

A forum for Christian school educators

Christian Educators Journal

Volume 48 No.4 April 2009



**Divorce
in the
Christian
Community**





Bert Witvoet

Teach the Beauty of Marital Faithfulness

The Bible is very strong in its condemnation of divorce. In Deuteronomy 22:19 Moses lays down the law for marriage to the people of Israel. If a man takes a wife, and she proves to be a virgin, “she shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives.” There are other passages in the Old Testament that point to the permanence of marriage, but in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that he had not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. And he adds: “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments [and I doubt that he would consider the law of marriage ‘one of the least’] and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”

He then focuses on specific commandments, one of which deals with marriage and divorce. “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” In those days only men could divorce the spouse. Today Jesus would no doubt address both husband and wife, since either one can initiate a divorce.

School implications

Jesus frowned upon those who teach that divorce is acceptable without the justification of unfaithfulness. Since we are teachers, by profession, we should not, therefore, take lightly this commandment regarding marriage and divorce. That’s why various Christian schools have clauses in their contracts that spell out that those who cause the divorce cannot continue teaching in the school. This is not a simple matter, of course, since school boards are not always the best agencies to determine who’s at fault. And it may become more and more difficult in a society that permits easy divorces to actually enforce the “divorce” regulation in our contracts. But we must not shrink from applying the teachings of Scripture lest our Christian schools also become the least in the kingdom of heaven.

The matter of divorced parents falls into an entirely different category, of course. School boards are not responsible for the conduct of parents. That task falls to the church. It would be wrong for Christian schools to apply any kind of censure or show disapproval of those parents who violate their covenantal agreements with each other. The school’s primary concern is the children who attend their institution, and *they* cannot be held responsible for the actions of their parents. The children are the

obvious victims when their parents break up. Few things are more traumatic for these helpless children than to see the people they love and depend on for sustenance and security tear up the home with their drastic decision.

Decline of faithfulness

Christian schools are more and more setting up support systems for children of divorced parents. What used to be a rare occurrence in the Christian community has sadly become commonplace. If statistics are to be trusted, Christians are almost as likely to break their marriage vows as non-Christians. This is a troublesome reality, one that puts into question the integrity of the Christian community. If having the benefit of growing up in Christian homes, attending Christian churches and enrolling in Christian schools does not make you more faithful to the requirements of a covenant made before the face of God and in the presence of many witnesses, then what is the Christian gospel really about?

So what do we do in Christian schools? Do we skirt around the fact that God hates divorce? Do we end up watering down the words of Jesus because we do not want to hurt the children of divorced parents? I am not suggesting that the answer to this question is easy. We have to show a lot of sensitivity and care when we talk about marriage and divorce in family studies, social studies, and media studies. Surely we can’t always predict when the topic of marriage and divorce will be raised. It may happen when a child breaks down because of what has happened in the home. It would be good if teachers spent some time helping each other develop a caring and faithful response.

Stinking thinking

One thing has become evident over the years, namely, that members of the Christian community are losing their moorings in a culture that justifies their actions based on their right to be happy. I know of a couple that broke up when the woman told her husband that she no longer loved him and that she had found a new lover. It came as a shock to the husband. The wife justified her new life style to her two teenage daughters by saying that she was not committing adultery because the love in their marriage had died. That’s a strange argument, to say the least. When she made her wedding vows, she was not asked to promise to remain the man’s wife “until the death of our love us do part.” That

“We can’t always predict when the topic of marriage and divorce will be raised.”

would hardly pass for a sincere effort. It's their own death that releases them from their vows. But the sinful heart is very clever and deceitful. And we can expect people to use all kinds of excuses to explain their actions. The woman's two daughters, who at the time attended a Christian school, didn't fall for this reasoning. They told their Mom that she *was* committing adultery.

Too high an ideal?

The Sermon on the Mount does not allow a lot of wiggle room when it comes to living a disobedient life. A lot of people stop squirming, though, because they conclude that nobody can possibly live up to the expectations laid out in this "idealistic" presentation of "righteous" living. They might try to find refuge in the fact that, since Jesus fulfilled the demands of the Law, we don't have to fret anymore. I suppose to some, Paul's writings in Romans appears to lend a fair bit of support to that position. "To anyone who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." (Romans 4:5).

So our faith in Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross gets us off the hook when it comes to the strict application of the Sermon on the Mount, does it? Not really, because Jesus adds, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is saying, Don't ever think that the commandment to be perfect can be watered down. Yes, I know that you will fall, and I am there to offer forgiveness when you repent, but don't make that forgiveness cheap by saying that God's demands are unreasonable and subject to compromise. When you divorce your spouse, except for reasons of unfaithfulness, you cause that spouse


to commit adultery. No ifs and buts.

And that is what the Christian school has to teach, somehow, somewhere, some time. It's up to you to figure out how.

Positive approach

Of course, the best way to teach that is to teach the beauty of marital faithfulness. That's the positive side. Marriage in our society is seen as a contract between two people. Contracts can be broken, although it usually requires payment of a penalty. You offer to buy a house but change your mind just before the closing date. You lose your down payment. That's all. But in the Christian community marriage is not a contract but a covenant. And a covenant has three partners: God, your spouse and you. A covenant cannot be broken. It is for life. And what a blessing the first partner, God, brings to this arrangement. Love can weaken, but it need not die. Love can be revived when both partners try, because God keeps his part of the deal.

Love is a spiritual gift. It is patient, it is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered. Love keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. That's God's promise for teachers and parents and children.

And that's how we honor the Sermon on the Mount in the Christian school community — by focusing on the blessings of faithfulness. 

Bert Witvoet

Christian Educators Journal

Published four times a year:
October, December, February, April

Reprint Policy:

We allow free reprinting or photocopying of individual articles that have appeared in our journal, as long as the copied articles are used within the context of schooling and the source is acknowledged.

Managing Editor: Bert Witvoet
Design Editor: Doug Roorda
Manuscript Editor: Nelly Westerhoff
Production Editor: Alice R. Oldejans
Business Manager: James Rauwerda

Board of Trustees:

Calvin College
Jim Rooks
Trinity Christian College
Dan Diephouse (secretary)
William Boerman-Cornell (chair)
Christian Educators Association
Kristin Bush
Lois De Vries
Rod Jager
Joan Stob
Tony VanderArk
Sheri Vink
Covenant College
James L. Drexler

Dordt College
Pam Adams
Institute for Christian Studies
The King's University College
Alyce Oosterhuis
Ontario Christian Teachers Association
May Drost, Katie Hoogendam
Fred Breukelman, Joel Westerhof
Diane Stronks, Sean Schat
Redeemer University College
Dirk Windhorst
CEA-PACS-Alberta
Vic Mensch
Christian Teachers Association British Columbia
SW Christian Teachers Association

Regional Editors:

Alyce Oosterhuis - Western Canada
Agnes Fisher - Eastern US
Sean Schat - Eastern Canada



Let the Little Children Come to Me

by Barbara Ubbens

Barbara Ubbens (barbara.ubbens@gmail.com) is a teacher at Timothy Christian School in Rexdale, Ontario.

A collection of thoughts runs through my mind, and emotions churn within as I attempt this article. Divorced, like a chant that echoes on forever, filters through the shadows of time and spins me back to childhood. In the seventies, "Divorced" separated you from everyone and everything, normal, right and good. Today, "Divorced" is normal, acceptable and better for all involved. Or so they say.

Having lived through being a "divorced child," I strongly question this popular perspective. The faces of my recently separated friends' children are an open book of the same pain, fear and insecurity that plagued my childhood and still affects the lives of my brothers and me. Times change, perhaps acceptable tolerances or norms change, but loss and pain continues to cut deep into children of divorced families.

I write from the perspective of an adult who has lived a divorced childhood, an adult who, in her twenties, committed unswervingly to marriage that would last until death, an adult enjoying a beautiful husband-wife relationship that was hard-won in overcoming weaknesses formed early in my life, and as an adult that watches some of her students live the divorced life.

Classroom voices

A young voice pipes up in the classroom, "My mom's boyfriend knows all about racing bikes. He's awesome." The conversation continues as she pumps up "the boyfriend" to near hero status. He is the newest in a progressive change of men through her mother's life. Fortunately, her own dad is strongly committed to her and her siblings, spending quantity and quality time with her, coming to parent-teacher confer-

ences, and coaching her baseball team in the summer. These types of men make a massive difference in their children's lives. They are more rare than God intended in this world.

Another child confides to his friend, without lowering his voice, that he hates his dad. "He just doesn't care. He complains that I don't want to visit anymore, but why should I? He knows nothing about me and if he really cared he would phone me." He emphasizes "me" as he attempts to mask his hurt with anger.

A third child doesn't see Dad — doesn't know Dad, in fact if asked, doesn't have a clear definition of Dad. She has trouble with God being Father because, she said once to me, "Really what is a father, other than someone Mom gets upset at when he misses another birthday. Fathers are unreliable."

A safe place

These young people talk in our class casually, they talk during class lessons, and they talk with me, not because I am from a divorced family, for they are not aware of that fact, but they come to talk. They need an outlet, a place to vent, to question, and wonder why they are unlovable. I don't have all the answers, none of us have, but I recognize their comments, their questions, their hurt, for I asked them once myself.

No one was there to listen to me except my mom who was dealing with her own pain. I was left outside of the normal kids' activities — alone, until step by step Jesus put his loving arms around me. He has since healed that little child and he is more than willing to heal the "divorced child" that comes to him today. It is our responsibility to take them to him. When we open the Word with a child, we invite Christ into their world.

Our classroom is a place of acceptance

for all opinions, statements and discussion as long as God is respected first and foremost, and respect is given to family and fellow students. Ridicule and laughter cannot exist with comfort and openness of heart. The policy and practice are in place, and I hear many voices as each student struggles to understand the world we live in. We each come with our thoughts, frailties and emotions. They allow me to be part of their worlds because I am a person of authority they respect, a stable presence, because I know them in a unique way, and mostly because we talk with God and about the Word every day. It gives an opening. It presents opportunities.

Students incensed

One day in Bible class we were talking of King Xerxes, Queen Vashti, and Queen Esther. Asking a student to read from Esther 1, I had no prior warning of the discussion that was about to explode with inquiries and emotion. It was a blessing that I had begun this class with prayer for God's wisdom and words to fill me in teaching the planned lesson. We went radically off the plan, not unexpected for teachers. The student read from Esther and immediately hands were raised with questions of vital importance. Here is the reading from Esther, which was quickly followed by more excerpts from Esther introduced by students:

King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come. ...let him [KingXerxes] issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. (Esther 1:17-19)

A student summary was stated: King Xerxes as a king and husband could com-

mand, discard his wife at a word, and then select a new wife from a list of women at his disposal. Women were of little value. Marriage had little value. Not very different from today.

Thus ensued a major discussion, spurred by incensed students, of marriage and the roles of a man and woman in the marriage relationship. Some students openly mocked the role of man as the head of the household; others declared that women should not consider their children before themselves in major or minor decisions; others denounced their mothers' decision to stay at home to raise children — they said this was not normal. Just look at society. Still others said, "No man will *ever* rule over me." About a third of the class took this vehement tone. None of the students are ridiculed for their words, spoken rashly or with conviction and emotion. None are laughed at by their peers. All are listened to.

Confidence with Scripture

Another third flipped through the Bible and began challenging the role of husband and wife using Scripture:

"Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...." (Ephesians 5:25)

They extolled the values their parents modeled in their homes. They clearly respected the positions of a man and a woman in God's plan. They saw value in motherhood and nurturing from both father and mother. They spoke of love, respect, sacrifice and commitment. They were comfortable with the Word in their hands — they opened it with confidence and familiarity. They read the words as inspired from God. They are not perfect, they are not completely secure in their speech, they are not always bold, but they gain con-

fidence as the Word is held as the only Truth in our classroom. They are not laughed at by peers. They are listened to.

The final third are silent. Their silence represents a loud shout. We speak of silence as a voice, as an opinion that is personal, private or not fully formed. We respect silence and salute those who think and listen. They are not laughed at by peers more vocal.

Do we resolve the conflict? Do we hash it out until all are in agreement? Is that possible? "None of the above," as the multiple choice answer declares. We talk, we listen, we debate, and, what is most important, we read the Bible and declare it as Truth. In that we are in agreement — all of us. A blessing! Our discussion left questions that I encouraged children to ask of their parents, to ask of me when they wished, and to ask of God. We cannot solve society's ails within a classroom, but we can step out and allow emotion and heat to speak, to hear pain and disgust lash out, to wonder at and challenge societies' perspective, and to boldly acknowledge that God knows best and that, in his mercy, he will reveal what we ask and desire to know when we seek the truth.

Each one unique

So within which third do the divorced students sit? In the years I have taught I can state that divorced children are within each of those thirds. Divorced children do not fit a mold of behavior or look particularly lost and forlorn. They are all unique, each with their own story, each with their own insecurities, each with their own needs, and each with a singular relationship with God. But what unites them is the lack of a role model of marriage, of a husband and wife relationship, of the standard of dad and mom together at home. They cannot compare what they hear from society, what they read in fiction, or what

they read in the Bible or hear from the pulpit with their picture of marriage. We compare and contrast naturally from our personal standard to each situation. Without this standard it is difficult, if not impossible for a divorced child to measure and find comfort in marriage. This lack inserts itself as insecurity, often without awareness, that grows as it is ignored.

Granted, many Christian parents have their eyes wide open and try to help their children heal and understand. I salute them and pray that God sustains them and their children. The other children are alone in their struggle, and for them our hearts should turn and feel empathy.

Painful admission

My friends separated 13 months ago. He says the kids are fine — they are getting better. My response to him was frank, since that is the way our friendship is in the Lord: "No they are not, this is way too soon for healing." Then he hangs his head and says, "They are getting used to it," and looks me in the eye, "getting used to hiding it." He is a committed dad; they need him. Their mother just simply states that they are all better off. She chose to be separated, he did not. She suffers from chronic depression since the separation. She cannot care for the children, clean the house or work. Each day is a nightmare in the house around the corner where they live with her.

How their life spins out from here is unknown, but I am so thankful that the Lord has used my family to witness to those children since they were infants. My front door stands open and they know it; we talk as we shovel snow some days, and other days my husband watches their dog cavort in the snow and chats about nothing and everything. We continue to extend the hand of friendship to all the family and pray unceasingly. I loathe the emotions I see


clouding their eyes, I loathe the pain that is clearly overwhelming and I ask God to send healing. In time, with grace, he will. A long time.

Divorce is tough

As Christians and as Christian teachers we are asked to serve, as Paul writes, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13) Jesus undergirds that with his statement, "love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 19:19) Our neighbors are the children next door, down the street, in our church and in our classroom. Let us not delude ourselves that divorced children are better off, that they have healed and that life is the same for them as everyone else, but for a few inconveniences. They are divorced.

Divorce is tough on adults who choose it or are left with it. For children, divorce undermines God's design and all the good that is placed in a child's life prior to the divorce — all the secure teachings, love and stable practices. All is changed and tarnished. And each child is very much alone. Open the Word with them, be bold, and open your hand of love. Without judgment, extend God's grace for help and mercy, and be there to listen. Hear what they say inside, beyond the mere words. See what they hide, and speak of God's forgiveness so that they, too, can forgive. With forgiveness comes full healing.

Each divorced child lives a different life, has different challenges, and has his own perspectives. This article represents my point of view as a child of divorce. I have forgiven my imperfect earthly father and embrace my heavenly Father. In time, and by the grace of God, I have healed and can extend my healed hand to others.

(None of the discussions and quotations are taken from the current class I teach.) 

Paddling a Leaking Boat

Don't get divorced!

Jesus has preached this word to you, because your soul is at stake.

Your soul is like a leaking boat that you are paddling in serene indifference over what seems to be a placid though slightly rippling pond of your habitual washed-up existence, but what is in point of Christian fact a roaring hell of a stormy sea of billowing arrogance and folly.

The poisonous splashes can't but stick to your mist-bound and fever-stricken face of a sinner precipitating his own rack and ruin in the depths.

The wicked waves rejoice in their long-anticipated triumph, as they are breaking over your leaking boat caught up in the squall of fatal choice: to obey what Jesus has commanded or go down to the depths of death.

Jesus will rebuke the waves if you have faith and power enough to move your numb fingers and shake off the drops of sinful poison.

Vladimir Orlov, Volgograd, Russia

Teaching the Promises of God to Children of Divorce

by Kristine Steakley

Kristine Steakley (steakley7@yahoo.com) is the author of Child of Divorce, Child of God: a Journey of Hope and Healing (InterVarsity Press, 2008). Between 1st and 10th grades, she attended six different Christian schools in five different states. In 1992 she graduated from Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. Today, she is a freelance writer and grant-writing consultant, living in South Carolina.

Surveys and statistics all tell us the same grim reality: Divorce affects just as many church families as it does families who never darken the inside of a sanctuary. Some of those families experience divorce and then turn to Christ at a later date. Others may have been part of a church community when, for whatever reason, their family life imploded. Whatever the circumstances, the fact is that Christian educators today often have students in their classrooms who are dealing with the realities of a divorce at home.

Nothing in your educational training may have prepared you for the heartache of a young child whose father has abandoned the family, or the confusion of a pre-teen girl whose single mother is back in the dating scene. Prepared or not, these may be some of the faces you see in your classroom. What can you do to help the young people you serve each day deal with the immediate and long-term effects of their parents' divorce?

Know the arrangements

First, as teachers and administrators, you should ask the parents of any child from a divorced or single parent household about the custody arrangements for the child. Although it is relatively rare, some divorces are the result of abusive situations. If one parent has a restraining order that prevents him or her from coming into contact with

the child, the school needs to be aware of this restriction to help protect the child from a potentially dangerous situation.

Many parents today share custody of children following a divorce, and, often, this means that the children spend a few days each week at each parent's house. If that is the case for children in your classroom, sending home a note about a project, field trip or teacher conference in a homework folder may result in only one parent seeing it. This gap can result in confusion and distress. You can help by taking the initiative to make sure that each parent gets a copy of any notices that are sent home. If you send updates to parents by email, suggest that the parents set up a joint email account that the school can use to inform both parents of any special events or important dates.

When children are shuttling back and forth between mom's house and dad's house, mix-ups can happen. One parent may forget that it is her day to pick up the child from school, or a pre-arranged switch in the usual routine may be forgotten. Keep an extra eye out for any children who routinely get picked up by a different parent on different days of the week. A first-grader whose mom or dad has forgotten to pick him up after school may not have the presence of mind to find a teacher and ask for help. Even a middle schooler or high schooler who knows one of their parents has a reputation for being late or not showing up may try to melt into the woodwork rather than call attention to the fact that mom or dad has forgotten them yet again.

Spiritual mentors

These practical interventions are ones that apply to any teacher at any school. But as a Christian educator, you have a special role in the lives of the children in your classroom. In addition to leading them ever further along the path of knowledge, you get

to share in the spiritual journey of the young souls sitting at desks in your room each day. Some of those students may begin their spiritual journey in your classroom, while many of them will come into your room on the first day of the school year having already given their lives to Jesus Christ. Whatever their situation, you have a wonderful opportunity to build character and spiritual maturity in the lives of young people.

Many children in your classroom will face many different and difficult circumstances. Some may have lost a parent or sibling through death. Others may face financial hardships. Some may have physical challenges. And some of the students in your class will be dealing with their parents' divorce. In all of these circumstances, you have at your fingertips the best resource anyone could hope for: the Bible.

In God's Word, he reveals to us the wonders of his character in all its splendor: majestic, holy, wise, patient, loving, kind, and just. He unfolds for us the marvelous plan he has to redeem us and the world he created. He reminds us again and again of his promises to care for us, to watch over us, to be near to us.

Range of emotions

Depending on the age of the children in your classroom and the age they were when their parents divorced, you may see many different reactions and attitudes. Very young children may exhibit regressive behaviors, while adolescents may act out in rebellious ways when a divorce occurs. And while we would expect some trauma in the life of a child whose parents divorced last month, we might be surprised to see a child brokenhearted over a divorce that took place five years ago. Many children — and psychologists — compare divorce to a death that never ends. The trauma continues, because new issues arise as the child ages or

when major events occur such as the remarriage of one parent or a parent who moves far away.

Generally speaking, it is not uncommon for children whose parents have divorced to experience grief over the loss of their families, as well as such emotions as shame, fear, and distrust. One way you can help is by acknowledging the child's emotion and letting them know that it is legitimate to feel that way. When families split apart, children are right to grieve and feel sad. Likewise, children may have real reasons to feel fearful or distrustful because of situations at home. Allow children to talk about these feelings without trying to convince them that they should feel a different way.

Point to the promises

The only real answer for any of the problems facing children of divorce — or any of us — is found in our Heavenly Father. God promises in Scripture that he will never leave us or forsake us. He promises to be a father to the fatherless, to be our shepherd and guide, and to be our strong tower when we are afraid. We find these promises throughout the Bible, but especially in the Psalms. David and the other psalmists felt a tremendous freedom to express their anxieties and fears and even doubts. But inevitably each of them returned to the promises of God. By reminding themselves of the great ways God had already intervened in their own lives and in the lives of Israel as a whole, they found comfort and hope that God would continue to intervene in their present situations, and that he would protect and guide them in whatever situations they faced in the future.

One of your joys as a Christian educator is the opportunity to share these promises of God with the young people in your classroom. When you see a ten-year-old boy who has become “man of the house” and


is sinking under the weight of responsibility, you can remind him that God says we can cast all our burdens on him. When you see a twelve-year-old girl who is heartbroken because her father left, you can remind her that God is a father to the fatherless. And you can remind every child of divorce in your classroom that God sees them as his very own children.

Intercede for them

Some of these interactions will occur during the course of your normal classroom routine. But often the demands of curriculum and special events and children struggling academically will mean that you have very little time to deal with the emotional issues that children in your classroom are facing. No matter how little time you have during your teaching day, try to find some time in the evenings or on the weekends to pray for the children in your classroom. This is the best way you can help them, by interceding for them before God's throne, asking his Holy Spirit to bring them the comfort and peace and help that only he can provide.

If your school runs an after-school pro-

gram, you may consider adding a class for children whose parents are divorced. Divorce Care for Kids has an excellent, biblically-based curriculum for younger children, and other programs exist for older children and teens. These classes can be held as an outreach to your community as well, providing a way for your community to offer spiritual help to families in the local area. Many churches also have organized outreaches to single parents, helping these families with home repairs, financial assistance, and child care. These are very practical — and Christ-like — ways to care for families in your community.

Above all, remember that God loves every child in your classroom, and that he has a plan and purpose to redeem them. No matter what painful, difficult, or heart-wrenching situation we face, God is able to redeem it, to reshape it for his purposes and produce something unspeakably beautiful from our brokenness. 



Dennis Divorced his Parents

by Bill Boerman-Cornell

Bill Boerman-Cornell taught high school for nearly ten years at Illiana Christian High School. He is now an assistant professor at Trinity Christian College and serves on the CEJ Board.

We are often amazed at the resilience of students whose parents are getting a divorce. The students seem often to almost take it all in stride. We may see a few tears now and then, perhaps in connection with a journal entry; or, sometimes, a bit of misdirected anger may come out. More often than not, though, students seem to do amazingly well, making the transition from living in a family with two parents to living in two families with two or more parents. Every now and then, though, a student has let me see what was really happening inside of him.

Before I tell about Dennis, I should explain that I have seen many cases in which divorce made the home environment more peaceful for my students. I don't mean for Dennis's story to be an attack against parents who get a divorce. I don't have the overall knowledge or insight to make that determination. I suspect no one does. Rather, Dennis's story helps remind me that what we see of our student's handling of divorce may be only the surface, only a mask, and only what they want us to see.

I was scared of Dennis even before I had him in class. He looked mean, and, further, he looked like the sort of mean kid who could inspire other kids to be mean, too. I had heard stories in the teacher's lounge. I was afraid.

Once he joined my Senior English class, the basis for my fears seemed to be confirmed. He sat in the back and glowered and glared with an angry intensity I had never seen before. He never smiled and he never laughed, and every time I would introduce a new topic or activity, I would be

met by the same stare of hatred.

I asked my colleagues why Dennis was always so angry. I wasn't prepared for what I got back. It was a story of two affairs and two divorces intertwined with each other and our school community. I could understand why Dennis might be embarrassed and angry, but the intensity of his emotion was still baffling.

The breakthrough

About midway through the first quarter I assigned an evaluative paper in response to a piece that we had read over the previous couple of weeks. When I read Dennis's,

"He was painfully
tightlipped
about how
he was feeling."

my first thought was to give it an F and move on. He hadn't met the requirements of the assignment. In fact, he didn't even mention the piece we had read. Instead he wrote a handful of paragraphs about how spending time reading and thinking about literature was stupid. Why should I dignify such a display of mean-spiritedness with anything more than a dismissive mark of failure?

I believe, theoretically, that the Holy Spirit can affect my teaching. I say "theoretically" because, as a reasonable and well-read cerebral sort of Christian, I get freaked out a bit thinking about such things. I would rather people not know that I believe in something inside of me that can work in me to do things I don't understand. The whole thing seems superstitious and spooky. Yet the fact remains that what I

did next made little sense to me, and so I uncomfortably attribute it to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

I wrote on his paper. A lot. Essentially I suggested ways he might strengthen his arguments about the stupidity of literature. I identified the points where his arguments were strong and where they were weak. At the end, I didn't give him a grade, but suggested that he rewrite the paper, strengthening the arguments — and that if he did so, I would give it full credit.

At first, nothing seemed different. He rewrote the paper, handed it in with a scowl, and received his grade (a B- if memory serves me right) with an additional scowl. But I know he read my praise about how he had built a stronger, tighter essay because of two things that happened.

First, on the Friday before homecoming, my students were typically excited, and the level of whispering as I was trying to teach was becoming distracting. Before I could address the noise level, though, Dennis raised his voice. "Shut up! I am trying to hear what he is saying!"

The rest of the period was as silent as could be. I was marveling that Dennis, who hated literature, life, and apparently everything, actually wanted to learn. This was humbling, but not half as humbling as the next episode.

A matter of trust

We were beginning Hamlet, Act II. I had my students write a quick in-class journal entry about who they felt they could trust in the world. I would then collect them and write the categories on the board. Then, as we read through the act, we could see how Hamlet cannot trust his parents, his friends, his girlfriend, or, really, anyone. Typically I could work through the pile pretty quickly since my students would always write the same things — my mom, my dad, my pastor, my girlfriend or boy-

friend, my church youth group leader, my friends, and so on.

Dennis's paper stopped me cold. He hadn't written a paragraph or even a complete sentence. He had written one word. "You." I was the only person in his life that Dennis trusted? That was the most frightening thing I had ever read. I know I am far from perfect. The potential for letting him down was sobering.

A sad entry

It would make a good ending to this story if I could tell you that, after that, Dennis opened up to me and we shared long talks about his anger with his parents' divorce and his frustration with his new stepbrothers and stepsisters. How he gradually came to terms with the whole situation and was less angry and went on to a successful career — perhaps as a counselor to other students with similar problems. But that isn't true.

What actually happened is that Dennis remained attentive and reticent through the remainder of the year, with the exception of one more thing he wrote. As we moved into Spring and the seniors began thinking about graduation and beyond, I asked my students to write in their journals about their goals for life beyond high school. Some wanted successful careers, some wanted large families, some wanted to own their own pole barn filled with classic muscle cars, and a few wanted to serve God by helping fix a broken world. As usual, Dennis was the exception.

Dennis's entry was characteristically short. "I want to get a job and work hard until I can earn enough money to pay my parents back every cent they ever spent on me. Then I will never have to talk to them again."

There was something honorable about Dennis's goal. He recognized the obligation he had to his parents, but at the same

time he wanted to be rid of them forever. Dennis's entry may be the saddest thing I have ever read.


Modest expectations

What does this mean for my classroom? To be honest, I am not entirely sure. Divorce is so complete and so painful that I am not sure that I, as a high school English teacher, or you as a third-grade teacher, or middle school PE teacher and basketball coach, or whatever you are, can make much of a change. To think otherwise seems remarkably egotistical to me. But there are one or two small impacts we can make.

First, we can be the one person in the child's life who doesn't assume he's all right; who doesn't gloss over the pain of what they are feeling; and who doesn't dismiss their fears as overblown, their anger as misplaced, and their grief as something


that will pass. I suspect that reassurances offered too early in the process of coming to terms with divorce are not helpful at all, but rather the opposite.

Second, we can make room for them to speak or write about their struggle, and we can listen. Dennis was not a prolific writer or an effusive speaker. He was painfully tightlipped about how he was feeling. The contributions he made in class were more a seepage through the wall he built around himself than a torrent — but I still think they were important.

The bottom line for me is this. I am not a child of divorce. I don't actually have any idea what it is like to be Dennis. But as Dennis's brother in Christ, as someone who has felt other forms of pain in my life, I can listen to him and try to find out what he is going through. 


Note: Dennis is a pseudonym.

DORDT COLLEGE



Master of Education

- Complete an M.Ed. in K12 Curriculum and Instruction in as few as three summers
- Distinct Christian perspective
- Supportive environment, learning with and from other Christian educators
- Innovative course format with one week on campus per course during the summer



Preparing Leaders
In Christian School Education

498 4th Ave NE • Sioux Center, IA 51250
1-800-343-6738 • e-mail: m_ed@dordt.edu • www.dordt.edu/master

A School Life-Style Policy

Apparently Christian schools have different life-style policies to which they expect their teachers to adhere. Here is a sample of such a policy that is part of a contractual agreement between a Christian school board and its employees. We were told that this policy is a bit outdated. We do not mention the name of the school since that is not important for our purpose, but we are willing to share that information if some CSI school should request that.

BW

1.01 All teachers and support staff (employees) are mutually bound by and agree to uphold and promote the objectives, aims and purposes and goals of the School Association.

1.02 Employees must be disciples of Christ and as such are expected to lead children in the life of Christian discipleship not only by precept but also by example as set out in the Bible.

1.03 Without restricting the generality of the foregoing, the following are specific areas of belief and life-style which the School Association requires of all its employees. Employees are expected to:

a. Agree with Article II of By Law No. 1 of the Association.

b. Demonstrate active church participation.

c. Maintain fidelity in marriage, honor the marriage vows for life, and reserve cohabitation and sexual relations for marriage.

d. Provide for Christian nurture of their own children as an example to the community and enroll their children in a [CSI] elementary and secondary schools as outlined in the School Association's policies.

In unusual circumstances, a teacher who believes that the best educational choice for his or her child contravenes this policy of the School Association may apply to the Board, via the principal, for an exemption to this policy. Before the Board makes a decision on the request, the Employee will be given the opportunity to make a representation to the Board. The Employee

agrees to abide by the Board's final decision and the Board agrees to explain the reasons for the decision. Such reasons will address the concerns raised by the Employee.

e. Refrain from any offenses under the criminal code and the Human Rights Code.

f. Refrain from substance abuse (e.g. alcohol or drugs).

g. Refrain from a homosexual lifestyle.

h. Employees will strive to honor God and each other in all interactions with one another, as well as with students, parents, and supporters.

1.04 The School Association shall continue to demonstrate love and compassion to any Employee whose conduct appears to be in breach of the standards set out

above and will give a fair and impartial hearing to any Employee who requests it. Recognizing the healing power of Christ's redemption, the School Association will also explore the possibilities of reconciliation and restoration.

1.05 Notwithstanding the above, if the belief or conduct of an Employee is judged to be inconsistent with Christian standards as outlined in this section or in some other way is contrary to the aims and standards of the School Association or brings the schools into disrespect in the community, such an Employee may be disciplined by the School Association. Such discipline may include dismissal for just and reasonable cause. ☺

Principal's Note

Regarding children of divorced parents:

We must have a copy of the separation/divorce agreement that specifies who has custody of children with details spelled out.

We do our best to communicate with both parents equally if that is the desire of both i.e. two copies of progress reports, all communications sent to both homes, two parent-teacher conferences (seldom do they want one together!).

We are sensitive on Mother's and Father's Days and other special days. We have a school councillor and often have these children see her to deal with issues as they arise.

We have the Rainbows program available for dealing with loss by death or divorce if parents request that.

We try not to get into the middle of disputes — very difficult at times!

Notes from the editor

While preparing for this issue on divorce in the Christian school, I surfed the Internet for ideas. I did come across a few strange items.

Item # 1.

According to a news source called Ananova, a primary school in China has closed its doors to its students because its teachers are all getting divorced — all 40 of them! Teachers at Tongxing Centre Primary School in Dandong have filed for divorce because they were afraid of losing their jobs. Apparently local authorities said they would cut down on the number of teachers at primary and middle schools as a cost-cutting measure. But in order to show their humanity, authorities said that teachers who are divorced or widowed would not be cut. I guess the teachers figured that to make themselves widows might require measures that would be considered too drastic, so they chose the next best option: they all signed divorce papers.

Item # 2.

A study at Duke University's Center for the American Family has concluded that children whose parents are divorced "are twice as likely to compose bad poetry as those whose parents are married." Dr. Ruth Wyler-Feldman, director of the Center, traces this decline in poetic ability to the trauma divorce can inflict on kids from broken homes. "Devastated by the break-up of the family unit, these children are responding with poems awash in bathos, forced rhymes and mixed metaphors comparing their souls to rainstorms." The study showed that the rhyming of "despise" with "my eyes" occurs much more often in poems written by children of divorced parents than in the poetry of children from stable homes. Apparently the nature of the break-up even affects the choice of verse: free verse for contested divorces and haiku

for divorces involving custody battles.

Some of these findings make sense to me. Divorce is very traumatic and brings out strong emotions and exaggerated images, especially in teenagers. But I would say that children of divorced parents may also produce wretched results in other areas of study. Why focus on the quality of poetry? On second thought, maybe we can use these results about bad poetry to scare parents away from divorce. Imagine having to put up with forced rhymes and bathos!

Item # 3.

Authorities in the communist state of North Korea don't like divorced people. They banned divorced people to the outskirts of the capital Pyongyang in 1989, just before the World Festival of Youth and Students. They frequently readjust their resident registration projects, keeping undesirables out of their main cities. Lately, the divorce rate in North Korea has been climbing alarmingly, most of it having to do with economics. Many times men don't come home with money even if they have jobs, forcing the women and children to fend for themselves. Korean society is male-dominated, and, as a result, women don't have a high opinion of men. On order of Kim Yong Il, the courts usually do not allow divorces. But because wages for judges are low, they can be bribed. It is also reported that many North Koreans just separate, without going through a divorce, and many young couples do not register their marriages anymore. People will find a way to do what they want to do even in totalitarian systems.

Item #4.

In Hisar, India, Virender Verma and his wife, Meena, found out to their dismay that, according to a local court, they were divorced. The couple have two children

and have been happily married for many years. The discovery was made when Mena filed a petition under the Protection of Women From Domestic Violence against her in-laws. She was told she was not eligible for protection because she was no longer married to Virender. It turns out Virender's brother had filed the divorce papers on behalf of the couple with the help of four advocates. At the time of the bogus divorce proceedings, Virender and Meena were thinking of filing a criminal complaint against Virender's brother and parents for cruelty and harassment for dowry. Virender claims that his family arranged for the divorce to escape Meena's complaint.

Item #5.

According to a study done by University of Chicago sociologist Linda Waite, Ph.D., two-thirds of unhappy marriages correct themselves within five years. Also, depression and low self-esteem seldom disappear after a divorce. Out of a group of 5,232 married adults, 645 reported marital dissatisfaction. Five years later, those who remained married were more likely than those who had divorced to say that they were now happy. As a matter of fact, the most unhappy marriages had the greatest reversals: 78 percent of people who stayed in very unhappy marriages, reported being happy. Linda Waite concluded that "for most people, marital unhappiness was not permanent." It seems that the initial attraction and falling in love between people is not as baseless as people sometimes think.

© BW

When High School Chapels Become Worship

A report on a worship symposium with a difference

by May Drost

May Drost (wdrost@sympatico.ca) is a retired teacher of English who lives in Sarnia, Ontario.

In the rural public high school that I attended (more than half a century ago), the school day was begun with a perfunctory recitation of the Lord's Prayer followed by morning announcements. We all stood up beside our desks for the prayer, though this was a matter of formality, not reverence on our part. Then we went about our business with no further attention to the deity we had invoked in unison. When I went to Calvin College, Chapel was compulsory; we were expected to attend three days a week. Student monitors known as "chapel checkers" were appointed to keep tabs on who came and who didn't. Chapel checkers were approachable, and deals could be made. My own interest in chapel waxed and waned according to the faculty speakers.

Gradual improvement

When I began teaching, the word "chapel" took on a whole new meaning. I needed all the help I could get — God's and anyone else's, and so a devotional beginning to the day became a lifeline of sorts. Trouble was, the faculty was largely responsible for setting up the chapels — preparing the responsive readings, choosing the hymns, supervising student participation, sometimes being the speaker — and so the time set aside for worship was sometimes a burden as much as a blessing for me.

Over time, this situation improved, for the most part because of more intentionality on the part of faculty, and more participation by the students themselves. But I know that my particular high school was not the only one challenged by creating a meaningful worship experience distinct from what was happening at students'

homes or in their churches. Over the years, I have been aware that worship practices vary widely from one Christian school to another.

A golden opportunity

So I was pleased when, in January of this year, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship set up a special seminar for high schools at its annual Symposium on Worship, under the leadership of Professor Robert Keeley, Chair of the Education Department at Calvin College. This seminar was planned to set the stage for Keeley's sabbatical work next year when he will be visiting various schools as part of an in-depth study he is conducting. Happy to be a small part of such an important study (as an observer), I joined 135 students representing schools from across Canada and the United States, along with some of their teachers and administrators, to learn and share.

At the first session, I sat at a table with four students, a teacher, and an administrator. It did not take long to engage the students in conversation. All of them said they were giving leadership in planning for, and participating in, worship at their schools. They all felt challenged to communicate effectively with the indifferent and apathetic members of their student body. They felt music was crucial in planning chapels. They shared opinions on how often chapels should be held. Their enthusiasm for interacting with each other was obvious: they were here to get something out of the experience.

Selecting hymns

The first presenter was Ron Rienstra, assistant professor of preaching and worship at Western Theological Seminary. He began by listing about eight hymns and asking the participants to choose their absolute favourite, giving reasons for their

choices. The resulting conversation was heartwarming: students actually related the songs to their own spiritual experience and their own faith journeys. Not only that, but they were able to move beyond their own preferences to consider how suitable a song might be for *corporate* worship, or for a given theme or occasion. Terms like "culture bound" and "central truths of the gospel" floated through the air. When Rienstra summed up the exercise by suggesting that chapel planners should not necessarily pick their own favorites but consider first of all the context of a particular chapel as well as the needs of the students attending, I had the feeling that they knew exactly what he meant.

Defining worship

The next topic was "worship." "What is it, exactly?" Rienstra asked. These are some of the things I heard:

- Everything we do is worship.
- Worship is meeting God.
- It is a distillation of our relationship with God.
- It is an intimate sense of God's presence — anywhere, anytime, but you can't manufacture this; you can't manipulate others into feeling it.
- There must be a connection between assembled worship and the rest of our lives; that is, strange words or strange music not heard any other time can create boredom and indifference.
- High school chapels are way stations to connect daily life and worship times.

Again, I was impressed by the way the students listened to one another, and refined each other's definitions.

Worship is essential

Then on to "Why do we worship?" You had to be there to appreciate the cumulative richness of the answers, but a brief

and partial checklist will have to do: to practice resurrection, to remember, to “wait and see,” to dedicate ourselves to service, to praise or to lament, to re-orient ourselves to reality, to receive, to change.... One young man mentioned that there is a “coercion factor” involved in why we worship, a sort of spiritual self-discipline. He was right, of course, and showed that he was already more mature in high school than I was in college complaining about compulsory chapel attendance.

The observations in this part of the discussion re-emphasized for me that worship in Christian high schools is not an irrelevant add-on, or superfluous because we already work hard to integrate faith and learning in the curriculum. It is essential because, if faith is to mean anything for students of safety and belonging, they are better equipped to tackle the daily academic work of understanding God’s world, not to mention the challenge of loving each other as neighbors in Christ.

As a final exercise in understanding worship, Rienstra invited participants to make comparisons between worship and other types of gatherings. In choosing whether a worship service is more like, say, a pep rally than an AA meeting, or more like a date than story time at the library, participants could further sharpen their awareness of what factors can detract from or enhance worship.

Practical suggestions

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship offers worship renewal grants to high schools, and, when Ron Rienstra had finished his introductory sessions, Jack Postma and Sharon Veltema, on behalf of Unity Christian High School, told the story of their chapel “make-over.” Their comments and suggestions were practical and



Courtesy of Steven Huyser-Honig

realistic. Here’s a sampling of what they said:

- In order to change the culture of worship in your school, you need the full support of the administrator.

- Everyone comes to chapel — including the support staff.

- Appoint a Dean of Student Life or the equivalent.

- Listen to the students: are they being encouraged daily?

- *Teach* your students about worship — don’t assume they know.

- Chapel is not for “the future”: it has to speak to students in the here and now.

- Make chapel a safe place: don’t drive students outside their comfort zone.

- Chapel should become a kind of “family gathering” where students, teachers, and staff feel connected to each other.

- Chapel must be made relevant for student life so that a sense of worship can pervade all aspects of school culture.

Art, music and words

The seminar provided a good balance between the “ideal” chapel and practical steps to move closer to that ideal. Therefore, in the afternoon, students attended three different sessions led by Calvin College Worship Apprentices, young men and women actively involved in campus worship. The first session was about using the arts in worship — dance, drama, and visual art. Included were some very practical suggestions about using technology effectively, and creating seamless transitions from one part of worship to another.

The second session was about music. Important as it is, it must also be used only to facilitate communal worship; I was impressed to hear obviously competent musicians remind us that a worship service is not a concert! The third session focused on the role of the spoken word in worship. The most meaningful advice here was: When you prepare to read, draw the meaning out for yourself, so that you can convey it to your listeners. In all three sessions, the emphasis was on authenticity as much as on thorough preparation.

vice is not a concert! The third session focused on the role of the spoken word in worship. The most meaningful advice here was: When you prepare to read, draw the meaning out for yourself, so that you can convey it to your listeners. In all three sessions, the emphasis was on authenticity as much as on thorough preparation.

Discussion starters

A plenary session ended the day. Participants had a chance to reflect on what they had learned as well as to make comments and ask questions. I leave you with some of these as discussion starters in your staff rooms, or at your faculty meetings:

- How can schools build bridges between students and their respective churches? Should they worry about this? Is it their task?

- In emphasizing worship time, are schools encroaching on the church’s work?

- Do schools need to cover the lack of worship time in families?

- With all the emphasis on *preparation* for worship, what happens to a spontaneous meeting with God?

It was a good day. I left reassured that God through his Spirit is at work, continually renewing our lives and revitalizing our worship. I was reaffirmed in my belief that the Spirit is present during preparation time just as surely as during worship time, and that structure in worship is no deterrent to an outpouring of praise and gratitude — and lament — to God. ☺

January 11, 2009

Al Boerema asks the panel to discuss the topic of this issue of the journal. Divorce is a reality that teachers need to confront in their classroom. Almost every classroom will have a child whose parents have gone through divorce. In order to teach about marriage you can't avoid talking about the breakdown of marriage in our society. Should teachers avoid the topic, address it, and, if so, how?

January 12, 2009

Pamela Adams begins the discussion:

Hi, This topic is very important for the children of parents going through a divorce and for children whose parents have completed a divorce. The children must feel some guilt and carry this around with them. You need to deposit the reason for the divorce at the feet of the parents. I would not lay a heavy burden on the parents but just say that parents are responsible for a marriage and when one fails there are one or two people who have contributed to the situation. We must allow — because we all know of such situations — that the parents did not play an equal role in the divorce.



Once you allow the children to relax their blame, you are free to talk with them individually about the situation. You can share things that make up who you are—marriage, family, parents, children. Let the child know that everyone has a different background. Remind them that making a careful choice of the marriage partner is important for all. If you are married, tell him or her how you made your decision, or, if you are not married, how you will make this decision.

God's blessing is important in all marriages. Remind the child of this important factor. Call on God when things are rough. Pray for wisdom and have others pray for you.

Pam

their fault. Divorce is an adult's or adults' decision. It is crucial to be very direct and even talk about the fact that, though the child does do some naughty things, those misdeeds are not the cause of the divorce.

It has often brought me comfort when I realize again that Jesus was born into quite a sticky situation himself! His mother was not married, and — when he found out — Joseph was planning to leave her! I wonder how she came up with the courage to tell Joseph, or maybe he just found out through gossip. I wonder if the town was buzzing with rumors about her. I wonder how Mary's parents reacted. Praise God that Joseph did respond to his dream and in faith, took Mary to be his wife.

Jolene



January 28, 2009

Christian Altena continues the discussion:

Greetings Everyone! I certainly don't think that teachers should avoid the topic of divorce, but I do agree with Pam and Jolene that the issue requires a great deal of sympathy and understanding. The very last thing children of divorce need to hear is some clumsy moralizing by their fourth-period teacher. Whenever the topic comes up in a classroom, the teacher needs to be keenly aware that sitting before them may be several students who are daily weighed down by the guilt, loneliness, and frustrations of their family situations. Over the years I've come to know the stories of some of my students and have gained a powerful sympathy and respect for these young individuals whose life experiences and struggles make them, in



January 28, 2009

Jolene Velthuisen joins in:

Pam! It is good to have you back on the panel. Praise God for the healing in your life!

I agree with your comments regarding blame in a divorce. When I talked about this discussion with my colleague, she reiterated herself that children always believe divorce is their fault! It is important to address that right up front and tell them it is not



Albert Boerema
ajb@37calvin.edu

a very real way, my elders.

I love Jolene's mention of Joseph and Mary. This and other examples from scripture combine to create a very extensive pattern of God's championing of the underdog, the outcast, the disadvantaged, and the hurting.

The pain and effects of divorce will remain for a long time, and, while there's often not much we can do as teachers, we can communicate God's consistent and unchanging love.

Christian

January 31, 2009

Jolene Velthuisen adds:

With you Christian, I feel the admiration for young students who struggle through such pain from family situations and yet endure with hope.

I think it is good to mention the reaching out that we as teachers can do to include both parents in the schooling of their child. Though one parent may be the main contact for the school, I think it important and helpful to include the other parent in the school year with classroom newsletters or events such as field trips and parent teacher conferences — though it can mean a separate conference for each parent. I think keeping both parents updated shows that they are both important to the teacher and important in the growth and development of their child as well.

As students have entered my class, and interacted daily with me for a year, I've found that the students most lost seem to be those who do not belong to any adult. These students are passed around the family, or at times the state system, but no one claims them as their own. I think these students, even at eight years old, are floating in uncertainty about their future. I recall encountering students who didn't seem to belong to any one adult, who lost their hope and did not know where they could rest. How can we communicate God's consistent and unchanging love in such tough situations as these?

Jolene

February 1, 2009

Tim Leugs adds his insights:

Hi everyone, You have all made good points, emphasizing the gentleness and empathy necessary to comfort students in this difficult situation. I am in whole-hearted agreement with you, Jolene, in regards to the need to enfold both parents in the teacher-parent partnership,



allowing that additional measure of peacemaking to occur. I also see value in promoting support groups for the students themselves if more than one is present in the school. Taking time to process all of those emotions referred to already, developing coping mechanisms, and even knowing "you are not alone" may seem cliché, but really do work for many students. At the same time, however, it is of course vital to remember that not all students benefit from such a group in the same way; though encouraging participation may well be helpful, mandating it may lead to feelings of being ostracized.

Tim

The panel consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu), professor of education at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.

Christian Altena (caltena@swchristian.org) teaches history at Chicago Christian High School in Palos Heights, Illiana.

Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education, Smithville, Ont.

Tim Leugs (tleugs@legacys.org) a fifth-grade teacher at Legacy Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jolene Velthuisen (jvelthuisen@rcsnm.org) a second-grade teacher at Rehoboth Christian School in Northwest New Mexico.

Bruce Wergeland (bcwerg@shaw.ca) teaches Grade 8 at Langley Christian Middle School in Langley, British Columbia.

Note to Our Advertisers

Please make sure that all
camera-ready ads are emailed as
PDF files to the editor
before the following dates:
October Issue — August 15
December Issue — October 15
February Issue — December 15
April Issue — February 15

In Canaan's Land

by Greg Schemper

GregSchemper (gschemper@hotmail.com) teaches a class called Media Literacy at Holland Christian High School in Holland, Michigan.

When the twelve spies returned from the land of Canaan to report their findings to Moses, ten shook with fear, while, although they had seen the same things, only two assured victory for Israel. When we look into American media — a Canaan's land in its own right — what's our response? Can we identify God's fingerprint on TV, in advertising, in the evening news? Or should we, if we could, torch the whole thing? We who are of the Reformed tradition pride ourselves in saying we are biblically mandated to be "in the world, but not of the world." How to carry out this mandate in practice is the question my colleague Andrea Bult and I sat down to outline two years ago in preparation for a course in Media Literacy. Before we put pen to paper, we knew the class couldn't merely be about absorbing media facts — not at a Christian school. Its basis needed to be about discernment and the equipping of students with tools for separating the pyrite from the gold, the toxic from the nutritious.

We learn in Media Literacy that the media's greatest danger to us is that it may convince us that something toxic is normal and even good. Studies show that the average G.I. Joe doll's biceps have swollen from 11 inches in the 1950's to a massive 26 inches today. To give you better perspective, mighty Mark McGuire's biceps are 20 inches. If a woman were proportionate to today's Barbie Doll, she'd be well over seven feet tall and weigh only 110 pounds! Also, according to Jean

Kilbourne, only about 1% of women have the body type of a model — something no amount of dieting can change. These facts, which may appear benign at first glance, help illustrate why so many boys are obsessed with getting "ripped" and why studies show that 80% of ten-year-old girls have dieted — suggesting our society's media filter is either missing or badly damaged.

Developing a media filter

The Media Literacy curriculum includes



units in the history of Western culture, music, film, media distortions of reality, the news, advertising, gaming, globalization, female and male stereotypes, comedy, and consumerism. Scratch the surface of any of these studies, and it's clear that, without discernment, the media, by deliberate strategy, constructs its own worldview.

But maintaining a functioning media filter is hard work, and humbling. Each time I teach the unit on consumerism, I find myself walking to school more, taking shorter showers in the morning, and agonizing over how much plastic we throw away — I'm convicted — which isn't at all

pleasant. The students and I brush shoulders weekly with people and ideas that ask us to change our lifestyle, to bend it further and further away from the snug lifestyle through which our culture promises fulfillment.

In his book *Training in Christianity*, Søren Kierkegaard writes, "The truth consists not in knowing the truth but in being the truth" (p. 201). Simple words, but, *wow*, such difficult ones to wear. Now, I'm not claiming that each student leaving my classroom "is the truth" or is even armored and equipped to isolate and subdue each deadly dart from the media. It is my hope, however, that they will become more able to begin to define their relationship with the media — and set boundaries.

Who failed?

With the extolling of each new invention comes the promise of better, or more, community. The telegraph, telephone, e-mail, and cell phones each promised to strengthen our relationships. So isn't it ironic that when we receive a hand-written letter, we find that medium more meaningful than a phone call? Either the "new" media failed us or we failed them — or maybe both.

Integral to setting boundaries around the media is having a clear vision for how a medium affects community. For instance, does gaming six hours a day build or tear down community? Perhaps it builds community with friends but tears down community with family. It takes an astute teen — or adult — to see the issue and respond to it positively. This response — to fortify and create community — is the difference between living "in the world" and not being "of the world."


Time out

Part of setting boundaries with the media is knowing when to shut out the media altogether. God knew what he was talking about when he set aside a day for rest. He knew that if we didn't get enough of it, we'd forget the sound of our own voices and begin parroting the language, attitudes, and habits of the media.

Unbridled media consumption is capable of sucking the individuality from anyone. Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:3, "Your life is hidden with Christ Jesus in God" — not in the constant drone of the radio and in the high-pitched hum of the TV, or on the shelves of any store in the local mall, as convenient as this would be.

To get a taste of this rest, at the end of each semester we try to "unplug" ourselves for three days — no radio, e-mail, gaming, TV, movies, iPods, or frivolous text-messaging or surfing the Net. Few of the students are intimidated by the task — shoot, it's only for three days. They soon discover, however, just how addicted we are to the media. "Addicted" may seem a tad strong of a word, but when you get "the shakes" the second night or when conversations with your hamster become routine, you soon become aware of the tight grasp the media has on many of us. You then realize that you use the media as an escape from homework or from guilt or dealing with difficulties.

Each semester this class has changed dramatically — with the help of my students. I see what works and what needs to be dumped or re-worked — and the students are wonderful, astute, and gracious critics. But what hasn't changed is my love for this class and, I believe, the need for a class

like Media Lit at Holland Christian. For all of us, we who call ourselves Christians, are only spies in Canaan, where it's easy as pie to forget about our real home. Instead, we too quickly become one of the locals. 

TEACHING, LEARNING, AND CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

October 29–31, 2009

Prince Conference Center at Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Hosted and sponsored by the Kuyers Institute for
Christian Teaching and Learning (www.pedagogy.net)

There have been substantial theological discussions in recent years concerning the nature and significance of Christian practices such as hospitality, Sabbath-keeping, forgiveness, intentional community, healing, prayer, worship, liturgy, spiritual reading, and so on — emphasizing that faith is not reducible to a mere system of ideas and beliefs. There has also been significant discussion in the world of education regarding the nature of educational practice, and of teaching and learning settings as communities of practice. The Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning will host a conference in October 2009 that seeks to address the intersection between these discussions, asking how Christian practices illuminate, challenge, or contribute to Christian teaching and learning.

Keynote addresses at the conference will be delivered by Paul J. Griffiths and Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung. Dr. Griffiths is Warren Professor of Catholic Theol-

ogy at Duke Divinity School and author of numerous works, including the books *Religious Reading* and *The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite*. His newest book, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar*, will appear in late 2008 or early 2009. Dr. DeYoung is currently assistant professor of philosophy at Calvin College and has published numerous scholarly articles and book chapters on various virtues and vices, as well as curricula for adults and youth on spiritual formation and the seven deadly sins. Most recently, she has authored *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins* (Brazos, 2009).

This conference is funded by a grant from the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith. It will incorporate results of a two-year research project funded by the Valparaiso Project and directed by David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith of Calvin College.

CALVIN
College



KUYERS INSTITUTE
FOR CHRISTIAN TEACHING AND LEARNING

For further information, contact: Seminars in Christian Scholarship • Calvin College
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE • Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402
phone: 1-616-526-8558 • fax: 1-616-526-6682 • seminars@calvin.edu

Little Teachers Protecting Little Ones

by Bert Witvoet

This is my last issue as editor. I don't want to make a big fuss about it. But I have decided to leave you with a meditation on Matthew 18 as my farewell speech.

Most of us know that Jesus was a master teacher. It would not be wrong to think of him as our prime principal. We can learn from him, both about attitude and pedagogy. The time when he taught his followers what it means to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven stands out as one of his finest professional development workshops.

Matthew 18: 1-10

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea....

See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Who is the greatest?

The passage of Scripture that I have chosen shifts from one point of view to another. The first four verses are about the adult disciples who are vying for position and status: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" "Mirror, mirror on the

wall, who is the greatest of them all?" The next six verses are about how the disciples relate to "these little ones."

In the first section, Jesus calls a little child into the circle as a teaching tool, a prop, to rebuke the disciples for asking such a foolish un-kingdom-like question and, at the same time, to answer their question: "Who is the greatest?" with his revolutionary slogan "Be the least." The child has no significance in this scenario. Had the child

**"Even alienated youth
have their dreams
about a world
that is humble,
kind and gentle."**

been an adolescent, he would have realized that he was being used as a simile.

But then, all of a sudden, the child is no longer a teaching tool, but she becomes the center of Jesus' attention. The child comes into her own. The child becomes the recipient of Jesus' love and care. Toward the end, we hear that the child is so important that guardian angels are constantly looking at the face of Jesus' Father in heaven. As soon as the Father notices that some harm is being done to his little one on earth, he sends these angels off to protect that child, maybe even to tie a millstone around the neck of the abuser and drown him in a way that would make the Mafia proud.

But, you say, it's not just about the child or children. True. It's also about people who are little of spirit, who are humble, or who are weak. It includes the child, but it also embraces all those who are like children. For our purpose today, let's restrict

it to the learners who are in your care.

Choose your favorites

Sometimes teachers have favorites in their classroom. According to this teaching, the only favorites they should have are "the little ones" — the meek learners, the weak learners, the trouble makers, the ones who have attention deficit disorder, the ones who don't get it. The strong will take care of themselves. When I was a teacher years ago, I tended to focus more attention on the troublemakers and the unpopular students than on the "winners." When I taught grade 13 (the equivalent of first-year college) at Harbord Collegiate in downtown Toronto years ago, I once cancelled a class because a certain young man named Ernie, who was into drugs, had shown up. I took him out for coffee down the street. One young woman in my class asked me why I had done that. I told her that he needed me more than she did. My philosophy differed sharply from that of a colleague who taught history and who told me that he spent extra time only with students who deserved it.

Whoever welcomes one such adolescent in my name, welcomes me.

A one-page entry

We have a coffee table book in our house called *Floral Passion*. It's a great book with all kinds of wonderful stories of how mostly post-war immigrants established flourishing (pardon the pun) greenhouse businesses in the Niagara region. Each business gets anywhere from one to four pages of pictures and story, depending on its size and importance. Many of these growers are humble people, I'm sure, the kind that Jesus would feel at home with. In spite of their success, they remained like a child.

So if I focus on one particular story in this book, which for me highlights the

teachings of Jesus, it's not because I judge any of the others.

The story that always strikes a chord with me is the story of one couple of Vineland.

Their story begins this way: "With only 22,000 square feet of greenhouse space on their 10-acre property near Vineland, Frank and Nelly are just small players in Niagara's flower industry. That suits them fine. 'We are making a living,' says Frank. 'It's something we'll never get wealthy doing at the size we are at. But we made a choice. We decided that lifestyle is more important than income. Others have made more money and have expanded a lot in the last few years — and more power to them. This was never our intent.

'We've had the opportunity over the last 14 years to be with our children,' he says. 'We were home with them every day. Later, we put them on the bus and we were here when they came home.... That was an important choice for us, one we don't regret at all. We were able to provide time for volunteer activities. We were involved in the school and the church. If there's a class trip to the museum, for example, we can say: If you need volunteers, we are free to come.'"

Today Frank is part-time ministry coordinator and consultant in training home missionaries for his denomination. His wife, Nelly, too, is active in their local church. Now it's not my intent to glorify these people. They are little of spirit. It shows. Their story in the book *Floral Passion* takes up only one page. I have reason to believe that their story takes up several pages in the book called *Kingdom Passion*.

Leading by example

I don't know what it was about Frank and Nelly that made them decide to stay small. They were in essence cutting off a hand or a foot, getting rid of whatever might stand in the way of entering life. Of

course, not everyone has to follow suit. There is nothing in the teachings of Christ that says you must be small as a business or as a school, although he did warn against riches, did he not? Something about the eye of a needle? But this I will say, there must be some people among all these successful Niagara growers who would have been better off had they cut off a hand or foot and stayed small. All of us have a tendency toward pride and importance. Whatever it is that causes us to want to be great,

**The only favorites
teachers should have are
"the meek learners, the
weak learners,
the trouble makers...."**

it will cause little ones to stumble.

Parents cannot produce faith in their children. But they're not totally helpless when it comes to faith development in their children. Parents can do two things — they can avoid becoming an obstacle, and they can lead the child by word and example.

As teachers, you cannot produce faith in your learners either, but you, too, can do these two things: not be a stumbling block, and you can lead by word and example. Faith is not guaranteed as outcome. But it has a better chance to develop and grow when the conditions are right.

Schools and teachers must create the environment talked about here in Jesus' teaching about being like a child and respecting the little ones. Each one of you is called to be not the greatest, but the least.

You are called to be little ones. Even the principal is called to be a little one. You know that the word "principal" started out

as being an adjective rather than a noun. A principal is the principal educator, the principal teacher. A principal is also called to be the principal little one (PLO, for short). And the vice-principal is called to be the assistant principal little one (APLO). Altogether, we are called to be little ones so that we can enter life, enter the kingdom, here now and coming. This is also what our learners are encouraged to be.

About protection

Years ago I taught a novel called *The Catcher in the Rye*. Teaching this novel got me into trouble — big trouble. But that's not what I want to talk about. I want to talk about the protagonist in the story. His name was Holden Caulfield. Holden was a young man who was totally alienated from the people around him. He thought of them as phonies. But he had one ambition: he wanted to protect little ones. He pictured himself as standing in a field of rye, with children all around him, playing and laughing, and chasing each other. Close by was a steep ravine. So Holden placed himself near the ravine, and whenever a child came too close, he caught it and guided it away from the ravine. He saw himself as a "catcher in the rye." Even alienated youth have their dreams about a world that is humble, and kind and gentle.

Teachers, too, should be catchers in the rye. Keep in mind — you are being watched by angels. When we become like little children, radiating humility, lowliness and powerlessness, we not only enter the kingdom, but we also help others gain entrance. See to it that you do not look down on any of these little ones. ☺

The Cherry Orchard Divorces or Uncle Vanya and Aunt Varya Split Up

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam is excited to announce that after receiving his third masters degree in as many years, from the Digital University of a New Generation, he will begin applying for positions in the bio-chemical engineering, business administration or psychology departments at Trinity, Calvin, Dordt, Kings, and Redeemer Colleges. He hopes to start a bidding war between the institutions to see which faculty he will finally consent to join.

"This is ridiculous!" shouted Jon Kleinhut, slapping an open hand on the table to punctuate his point. "It's an outrage. To think that I should get reprimanded at a Christian school for speaking the truth."

Biology teacher Sam Toomer nodded forcefully in agreement. "This school's been losing its Christian moorings for some time, Jon. Nothing should surprise you."

The door to the staff room slammed open and Rex Kane appeared carrying a stack of textbooks with titles like *Quantitative Research: Is There a Difference?*; *Pair Off into Threes: Physical Education and Content Area Reading*; and *Positing a Constructivist Paradigmatic Methodology: Basketball Skills in the New Millennium*. He wore a wrinkled t-shirt that said, "Reading: The Last Bastion for Scoundrels." The PE. teacher looked exhausted.

"This class is killing me," he moaned. He dropped the textbooks on the table where they slid haphazardly in front of Toomer and Kleinhut.

Sam said, "Not now, Kane. Kleinhut needs our help. He's in trouble with VanderHaar."

"What! Did he find out about you charging your students money every time they exhibit bad posture?" asked Rex.

"No," Kleinhut scowled. "Remember, mum's the word on that. No, I was telling my students how it makes me sick the way these Hollywood stars get married and divorced over and over again, like it is nothing. It is sick!!"

"Yeah, and he said this in a class with Annabelle Rueben in it," explained Sam.

"Oh. Yeah, I can see how that might be a problem," said Rex.

Annabelle Rueben's mother had just gotten divorced for the second time.

"But it shouldn't be a problem," Kleinhut said. "I mean, I'm sorry that Annabelle is suffering with her mom breaking up yet another marriage, and maybe I could have been more sensitive in how I made my point. I'll be the first to admit that. But, still, the truth is on my side. The Bible could not be clearer about the sanctity of marriage. Divorce breaks God's heart."

"PREACH IT, BROTHER!" Toomer shouted, his eyes closed and his fist pumping in the air. Being Bedlam's only charismatic

southern Baptist, he was prone to such displays. Rex stepped back uncomfortably. He had seen this sort of behavior from the biology teacher several times before, including last fall at an in-service where, in the middle of prayer, Toomer had appeared to begin speaking in tongues. It turned out he was just choking on a peanut, but his garbled words had made a lasting impression on Rex nonetheless. Rex never knew how to respond after such a display. Was he talking to Toomer or to the Holy Spirit?

"Um," Rex said, scratching at the floor with the toe of his running shoe, "I know that you're right about the Scriptures, but don't forget what the ancient Roman poet Ludicrus once said: 'When the bee flies straight, the honey runs dry.'"

Toomer's hand drifted to his lap as his eyes opened in befuddlement.

"Rex, that doesn't even make sense," said Kleinhut, breaking the spell of Rex's non-sequitur. "Besides, I don't think Ludicrus ever said anything like that. Wasn't he the guy who wrote the Iliad?"

"No," said Rex confidently, "that was Sillius, I believe."

Kleinhut sighed. "Look, the point is, our exalted Principal can't stop me from speaking the truth. The Bible says that divorce is wrong. I ought to be allowed to tell my students what the Bible says, right?"

Rex kicked one of his textbooks aside so that he could take a seat at the head of the table between Toomer and Kleinhut. He leaned forward and said quietly, "Did I ever tell you about Principal VanderHaar's three sisters?"

Kleinhut sensed a conspiracy and leaned in, as did Toomer. Rex began.

"VanderHaar grew up in New Jersey, where I taught for a while, fresh out of college. The word on the street was that his oldest sister, Varya, I think her name was, got married to a long-haul trucker. After they had been married for only three months, Varya found out that her husband had been married to two other women in different states. She got a divorce." Rex looked at his audience. They were utterly absorbed in his gossip. He went on.

"His next oldest sister, Anya, married a guy who worked as a clown for the 'Bunkum Brothers' Circus. Turned out he had quite a temper. VanderHaar visited her out of the blue one time and she had two black eyes. VanderHaar got her out of there to somewhere safe. Later he took her to a lawyer to get a divorce." Kleinhut's eyes were getting bigger. Rex continued.

"The third sister was named Dunyasha. She didn't marry until quite late in life. She married a pastor. Turned out he stole money from the church. They went through counseling. He got a job as a chaplain at a hospital. Then he was caught stealing money from there. Again they went through a counseling program. Two

months later he left her. Took all their money with him. They never heard from him again except for a postcard that said he had moved to Tibet. Her divorce was finalized earlier this year. So the topic of divorce might be a little sensitive to VanderHaar."

"Okay, I can see that," said Kleinhut. "But those women all got divorces because of good reasons. These Hollywood people seem to get divorced just for the fun of it. That isn't the same thing."

Rex leaned in again. "Do you know why Annabelle's mother got divorced?"

His expression abashed, Toomer looked at him expectantly, but Kleinhut broke the spell.

"That's not going to wash, Rex" he insisted. "VanderHaar's sisters might have legitimate, biblical reasons for their divorces, but Annabelle's mother was running around with a guy barely out of high school. She had an affair. Her situation is not analogous to VanderHaar's sisters."

"Ah," said Rex, smiling. "But let me remind you of another saying of Ludicrus: 'The bee attracts more bears with honey than with vinegar.'"

Stupified, Kleinhut shook his head. Toomer, however, nodded thoughtfully and jumped back into the conversation. "This scares me, but I think I know exactly what you're trying to say, Rex. But let me explain it in a different way. You know, the good book does say, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' And the Gospel of John celebrates Jesus as one full of grace and truth. Maybe Kleinhut here was full of truth, but he wasn't showing much grace. Or in the words of I Corinthians 13, 'If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge



... but have not love, I am nothing."

Kleinhut breathed a deep sigh, uttering one last heartless protest: "But divorce is a sin."

Rex smiled again. Frankly his smile was a bit unnerving. "I like that idea Kleinhut. Maybe we ought to talk about all the sins, so students will know about them. Like, maybe you could talk to them about how cheating on your income tax is a form of stealing." Now Kleinhut looked sheepish.

Rex stood up and began gathering up his graduate school textbooks. He was just reaching for the last one when Toomer asked him a question. "What about you, Rex? Kleinhut and I have both admitted to our

sinfulness. Are you some kind of perfect saint or something?"

Rex placed the final book atop the pile. It was a tattered copy of *The Plays of Anton Chekhov, Abridged*. "Not at all, my dear chap. As it happens, I am a habitual liar. Good day." ☺

We welcome Jane Hoogendam as a new columnist for CEJ.

by Jane Hoogendam

Jane Hoogendam (vprincipal@knox.christian) is the special education teacher and vice-principal (curriculum) at Knox Christian School in Bowmanville, Ontario.

One of my hobbies is gardening. Looking out my living room window to where the garden is supposed to be, all I see is a huge mountain of snow. Perusing through and looking at the beautiful pictures in the seed catalogue remind me that this blustery, snowy, picturesque winter will end! Once spring comes, there's nothing more exciting than bending over in the warm sun and tucking the little bean and marigold seeds into the dark earth.

The basil and kale plants that are stretching in the windowsill to reach the sun are elated to be transplanted into their new home. Summer comes, the weeds grow like gangbusters; but with care, a hoe and perseverance, the plants develop into food for the table and flowers to decorate the house or to bring joy to a shut-in.

Child gardens

Teaching and parenting is much like gardening. Parents surround infants with language and learning, love and nurture. When they start school at the age of four or five, they grow and develop and before long become confident students, eager to read and write and explore as God's children.

Reflect on how often you read and write in a day? Have you ever imagined a world without reading? Think of the joy of the wind and snow howling outside, and you curled up on the couch reading a good novel. Or the fun and laughter as you read Robert Munsch books to your children? I know my 90-year-old mother waits every other week for the mail to come and bring in the newest *Christian Courier*. How about when you play a good game of Scrabble on-line with your friend? Or the daily crossword puzzle? Words and language are essential to our world and open many doors into God's amazing world.

Print-rich environment

How can we encourage our children to read? How can we as teachers and schools promote reading beyond the daily classroom assignments? Reading is actually "thinking cued by written language," and effective readers "think within the text, beyond the text, and about the text" (*Educational Leadership*, Oct. 2005, p.25). We live in a print-rich environment and are constantly bombarded by print, yet are not producing a nation of readers. We need to teach our children to be discerning and responsible stewards of God's kingdom. We need to give them the tools to be astute readers and writers for the future. We need to challenge

our students to read, not just novels, but newspapers and articles, Internet sources, non-fiction books, and discussions on issues such as the environment and responsibility. With homes and schools working hand in hand, we need to challenge our children to "harvest a garden of stories." We need to instill a joy of reading and a love for language. This is such a gift that God has given the human race.

Here are just a few ideas for schools:

- Make the library the heart of your school. Storytelling is essential for children to have books come alive. Computers are an important resource, but cannot replace books and especially storytelling.
- Have community members, parents, grandparents, other special friends, come into the school and read with the younger children, or listen to them read. Here's a chance to bring community members into the school. We started this program last year, and the children and the special friends can't wait for it to happen every week.
- As parents and teachers, serve as story-reading models for your children.
- Join a book club in your community or set up a book club for your students to share good novels.
- Join community events like "Battle of the Books" with other schools in the area to challenge young readers to sharpen their reading skills and venture into new types of literature. I'm just getting into the thick of the action in "Inkheart" by Cornelia Funke. It's very intriguing and I'm not sure where it's going. (This is one of our "Battle" books this year.)

A garden of stories

My garden produced well last fall. We had an abundance of rain in the summer, and the plants rejoiced. Only the Brussels sprouts didn't do very well. I planted four plants and I harvested five sprouts. What happened? My theory is that the rain went into the *development* of the plant, and the plant forgot to bear fruit. It could be that I pruned the plant too early or too late. It could be that the seed was not productive. But we enjoyed the five sprouts anyway! Once again, I had enough zucchini that I had to hide them in the cars at church. And my kale is feeding our family as well as many other families. We seed and nurture and harvest and God watches all things. Is this not the way of education as well? Let the seeds of knowledge bear fruit. God is the great inspiration, the master teacher, reader, and writer. Is not the Word of God the most awesome garden of stories? ☺

What Constitutes a Teacher's Authority?

by Ken Badley

Ken Badley (kbadley@georgefox.edu) is Director of the Doctorate in Education Program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

Ask teachers to tell a story about teacher authority, and they might tell you about a disciplinary confrontation in a classroom. Perhaps you would hear about several students who decided to protest publicly their own grades on an assignment and the whole grading framework for that assignment. Or maybe a student decided that the teacher did not have the right to expect full attention while giving some instructions.

All teachers deal with the question of their authority. Anecdotes like these may mislead us into thinking that the teacher's authority relates only to classroom management, or that it follows some simple formula suggested in a trade book about classroom management. In fact, authority comes from many sources and in many forms. Teachers gain and spend their authority every hour of every teaching day. In what follows I will review ten kinds of authority and then explore briefly how they combine in classrooms to give teachers the room we need to conduct their educational program

Charisma — Some people gain authority simply because of their personality traits. Other people are drawn to them and want to please them because they remind them of certain actors, politicians, students, teachers, speakers, singers and athletes. Sometimes charismatic people gain authority even when they lack expertise in the area in which they are being granted authority. In all likelihood, Robin Williams can act funnier and Julie Roberts can look more thoughtful than I or most of my readers can. Still, real classroom teachers face comparisons to actors such as Williams in *Dead Poets Society* or Roberts in *Mona Lisa*

Smile. Granted, some teachers do strike students as similar to this or that fictional teacher, and they thereby gain a certain pedagogical advantage. The fact, however, that most of us lack the qualities portrayed on screen likely indicates that our real authority as teachers must ultimately derive from other sources.

Expertise and competence — When I call a technician to fix my computer, I grant that person authority based on my assumption of his or her expertise. All of us presume — usually rightly — that people oc-

“People seem to grant men authority more quickly than they grant it to women.”

cupy the positions they do as technicians, pilots, social workers and so on because they have expertise in their respective fields. Sometimes, of course, designated experts lack expertise, and those they serve go away disappointed, concluding that the so-called *experts* were not authorities after all. As teachers, we take satisfaction when others trust our expertise on such matters as when to expect a child to read or what methods work best for students to gain understanding of difficult concepts like *synecdoche* or *valence*. Whether negative or positive, these cases point to the importance of this kind or source of authority.

Constituted or official — When schools and other organizations work as they should, people with expertise occupy offices that bring with them formal authority. According to a jurisdiction's laws or an organization's bylaws, someone may have the authority to serve as president until

the next election or as treasurer until next year's annual meeting. A student may serve as sports co-ordinator on student council until next June. Obviously, the teacher's contract fits into this category. Sadly, the worlds of politics and education both furnish examples where someone retained an office despite having failed to prove his or her competence and expertise. But many beginning teachers, and some veteran teachers, over-estimate the importance to students of their official authority, or their occupation of an office; any person attempting to carry out the duties of an office based on constituted authority alone will almost certainly encounter difficulties.

Traditional — Some cultures recognize that a certain kind of authority comes with age. Out of respect for the elderly — and perhaps because we think they have gained some wisdom — we listen when they speak and may take heed of what they say. Some might object that cynicism and irony have spread so deeply through Western society that students no longer grant traditional authority. Certainly, no teacher will get by on age alone, and in some settings, age may serve as a disadvantage, but I will argue shortly that most students, in their hearts, function with a winsome age-blindness in their granting or withholding of teacher authority.

Divine authority — Many people suppose that authority derives from a divine warrant — a situation that exists in churches, in families, in schools and even in certain societies. I will not take on the task here of sorting through the varied understandings of this attitude. Nor do I wish to pursue the question of whether a claimed divine warrant can be proven, although we all usually recognize that this question of proof usually leaves those expected to respond to claims of divine authority in a bit of a quandary. I do wish to point out that, except in the rarest of cases, claiming a

divine mandate will not advance most teachers' educational program in today's classrooms. In fact, as *Saved*, the unflattering 2004 film about a Christian school, made quite clear, claiming divine authority may work against any teacher or school that fails to satisfy several other student-specified criteria. Thankfully, most of us know teachers whose character and passion produce the opposite effect from that portrayed in *Saved*.

Money — Money has a certain kind of power, but we likely don't call it *authority*. People do things for money, but, if they do them only for money, we don't credit the person who pays with much authority. In fact, we typically get sceptical about people who try to buy their way into people's favor. This observation about the questionable authority (or, more likely, *power*) that money brings gives a certain perspective to explicit classroom rewards such as candy. Every school staff includes a few teachers who would never dream of using candy, a few others who swear by it, and still others who try to negotiate a middle path with points jars (or one of a thousand variants) that lead to whole-classroom rewards at certain thresholds. My task here is not to examine the current culture of assessment, but I wonder if grades themselves fit partly into this category.

Coercion — A long-time educator once said to me that in a fallen world there would always be school bells, by which he meant that none of us will always do all we should entirely of our own accord. Classroom teachers at every level know that coercion remains an element of our authority. To be blunt, we *make* our students do things. In our honest moments, we admit that we sometimes need some compulsion ourselves to encourage us to attend to our tasks. Outside our classrooms, we recognize that a kind of authority or power comes from the threat of state or

private action against a person. We pay taxes for many reasons, one being that the government accountant is *not* simply a private citizen when she says that we owe tax: she can have the government take us to court if we refuse. Authoritarian governments, of course, constantly use such state instruments as kangaroo courts and secret police to enforce their power. Interestingly, when they do so, we make another linguistic distinction: we say that they lack legitimacy. In these circumstances, citizens may hate the government and obey it only

"Some cultures recognize that a certain kind of authority comes with age."

out of fear or resignation. This exploration of legitimate and illegitimate government reveals something about classrooms. Coercion does give a kind of power to us as teachers, but to the degree that it increases student fear or resignation, it diminishes their curiosity and possibly undermines the learning process. If this account rings true, then as teachers we must find another framework to produce the classroom conditions necessary for learning and teaching to occur.

Self-authorization — In the film, *Catch Me if You Can*, Leonardo de Caprio played the role of real-life fraudster who got authority simply because he acted in a certain way and put himself in certain positions. In one powerful scene, he dressed as an airline pilot and strolled through an airport. Those around him treated him as if he were a pilot. No one authorized him to fly a plane, or to dress in the uniform of

those who do. But he authorized himself to walk and dress as if he were a pilot, and those around him — given their ignorance — responded appropriately. (Jack Black authorized himself to teach in *School of Rock*, but most readers probably agree with my excluding that title from my list of teacher films.) I am not suggesting here that as teachers we commit fraud. But the character in *Catch Me if You Can* has something to teach us teachers: at the start of the term, at the start of each lesson, at the start of an assembly or concert or parent interview, we need to do just that — start. We need to authorize ourselves. The percentage of people in front of us who are actually waiting or hoping that we will do what teachers do in the circumstances will vary depending on their age and a number of other conditions. Even with a high percentage prepared to allow us to exercise our teacherly role, we still need to authorize ourselves. When that percentage is low — say when a small group of students has openly opposed a decision we have made — then our need for self-authorization is even greater.

Passion and conviction — Perhaps not so much a form of authority as a source, passion and conviction usually bring a measure of authority to teachers, and, recognizably, to people in many other settings. In some settings, people convince us partly because of their commitment to their views. On the other hand, if we think that people hold irrational convictions, their passion convinces us more fully of their error. Perhaps strength of conviction only serves to intensify our pre-existent assessments. Related to the question of the teacher's authority, the research on good teaching consistently identifies the twin themes of excitement about learning and passion for the subject. Teachers who send the message, covertly or overtly, that they would rather be somewhere else will pro-

duce a similar effect in students. Teachers who consistently send the message that they could not wait to get to school, or to this unit, or to be with their students, gain authority with their students and a concomitant increase in freedom to deliver their educational program. My own regular exclamation, "I can't believe they pay me money to study this with you!" has never diminished my pool of student goodwill.

Goodwill, moral or consensual — When people prove trustworthy over the long term and others then willingly obey or follow their directions, we say that they have gained *moral authority*. In ordinary speech, we say that a government that has lost its moral authority while retaining the constitutional right to rule has lost its people's *consent*, or its *legitimacy*, a word that we suggested earlier as the antithesis of raw power. Examples of the opposite also come to mind. While Nelson Mandela remained in prison in South Africa, he had no constituted authority, but people throughout the world granted him great moral authority. Goodwill — moral authority — functions centrally in successful classrooms, a matter we will return to shortly.

We know that teachers' authority derives from many sources other than the ten that I have catalogued above. For example, people seem to grant men authority more quickly than they grant it to women. Teachers gain authority — a good reputation — if students consistently learn in their classrooms. Some gain a kind of authority, or, possibly, popularity, through involvement in a school's sports, drama or music program. We will not explore these possible categories here.

Our catalogue, then, includes these kinds or sources of authority: charismatic, expertise or competence, official or constituted, traditional, divine, money, coercion, self-authorization, passion or conviction, and, finally, goodwill, moral or consen-

sual. Think of the successful teachers you know, and you will agree that no two teachers seem to possess the same combination of elements. But the careful observer will see some common themes.

The teacherly office

Most students are willing to recognize that teachers have bad days, that we don't know everything, and that we won't always

"Classroom teachers at every level know that coercion remains an element of authority."

be on top of our preparation and grading. But students, administrators and parents, generally speaking, expect expertise. Most teachers expect it of themselves. Thus, I suggest that we consider *expertise* a minimum condition. Because we can all think of outstanding teachers who lack charisma, we refuse to claim that as necessary; perhaps it is not even typical. Informal settings where great learning occurs illustrate that teachers do not need certificated or constituted authority, although we ordinarily expect that in formal classrooms. We know that young people can succeed as teachers, so we omit traditional authority as a necessary condition. Likewise, recognizing that non-Christians can teach well and that many Christians refrain from claiming too loudly any divine warrant for their day-to-day classroom work, I suggest that a divine warrant is not a necessary condition. I noted earlier that material rewards and coercion have the potential to harm

or help the educational enterprise.

We are left then with expertise as a minimum condition and some combination of passion, self-authorization and goodwill. To carry out the duties specified in our contracts or to teach what the curriculum guide or our own plans specify, we teachers need the consent — the cooperation — of our students. The nautical term *freeboard* — the distance between the waterline and the boat's gunwale — may help us here. As teachers, we need freeboard to carry out our program. Charisma, coercion and rewards may be necessary here and there and in the short term. But for long-term success, we need to be courageous enough to authorize ourselves to stand up and begin our class, to answer a question, to decide how to respond to a hundred requests, to intervene in a conflict.

And we need to show that we have passion for our subject. Most of all, we need to earn the consent and goodwill of our students — moral authority — by consistently showing care for those students and by creating a culture of curiosity, wisdom, trust and respect. Teachers who create that culture in the classroom will find less need to rely on other kinds of authority when faced with challenges to our authority. But more to my point here, we will enjoy greater success every day in our efforts to carry out the educational program set before us.



Helping Children to Learn Social Skills

Tena Siebenga-Valstar (tvalstar@telus.net) is currently living in Calgary, Alberta, in "an in-between space," waiting on the Lord's direction. She is also supporting her husband by commuting with him to serve in a part-time ministry position in Central Alberta.

Teaching how to share

Question #1:

Sharing is a great way to promote social interaction. What are some useful prompts to give children in order to promote and exercise sharing?

Response:

Young children learn social skills from their family and caregivers. They can help them learn social skills by teaching them to share toys and games and take turns when playing with others. When encountering a situation in a setting of coloring or drawing with a preschool child where the child wants all of the pencils or crayons, an adult can say, "Davis, you use the red crayon first, and, after a while, Grayson will have a turn to use it." It is important to speak the words used in sharing so the young child becomes familiar with them. In a play situation use the words such as, "Now it is Jolene's turn to ride the tractor. In a while it will be your turn."

Use games to teach children to take turns. Involve them in games with older children by being the younger child's partner and modeling how taking turns happens. In a prekindergarten or kindergarten setting, the child who does not know how to take turns may be partnered with a child who has already learned to do so. The teacher or any adult can make a point of praising the child who has already learned the behavior so that others will observe what acceptable behavior looks and sounds like. Words such as, "Caleb and Jacob, you can share that bottle. Caleb can carry it to the gym, and Jacob can carry it back" uses the words and describes the action required.

Since a timid child may not know how to initiate sharing, the teacher may have to help. The teacher may say, "In five minutes we are going to have free time," meaning, the children can play with whatever they wish. Since Kyler, however, is shy, the teacher may ask, "Kyler, what would you like to play with? Is there anyone you would like to play with?" Upon receiving a response like "I would like Deymen and Bryn to play with me in the building center," the teacher says, "OK, I will ask Deymen and Bryn to come to the building center. When they do, you ask them, 'Deymen and Bryn, will you play with me?'" Once the

timid child realizes that his classmates will respond to him, he may interact with them more often.

When children enter elementary school, it is often assumed that they know how to share. If, however, their actions indicate that they do not, words to describe actions have to be used. I have often heard teachers say to their students, "Use your words," meaning that the one child must tell the other what they want or how they are feeling about a certain situation. Rather than having a physical reaction, children can be taught to complete a sentence such as "I feel sad because ..." when another child does not share or when feelings are hurt. As children engage in group-learning activities, teachers must carefully describe the guidelines rather than assume the children will know how to take turns or equally contribute to the project. The teacher may have to ask, "What does sharing look like in this situation?" or "What does cooperation look like as you do this project?" By participating in a post-evaluation session of how they all contributed, students will hear how their involvement is viewed by their peers. Here, again, students must be given appropriate words (written or happy faces) so as not to destroy others' sense of confidence.

As a sense of community is built in the classroom, questions such as the following will be common: "Has everyone been included? Is there anyone else who would like to contribute? Emma, did you have a turn? A comment such as "Last time the boys were first so today it is the girls' turn" will be normal. Jesus' teaching of "The last shall be first" (Matt. 19:30) turns individualistic thinking upside down and causes us to look to the good of everyone rather than to the benefit of the individual. The hope is that, when a teacher chooses this direction, children will sense that they are created in God's image — worthy of respect and an important part of the classroom community.

Addressing early bullying

Question #2:

I have seen a student get physical with teachers when he or she does not get a turn right away. If another student gets to pick a game, that student will start to yell until someone says, "OK, you can pick the game." That's not fair to the other students. How do you control the student's behavior so he knows how to take turns?

Response:

Your question indicates that the student has not learned to share or take turns as is addressed in the previous question and answer. It is apparent that the child is thinking only of himself. His ac-



Tena Siebenga-Valstar
tvalstar@telus.net

tions indicate that there is a problem with self-control and that bullying behavior is coming to the fore.

Getting physical with a teacher is something that must not be tolerated regardless of the age of the child. There could be reasons (learned or otherwise) why the child is acting this way, but the physical attack on a teacher must have immediate consequences, including administrative and parental involvement. It could be that the child sees adults in other settings acting aggressively and therefore follows this action. The child must know that this action is not acceptable in a school setting.

The teacher should follow the school's discipline policy, which likely addresses this kind of behavior, and the school administration should take action. Part of the discipline would be to get help for the child. The root word of discipline is "disciple," and one of the goals of Christian education is to have students become followers of Christ. The child, along with the parents, will have to "paint a picture" of how a follower of Christ acts and speaks. Jesus refers to this kind of situation indirectly when he says, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34, Luke 6:45).


A preschooler's action may get out of control because he has not yet learned to verbalize what he needs or wants. He must be taught to use words in an appropriate manner. If inappropriate actions and words have become a habit, the child may need some time to think about and retract what has been said. Forgiveness is an integral part of this discipline.

It is important not to give in to the child's aggressive behavior. Negative behavior is often a call for attention. Since reacting to such behavior with yelling and intense emotion rewards the child with a sense of power, attention and involvement. Avoid giving such behavior undue attention, instead, calmly state in a quiet voice what you want the child to do — for example, "I want you to stop yelling and stand outside the door." Repeat this as often as is necessary. Once you have dissipated the crisis and involved the classmates in an alternate activity, talk quietly to the child outside the hearing of the others. If, during the altercation, the child refused to calm down, ask the other students to leave the room to go a predetermined place, thus leaving the child without an audience.

You will need support in these actions. Administration should

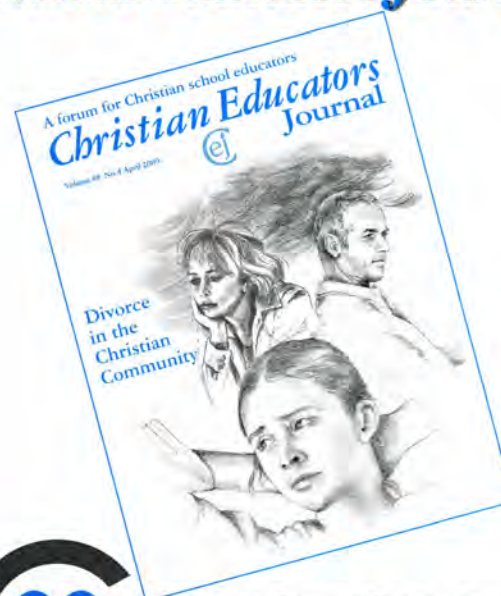
be aware that you are dealing with this type of situation and should be involved in the strategies needed for corrective action. Other teachers will have to be involved, not only for back-up but also to care for your students should the latter action be taken.

Use a phone or intercom system, if they are available, to enlist the help of others.

When the child realizes that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated, that there are other ways in which to get his needs met, and that alternate ways of behaving are more rewarding, his behavior will hopefully change over time. 

"As a sense of community is built in the classroom, questions such as the following will be common: "Has everyone been included?"

***Proud to be part of the
Christian Educators Journal.***



**CUSTOM
PRINTERS**

2801 Oak Industrial Drive NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505
www.customprinters.com

Book Reviews

Children Front and Center

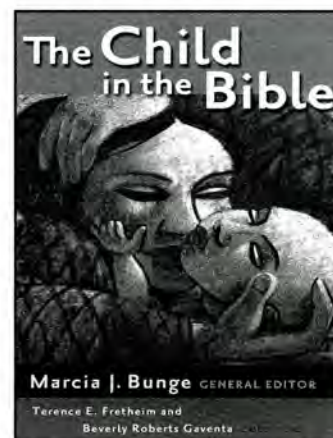
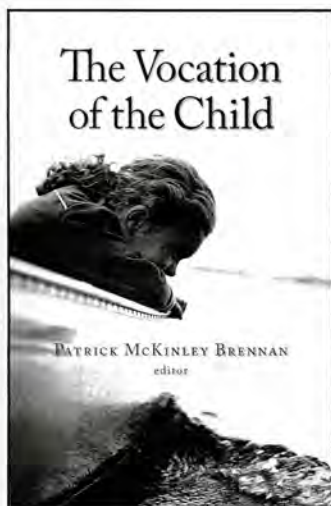
Eerdmans Publishing Co. has just published two substantial books on the subject of children. The books deserve notice now, though more substantial reviews may appear later. The following comments are only a thin flashlight beam pointing to these two fine anthologies of essays dealing with those lovable and exasperating beings we call children. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)

The first is *The Vocation of the Child*, edited by Patrick McKinley Brennan. The essayists contend that children are more than adults-in-the-making, not to be taken seriously until they reach an acceptable level of maturity. Childhood has its own integrity, and the Lord assigns them their own vocation. Such ideas prompt ancillary questions. To whom does the child belong?

Those who advocate as early a breach as possible with the parents to promote autonomy? The teacher who presumes to know the child better than the parents? The State? Legal pronouncements about “the best interests of the child”? The essays achieve a consensus that the parents, despite their imperfections, sustain a distinct relationship to the child for which no outside agency can or should substitute. The authors provide a rich historical feast as they inform us how other nations at other times, from the Greeks to the present, have viewed these problems.

In combination, these sixteen essays explore almost every possible aspect of child formation. The book is part of a series, “Religion, Marriage, and Family,” edited by Don S. Browning and John Witte Jr. 2008, 431 pages plus indices, PB, \$36.00.

The Child in the Bible, edited by Marcia J. Bunge and others, breaks new ground in this well-informed, carefully focused study of the concept of childhood in the Bible — from the role actual children play, such as Isaac and the servant girl in Naaman’s household — to the broader sense of relationships of children within the family and community. And attitudes towards children vary dramatically — from love to hate, from delight to fear — fear of the child as a threat. And the authors deal with the metaphors which childhood prompts, such as Jesus saying, “I will not leave you as orphans,” or Paul’s use of childbirth as a metaphor. Truth to tell, biblical scholarship has been carried out by adults and for adults. These nineteen essayists are highly competent biblical scholars who make good their claim that their work, with the implications for the study of religion and various religious traditions, fills an embarrassing gap in Biblical studies. Published in 2008, 422 pages plus 44 pages of indices, bibliography and other appendices. PB, \$30.00. €



Helping Our Children Grow in Faith

So much in Robert Keeley’s book about nurturing children in the churches applies as well to day schools that this notice seems necessary. After all, church and school serve the same children, and overlapping is not only unavoidable but desirable.

True, much of the material — such as the question of whether children should be segregated for worship and what roles they should be encouraged to play in the church community — does apply to church settings. But the chapters on Jesus’ high regard

for children, on the importance of acknowledging the mysteries of the Christian faith, on the power of narrative, and the role of obedience and faith all have relevance for any classroom involving children. Keeley emphasizes that, although in the final analysis faith is a gift of God, people have an enormous responsibility in the process and can and do have a powerful impact on the lives of the children whom they teach.

Robert Keely, Professor of Education at Calvin College and

Robert J. Keeley, *Helping our Children Grow in Faith: How the Church Can Nurture the Spiritual Development of Kids*. Grand Rapids: 2008. Baker Books. 128 pages plus 27 pages of appendices, including a list of picture books, notes to chapters, and bibliography.

Report by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)




Steve J. Van Der Weele
svweele@calvin.edu

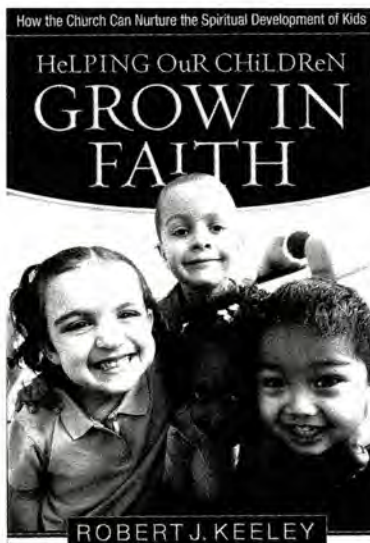
codirector with his wife, Laura, of children's ministries in a CRC church, sets out to define what he calls Three Dimensional Faith — a fusion of head, heart, and spirit. He provides six principles important in nurturing children, ten requirements for an authoritative community, (as formulated by **Hardwire to Connect**), Fowler's six stages of faith development, Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, and Kohlberg's six stages of moral development. All these apply to children in a variety of settings — including, of course, their own homes. But Keeley sets these convenient paradigms in the context of his own experience and observation. His many stories and examples richly illuminate his argument.

Internal response

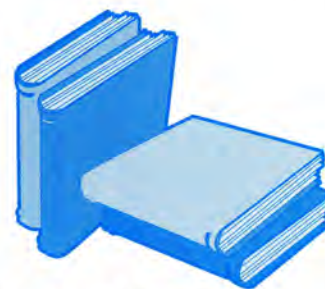
I found Chapter 5, "The Power of Story," particularly well done. Keeley issues some good reminders. The Bible is presented as narrative, as the chronicle of redemptive history. Thus, it includes many individual stories. The temptation for teachers is to regard a given story — say, the story of Aaron and Hur holding up Moses'

arms, or of the Esther story — as a lesson plan for the Bible hour. The temptation is to reduce the story to a one-line moral statement, such as (incorrectly) stating that the Aaron and Hur story illustrates the value of friendships. To be sure, at some point the relevance of the story for the child should be established. But this must be done with care, with finesse, with sensitivity, and with respect to the integrity of the story.

He observes, "Taking on a view that each story in the Bible must have a direct life application puts an unreasonable expectation on the story." (87) The metaphor, or story, must be given a chance to exercise its imaginative power in the mind of the child. His or her response will more likely be an internal one — shaping attitudes at a deep level — rather than one requiring short-term external adjustments. Anyone involved in children's ministries in his or her church should consult this book. Beginning teachers in a day school will find the relevant parts of it valuable, and experienced teachers will find encouragement and pleasant reminders. 



From My Bookshelf...



Graphic Novels for the High School Classroom

Bill Boerman-Cornell

In North America, the comic book format has long been associated with superheroes beating each other up; or ducks, mice, and other anthropomorphic figures engaging in hyginks galore. In much of Europe, for the last thirty years or more, the comic book format has been used to tell serious stories with significant themes.

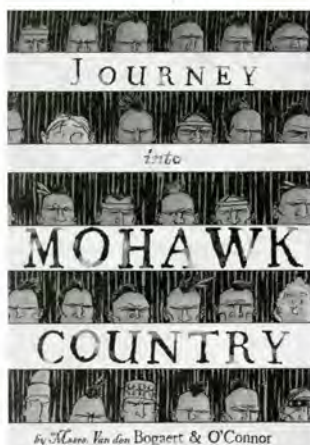
In the last five years, graphic novels have been gaining ground, and more and more teachers are using them in class. The following are two graphic novels that could be useful in high school

Two professors from Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, recommend three books to teachers.

content area teaching.

Journey into Mohawk Country by H.M. Van den Bogaert, adapted by George O'Connor.

In the winter of 1634, a Dutch explorer set out with a small party from the tiny new colony of New Amsterdam to look for new trade routes in what would become upstate New York and Ontario. His journal chronicles his struggles with difficult weather, his interactions with the Mohawk people, and his eventual return home. Van den Bogaert's story is fascinating, but his seventeenth-century prose could be a bit daunting for high school history students. O'Connor's images and comic book layouts bring



the story to life and allow students to read the original words while connecting them to particular characters and situations. This would be an especially useful book to help students learn how to work with primary source documents.

The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam by Ann Marie Fleming.

Fleming is a Japanese-Canadian who became interested in some family stories about her grandfather, who had worked as a magician. As she investigated, she soon

discovered that her grandfather had been one of the most popular magicians on the vaudeville circuit, sharing playbills with Harry Houdini and the Marx Brothers. As she interviews people who knew him, what began as a story about her famous grandfather becomes a journey of discovering her own identity. Fleming's revelations about the meaning of ethnicity, culture, nationality, and family help define what it means to belong and not to belong. She tells her story using brightly-colored comics, black and white photographs, original documents, and drawings.

This graphic novel could be most helpful for English teachers who want to explore with their students the nature of the memoir, or who need examples of how to convey a narrative using words and images. Fleming's journey into her family's past will hold the attention of brighter middle school students and most high school students.

Bill Boerman-Cornell is an assistant professor of Education at Trinity Christian College.

Windows into the World of ADHD

Pete Post

In my SPED 216 — Introduction to Special Education — course at Trinity Christian College, I require that all of my students read



and report on a book written by a person that has a disability or by the parents of a child with special needs. I want my students to experience a first-hand account of not only the challenges but also the blessings that may come about because of a person being different. *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* by David Michael Carrillo has quickly become a class favorite. David Michael is a Christian speaker and musician who speaks and writes quite candidly about having ADHD — attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

One of the admitted reasons for the book's popularity is that it is short — just 91 pages — giving the beleaguered college student a brief respite from much of the technical information required in challenging coursework. But the real strength of this account is its genuineness, and a number of students have used it as a springboard to enter into discussion about their own struggles with maintaining the discipline of paying attention to long lectures or detailed textbooks.

David writes about his early failures in school and his feeling as if God had made a mistake in creating him. He includes the lyrics of a song that he has written about his mother getting the news that her son would be different — defined by four little letters. Through the gift of one particular teacher who allows him to present a lesson in song, David begins to work towards positive self-esteem. And when he is asked to sing a song that he has written at the funeral of a student killed in the Columbine disaster, David comes to praise God for the unique way that he was created to comfort others and praise him.

The book concludes with a list of suggestions for helping parents and students with ADHD to live "their colorful life." This is a nice addition for a school library and something that a parent and child could possibly read together to identify challenges and seek ways to make progress in succeeding despite differences.

The book can be found through David Michael's website at www.gentlewindmusic.com.

Pete Post is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at Trinity Christian College. ©

