, the Bible warns against being taken captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which is what asking questions and too much reflection may lead to.

Happy ending

Maybe we should get back to the beginning of the Elephant's Child story, before all this dreadful post-modern, post-Limpopo turmoil took place. Let's return to the familiar and be comfortable:

"One fine morning in the middle of the Precession of the Equinoxes this 'satiating Elephant's Child asked a new fine question that he had never asked before. He asked, 'What does the Crocodile have for dinner?' Then everybody said, 'Hush!' in a loud and dreadful tone, and they spanked him immediately and directly, without stopping, for a long time."

And they lived happily ever after.

Bert Witvoet

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Reflection

An Alien in Our Christian Schools?

by John Van Dyk

John Van Dyk is professor of education at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. He is the author of Letters to Lisa: Conversations with a Christian Teacher and a frequent speaker at teachers' conventions.

Classrooms can be described by metaphor. Some classrooms, for example, resemble a zoo. Others look like a circus. Still others effectively mimic the atmosphere of a morgue. I suspect the teacher in such classrooms can be described as an animal trainer, a clown, or an undertaker.

Whenever I spend extended time in schools, I frequently experience them as pressure cookers.

Consider a typical teaching day. It begins with some cursory interactions with colleagues, a quick glance at the latest memo from the principal, a rush to the photocopying machine, and a beeline for the classroom. The remainder of the day consists of teaching, teaching, and more teaching — some of it disguised as seatwork, to give some relief — punctuated by brief intermissions, an occasional prep time, and a lunch break scarcely long enough to munch a peanut butter sandwich or peel an orange. At the end of the day bleary-eyed teachers stare at each other, ready to leave this madhouse armed with stacks of papers to correct or materials to prepare for the next equally grueling teaching day. Some of the teachers look to a late-afternoon “power nap” to regain sufficient energy to continue.

A caricature, you say? Well, maybe not every school is exactly like the picture I just painted. But my guess is that, in general, my description is not far from the mark. Whatever the case, there can be little doubt that the pressures of a typical teaching day offer very little incentive for anything remotely resembling careful and sustained reflection. I suspect that robust,

healthy reflection is often an alien in our Christian schools.

A desire to reflect

I am currently conducting a study of the place and task of reflective practice in Christian schools. During a recent sabbatical — which affords me the luxury of reflection! — I interviewed numerous teachers, both at elementary and secondary levels. Two of the questions I asked were these: (1) Is teacher reflection important? (2) Do you think your own teaching practice can be described as “reflective practice”?

The responses to the first question were uniformly affirmative: Yes, teacher reflection is very important — even indispensable, some teachers insisted. But why? Well, the teachers said, without reflection we become stale. We need to grow, they said, because no matter how long we teach, we never arrive. We never reach the point of perfection. No matter how long we teach, no matter how effective we become, we never learn to fully master our craft. A lurking danger, others reminded me, is that without reflection experienced teachers go on automatic pilot, as it were, and stagnate. All very good answers, don't you agree?

But now the second, more critical question: Do you see yourself as a “reflective practitioner”? The responses were curiously mixed. Most of the teachers think of themselves as reflective, or, at the least, as professionals who *want* to be reflective. After all, they affirm the importance of reflection. The problem they face is this: Their desire to be reflective appears to be stifled and suppressed. By and large, they feel prevented from being the kind of reflective practitioner they would ideally like to be. “In our school,” one teacher said, “reflection is a little bit like trying to pick blackberries in a bramble bush. I love the berries, and I know how to pick them, but I

just can't get past the brambles.”

So what are these brambles? What obstacles prevent reflective practice? I will sketch a few of them.

The obstacles

1. Time

“Time — if only I had more time...!” Teachers attributed the lack of reflection to the lack of time. And, indeed, given the pressure cooker environment of much schooling, their complaints look legitimate. Of course, there are assumptions at work here. For example, complaints about time suggest that we cannot reflect while we teach. To reflect, presumably, requires us to remove ourselves from practice. In other words, the complaint says something about the nature of reflection. Whether what it says is really so we shall explore later in this article. For now, let us consider several additional obstacles that prevent teachers from being the reflective practitioners they say they want to be.

2. Leadership

To establish and maintain a reflective culture in Christian schools requires leadership. Sadly, some principals view their task as primarily administrative and managerial, and, consequently, do not adequately address the important questions of curricular and instructional leadership. These questions require sustained reflection. When educational leadership is reduced to administrative and management tasks, meaningful, Christian reflection is soon crowded out of the school.

3. Mission statements

Paradoxical though it sounds, mission statements — surely products of reflection — actually can prevent reflection. An articulated mission can lull us into believing that all is well, that the thinking has been done, so there is no need to engage in further reflection on what the mission statement means or on how it is to be imple-

mented and assessed. One time I heard a principal say: "Our philosophy of education? We ironed out that stuff a long time ago! We're now *doing* things!" His response seemed to insert a very large gap between past reflection and present practice.

4. Dualism

A lingering dualism between secular and sacred domains seriously skews Christian reflection. As long as religion, faith, and "sacred activities" are viewed as distinct from "natural," "neutral," and "nonreligious" concerns, the focus of reflection will shift. Teachers in dualistic schools are encouraged to think about "sacred" devotional matters as un-

related to pedagogy and curricular choices. Teaching presumably is a neutral, technical, "nonreligious" affair, and so needs not be subjected to a Christian analysis and critique. Consequently, reflection becomes confined to matters of personal salvation, evangelism and conversions.

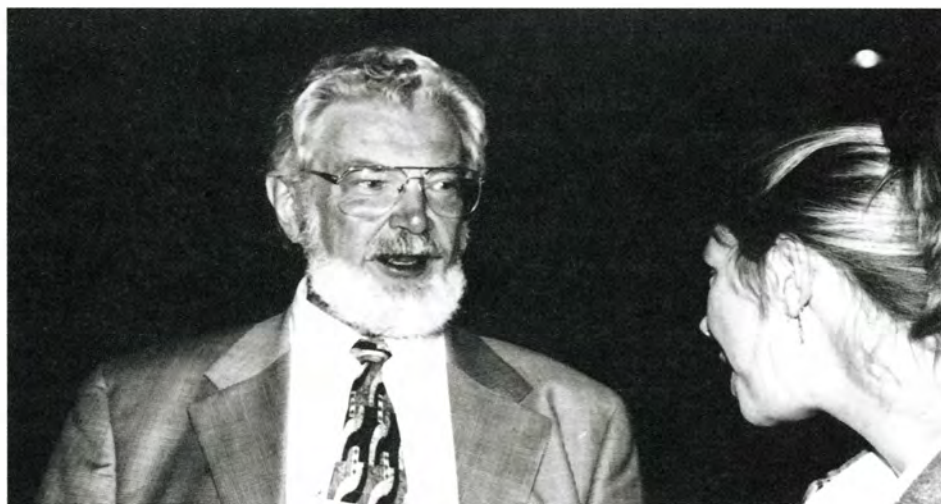
5. Idolatries

Other factors inhibit a reflective culture as well. Important among these are powerful idolatries, spirits of the age that creep into Christian schools and into teachers' hearts. They deceive us into believing that all is well as long as the kids behave, learn what is in the textbooks, and achieve acceptable test scores. Among these spirits are individualism, materialism and intellectualism. These idolatries function like blinders. They distort our vision of what Christian education is really all about. They make it difficult, if not impossible, for Christian teachers to critically assess

schooling practice. These secular spirits radically alter their ability to reflect in a holistic, authentically biblical perspective.

6. Assessment obsession

If there is one theme that dominates, even controls, the educational scene today, it is



John Van Dyk is a popular workshop leader at teachers' conventions.

assessment. Though surely a good idea in itself, assessment has become an obsession. And when a good idea becomes an obsession, it ends up seriously flawed. Assessment has come to be mistakenly viewed as a synonym for evaluation on the one hand, and for measurement on the other. Such reductionism creates havoc in Christian education. The continuous demand for "measurable objectives" eliminates from view much learning that, though it certainly can be evaluated, cannot be quantifiably assessed or measured. I think, for example, of the deepening of faith commitment and the building of trust. The assessment craze does not recognize or make space for such non-measurable learning. It is precisely these non-measurable (often philosophical or foundational) dimensions of education that require the most reflection. The failure to recognize or make space for these dimensions shuts down reflective practice.

7. Textbooks

Even the textbooks themselves prevent reflective practice. Let's face it: much of (Christian) education is textbook-driven. Textbooks define, categorize, constrict, and direct a teacher's thinking about practice.

Teacher reflection, as a result, is restricted to the parameters provided by textbooks. Fundamental questions about the textbook, about subject matter, and about suggested learning activities and lesson goals are marginalized.

Complications

Suppose these obstacles were, by some magic wand, entirely removed from the school. Suppose the teachers suddenly received three free hours in every school day, and suppose all dualism were to evaporate, and suppose the assessment mania and resulting bureaucratic paper shuffling dissipated, would reflective practice now flourish? Frankly, I doubt it. I say this not because I have no confidence in teachers. On the contrary, teachers are competent professionals. I have learned that they do not need experts to tell them what to think and what to do. They can make accurate judgments as often as any self-styled expert can, and probably more often because teachers have what most so-called experts do not have, namely, ongoing daily classroom experience.

Reflection, however, is not quite like picking berries. To pick the berries, just remove the brambles, and presto! — there they are. Removing obstacles surely will make space for reflection. But more than

space is needed. My doubts about reflective practice becoming commonplace if only the obstacles were removed are based on complications that none of us have a good handle on. These complications revolve around the following three questions: 1. What is reflection anyway? 2. What do we reflect about? 3. How do we reflect?



What is reflection?

At first glance it looks as if reflection is just another word for thinking. Not just any kind of thinking, of course. Rather, we might describe it as a kind of “visualizing thinking.” You close your eyes and mentally review some recent events in your classroom, usually the more problematic events.

Take Janie as an example. She recalls how her after-recess third-grade lesson on fractions did not arouse wild enthusiasm among her students. With some pain she relives the moment when Keith — a boy too big for his age and always a trouble-maker anyway — in frustration closed his math book with a loud clap and declared with impressive finality: “I don’t get it!” Janie visualizes the events and thinks: What went wrong? What should I have done? How can I avoid this happening next time? She considers some options. Maybe the students were not ready yet for fractions? Maybe the time of day was wrong? Or was the lesson too abstract? She decides that she needs different kinds of “manipulatives” to keep the children interested. She jots down some notes in her journal.

Objective analysis

What shall we say about Janie’s “reflections?” In much current discussion, reflection is indeed synonymous with “visualized thinking.” Of course, such thinking is

not just recalling a random series of pictures or merely reliving past events. Current handbooks on reflection suggest that the thinking be *analytic* in character. Reflection, the proposed models say, requires not only visualizing, reliving, and reviewing, but also taking a critical, assessing stance. Teacher reflection, we are told, requires that we objectively analyze a situation, identify what took place, explore the reasons for its occurrence, and propose alternative ways in which we could have handled it. According to this view, reflection can best be described as a more or less scientific technique.

When we see reflection exclusively as the objective, technical analysis of a difficult situation, it is turned into an after-the-fact process. Presumably we teach first and reflect later. If so, reflection obviously will require time, time that busy teachers do not have available. And so reflection receives short shrift. But what is even more important, reflection turns our practice into an object of study.

Take Keith’s refusal to do fractions, for example. To analyze what happened, Janie must take distance from the event itself, look at it, and turn it over in her mind, the way she would examine a fossil in an effort to determine what it was and how it came to be. Janie must separate herself from what happened. She must become an objective, dispassionate observer.

Well, you say, what’s wrong with that?

Isn’t analyzing essential if I am to reflect? How can I improve my practice if I don’t spend time figuring out just what went wrong? Yes, you are right. If we could be given time to systematically review our practice, things surely would improve. Nevertheless, I submit that if we want to develop a more holistic vision of reflection, we need to expand the concept considerably beyond visualizing, analyzing, and developing alternatives.

After-the-fact reflection

To see reflection as mostly a matter of sitting back, visualizing, and thinking — an activity for which we need to set aside a special time, perhaps even a special place — suggests that no reflection can go on while we teach. It fosters a separation, rather than merely a distinction, between *reflection* and *reflective practice*. Such a view easily leads to *unreflective* practice and *unreflective* practitioners.

I suspect that certain kinds of teaching practices do display all the earmarks of unreflective practice. I think of teachers who slavishly follow the teacher’s manual, or for whom covering the material is the ultimate, foolproof measure of teaching effectiveness, or who pay no attention to learning styles or to the needs and gifts of students, or, who, on a more fundamental level, do not ask what it means to teach Christianly. Setting time aside to reflect on such practices may promote reflection, but it does not necessarily lead to reflective practice and a reflective practitioner.

On-the-spot awareness

What is reflective teaching practice? It is practice that maintains a keen sense of awareness, of what Kounin has called “with-it-ness” throughout the teaching process. Of course, the classroom is a complex,

multifaceted and demanding place, and teachers cannot be aware of everything that goes on. Nevertheless, with practice and experience, we gain the ability to respond to the steady stream of classroom events in thoughtful rather than impulsive or mechanical ways. Reflection, in sum, is essentially awareness, imbued with the ability to place classroom events, both as they happen and later on, in the context of what we know, believe, and anticipate, and to respond intentionally and wisely.

In some ways reflection functions like prayer. Sometimes prayer is a very special, deliberate activity, as when we enter our inner chambers to pray. But prayer is not limited to closets and bedsides. Throughout the day we need to cultivate the awareness of God-with-us, of the Holy Spirit walking arm-in-arm with us (cf. Gal. 5:25). Our entire life is lived in ceaseless conversation with our heavenly Father.

So it is with reflection. While we surely should take time to reflect (and schools must make such time available to teachers), we must also develop our ability to reflect-in-the-situation, in the fast-paced nitty-gritty of busy classrooms. In such ways not only the practitioner becomes reflective, but his or her practice becomes reflective as well.

Beyond objective analysis

Reflection, then, is not just a matter of sitting back and thinking, by means of which we turn our teaching practice into an object of study. Reflection — even if we did understand it as just visualized thinking or as a technique — always takes place within the rich context of our life as Christian teachers. We bring into the activity our beliefs, priorities, assumptions — in short, all of our experience and our entire worldview. Our worldview is operative while we reflect, whether in special times set apart or right in the classroom. We can-

not really turn our practice into a distant object, anymore than that we can turn ourselves into a scientific problem.

When Janie reviews the actions of Keith, she carries into her observations already a whole range of values, such as her belief about what was right or wrong about it, responsible or irresponsible, good or bad, and so on. But, you say, can I not turn these hidden values into an object of analysis as well? Well, yes, up to a point. You can press the analysis quite a way, but ultimately you cannot escape yourself, your personal involvement, and your heart commitments. You cannot eliminate your deepest self from the scene.

Another way of looking at it: When Janie thinks about her teaching practice — such as an event like Keith refusing to learn — she really re-frames and reshapes her practice into categories familiar to her own experiences. Her reliving of the Keith incident is not identical to what actually happened. Her reflection will be in terms of her relationship with Keith, such as whether she perceives him as likable or despicable, in terms of her view of fractions as important or unimportant, her worries about meeting her objectives, and so on.

Her emotions, too, play a role. Reviewing the Keith incident can be so painful that she shuts herself off from its reality, or she rationalizes it into an insignificant event not worth reflecting about, or she simply attributes the whole thing to Keith's character, exempting herself from any responsibility. In short, personal feelings, emotions, values, beliefs, and ultimately worldviews always play an integral role in reflective activity, no matter how objective we think ourselves to be.

Does all of this mean that reflection is such a complicated affair that it had best be avoided altogether? Of course not. As my interviews with teachers affirmed, reflection is important. We do not reflect

fruitfully, however, if we see it merely as taking some time here and there to review our practice, consider alternatives, and write a paragraph or two in our journals.

A kind of wisdom

So what really *is* reflection?

Reflection is a multifaceted process consisting of a number of ingredients. Key among them is the ability to discern, to become aware, to examine, and to evaluate. It requires the ability to bring our knowledge and experience to bear on everything we do in the classroom. It means that we continuously place, trustingly and prayerfully and consciously, our teaching practice in the context of our fundamental beliefs about the Christian life. Ultimately, reflection should be seen as itself an ingredient of the biblical notion of wisdom. To advance in wisdom, to journey with the Lord on the road of sanctification, requires a deep and broad kind of active, continuous reflection.

The Scriptures seem to support such a claim: they speak, for example, of “discernment” (I John 4), “looking as to how we walk” (Eph. 5), “testing our actions” (Gal. 6), “understanding the will of God” (Rom. 12, Eph. 5), “examining ourselves” (II Cor. 13), and similar themes. Such broad reflection takes place *both* at special times set aside *and* throughout our teaching activities. Such reflection goes far beyond the mere application of logical thinking to problematic events.

How can a broader, richer and more dynamic view of reflection lead to a more genuinely Christian teaching practice? How can we reflect in such a way — in or out of class — that our worldview, values, beliefs, and personhood are not set aside but actively play a role in the process? What practical guidelines can we suggest? I will turn to these questions in my final article in CEJ's December issue. ☪

How Can We Teach a Sense of Wonder-Based Reflection?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel the following question: How is it possible to develop in students the habit to reflect on issues below the surface of everyday, practical concerns? How might we lead them so that they, with a sense of wonder, truly engage reality? Given the climate of education today, is it possible to get our students out of a “how” mode and more into a “why” line of thinking? Why would this be important for a Christian school?

May 23, 2003

You must be a college professor, Clarence. Plus, your school year must be over, so you are afforded the opportunity to sit in your office and *reflect* on the complexities of life yourself. I live in a different world. I'm too busy putting out fires, problemsolving, and refereeing to *reflect* on anything this time of year. I think most of my teachers feel the same way. The demands on them and their time have increased dramatically over the years.

Reflection takes *time*, which is a commodity of great scarcity. The same is true for students ... even our very best ones. They take seven classes a day, are heavily involved in our extra curricular program, and juggle work, church, service projects, and friendships at the same time. To get them to take a deep breath and reflect is a most difficult task.

At the same time, I do think reflection is a very valuable educational goal and would assist us in our mission as a Christian school. But it means teaching and learning in a different way from what we are used to, and that change can be painful.

I'd like to continue but I need to respond to eight voice-mails, 12 e-mails, talk to visitors who are here for Open House, work on my end-of-the-year chapel speech, complete several tasks for our central office, mail in the MEAP tests, keep students out of the halls during class time, meet with several teachers who are in crisis with students (and the students who are in crisis with teachers), and prepare for graduation ... all before lunch!

Tim



Tim Hoeksema

May 26, 2003

Tim, you describe very well the busy life of students and teachers. It does seem true that life for both teacher and student is busier than in previous generations. I see that in my own children's lives as well. How can we get our students to reflect? It is one of the Christian disciplines.

We read in Psalm 111:2 "Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them." This is what we want our students to reflect upon: the great and mighty deeds of our God. I remember how we were told not to sing the hymn "Take Time to Be Holy," since everything we do is holiness unto the Lord. That is true, but being silent before God, reflecting upon his great deeds, and waiting upon him are all aspects of the Christian life.

If I neglect spending time with God, my relationship with him will suffer. Just as Jesus spent time with his Father, so we must teach our students to reflect upon their relationship with their Creator, their purpose on this earth and their ultimate goal. The tyranny of the urgent can only be met if we are at peace with God, walking as Jesus walked: unhurried, in control and about his Father's business. If we neglect to model that and do not encourage our students to reflect and be still, we are doing them a disservice.

Johanna



Johanna Campbell



Clarence Joldersma

May 28, 2003

Tim, we are all busy, even college professors. However, what Johanna says is so important.

Last night I was catching up on some reading and read a few of the articles in the December 2002 issue of CEJ. The issue is on technology. I particularly appreciated the opening editorial of Bert Witvoet and the second article "Idols of Silicon" by Peter Schuurman. We don't reflect anymore because we are constantly on the move. Tim, maybe we should rethink the schedule to which you and your students are subjected.

Peter Schuurman, talking about technology, says, "As the creation groans under the strains of an already over-developed world, out-door education initiatives should out-weigh increased commitment to technological sophistication. Maybe camping teaches more significant skills than computing." Maybe we all need to spend some time outdoors and enjoy God's good Creation. It refreshes the soul and helps us appreciate the Creator. Johanna, Tim, Tony, Lois, and Clarence, I hope to get a chance to do a little camping and reflecting around the camp fire.

Pam



Pam Adams

May 29, 2003

You know, from my seat, I hear a lot of "why" questions. If *why* indicates reflectiveness, students and teachers are reflecting a great deal! While it is difficult to *hear* reflectiveness, especially in the midst of a busy day, I am not sure this means that students and teachers are not being reflective. In our Christian schools, directed by biblical and Reformed concepts, the four panes of creation, fallenness, redemption and restoration (renewal) form a window for reflection, both for staff and for students. Those little moments of considering these truths are reflections. Further, we are reflecting the image of God through this reflectiveness. And isn't that the point?

Okay, so what is my point? Perhaps we do not have to "lead" students to reflectiveness. Perhaps we just have to give a little time, a little assignment, a little musical interlude, a little muse, and reflections will "come forth" as part of our nature, made in the image of God.

Actually what is this reflectiveness? Is it thoughtfulness? Praise? Depression because of fallenness? Finding patterns? Muse on this a while and let me know your thinking.

Lois

June 3, 2003

Reflectiveness and busyness may not have to be mutually exclusive. In fact busyness can be a factor that leads to a higher level of reflectiveness! If being reflective means drawing connections between a variety of things, so that a bigger picture can be discerned, being involved in multiple activities may help. Connecting the dots may be easier if there are more dots in your experience to connect. I think that sort of busyness also helps guard against a tendency to draw simplistic conclusions.

A person just can't make the easy statements about homosexuals when he's worked with homosexuals in a community venture. A person just can't blindly accept all approaches to life as "valid" if she's seen the pain caused by self-centered individualism. Working with those in poverty removes some conclusions that seemed obvious before that experience. I think being reflective is encouraged when we draw people into an approach to life that has had the broad lines roughed in, and then we let them ask the questions. Most will ask by virtue of being human: "What is the meaning of this?" "How do we fit in?" "How do I fit in?" "What's going wrong here?" "What is the verse that I can contribute?" Closing off the process by providing the "right" answers won't cut it. Acting as if there are no answers better than others won't cut it either.

We had a speaker at one of our assemblies who called upon students to consider an active, vibrant Christian life. "People admire people who are 'into' something bigger than just themselves," he said, "and guys, chicks love that stuff." This speaker is onto something that we're onto, in our best moments. But what of those students whose created reflective tendency has atrophied? I say we force them to experience reflectiveness. We push them, kicking and screaming if need be, into activities designed to jump start their reflective abilities. After all, the unexamined life is not worth living, and we'd all hate to graduate deadwood from our Living Water schools.

Tony



Tony Kamphuis

June 5, 2003

Tony, we still have not defined reflection, but your idea that learning experiences provide the fodder for reflection was helpful. We know that active learning experiences need to be balanced by reflection time. Reflection does not automatically happen. Often guided reflection is needed, as you suggested. Educa-

tors who rely on experience may wonder why kids have not assimilated information or understanding from their “authentic” learning experiences. An answer may be that there was no time allotted to incubate, to synthesize, to package or “unpack” experiences, and no guided practice with suggestion for how to unpack an experience or learning event. Certainly reflection needs time, some direction, and perhaps an activity to precipitate reflection. We can use group “input” and individual or group “output.” A discussion, not a question and answer session — time for responses with some thoughtful pauses. Some tool like a guided journal or sketch book. Guided practice with a framework like creation/fall/redemption/restoration. Even a worship service after some experience or event. So if we want reflection, we need to make a time and a place for it to happen.

Lois



Lois Brink

The panel consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu), professor of education and director of graduate studies at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.
Lois Brink (LBrink@grcs.org), curriculum coordinator and media director at Grand Rapids Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Johanna Campbell (ctabc@twu.ca), executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia, Langley, B.C.
Tim Hoeksema (thoeksema@hollandchristian.org), principal of Holland Christian High School, Holland, Mich.

Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education. He lives in Smithville, Ont. [e](#)

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The Disabled and the Power of Service Learning

by Patti Powell

Patti Powell (e-mail: patti_powell@hotmail.com) is assistant professor of education at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. She is currently working toward a Ph.D. in curriculum design. She has for many years taught and worked with the hearing impaired and has been awarded the Studs Terkel Humanitarian Award of Illinois for incorporating music into the lives of the disabled.

Are there times in our lives when a particular book or author speaks to both our head and our heart? For me, this author was Viktor Frankl in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Here was a man who, like me, had experienced overwhelming grief and loss and yet had found meaning for life.

Frankl, a holocaust survivor and student of Adlerian psychology, developed a method of psychoanalysis called logotherapy. This therapy was founded on the belief that the search for meaning is at the core of human striving. It deviates from traditional psychoanalysis in that it considers actualizing values more important than mere gratification and satisfaction of drive and instinct. Its basic premise is that humans need a worthy goal, a concrete assignment that demands their time, energy and fulfillment; and that responsibility is the very essence of human existence. It sees depersonalization as the cause of meaninglessness, with meaning being found in the courage to be responsible for each other — being our brother's and sister's keeper.

This perspective rings true in both my head and heart, and it is for me a universal truth, available to every man, woman and child, able-bodied or disabled. The connections of thinking and experience, grief

and joy, responsibility and passion are intricately connected, and one cannot fully experience one without the interplay of the other.

I then began to wonder whether service in learning could be the important tie I was looking for when considering transition curriculum for disabled students.

Finding a source of meaning for our life is the way to a worthwhile existence. This goal can be reached through being other-oriented or through the act of service. Yet the need to be involved in acts of service has been underestimated and often overlooked in contemporary me-centered systems of education and culture. It is encouraging, therefore, to know that the service-movement philosophy and pedagogy has taken root in America again.

Teachers have written with near-unanimity about the positive impact that service participation has on students who volunteer. They speak of personal growth, social growth, intellectual growth, citizenship, and preparation for the world of work. Service-learning aims to prepare students to be lifelong learners and participants in the world. When combined with learning, service adds value and transforms learning by focusing on students knowing "why" as well as "what." Service can uniquely provide youth opportunities for growth in moral, social and civic awareness.

Service-learning and the disabled

So what about the role of service learning in the education of disabled students? We must first realize that disabled students are usually viewed as service recipients rather than resources. To change this view requires a major paradigm shift on the part of educators, parents, and students alike. How would the recipients of service feel about the disabled as care givers? Special education students are painfully aware of the ways in which they are different from

other students, often feeling that they are inferior. What they don't see are the ways in which they are similar and are often not given an opportunity to "give back."

Disabled students, like their peers in the general education program, need to claim their role as citizens. By participating in experiences that approach the normal, they can actually achieve more capacity for normal behavior. Opportunities to help others may also provide a way to break the devastating cycle of failure experienced by so many disabled students by substituting caring for anger and replacing low self-esteem with feelings of worth.

There has been a long-standing problem in education and society in general where the disabled are often isolated from their non-disabled peers and their community. In the field of mental retardation, the dominant idea for years was that the retarded were a menace to society. A lack of familiarity with the disabled has also led to negative stereotypes of students with disabilities. Even with inclusion being the foundation of education for the disabled today, true acceptance, genuine friendships, and authentic learning and work activities are the exception rather than the norm for most students.

Encouraging results

Preliminary research on the role of service-learning with the disabled has been very positive. Changes in socialization, behavioral improvement, academic improvement, improvement in functional skills, changes in students' attitudes and improvement in attendance were experienced when service was incorporated into the curriculum of at-risk students. It was a joy to see how disabled and non-disabled students developed genuine and enduring friendships when they were able to work together.

Finally, the on-the-job vocational train-



Patti Powell loves teaching sign language and making quilts.

ing that is often a part of service-learning is an invaluable educational experience for most students with disabilities. The work and service executed by the disabled should then be real and should vary in scope and complexity so as to meet broad interests and skills. The service should match the ability of the disabled student and should help him or her focus on transition to adult life.

The role of caring

Service-learning is about civic responsibility, learning work and job skills, and giving back to others. But what is even more important is the act of caring. Dorothy Day said it best: "there is a call to us, a call to service — that we join with others to try to make things better in this world" (Coles, 1993, p. xxiii). Service is directly or indirectly an ethical activity, a reply to a moral call within, one that answers a moral need in this world. Service-learning engages our students' hearts as well as their heads and helps them understand the complexity of what they are studying in the traditional school curriculum. It provides opportunities to apply what they learn and to think critically about assumptions they had never questioned before. Service-learning also creates connections between feelings and thoughts, studies and life, and self and others and is often designed to promote caring as an antidote to narcissism and irresponsibility. "We" replaces "me" as schools have the opportunity to become places of joy, justice, and love, places where people can be affirmed and the pleasures of reflection, growth and challenge can be experienced (Purpel, 1964).

Ten years ago, the report on "A Nation

at Risk" called for increased homework, standardized testing, and focused requirements in core subject matter. But could it be that we are a nation at risk because we are not serving? Hardly any consideration has been given in our schools to the ways in which activities might build strong character and better citizenship. There have been attempts made in this area, but it has been challenging to create a true "climate of care" in our schools, a climate in which the need of all students in our society and in our community are met.

Students need to learn to care for others and to care for themselves, something that is crucial for a decent quality of life because to care and be cared for is the mark of being human. There is a natural impulse to do good and to want to live a coherent, meaningful life. We need to learn how to respond to this most human of all impulses, to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers (Purpel, 1964).

Habits of the heart

For students, caring is an opportunity to integrate the life of the mind with the habits of the heart. To answer this call to care is required of each of us, young and old, black and white, able-bodied and disabled, for it is in answering this call that each of us actualizes the basic human need to be altruistic. Going back to what Frankl taught us through the words of Jesus, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." If we do not incorporate opportunities for learning to understand ourselves and others through acts of altruism and civic participation as part of the school curriculum, we give students the impression that acts of courage, compassion, duty, and com-

mitment are rare, and surely done by extraordinary people, people much different from them (Ruggenberg, 1993).

We need to realize that the problems we face today, from the homelessness in our cities and poverty in the third world, to ozone depletion and the greenhouse effect, can not be solved by technology or technical expertise alone. But even to begin to solve these problems, let alone the problems of emptiness, loneliness, and meaninglessness in our personal lives, requires that we greatly improve our capacity to think about our institutions such as schools. We need to understand how much of our lives is lived in and through our institutions and we need to understand how to improve those institutions if we are to lead better lives (Bellah, p. 104). Service to "the least" of persons is a moral command for everyone and all must participate in communicating new meanings of caring and kindness.

A means toward caring

Service-learning may provide a forum for reconnecting the hearts and minds of troubled and troubling students. Such pedagogy will lift up their trampled spirits as they devote themselves to a supremely worthwhile challenge. It may provide a quality of life that springs from an ultimate commitment to the common good of all. Service meets young people's need for personal relevance and a sense of membership in a community. As Silberman said, "Education should prepare people not just to earn a living but to live a life — a creative, human, and sensitive life — and provide a liberal, humanizing education" (Ayers, 1995). Or, as Eisner said, "the aim of curriculum and teaching is not simply to help students meet the demands of schools, but to help them meet the demands of life ... both curriculum and teaching should help students internalize what they

have learned and relate it to life outside of school" (McPherson & Nebgen, p. 28).

Reciprocity is inherent in service-learning: you have something to learn from the people you serve. In an effective service-learning model, no voice is silenced, no role is invisible. Rather, equal voice and consideration are acknowledged by all members of the community and the abilities of all are appreciated and celebrated. Students begin to see the value of their personal "gifts" and will use those gifts to complement the group rather than diminish personal recognition. Community members and students find a common social interest that breaks down social barriers and fosters the sharing of common goods, ideas, and time.

We must all accept the task of remaking society because a society is really judged by how it treats those it perceives to be its least desirable people. Development occurs

as students in turn construct a relationship with society. In remaking society, we will empower each person to gain the resources and validation essential for a healthy identity. As the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore so eloquently put it, "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was duty. I acted and behold, duty was joy!" (Wade, 1997, p. 63).

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Personal journey

Often we find that our work parallels the road we have traveled to arrive at that work. The journey to my current dissertation work began when I was a special education teacher of the hearing impaired and, later, when I was a young newlywed and mother. Teaching hearing impaired children gave me great joy; I was excited to share this joy and love of children with children of my own.

I was in my early twenties when my husband and I endured the tragedy of losing three children to heart disease. I sensed that I was being given a story to tell and the proper voice with the triple experience of grief and death. Initially, though, I was too overwhelmed by loss to put words to what was growing in my heart and mind. What was this story? Over time I grew to understand that the impressions in my heart and reflections on my experiences seemed to be universal to the meaning of life; that both joy and sorrow are a fundamental and necessary part of the human experience. What we do with our experiences and the choices we make with a view toward growth as well as giving back to the community, give our lives meaning, joy, and a central purpose.

After a set of what can only be called "miraculous" circumstances, my husband and I were able to adopt three beautiful children. They were and continue to be a tremendous blessing to us and brought healing, joy, and a sense of completeness back into my life. I went back to teaching special education at Elim Christian School, this time teaching music to children with a variety of disabilities. I felt fulfilled when teaching children with special needs and realized that I now saw these children through eyes transformed by my own experiences of dealing with disability and the deaths of my three birth children and adoption of three children. I was better able not only to understand each disabled child's individual needs, but also to see them ultimately as very whole, valuable, and necessary human beings.

Patti Powell



Nancy Knol
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Musings From the Back of the Balcony

by Nancy Knol

Nancy Knol teaches English and Religion at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is co-author of the book Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents. Most days you can find her in Room 219.

I have to confess that there are times when I am sitting in chapel that I spend more time observing what is going on around me than what is going on at the front. This year, I sit in the last row of the first balcony in a large auditorium, one that does not always lend itself to intimate worship. So there are distractions — some of them are a gift, others make me sad or angry.

Last week there was a senior sitting behind me who was singing with so much fervor that I found myself grinning instead of singing for a little while. And I love the way that boy in my Advanced Composition class always takes off his hat as soon as he sits down, recognizing it as a gesture of respect. But last week there was a girl sitting three rows ahead of me who decided to tuck her arms inside her sweater and get the girl beside her to tie the two sweater arms together. She was laughing and trying to glean as much attention as she could from those around her. And a senior off to my right decided it would be an impressive display of school spirit to yell "Seniors!" when one senior girl stepped forward to read scripture.

Despite many pleas and admonitions and even warnings, there are some students who close down or act out the moment they enter into a worship setting. Why? Well, I'm sure there are lots of reasons. But this past week in chapel I began thinking about something I ask my ninth-grade Religion students to do early in the semester. I ask them to write on the bottom of one of their assignments one question they would really like God to answer for them immediately. I am always aware of the fact that for some the routine questions are legitimate enough, but I can't help feeling that they could have come up with something more tangible to their own experience.

Here's a list of the latter: Did Jonah really get swallowed by a whale, or is that just a parable? Did You really make the world in seven *consecutive* days? How can You be three and yet one? Why did You put a forbidden tree in the garden? Will we just pray and sing in heaven? Are there exceptions to some moral issues?

Others are heart-breaking: Why did You take my mom when I still needed her? Why did you put me in *this* family? If I died right now, would I go to heaven or to hell? Why don't people like me? Why do bad things happen to people who seem to be most needed here? Why do You make it so difficult to believe? Why do

I have diabetes? And some, I am convinced, must make God himself smile: How much can I get away with and still make it to heaven? How am

I doing? What would You like me to do for You? Was it fun creating the universe? Am I loved?

My students are all at a different place in their relationship with God. Some have lived with such ease that the hardest question they can think of is distant and cerebral, while others are crying out of the depths of their own doubt and pain, wondering if they are speaking to anyone at all, really, but trying to trust. Still others are grateful and conscious of a growing relationship.

When the parents of all of these students come to our school's Open House, I share the list (without names and sometimes with a little editing for the sake of privacy), and use it as a reminder of how variously fragile we all are, and how much we need prayer.

Can you guess the theme of the most frequently asked question? I have been doing this for five years now, and consistently each semester, the most common question is some form of: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The second most frequently asked question is: "Will I go to heaven?"

So back to my "Why?" question. Why the variety of behaviors in chapel? Well, of course it has everything to do with how seriously we believe that God is actually present. Those who have begun a relationship with him — out of pain, or gratitude, or understanding — most likely will be seeking direction or hoping to give something back. The rest, I suspect, are either still caught up in the allure of the audience and self-promotion, or are perhaps too disappointed or angry or tired to even try.

The darkest question I ever read was: "Why don't You just leave me alone?" But then again, I know the answer to that one, don't you? The Spirit of God has a way of breaking through — sometimes it even happens to those who resist most fiercely. ☹

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Slouching Toward Bedlam

The Convention of our Discontent or Lord, What Fools These Teachers Be

by Jan Kaarsvlam

After Jan Kaarsvlam encouraged several Christian schools to consider a two-year science curriculum focusing on "Fish of the Bible," including an entire semester of problem-based learning in which students considered whether the two small fish in the story of the feeding of the five thousand were more likely tuna or "some kinda giant squids," he was encouraged to leave the position of curriculum coordinator for CSI District 3. Jan is looking forward to heading north of the border where he will try his hand at fundraising. He will be taking over the position of campaign director for Beacon Christian Schools in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Christina Lopez swept through the door and quietly cleared her throat. Everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at Lopez expectantly. "Cal VanderMeer has been taken to the hospital in an ambulance," she stated calmly. "A student told me Cal was experiencing chest pains. The paramedics think he might have had a heart attack."

Jon Kleinhut, the neurotic yet beloved librarian, leaned forward and said, "He's probably just trying to get out of the teacher's convention next weekend."

An icy silence gripped the room. Max Prentiss-Hall, counselor at Bedlam Christian High, stared incredulously at Kleinhut. He said, "That was an unbelievably insensitive thing to say, Jon, even for you."

Kleinhut, had he been anyone else, would have felt some modicum of remorse at this point, but instead he got defensive. "Hey, man, don't blame me! Cal probably just got a look at the latest memo from VanderHaar. Did you catch the part about having to write a one-page report outlining what we learned in every sectional we attend? I almost had a heart attack myself when I read that."

"He probably got a heart attack from eating too much fatty food," said Gord Winkle as he hovered over the doughnut box, poised to make his third selection of the day.

Jane VanderAsch looked up from the pile of papers she was grading and arched an eyebrow. "Physician, heal thyself," she muttered under her breath.

Winkle heard her comment and replied, "Hey, I eat a lot of oatmeal, you know."

VanderAsch turned from Gord and addressed Jon Kleinhut. "And actually, Jon, I think Cal really likes the Christian Teachers' Convention every year. In fact, he was just telling me at break how upset he was that Valhalla Christian is not only skipping this year's convention, but they are talking about pulling out of our local Christian Teachers' Association entirely."

"Well, Cal ought to relax."

The voice had come unexpectedly from the corner of the room nearest the telephone. The staff had generally avoided sitting in that part of the lounge ever since Kleinhut had accused them all of trying to listen to his private phone conversations during lunch. As a result, no one had noticed Rex Kane hunched over the countertop, with a stack of pizza boxes under one arm and the phone cradled on his opposite shoulder.

Another reason Rex had gone unnoticed is that he had been uncharacteristically *quiet*. The teachers at Bedlam had gotten used to *hearing* their boisterous and quirky P.E. teacher long before he came into view. Today, however, Rex was in the process of trying to claim a sweepstakes prize over the telephone, and didn't want his colleagues getting curious about the boxes. He had given each of his students two days free from running laps for every Alphonso's Pizza box they brought in, and he knew Jane could be a stickler about what constituted worthwhile extra credit.

Rex continued, "Valhalla is on to something. Every year we go to this stupid Christian Teacher's Convention, and for what? We have this long, boring litany followed by a keynote address. That's usually okay, except when the planning committee brings in some political shill to push her school choice agenda. After that, we go to a bunch of sectionals about teaching or coaching or mentoring from a Christian perspective. Blah, blah, blah. I've heard it all before."

"I agree," Kleinhut said. "And let me tell you, Rex, you and I aren't alone in thinking that convention is a big waste of time. I have friends at Mt. Olympus Christian, Nirvana Christian, Xanadu Christian, and Shangri-la Christian who are all talking about pulling out of the convention and the association. My colleagues there are all fulfilling their mandate as Christian school teachers just fine without any outside help."

Maxwell Prentiss Hall decided to enter the discussion. "Well, I think..."

He was cut off by Jane VanderAsch. "First of all, I can't believe you are saying it is a big waste of time. In the last five years we've been able to hear keynotes by Cody Tompolo, Valt Vangerin, Don Van Jyke, Marty Martin, Billy Greekowski, Gary Schlitz, Calvin J. Schaaf, and Neil Schlantinga. Our school on its own could never afford that. And even though I have been attending these things for over twenty years, I still get good ideas out of the sectionals."

Jane paused to catch her breath. Maxwell saw his opening and took it. "Yeah, Jane, but you know..."

VanderAsch was just getting started. "These sectionals encourage some reflective thinking on our part. What does it really

mean to be a *Christian* school-teacher? How can our classrooms reflect God's justice and grace? How can we encourage our students to grow spiritually as well as academically? How can we lead our students to join Christ in redeeming *all* aspects of creation? These kinds of questions don't get asked or answered at any other convention but ours."

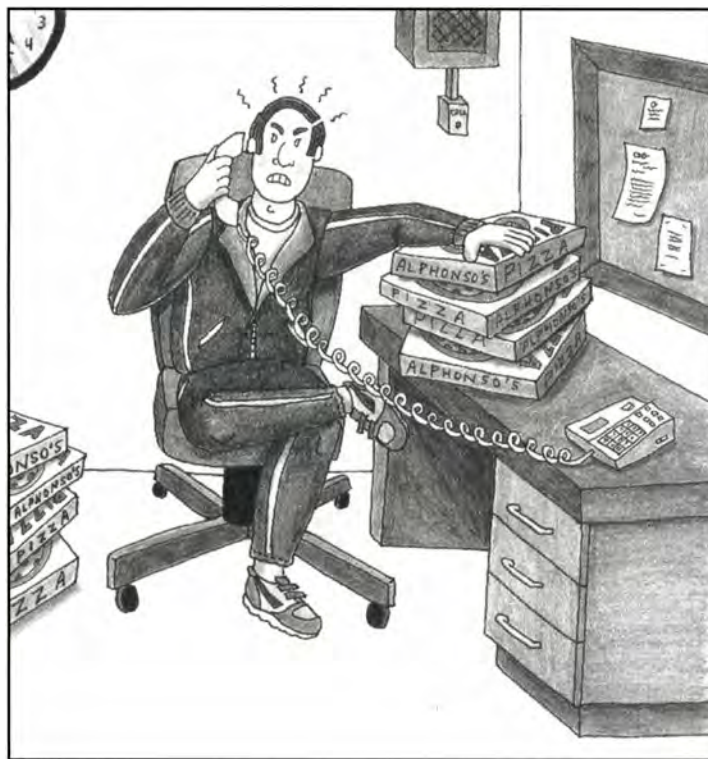
Maxwell plunged into the tiny break Jane left him. He spoke as quickly as he could to get his comment in before she started up again. It ended up sounding like the disclaimers at the end of a car commercial. "But Jane, those questions are old questions. Teachers need something new to bring to their classroom."

Jane snorted. "The questions may be old, but the answers are always new, always evolving. I discover new things every year about what it means to teach the kingdom of heaven to image-bearers of God."

Rex, forgetting about his desire to hide his pizza boxes from prying eyes, spun in his chair and faced Jane. He still held the phone to his ear. There was a competitive fire in Rex's eyes that usually flared only when finishing the crossword or ordering Chinese takeout. "That all sounds good, Jane. But it's all theory. I, for one, want to come home from a convention with a couple of practical ideas, things I can use immediately in my classroom, and if the convention doesn't"

Now Christina Lopez interrupted him. "That is ridiculous, Rex. I hear that complaint all the time from teachers, but I don't understand it. Teachers are college graduates. They are supposed to be intelligent and thoughtful. Yet a number of them complain about a lack of practicality. I have left sectionals that I thought were wonderful, sectionals that did affect the way I approached teaching the very next Monday in my classroom. But other teachers, sitting in the same sectional, have told me, 'That was a waste of time. All that theoretical stuff doesn't help me.' What's the deal? Are some of my colleagues really so stupid they can't make connections, or are they just lazy?"

Rex looked angry, then grinned. "As the ancient Chinese proverb states, 'Lazy man under the new moon begets harvest of glowworms, but industrious man. . . ' Hello?" Rex spun his chair back to the desk behind him. "Yes, hello there. I'd like to claim my sweepstakes prize."



Jon Kleinhut had been shaking his head vigorously. "You know, what I find offensive is that we all need to be lockstep about this. My understanding of Christianity may well be different from yours and you know what? That's okay. I don't need some convention teaching me how to think exactly like everybody else."

Sam Toomer looked up from his stack of papers. "You might have a point there, Jon, if the convention was run by some

kind of bureaucratic organization of administrators, but it isn't. The C.T.A. is made up of teachers just like us."


Christina Lopez joined in on the building momentum of the discussion. "And the sad thing is, many of the teachers who are whining about the convention are the younger teachers like me, who are fresh out of college. Apparently they think they got too much Christian philosophy in college. They know everything there is to know about teaching Christianly, and they just want a rest."

"How could you ever have too much Christian philosophy?" asked Red Carpenter without looking up from his putting. A ball clinked into the glass, and Red thrust a hand skyward triumphantly. Maxwell Prentiss-Hall was about to interject with what he thought was a scathingly witty comment when Cal VanderMeer walked into the room and everyone ignored Maxwell. There were gasps of amazement. Finally, newly hired English and Botany teacher Brian O'Braenargh bluntly voiced what all of them were thinking, "But Cal, we thought you'd kicked the ol' bucket or something."

Cal looked puzzled a moment, then said, "Oh, that. One of our old students, Gord DeVries, got a job driving ambulance and took me for a spin. But say, did I hear you guys talking about the convention?"

Rex slammed the phone back into the cradle and turned to address VanderMeer and company. "What a rip off! Before Alphonso's will give me my free Hawaiian vacation, they say I have to sit through some two-hour presentation about a time-share in Honolulu."

"That's not so bad," said Toomer. "You can surely survive that for a free vacation."

"Yeah," said Rex, "but the presentation is the same weekend as that stupid convention." 

SELLING THE SCHOOL

A Christian Response to the “Consumer” Education Model

by Marck Eckel

Mark Eckel is Associate Professor of Educational Ministries at the Moody Bible Institute. Mark taught 16 years in Christian schools and has published curriculum.

“What are you producing?” This question is often asked by Christian school boards that are managed by business people. But education is not an assembly line. And in the Christian school, seeing people as people, not products, should be unqualified.

Do we “love people and use things” or “love things and use people”? At times, even in Christian institutions, people can be corrupted by prevalent cultural viewpoints. The Bible teaches that children are made in God’s image and that they are to be treated as Spirit-gifted individuals. They are prompted to change according to biblical truth, yet we consider them responsible agents who are called upon to decide between truth and falsehood. Viewing education from the vantage point of a consumer directly contradicts the proper foundation for a Christian school.

Let me start out with a caveat: fund raising is not the issue. Even Jesus had financial support from those who could afford to give (cf. Luke 8:1-3). The apostles were also interested in raising funds for those who were hit by famine (cf. 2 Corinthians 8, 9). There are copious references to “handling money” in Scripture that set fiscal parameters for proper conduct of God’s people, not the least of which is having a proper reputation before both God and men (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:21). Money in the context of ministry is essential. But God will always raise up those who will directly contribute knowing the need (cf. Philippians 4:14-18).

Worldview confusion

But there is a difference between funding the school and seeing students as market products. Worldview systems have contributed to the belief that Christian education is a commodity to be purchased, that teachers are resources to be funded, and that students are consumers to be satisfied. Various worldviews have contributed to the unbiblical notion that people are the market. They include:

1. Individualism — “choice” is an assumed right in Western culture. While people do make school decisions, Christian education should be understood as distinctive, not merely an alternative among options.

2. Utilitarianism — if it cannot be “used” then it must not be useful. While instruction must be applied, Christian education is premised upon the personhood, not the production, of an individual.

3. Materialism — “matter is all that matters” to some people. While finances are necessary to pay teachers, Christian education stresses that children matter more than money.

4. Pragmatism — “immediate results” are commensurate with goodness. While goal-oriented training does take place, Christian education teaches the truth that seeds are planted and may take years to grow.

Monetary phrases

When Wall Street parlance is transferred from the trading floor to the school board room, education may not get its proper due. Notice the transfer and equality of meaning from the sphere of the stock market to the schoolhouse in the following examples:

1. “Getting what you pay for” is a phrase suggesting that quality of product is equal to financial outlay. If a product is considered *cheap* and little is spent for it, one should not be surprised.

2. “User friendly” indicates a desire for

both access and success. People are happy if time and effort are reduced in procuring any given item.

3. “Not the only game in town” represents the view that options exist. If a business fails to meet needs, needs will be met elsewhere.

4. “I want to get my money’s worth” is a variation on the first theme. In this case, the person desires every possible profit based on some perceived cost-benefit ratio.

If Christians are concerned about a materialistic approach to life, those in Christian education should begin to dispel any perceived equivalence between money and people.

Deserving questions

The mentality of “I’m paying for a product” misinterprets education as factory production. Children become commodities. Teachers become salesmen. Parents buy and sell. Schools are in competition. Consider the following inquiries in response to a customer or client-based assumption.

1. What is the biblical basis for the consumer model? If the model comes from outside the biblical paradigm, shouldn’t it deserve strong critique?

2. Does this model force us to biblical change or cultural accommodation?

3. Who is the consumer: the child or the parent? The answer to this question forces a discussion of ownership.

4. A consumer model is based on a business view of life. If this is true, can what a Christian school does be called “ministry”?

5. Compare the amount of money spent per child in government schools versus Christian schools. Shouldn’t we expect *more* from the government school in the consumer model since more money is spent for each child?

6. If “getting what one pays for” is taken to its obvious conclusion, shouldn’t we



expect *less* from teachers who are paid poorly?

7. If Christians lived in another country would this model be used? Would poverty force us to accommodate to resources? Are we allowing environmental factors (i.e., wealth) to drive our theology and philosophy?

The questions are rhetorically designed. Obvious answers should press everyone involved in Christian school education to re-evaluate their mindset and approach.

Potential contradictions

The teaching-learning process is unlike any other vocation. The consumer model fails to address elementary truths concerning education. Since the first statement after each number below is inherently biblical, the only question left to answer is how can the Christian community accept the consumer model?

1. Everyone is different. Not only does everyone have variant learning modalities, but each individual is affected by multitudinous environmental influences. According to the consumer model, no machine

could be made to manufacture a bulk product that would accommodate the differences.

2. The process of learning changes constantly to fit the needs of the classroom situation. According to the consumer model, no designs could be replicated consistently to meet the buyer's demand.

3. Results in teaching are not seen immediately: sometimes, not for years. According to the consumer model, the business would go under within days when production lines failed to meet inventory quotas.

4. The teacher and student are responsible for education to take place. Transferring and receiving knowledge leading to change is necessary. According to the consumer model, the producer and purchaser would be responsible to provide a product — a self-defeating process.


Christian schoolteachers are interested in producing transformational agents in society. Business people must make a profit in order to be successful. The two are not equivalent.

Possible solutions

A "pay-for-product" slant to education reduces the enterprise to a physical, visible, financial "bottom line." Approaches that might offer achievable clarification

could include:

1. Researching a biblical view of education from Scripture
2. Requiring former Christian educators to sit on Christian school boards.
3. Redefining marketing and mission in the Christian school with biblical principles.
4. Re-educating parents and staff through multiple communication links which stress that the Christian school is not controlled by a consumer mentality.

Christian school education — all subjects taught under the authority of Christ — rejects such a materialistic explanation of a process to be governed by spiritual standards. The Word of God, which permeates every discipline through the power of the Holy Spirit and biblically integrative teachers, has as goal the internal and eternal transformation of the individual student. 

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a principal at Forth McMurray Christian School, Alberta. We encourage all teachers and principals to submit a question for this column, even if they think they know the answer. Send your question(s) to Dr. Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2, or e-mail her at tvalstar@telus.net

Internal and external consistency

Question #1

What are the main differences in writing a unit to be taught in a Christian School as compared to when I wrote one for my

practicum in a public school?

Response:

Some Christian educators speak of an integral unit which has a thematic focus. The unit seeks internal consistency, external consistency and "includes pertinent and meaningful aspects of reality that are related to, or may even go beyond, the main discipline focus of the unit" (Van Brummelen, 2002, 169).

To gain internal consistency, you must focus on a unifying theme which contains key ideas, concepts and values which can be fostered throughout the unit. The central purpose can be captured when you come up with a thematic statement. To do so you need to encourage yourself and your students to ask some important questions about the topic you are going to study: (1) What is God's intention for this particular area of creation that we are studying, and what does it mean to treat these creatures according to their God-given calling in life? (2) How has this purpose been distorted by sin? Has this part of creation been disconnected from the rest of reality and so left to stand on its own and in that sense become an absolute? (3) What are the ways in which we might bring healing and hope regarding this area of God's creation? How does the Bible prompt us to take action so that this disconnection can at least be partially restored on the basis of Christ's redemptive work? (Stronks and Blomberg, 1993).

An integral unit has external consistency when it reflects the vision of the school (e.g. discipleship, transformers of culture) and when it has significance for the life of the students. I have reviewed units which may be fun for primary students but which do not touch the purpose of our existence, that is to give glory to God. For that reason an important question we must ask ourselves is, "Why am I teaching this unit?"

A useful tool to use in discovering the many aspects or sides of creation (your unit focus) is the modal model adapted from the work of Dooyeweerd. The model identifies the different aspects of creation as mathematical, physical, biological, physical health, psychological/emotional, aesthetic, analytical/logical, language and communication, social, economic, political/legal, ethical/moral, and confessional/spiritual. By examining our topic using these different "eyes," we gain a greater understanding of the integrality of creation; the wholeness of life as God intended it. All of creation exists in relationship to and with the rest of creation, including humankind.

In planning a unit, you must also consider the many ways in which one comes to a point of knowing about something. A variety of ways will enable students to unwrap or discover their varied God-given gifts. There is an overlap between the modal model and ways of knowing. Gardner (1983) emphasized multiple intelligences which include linguistic, musical, logical-math-



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emational, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal. Others have since expanded on this concept. Our examination of a topic will be more wholistic if students are encouraged to give expression to their understanding of a topic in creative and aesthetic as well as intellectual ways.

Much more could be said on this topic. In summary, the thematic statement and the various learning activities which seek to uncover the many sides of the area of creation being studied, must be rooted in our vision of Christian education which claims that "every square inch of the creation belongs to God."

Use their own speech

Question #2

I have a primary grade non-reading student who is very discouraged because she can't read. She tells others, including some adults, that she cannot read. Do you have any suggestions?

Response:


I think you have a child who very much desires to read. All children are different, created by God with their individual gifts and talents as well as their own developmental level of understanding the world around them. Not all children are ready to read at the same time. There are also many theories of how to teach children how to read.

A number of years ago, I used the Sylvia Ashton-Warner's concept of key words in my classroom. In the morning each student told me a word she wanted to know how to read. Sometimes the child told a story and out of that story I picked the key word and wrote it on a piece of tag board. That became the child's word for the day. Students learned to read the word because it was important to them. The next day we reviewed the word. I punched a hole in the card and put it on his individual ring of "Words I know." We regularly reviewed the words and discarded the ones that were too difficult to read. It worked well and the students developed their own sight vocabulary.

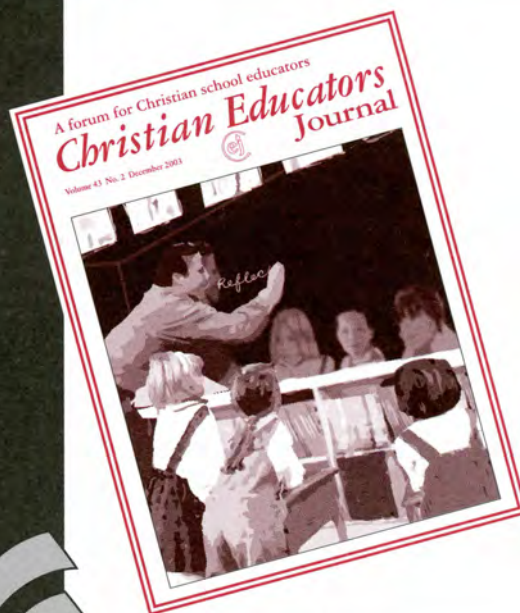
While working as a resource teacher, I used an adaptation of the key word concept. When the child came to me, she came with a stack of words she had been working on at home with her mother. We went through some of those words, separating them into "Words I Know" and "Words I want to know." As she tackled the words, I gained an understanding of what she knew about the world of reading and therefore could help her learn some new concepts and strategies. Her selfconfidence increased and the progress was amazing.

Our thirty-minute time frame included varied activities de-

pending on her concentration level. Sometimes the words came off the ring and she made a sentence with the words. These were written in her notebook and read a number of days later. She told stories which I scribed and she read back to me. While re-reading the story, she edited it because "it didn't sound right."

She started taking books home to read; something she had not done before. Her excitement and pleasure with her accomplishments were evident by her spontaneous hugs. Her teacher and I discussed her increased ability to read realizing that our combination of efforts had given her what was needed for her to feel successful and happy. I agree with Veatch and Sawicki (1979) "that teachers must use the children's own speech and either provide experiences or utilize those that arise spontaneously to fill the child's own personal, social, and academic needs." 

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"One Size Fits All" Doesn't Fit Alberta

Faith-based school-choice abounds in province

by Robert A. Brink and John L. Hiemstra

Robert Brink is a graduate student at the Institute for Christian Studies, and John Hiemstra teaches political science at The King's University College. This research is part of a larger study of faith-based organisations in social, health and educational sectors in Alberta and was generously funded by the Public Justice Resource Centre of Citizens for Public Justice.

CEJ readers may have heard of Edmonton Public School's surprising practice of offering alternative religious programs.¹ Edmonton's system now offers Jewish, Muslim and several types of Christian programs, including Edmonton Christian School, a CSI school of over 1000 students. But Alberta's openness to faith-based schools goes much farther, even beyond that imagined by many Albertans. The prevailing myth is that Alberta runs a monolithic, secular, public school system and that only due to a 'regretful historical anomaly' did it allow publicly-funded Catholic schools. In reality, Alberta has a number of types of public school authorities, and none of them are totally secular! Over a quarter of Alberta's students attend explicit faith-based programs or schools.²

To begin with, Alberta's Public Education system contains not one but four equal types of fully-funded school authorities. They are listed on the Alberta Learning website as Public, Separate, Charter, and Francophone school authorities.³ This bursts the myth that a single public system is essential for producing tolerant citizens and ensuring national unity. In addition to these four types of public authorities, Alberta Learning officially recognises three other categories of schooling: partially-funded private (or independent) schools, partially-funded home schooling, and fed-

erally-funded aboriginal schools run by First Nations on reserves.⁴ Furthermore, this wide array of school systems offers a wide variety of faith-based educational initiatives (based on 2001-2002 school-year numbers).

Public School Authorities

First, many CEJ readers may be surprised that the school authorities that formally appropriate the name "Public School," and today often act like secularised programs, in fact offer a variety of faith-based programs.

* Twenty-four of Alberta's forty-two public school districts sponsor Hutterite Colony Schools. A total of 153 schools educate 3109 Hutterite students. Hutterites are followers of the European Anabaptist reformer Jakob Hutter, who started a form of communal Christian living in 1528. They moved to Canada in 1918. Hutterites are pacifist and non-violent, reject most contemporary fashions, reject private property by living on communal farms where they hold all things in common, and believe in the full separation of church and state. The Westwind Public School Division, for example, has 19 Hutterite schools (58% of its schools), that enroll 367 students (8.5% of the district's students). Taught by public school teachers who are most often not Hutterite, these schools are faith-based primarily in the sense that they exclusively serve a single religious community. Instruction in German and in the Hutterite faith is offered by colony leaders after the regular daily school program.

* The St. Albert Public School Board is actually a Catholic system and serves 7,701 students. This situation is due to the historic constitutional provision that deems the first board created in each district as "Public" whether founded by Catholics or Protestants. Thus, alongside the public board, a largely secular St. Albert Sepa-

rate System educates 6,494 students.

* The St. Paul Education Regional Division is an amalgamation of former Public and Catholic boards and runs Catholic, secular and Protestant schools. There are 975 students in St Paul's three Catholic schools and 510 in the Protestant school. St. Paul Regional High School (434 students) is fed by all schools and offers programs specially tailored for the Catholic students (55-60%).

* Readers of CEJ may recollect the surprising case of Neerlandia Christian School (affiliated with CSI) that has successfully operated as a Christian public school since 1917. Founded in a predominantly Reformed Dutch farming community, this school is currently part of Pembina Hills Regional Division. It turns out that this arrangement of giving a local public school to a geographically concentrated faith community is not as unique as once assumed. The Peace River School Division, St. Paul Education Regional Division, and Prairie Rose Regional Division also operate Christian schools or programs in areas with high geographic concentrations of Mennonites.

* A more recent challenge to the secular uniformity of public schools in Alberta has been the rise of alternative programs. Since the early 1970s, public schools experimented with a wide variety of alternative programs. Calgary School District, Alberta's largest public school board with 99,572 students, spearheaded faith-based alternative programs. After a major confrontation in 1983, the Calgary Board shut down its faith-based alternatives. In 1988, however, the School Act was amended to specifically enable local boards to establish religious alternative schools and programs where numbers warrant. Today, most school boards in Alberta offer some sort of alternative programs, and 10 of 42 public boards offer at least one faith-based program.



The Edmonton Public School Board has the most advanced system of faith-based alternative programs.⁵ The Logos Christian Alternative Program is offered to 1297 students in eight schools. In 1999, Edmonton Christian School, a well-established CSI school with three campuses and about 800 students, joined Edmonton Public as an alternative program, as did the evangelical Millwoods Christian School with 613 students. Other cultural or language programs embody a religious or spiritual dimension, e.g. Talmud Torah School and aboriginal programs running in a variety of schools aimed at different age groups. Furthermore, some of Edmonton's bilingual programs teach their second language in a "way that children can be introduced to another country's culture" — which for some of the following programs includes references to spirituality (there are sixteen French, four Arabic, eleven Mandarin, five German, one Hebrew, one Spanish, and four Ukrainian programs).

Elk Island Public Schools Regional Division also offers numerous faith-based options that are utilised by 1,349 of its 16,244 students. The Logos Christian program is offered on four campuses, and two formerly independent Christian Schools have joined the district, including the 775 student Strathcona Christian Academy and the 160 student Fort Saskatchewan Christian School. Lethbridge School District, Wild Rose School Division, and Red Deer School District have 'adopted' the formerly independent Lethbridge Christian School, Drayton Christian School, and Red Deer Christian School, respectively.

Parkland School Division offers a Maranatha Alternative Program (Christian) with 127 students, which, like the Logos programs in Edmonton and Elk Island, was created by the school division to respond to expressed demand from parents; these programs never existed independently of

the public system. St. Albert Protestant Separate School Division, a nominally secular system, operates a Logos Christian program on two campuses.

All told, at least 11,358 Alberta students in school systems officially labelled "Public Schools"⁶ are enrolled in programs that can be identified to some degree as faith-based schooling.

Roman Catholic Separate Systems

First, it is surprising that 17 of Alberta's 18 separate school systems offer Roman Catholic schooling to 120,483 of Alberta's 590,904 students. It may surprise some North American readers, moreover, that these systems are fully government funded. When we include the Public Catholic School Authority in St. Albert, 128,184 students are enrolled in fully funded Catholic Schools.

Francophone School Authorities

The third type of public authority in Alberta is the French Language school systems. In 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada ordered Alberta to provide francophone communities with parent-controlled French schooling. Today, five small school divisions offer francophone education in Alberta. Surprisingly, three of these divisions now overtly refer to their school system's Catholic character. Within these five divisions, seven of the sixteen Francophone schools, representing 1,656 of 3,279 students, cite Catholicity in their mission or vision statements. Another six schools that do not individually make this claim operate within school divisions that do. Two religiously unaligned Francophone schools recently voted to officially become French-language Catholic schools, a move which will further raise the totals.

Charter School Authorities

The fourth category of public school

authority, Charter Schools, was created by legislation in 1994. Ten Charter schools educated 2870 students in 2001-2002. Since the law explicitly prevents these schools from being "religious in nature," most have an academic, pedagogical, or arts focus. Despite this prohibition, two Charter schools still have an aura of faith-based schooling. The Almadina Charter School in Calgary meets the English-as-a-second-language needs of Arabic students, but the vast majority of the students are Muslim. Mother Earth's Children's Charter School, slated to begin this fall, serves "those who want traditional Aboriginal Education." Its website says its vision is not "religious," but it makes frequent reference to spirituality, prayer, and a Creator.

Independent Schools

Besides the four public authority types receiving full government funding, a number of independent or private school authorities in Alberta are faith-based, and nearly all receive partial government funding. One hundred and seven independent schools, with 17,806 students, are faith-based. Fourteen of these independent schools are members of the Prairie Association of Christian Schools (PACS), associated with Christian Schools International (CSI), and serve 3150 students in 2001-2002. The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) lists 22 schools with a total of 5845 students. Three schools, with combined enrollment of 1218, were members both of PACS and ACSI. The Alberta Provincial Accelerated Christian Education Association (APACEA), has seven schools, with 1157 students, and one school, with 31 students, is a member of both APACEA and ACSI.

There are 11 Seventh Day Adventist Schools with 776 students, five Lutheran schools with 641 students, and three inde-



pendent Catholic schools with 321 students. There are also various protestant independent schools not affiliated with APACEA, ACSI, or PACS. These include six schools, with 1237 students, within other-than-CSI Reformed traditions, such as Canadian Reformed and Netherlands Reformed, two Mennonite schools with 214 students, and nine other Protestant schools with 1164 students.

There are also three independent Jewish Schools, two Islamic Schools, and a Punjabi Cultural school (Sikh), all accredited and publicly funded. Another ten faith-based independent schools, mostly Mennonite, with 367 students, are registered but not government accredited and receive no public funding. Since Early Childhood Services (ECS), or kindergarten, in Alberta may be run apart from existing school systems, a number of ECS programs operate as independent faith-based schools. Thus, in addition to ECS programs run by other faith-based schools, ten ECS programs with 233 students are independent faith-based schools, including Mennonite, Salvation Army, and Khalsa schools. All ECS programs receive full public funding.

One hundred and seven of a total of 327 independent schools, with 62% of the independent school students, are faith-based. Most of the nonfaith-based independent schools are either ECS schools, special needs schools, philosophical schools, or academic schools.

Home Education

In addition to this generous tilt towards faith-based schools, the government, in 1988, amended the School Act to allow homeschooling and to enable parents to choose to affiliate either with the local school board or an authority outside their home district. It was projected that 13,076 students in Alberta would receive home education in 2001-2002.⁷ Many home edu-

cation students are registered with faith-based schools: for example, Trinity Christian School in Grand Centre has registered well over a thousand home education students.⁸ Some public school districts have begun offering faith-based home education programs on the internet, including Edmonton Public Schools' "Argyll Centre" and the Pembina School District's "Alberta Distance Learning Centre". Although there are no recent studies of homeschooling in Alberta, reports in other jurisdictions suggest that up to 80% of parents choose homeschooling for, at least in part, faith-based reasons.


Conclusion

All told, 159,038 Alberta students (26.9% of the total student population in 2001-2002) are enrolled in programs that are, to some degree, faith-based. It is difficult to account for this diversity of faith-based school choice in Alberta and for the accompanying access to at least partial public funding. At least one answer is clear: it does not result from Alberta being a highly religious province. In fact, Alberta is not Canada's "Bible belt," as many Canadians assume. Albertans are the second most likely to say they have "no religion" on surveys, and Albertans attend religious services at among the lowest rates in Canada.⁹

One message CEJ readers may glean from this diversity of faith-based programs, however, is that many types of structural arrangements for accommodating Christian and other faith-based schools are indeed possible. An important challenge for the Christian community is to ensure that freedom and justice are available to all and that proper mechanisms are created in the long term to protect the rights of educational minorities from the "tyranny of the majority." Although the current Alberta system is far from perfect, its rejection of

"one size fits all," either religiously or structurally, is encouraging to all who think there should be no wall separating religion and schooling.

References:

1. See http://districtsite.epps.ca/cgi-bin/ListProgramProfiles.cfm?Group_Type=10
2. While all schools have a religious foundation of some type, we focus on schools that explicitly acknowledge their religious identity or programs.
3. See http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/ei/statistics/qf_1.asp
4. This article does not include analysis of federally funded, on-reserve aboriginal schools.
5. Lisa Martin and John Hiemstra, "Who gets a voice in a 'district of choice?': Alberta's 'alternative' schools challenge independent Christian schools," *Christian Educator's Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Feb., 2002, 18-20.
6. The Catholic public school numbers are counted below with the Catholic separate school systems.
7. Projected, as of February 23, 2002. Home Education Package – September 2002; Alberta Learning. http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationsystem/HomeEdPackage_sept_2002.pdf
8. Home education students are counted with the school authorities with which they have registered.
9. Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, Toronto: Stoddart, 2002, p 47. "Religions in Canada, 2001 Census (Analysis series)" Ottawa: Statistics Canada, May 13, 2003, 2001 Census of Canada. Catalogue no. 96F0030XIE200101. Warren Clark. "Pockets of belief: Religious attendance patterns in Canada." *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 2003. Data source: General Social Survey, 1999-2001. 

Is the Heart of Education Changing?

by Steve Ahrenholz

Steve Ahrenholz, a former math and science teacher and athletic director, is high school developer for Calvin Christian School in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

As Christian educators we are constantly looking for the best methods to educate the young people God has brought into our classrooms. But the current system of curriculum delivery at the high school level, rooted in practices established in the early 1900s, may not be the best way to prepare them for kingdom

service. While the elementary and middle school areas have undergone significant changes, high schools continue to use the same model that our parents and grandparents used. Although I do not lightly propose changes in our methods of education, I believe

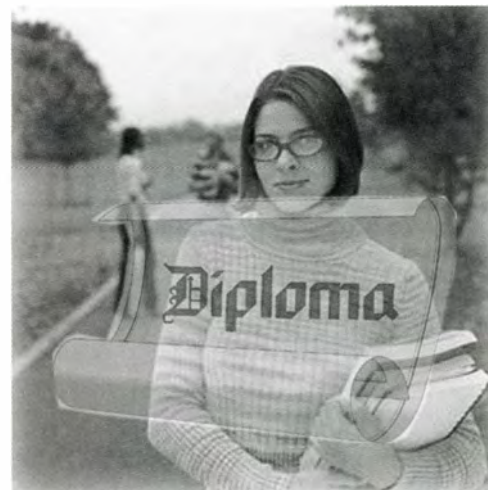
there are compelling reasons for us to reconsider our educational practices. Recognizing the need to develop new practices for curriculum delivery, a number of Christian schools are beginning to re-evaluate the core issues about how and what we teach. The new models that are being constructed should provide the curriculum that will meet the needs of a diverse community of learners, recognize the integrated nature of creation and, thus, of learning, and prepare students for diverse roles and responsibilities in God's kingdom.

Working together

Several key characteristics of the new curriculum are able to generate such change. First of all, we should establish a collaborative learning community where students and parents work with the teacher to direct student-learning experiences and foster student ownership of their own learning. Effort should be made to identify each student's learning style and provide curriculum delivery accordingly. In addition, every student should develop a close relationship with a teacher or mentor who will guide the student in selecting and completing learning experiences that provide educational growth.

Using multi-disciplinary and integrated units, the curriculum will reflect the unity and inter-connected nature of God's creation. Traditionally, each subject has been taught in isolation from other parts of the curriculum, even within the same curricular area. This isolation was also evident in the manner in which students completed their work.

Student evaluation is often based on a comparison to other students, a method which results in sometimes fierce competition for the highest grade. Instead of isolation and competition, we should be providing the opportunities for students to work in



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interactive small groups where they are a vital part of a learning community and are required to contribute to group goals.

Stepping outside the box

Another key element in changing education is understanding that not all learning will take place in the classroom or through teacher-delivered information. Every community has unique learning experiences and individuals who can provide insight and information that connects with the students and deepens their understanding of God's world. It should be our goal to identify these resources and weave them into the learning process. For some of us that means stepping down as king from the throne of information.

A final part of changing the heart of education involves assessing student learning. We have all met students who seemed to master material in the classroom but did poorly on the tests that are typically used to evaluate student learning. The question then comes to my mind, Did I misinterpret what the student responses indicated in class discussion? Or are the means that I provide to gauge student-learning deficient? Clearly, student learning should be assessed through a variety of methods that concentrate on what a student is able to do. In addition to tests, portfolios, projects, and journals provide critical insight into what the student has learned.

The need to change the way we do high school education has been identified by a number of individuals and organizations, both inside and outside the Christian community. The difficulty comes when each teacher considers the new characteristics of curriculum and the personal changes that must be made in order to bring about this type of reform. But why be afraid of change? The same God who has called us to the task of teaching will also equip us with the tools to provide the educational leadership that makes change possible. ☺

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The Joy Seed

by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a writer of short stories with a keen interest in education, not only because her husband is a teacher but also because she is part of a parent-prayer group that prays regularly for Beacon Christian Schools in St. Catharines, Ont.

When Joseph malevolently tripped Mary, sending baby doll Jesus flying from her arms across the school stage, I knew I had to escape up north as soon as the Christmas holidays began. The idea had nagged at the edges of my mind for weeks as I strained to muster up Christmas joy while teaching my third-grade students and directing the Christmas play to be performed by the seventh- and eighth-grade students.

I should have listened to Karen, a student, who, upon hearing that I had cast Ronald as Joseph and Carleigh as Mary, had said, "That's a mistake, sir. They can't stand each other."

"They can't?" I had asked, not knowing these students like my own.

Karen's warning, like an Old Testament prophet's prediction of doom, did indeed come to pass. Rehearsals became a nightmare as Ronald and Carleigh refused to cooperate. But by then it was too late to recast the production. At church, Carleigh's dad had slapped me on the back and said, "I'm glad you noticed my daughter's talent!" And Ronald's mother had given me the thumbs up at the grocery store as she dashed by me with her cart.

Initially, I had envisioned the play's success. Parents would congratulate me afterwards saying, "That was unforgettable!" But now I dreaded with certainty that that's exactly what they were remarking. Who could forget? Carleigh, sprawled out on the stage, wailing at Ronald, "I'll get you back?"

After the play, I called my Mom and

Dad. "But the gifts are under the tree, Ken!" Mom said when I told her I wasn't coming home for our Christmas Eve family reunion. Maybe it's because I was single at 39 that she felt she still needed to give me a childhood Christmas — to compensate for my lack of a wife and children.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I'll try to drop by after New Year's Day. Right now I need to get away." I ran my hand over my thinning hair as I listened to her litany of concern and disappointment. In the background I heard Dad say, "Let me talk to him."

The phone changed hands. "Hi, Ken. How are you?"

"Really tired. I'm not coming home. I'm going to do some cross-country skiing and snowshoeing at Arrowhead Provincial Park. I camped there last summer." I told Dad how I'd swum in the rust-colored water of Arrowhead Lake, viewed a glacial delta at Big Bend Lookout, hiked to Stubb's Falls beneath the dense, shady cover of sugar maples, and discovered the Porcupine Bluffs along Beaver Meadow Trail. "Being there energized me to begin teaching in September," I explained. "Maybe it'll do the same for me now."

"Then go," he said quietly. "We'll be here when you get back."

"Thanks, Dad," I said. Isaac's blessing on Jacob could not have been sweeter.

Three days later, Christmas Eve, I drove up Highway 11 to Huntsville. I pictured my parents' meticulous house descending into chaos and my mother becoming unhinged as my five siblings and their spouses, and my 14 nieces and nephews under the age of 11, converged on the homestead. The guilt pangs I felt earlier at deserting them evaporated as I realized that this year I could not play the role of cheerful Uncle Ken, successful teacher and lover of children, glad to be home for Christmas. Playing horsy with my nieces and nephews, and skating on the neighbor's

backyard rink after Christmas dinner had always been a pleasure. But this year it would have overwhelmed me.

The wipers plunged back and forth as snow fell thickly on the windshield. Light against darkness. I concentrated on the road, searching for the Huntsville exit. Spotting the sign, I pulled off the highway and drove to the Gratix Motor Inn.

Inside my room, I unpacked my bag and leaned my cross-country skis and snowshoes against the wall. I clicked on the TV and watched the 10 o'clock news. The news anchor related that, because of clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, Bethlehem was almost void of tourists. Enough, I thought, and flicked it off. Obviously, I wasn't the only one having difficulty celebrating Christmas.

I rested on the bed trying to read the latest *Maclean's* magazine but finally tossed it on the bedside table. I switched off the lamp. The motel's flashing sign punctuated the darkness. As I recalled the play and other events in the year 2000, I thought about how darkness always seemed to take a bite out of the light. I recalled how in the past year Ashley, one of my students, had died in a car accident, how Mr. Bentley, a parent, had incessantly criticized me for how I handled his hyperactive son, and how despite my dogged efforts to complete my daily work, it never seemed finished. I longed to turn off the geyser of my tumbling thoughts, and finally fell into a restless sleep.

Christmas morning I drove the kilometer to Arrowhead Provincial Park and stopped at the park office.

"How's the Stubb's Falls trail?" I asked the ranger.

"Got snowshoes?" he asked. "Because that's the only way you'll make it down that trail." He turned to his computer and asked, "Name, please?" I gave him the information he required and paid the en-

trance fee.

"Are you prepared for today's partial solar eclipse?" the ranger asked. I groaned. I had completely forgotten about it. "It should occur around twelve-thirty p.m. You won't want to miss it!" he urged excitedly. "Have you got eclipse-viewing glasses? You don't want to look directly at it with the naked eye. One glance can cause permanent retinal damage."

"No, I don't," I said regretfully.

He rummaged in a drawer behind the counter. "My colleague brought in extra pairs of glasses in case people came unprepared."

I took the glasses he handed me, and thanked him.

"The last partial solar eclipse visible over North America on Christmas Day took place in 1666," he spouted knowledgeably. "The next solar eclipse on December 25 will occur in 2307, but you won't see it unless you travel to Africa's west coast."

"I don't think I'll do that," I said, and smiled at his eagerness.

"There's a large clearing to the west of Stubb's Falls where you'll be able to view it," he continued. "Cross the bridge over the falls and follow the trail for half a kilometer."

Outside by the car I strapped on my snowshoes and put on my knapsack.

As I hiked through the hardwood forest and took in the pristine beauty of arching trees and steep ravines, glittering snow and deer footprints, I became aware, for the first time in months, of a "joy-seed" germinating in my heart. My students and I had coined the term when we'd studied a science unit on seeds, coinciding with devotions on the many and unexpected ways God plants joy in our hearts.

I finally reached Stubb's Falls and rested on the bridge that spanned the icy water. My stomach growled. I checked my watch. 12:18 p.m. I hurried on. When I came to

the clearing, the eclipse had begun.

Completely mesmerized I observed as the moon hid part of the sun, darkness taking a bite out of the light. And the dark zone grew. And grew. And grew. While watching, I thought again of Ronald tripping Carleigh, Ashley's death, and my job's frustrations. I ignored my hunger pangs.

Finally, I noticed that the dark zone no longer increased. The moon moved past the sun. And light returned in its fullness. At that moment I recalled a scene of the play I'd forgotten about.

Tim Delhouser, a seventh-grade student with a big smile and no acting ability, had been given what the other students considered the most insignificant role. No costume. No makeup. Few lines. In the play's opening scene, Tim had read Zechariah's words about Jesus: "...the rising sun shall come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Tim's four-year-old brother, sitting on his mother's lap in the front row beside me as I supervised the performance, had anxiously cried out, "Mommy, is the sun going to fall out of the sky?" Parents snickered. Tim blushed.

His mother replied, "No, it won't. Tim means that Jesus is like the sun. He came to be our dark world's light."



**"...the rising sun
shall come to us
from heaven
to shine on those
living in darkness
and
in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet
into the path
of peace."**

As I remembered her explanation and Zechariah's message, I felt the joy-seed bloom inside me. A gift from Jesus, the Joy-Giver. After eating my lunch, I left the clearing pondering all these things in my heart as Mary did so long ago. ☪

Understanding by Design

Wiggins and McTighe, both involved in teacher education, assessment, and improvement, have for the last ten years devised teaching strategies that challenge pedagogical practices in many of our nation's schools. They suppose that there must be a better way to educate our students than "Teach, test, and hope for the best," or teaching skills unrelated to the student's world, or teaching for "coverage," or relying too heavily on textbooks. Though the pages contain an abundance of sensible observations, the book is no mere manual of "how to's"; it is a carefully thought-out effort to respond to the perceived weaknesses of our schools.

Clear goals

The key notion of the book, implied by the title, is introduced in Chapter 1, "Backward Design." By this the authors mean that what is first in the mind is last in execution. This approach differs from one in which, say, we need to cover so many pages per week, where topics are selected for discussion randomly, as they appear, and with no pre-established priorities. It differs from an approach where the student is not informed at the start of a project what he is expected to know and do as the project proceeds.

Backward Design requires that the teacher, well before deciding on any resources or activities, or taking into account goals mandated by external sources, formulate a clear sense of what it is that she expects the student to understand at the end of the project. The unit, that is, has a destination, a terminus ad quem — a place of arrival about which the student has been informed at the outset and which enables him to proceed meaningfully in his work and to achieve understanding.

And a definition of understanding lies at the heart of the book. Four of the eleven chapters address questions relating to the complex subject of Understanding — indeed, one chapter is entitled "Understanding Understanding." Chapter 4 rounds out the concept of understanding by describing six of its "facets": Explanation, Interpretation, Application, Perspective, Empathy, Self-Knowledge. They describe Understanding in many ways: "a critical grasp of," "insight," "true knowledge," "warranted opinions," "internalized knowledge," "nuanced discriminations," "conceptual grasp."

Probe for understanding

To execute the practice of Backward Design the teacher must

ask many questions and run the material through many filters. (The concluding pages contain a sample template, this one pointing specifically to a unit on Nutrition). They offer an acronym, WHERE, to guide the teacher through this planning process: Where are we heading? Hook the Student through Provocative Entry Points, Enable and Equip, Reflect and Rethink, Exhibit and Evaluate.

Continual assessment is an important part of the concept as well. Chapter 5, "Thinking like an Assessor," and Chapter 6, "How is Understanding Assessed in Light of the Six Facets?," along with passages in every chapter, speak about learning loops,

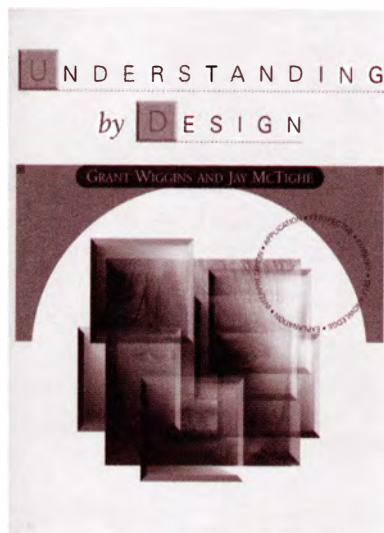
spiral designs, repetition, asking the same questions at different stages of the project, and suggesting methods by which the teacher can be certain that the student truly understands. The authors speak with some wisdom here, cautioning the teacher not to be put off by the glibness of an articulate student when a shy student with halting speech may actually have a better grasp of the topic.

Teachers will quickly recognize that much of the pedagogy encouraged by these authors is nourished by the work of John Dewey, who is frequently quoted in sidebars, along with many other authors — a pleasant amenity of the book. Thus, we are told that knowing facts is not sufficient for understanding — though, one might protest, a reservoir of information is not a bad place to start. Again, textbooks are to be distrusted, and textbook-driven

courses are boring and banal. One might urge, however, that most textbooks are carefully vetted, come with some authority, and may well contain more information than the teacher possesses. And teaching, we are told, must be student-centered; it must be anchored in the everyday experience of the student. The relevance of this notion, of course, depends on the grade level. As the student advances, learning will extend into areas where the student has little knowledge or interest, a situation which requires the teacher to inform, explain, and (alas!) lecture to establish bridges from the known to the unknown. And, yes, who will quarrel with the suggestion that teaching be dynamic rather than static, that much teaching should be done indirectly, through questions and follow-up questions, through teasing the students, to piquing their curiosity, and so on.

The really big question

What about the underlying idea of the book — that the teacher



Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*. Published by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1703 N. Beauregard St., Alexandria, Virginia, 22311-1714, 1998. 201 pages, including bibliography. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)



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should determine in advance where he wishes the student to be at the end of the project? The idea should surely receive our robust endorsement, and surely teachers will wish to include such an approach in their pedagogical arsenal. (One possibility: teaching history backwards).

But the authors have done their work only imperfectly. They prompt the teacher to ask the Big Question, to achieve Overarching Understanding. But if one can judge from the many illustrations, the authors do not ask big enough questions. Missing from the discourse is any notion of a worldview which frames the questions and directs the understanding process. (Their fully-worked out plan asks only the modest question, What does it mean to live a healthy life?) The authors veer away from positing a philosophy which establishes priorities or provides a unifying view of reality which imparts meaning to the questions. They are pragmatic, and construe experimentation and questioning as ends in themselves. They reflect post-modernist thinking in insisting that multiple views must be presented, prejudices dissolved, the students' convictions continually challenged and tested. They suggest scores of questions but offer no parameters.

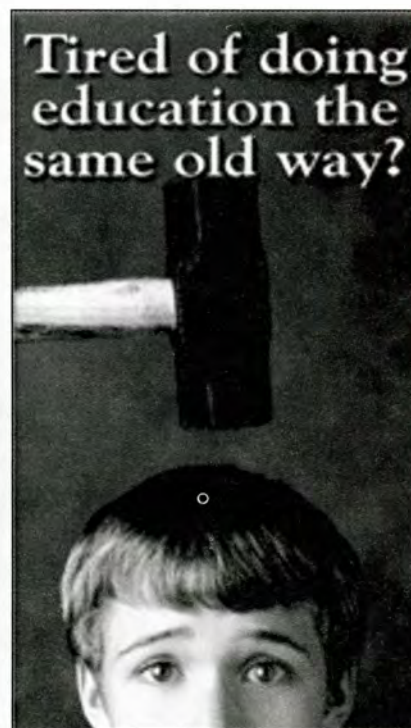
They are certain, however — and here they go against their own teaching — about the theory of evolution. They go so far as to prepare a schedule for “facts” students should know about evolution, from the second to the twelfth grade — all shaped,

and limited — to justify the notion, actually in dispute on many fronts, of the survival of the fittest. (See pages 73-74, but also p. 25, 50, and 173.)

Transcending reality

Teachers in our Christian schools have adopted a priori assumptions about the world, and these assumptions serve as the Backward Design which the authors are at such pains to define. If one truly believes that the meaning of all things is ultimately related to the Creator, then the Big Questions will involve the Transcendent. Then stewardship of our bodies (to use their topic, Nutrition) will surely become part of a unit on nutrition, to say nothing about what justice demands in insuring that people everywhere receive at least the minimum requirements for physical and mental health.

My reservations, however, should not obscure the usefulness of this study. Despite their suspicion of textbooks, this one could be most helpful in teacher education courses. The authors offer much practical advice and make thought-provoking observations. What I mean to say is that readers of this journal will have a running start at adopting the pedagogical principles defined in this book, simply by virtue of the mind with which we engage God's world from the outset. And that's no small advantage. ☺



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Biblical Thoughts on Teaching Language Arts

Robert W. Bruinsma. *The Joy of Language: A Christian Framework for Language Arts Instruction*. Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Publications, 2003. 347 pages plus 36 pages of appendixes, references and index. Reviewed by Pam Adams, Professor of Education and Director of Graduate Education. Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.

Robert Bruinsma, Professor of Education and Academic Vice President at the King's University College, has updated and greatly expanded his 1990 publication *Language Arts in the Christian School* with the brand new publication *The Joy of Language: A Christian Framework for Language Arts Instruction*. Bruinsma's goal in this book is to assist teachers in making educational decisions about the teaching of language arts so that the children become "discerning users of God's wonderful gift of language."

Bruinsma lays out a philosophical framework that encourages teachers to think biblically about how they teach the language arts. He urges teachers to look at whether their presuppositions about the learner and the learning process match how they are currently teaching. Bruinsma's message is especially important today when the market is full of reading programs that focus on the phoneme, syllable, and word level but often fail to inspire the love of good literature. Bruinsma should be thanked for being brave enough to go against the current trends.

Bruinsma contends that we must be concerned with the implicit messages we send by the strategies we use. He critiques as being behavioristic programs that demand rigorous adherence to scope and sequence and that rely on skill-and-drill. Conversely, he also calls into question radical forms of constructivism where reality becomes so heavily dependent on individual perception that the existence of an objective world is called into question. *The Joy of Language* promotes a redemptionist view of the child that acknowledges both the sinful nature of humankind and the salvation that frees us to live meaningful and purposeful lives. Today, popular language arts teaching approaches are moving away from whole language to a skill-oriented approach. Bruinsma sees skill-centered, disembodied, overly prescriptive language programs as being inconsistent with a redemptionist anthropology.

The Joy of Language addresses many topics, including assessment, language development, emergent literacy, and the four main areas of language arts: reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is chock full of background information about each topic and includes many wonderful resources for further study. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on materials for instruction. The choice of literature — particularly fantasy literature — elicits robust debate, and teachers will wish to consider carefully Bruinsma's valuable insights into the choice of literary material for the Christian classroom.

I must state one disagreement with Bruinsma's work: his negative evaluation of basal readers. Many new basal anthologies contain high quality children's literature, and, although choice is limited to the stories in the basal, it is useful at times to have

common texts to read and discuss. I agree with the author when he criticizes basal teacher guides as being overly scripted, but a well-prepared teacher who is knowledgeable about language learning can intelligently use basals as a resource. Although I point out this one area of disagreement, there is much in this book that I strongly affirm.

The audience for this book is in-service and pre-service K-9 Christian teachers; however, I believe secondary teachers and administrators would benefit from reading selected chapters. While not meant to be a complete course in teaching language arts, *The Joy of Language* is an excellent supplement to a traditional textbook. Each chapter is followed by a set of thoughtful discussion questions. This book provides what is missing in most language arts textbooks: Christian insights on issues related to the language arts. 