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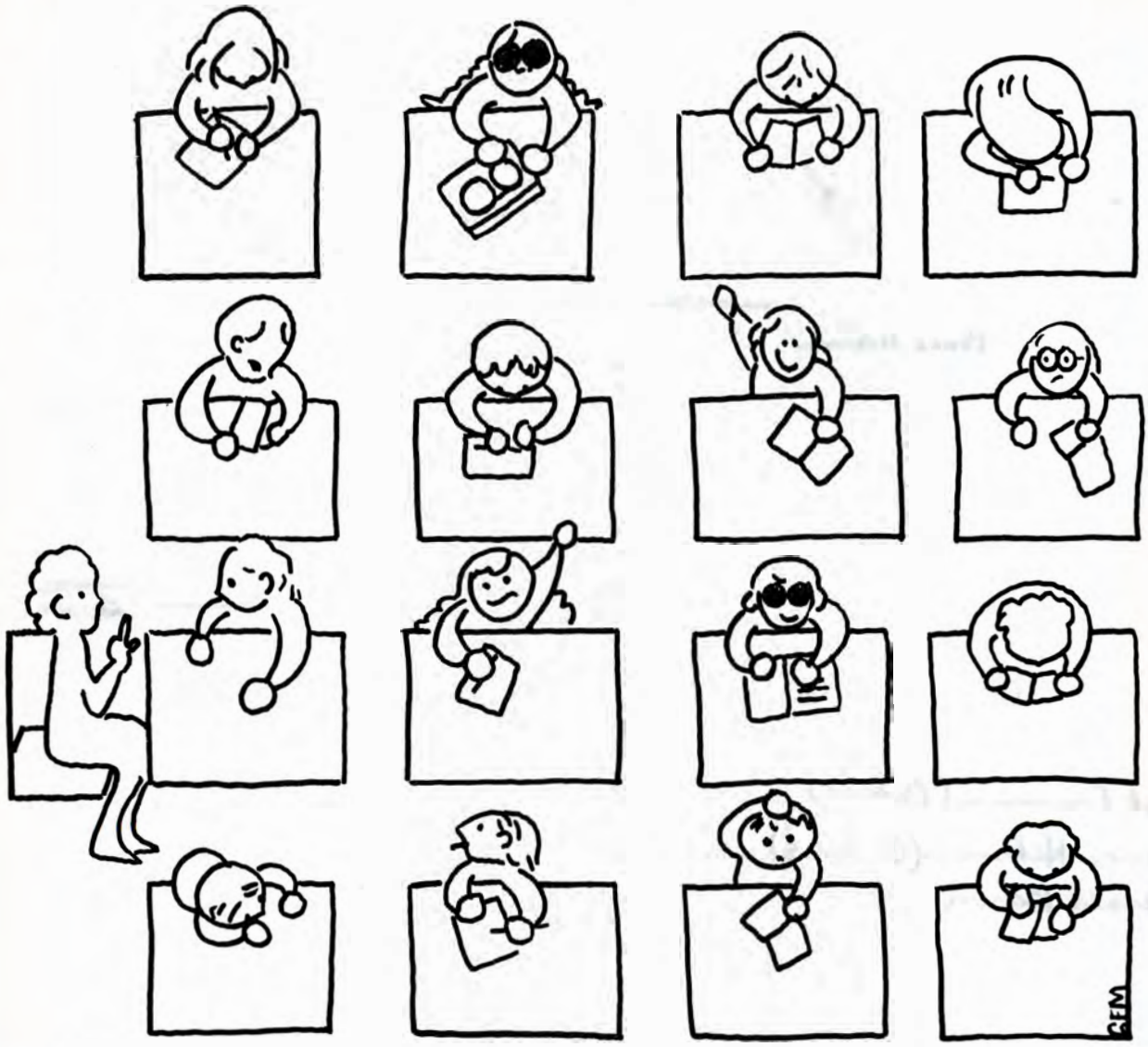

The Exceptional Learner:

IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS
IN SPECIAL CLASSROOMS
PARENT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS

christian educators journal

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MAY 1975

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Guest Editorial:

Now Is the Time

There is a right time for everything:
A time to plant;
A time to harvest;
A time to be quiet;
A time to speak up.

These four lines from Ecclesiastes 3 summarize the concern for the exceptional learner in this special issue.

Whenever and wherever teachers get together and discuss the joys and frustrations of the classroom teacher, it is the frustrations that dominate the discussions. Teachers are not negative people by nature or else they would not become teachers. In fact, teachers are born optimists, optimistic about their ability to teach and optimistic about the students' ability to learn. And yet, there is this frustration.

Parents too, are optimistic. They chose the school, support it, finance it, and are involved in its affairs because they believe in their child and what the school can do to prepare the child for life. Most parents are pleased but some are frustrated because their child is not learning as well as he or she should.

I remember that when my children started school they were so excited. I prayed that God would guide them and help the teacher to develop each special talent, all God-given talents. But there are students who no longer share this enthusiasm, this wonderful excitedness. They too are frustrated. For some students, the class pace is too fast, for others too slow. Some cannot read the book and others regard it as being sissy.

Now is the right time to speak up and examine our collective frustrations: those of Teacher-Parent-Child. What can we do in the classroom? We do not have to be specialists to implement the suggestions made in the articles in this special issue. Reading difficulties can be eased in both the two and eight-room school building. Learning need not be dull for Susan who has read everything in sight, and for Johnny who is struggling to get a D−.

Life is for real and learning should also be real. What we plant we harvest. Turn the page and learn how to plant in those frustrating places. There is a right time for everything.

Jack Zondag
Chairman, Special Issue Committee

SECTION I.

THE EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER: IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS

Mainstreaming Deaf Students

Harriet Vande Kamp*

The deaf students enrolled at Hope Haven School for the Handicapped are part of a unique program. Ten deaf students formerly in Hope Haven are now in the Rock Valley Christian School.

The Process

It all started last school year when three students with impaired hearing were integrated in the sixth-grade classroom for three subjects, Bible, math, and spelling. They needed an interpreter-tutor to sign instructions given by the classroom teacher, sign classroom discussion and sometimes tutor. They also needed a classroom teacher willing to be a part of this new venture. They had both, and things worked out so well that with the consent of the board, the principal and the teacher the program was expanded this school year to ten students and three interpreters, one part time and two full time, all three trained in deaf education. The ten deaf students are in grades one, three, and six-seven. Nine of them are there for a full school day, taking five or six subjects.

Advantages

What is the advantage of such a program? The

*Harriet Vande Kamp is the interpreter for deaf students at Rock Valley Christian School, Rock Valley, Ia. She is the natural mother of one deaf girl and the foster mother of another.

socialization it provides the deaf children is phenomenal. Many of the hearing students have taken an interest in learning to sign. This results in communication between the two groups. It not only gives the deaf students an opportunity to interact with hearing peers, but also provides a situation with normal communication. When there is communication there is also learning. Because the deaf students are constantly being exposed to new vocabulary, their language skills improve. Also, being able to compete with hearing peers in extracurricular activities as well as in academics gives the deaf students a feeling of self-worth.

Academic Comparisons

How do the deaf students compare academically with hearing children? In subjects such as math and spelling where limited language and reading skills are involved, they compare very favorably. They also compare favorably in subjects that involve more reading and language skills, literature, for example, but only as a result of much study, some tutoring and persistence. Because the deaf students miss out on much everyday conversation, they have a limited vocabulary and many other language difficulties. Manual communication along with lip reading has helped improve language skills, but not enough to bridge the gap.

Classroom Atmosphere

What effect do the deaf students have on the

teachers, hearing students, and the general atmosphere of the classroom? The teachers comment that they find the program challenging and that it has added new life to the classroom. Parents of hearing children comment that exposing their children to handicapped children makes them appreciate the handicapped and broadens their horizons. The general atmosphere of the classroom remains basically unchanged.

We thank Rock Valley Christian for opening their doors to our deaf from Hope Haven. Above all we thank God, who cares for His children and provides for their every need. He leads us on.

MONTESSORI for the "Specialness" of Children

Kathryn Vander Kooi*

When I refer to the "special" child, I refer to all children because all are unique and special in their own way. Today, many educators use the term "special" when speaking about children who are unusually gifted or deprived. However, an unfortunate situation arises when children have been categorized "Special Children." First of all, a teacher is expected to give different treatment to these children. A teacher should allow each child to grow at his own pace rather than possibly hindering his growth by labeling him, but it is impossible for a teacher to know exactly where a child is on the growth continuum. Possibly, one could guess, but there are no teachers who have the quality of omniscient. We should, as educators, concentrate on developing a carefully structured environment that will allow the child to discover his own level of development and extend the opportunities for him to work from that point. The teacher in the classroom environment can give the child a variety of learning experiences. Through this the child can discover his own best route to learning; whether it be from the whole to the parts, the parts to the whole, deductively or inductively. This, in essence, is a Montessori classroom.

The assumption we start with in a Montessori classroom is that every child has some kind of deprivation, and that through a rich environment we can match those deprivations with enjoyable, constructive activities. R.C. Orem in *Montessori for the Disadvantaged* says,

> The fact is that all children suffer to some degree what would be termed, "developmental deprivation." All but at best a handful of children lack the opportunities for full realization of their various potentials in the physical, psychological, intellectual and the social areas of human development.

It is important to remember that deprivations are not limited to one area of the population for it cuts across the socio-economic, racial and geographic lines. R.C. Orem specifies some of those deprivations,

> The "middle-class" child who is not given sufficient physical freedom in infancy is deprived physically. The "upper-class" child who is so well supplied with material things but who lacks attention and affection from too busy parents is deprived emotionally. The "lower-class" child whose native capacity for absorbing good language is not utilized, is deprived intellectually.

Part of the human condition is that no one (including both adults and children) uses his or her full potential. As adults it is our duty to give the child a secure, non-judgmental environment that is so rich and carefully organized that these deprivations can be matched by interesting, constructive activities. A positive consequence of such an environment is that the child uses his own initiative to grow toward his fullest potential. Usually, the well-meaning adult who tries to determine the child's potential hinders the child's realization of his growth potentials.

In a Montessori classroom, the physical deprivations are precluded by a clean organized environment allowing the children to learn "care of person" skills. The psychological deprivations or feelings of inadequacy, are met by having an environment that insures success. All of the Montessori didactic materials have a built-in control of error. Consequently, the child can solve his own problems without an adult intervening to "correct" his mistakes. Intellectual deprivations characterized by impaired perceptual or cognitive processes, are met by exercises that lengthen concentration span and develop eye-hand coordination. The child is given large blocks of uninterrupted time that allow the growth of the concentration span. Social deprivations of over-dependency on adults or peers are also redirected. The teacher instead becomes a "Directress" who is the guiding link between the environment and the child. The Directress merely guides the child into constructive activities, and does not pretend to control the classroom. Peer dependence is decreased by developing individual competence before the child becomes involved in group activities.

In summary, as adults we should concentrate on developing rich environments for children rather than categorizing and testing their developmental levels. We should also give each child the opportunity, through a variety of learning experiences, to discover his own routes to learning. "To discover one's self is the purpose of education," I find a significant maxim when dealing with children.

*Kathryn Vander Kooi is a Directress of Montessori education at Marywood School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Teacher as Assertive Helper

Marcia D. Zwier*

For several years there has been considerable interest in "the helping professions." The classical examples are nursing and medicine. But helping is obvious in other professions also. The majority of the members in the American Psychological Association are in clinical work. In social work the interest in the therapeutic approach is notable. Clergy are often trained in some form of pastoral counseling. This clinical or helping aura can be sensed in many of the professions, even though there are always some within the ranks more concerned with prevention, mental health, and empirical research. Still, the major emphasis that there are those who need help and those who provide help remains.

The teaching profession has been affected by this clinical or helping approach also. The term "clinical teaching" has become rather prominent. At first glance, it seems to highlight the importance of the dialogue between the teacher and the pupil. Usually, however, it means helping a pupil with a problem. The term is said to have originated in the field of Special Education, a branch of the profession working with the exceptional child. It is often used in a discussion of "providing for individual differences." Some deviation, defect, or at least some atypicality is the issue. The mentally retarded, slow learners, neurologically handicapped, emotionally disturbed, and disadvantaged are being identified. One often gets the impression that all discussants are musing, "Isn't it a shame that these exist?" There are those who have and those who have not. These lack, want, are in need. Implied is the notion that the educator, an innocent bystander to what nature or God or Environment or parents have produced, is called upon to do something about it. Something is wrong with the child. The disease model of what is adjudged to be deviant or defective behavior comes to the fore; the person exhibiting this behavior by definition has a problem and needs help.

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This approach may be the essence of what has been called the middle-class or "do-gooder" attitude of the conventional professional. It is as if the fortunate is called upon to reach out to, take care of, and provide for the unfortunate. This paternalism is the tendency to protect, insulate, separate the atypical, since it does not fit or match the professional's expected norms. Or it may simply be a matter of what one thinks ought to be done under the circumstances, especially if one truly cares. A kind of hysteria sets in and, at the slightest provocation, help must be given. Apprehension, concern, and dread are bred and born in this kind of atmosphere. Their facial expressions are a furrowed brow and a doleful look. In a short time the helper's resources are depleted and he runs to the supervisor who must help to help. A set of words or labels must be placed on the behaviors and be communicated to the relatives asking the questions. Not only is the professional supposed to be aware of all the problems; he is supposed to identify them and prescribe a solution.

An endless cycle of overinvolvement is likely to develop. There is preoccupation with pathology. There are lengthy discussions about patients or clients and their behaviors. In all the pathos it is determined that another specialist is needed. Most experienced helpers, however, know that it is often impossible for these specialists to come up with a solution. They have learned from experience that both the question and the answer reside in the person they are concerned about, and they have the foresight to take the time necessary for using their own skills of listening and making observations. They also know their own needs well enough to ferret out what is likely to be a projection of themselves as opposed to a reflection of the person in question.

Those who prepare professionals for the clinic or the classroom often encourage the development of this inappropriate orientation in the trainee. To some of these preparers it is simple. There are two types of behavior: the normal, the expected, the predictable, the average, the usual; and the abnormal, the unexpected, the unpredictable, the below

average, the unusual. In classroom lectures they tend to overgeneralize about the normal and shock with the abnormal. To enliven discussions, they highlight the abnormal and describe all forms of extreme behaviors. They leave the impression that almost everything in the field is routine and almost dull, but once in a while something unusual, dramatic, and exciting occurs. It is similar to coming upon a case of a rare disease. Furthermore, they leave the impression that to be truly professional is to be able to deal with this unique behavior by labeling it and making predictions about it. To do something about the deviant behavior is tantamount to stopping the development of a spreading cancer.

The teacher as helper often feels like a mere middleman between the specialists and the person with a problem. It is not possible to be a responsible person when one feels this way. Then one is only a technician or an assistant following the orders of others. No matter how much training a professional helper receives, how much money is spent on laboratory materials, or how small the caseload and low the student-teacher ratio, a pathology-oriented helper is likely to respond indecisively. Inferiority feelings develop. Lacking in self-confidence, such a helper abandons making decisions and turns over responsibility to others.

What is the appropriate stance for the helper and the trainer of helpers? The professional helper, first, needs to be a truly authentic human being. He or she emphasizes diversity rather than deviancy; knows a great deal about expectations in behavior and prerequisite skills and concepts; knows how to be with another person or group, *i.e.,* to facilitate communication, to absorb feelings, and to help resolve conflict; and knows how to communicate relevant information without pontificating. He or she accompanies others on their own personal safaris. To the extent that communications from consulting specialists are not relevant to the planning and implementation of the expedition, these communications are to all intents and purposes useless. To the extent that the professional helper needs to step aside from joining in the seeking, inquiring, exploring process and attempt to be a clinical expert, growth is neglected and may even be abandoned. To the extent that energy is spent in excessive concern about past trauma, less time is available for new pursuits. It is not that the helper is not interested in the other travelers; he or she is vitally interested in each one as a fellow explorer, an inquirer in pursuit of experience. This is the major task at hand; for classroom teachers this is what there is to be about.

All of us are acquainted with helpers we consider of high professional caliber. They are productive; their primary emotional needs are met outside the office or classroom. They do not require the approval of their clients to be considered of ultimate worth. They are open and forthright, encouraging others to become their best selves. They know when to smile and frown and the art of a well-chosen word at a particular moment. Nothing is expected from those encountered but that they grow for the sake of growing. The emotional security, the sheer fun, the togetherness are natural by-products of the process of growth.

When confronted with some behaviors which at first appear to be out-of-the-ordinary, the teacher as assertive helper responds humanly. Often the suddenness, the unexpectedness of the behavior triggers off shock, fear, and hostility. What teacher is not concerned to find that certain pupils never seem to catch on? What social worker is not upset by the child who continually sucks a thumb or masturbates openly? What counselor is not chagrined by the adolescent who insists on being a teenybopper? What clinician is not disillusioned by the continuing indulgence of an addicted person? The helper freely acknowledges feelings of discouragement, apprehension, and disgust, but does not wallow endlessly in anxiety over the matter. If assertive, he or she takes time to reflect on the situation. Rather than committing self to endless probing into home background and early trauma, he begins to view the specific problem behaviors in the light of what is typical for a similar age, condition, and life situation. He is well aware of what is real in the lives of these persons. All of them are viewed as forgers of their own futures.

Thus, the professional person is not a hapless helper or a tinkerer with lives. He or she is not applying a "poultice of polysyllables"*; the helping comes by heeding more than by healing. He or she employs both responsiveness and responsibility; the former resides in the helper, the latter remains with the helped. There is more interest in "seeing people through" rather than "seeing through them."* There is more caring about and less caring for. There is more interest in wholeness than in the whole person. There is more concern for authenticity than authoritativeness. There is more gentle nudging than abrupt confrontation, more affirmation than interrogation, more disclosure than discourse. The professional person is more active than passive, but more enabling than encroaching. He or she is an assertive helper.

*I am indebted to the contemporary novelist Peter De Vries for these descriptions of therapy in his *Blood of the Lamb.*

Mainstreaming:
A BASIC PREMISE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Virginia B. Anderson*

Can It Be Done?

A serious question, not sufficiently researched, is crucial to everyone actively involved in Christian education: Is it possible to educate children with mild to moderate learning disabilities and/or physical handicaps within the mainstream of a conventional classroom?

At Westminster over the past four years we have decided to answer a definite "yes." While not considered true research, our experiences may be helpful to others engaged in the same kind of education.

Support from Scripture

"Train up a child in the way he should go. . ." does not specify a child with a certain set of abilities or I.Q. Rather, these words commend *all* children to Christian education. A lofty goal? An unattainable goal? Perhaps, in some cases, yes. But in the past we have given up much too soon. In an attempt to tread carefully, we have been afraid to tread at all, taking refuge in popular generalities about educating exceptional children.

Granted, some children need tools we do not have: the emotionally disturbed, the ones with severe learning disabilities, the retarded. Yet almost all children go through periods of emotional maladjustment; learning disabilities vary by hundreds of degrees; and children on the lower edge of a normal range of intelligence may appear retarded when compared with their brighter classmates.

Support from Experience

For this second group of children we look more than to Scripture to justify mainstreaming. We also look to those who have had positive experiences with it. At the recent World Congress on Dyslexia, Roger Saunders, president of the Orton Society, stated, "Although there is a hard core of dyslexic children who require intensive treatment, most can be identified early and taught in general education programs since one in seven youngsters have the condition."

William Glasser, in *Schools Without Failure,* writes extensively of his positive experiences in the Palo Alto school district mainstreaming children with learning disabilities.

Requirements for the Program

In creating such a program at Westminster we set up several requirements:

1) The classroom teachers must be willing. They should also be eager, even anxious, to sacrifice their time and energy, to strain their patience and imagination to the breaking point. The classroom teacher is the key member of a team involving the child, the reading teacher or consultant, and the child's parents.

*Virginia B. Anderson is a remedial reading teacher and speech therapist at Westminster Christian School, Miami, Fla. Before working here the last four years, she taught retarded and emotionally disturbed children in both Dallas and Miami.

2) A special or remedial reading teacher should be employed to provide the necessary saturation in language arts, to help with required classroom reading and to diagnose areas of special need. If funds are not available, a committee should be appointed to study available community resources and report its findings to the faculty. Often reading clinics or qualified persons will serve schools on a consulting basis, giving tests and making recommendations.

3) Parents must be enlisted for support. Their support is vital to a successful program. Popular educational theories of the past presented parents as a necessary evil. They were to be avoided and told as little as possible. This is a dangerous myth, for without the involvement of parents no program for exceptional children can get off the ground. Granted, each school has a handful of parents who will not be helpful, but the majority are concerned and loving, eager to be of help, and the most valuable resource of any school.

4) Classrooms must be individualized for language arts and math so that varying needs may be met. This is not as difficult as it sounds. For language arts we use a Basal reader approach, with three to four reading groups within the class. For some classes this involves three entirely different series: Scott Foresman's for those whose learning style is visual, Lippincott's for those whose learning style is auditory, and American Book Company's for the slower learner who has difficulty forming sight-sound relationships or has more severe auditory and visual problems. More individualization is possible within the groupings by keeping language arts folders in each child's desk. Then the teacher can prescribe additional seatwork or projects for remedial or enriched learning on each child's independent reading level. Job cards, laminated workbook pages, individualized scholastic-kit assignments, tutoring from fellow classmates: all can be in the folder. A skill checklist stapled inside the folder enables the child to check off each new skill mastered and encourages him to assume responsibility for his own progress.

We use the *Barbe Skill List* in a master file and an instructional composite skills list for the folder. This second list is similar to the *Wisconsin Skills List.*

Every folder should also include an occasional personal note from the teacher, even if it is just "Dear Johnny, I'm proud of you."

Our Referral System

We also use a referral system for any child the classroom teacher suspects has a learning problem. He is referred for tests through the principal, to the reading teacher. He is tested for learning style; disability (if any); independent, instructional and frustration reading levels in word attack, word analysis, comprehension and memories. If necessary, a period of classroom observation also goes in, to the report.

Referral to Outside Agencies

Children are referred to outside agencies only if:

1) their behavior is so disruptive, in spite of various attempts to modify it, that the entire class is suffering,

2) they are making no progress in their present learning situation. (This judgment of course requires prayerful consideration by several involved staff members),

3) retention would not solve the problem, and

4) there is so much psychological overlay that the child's best interests are served in a more sheltered educational environment.

Our Program of Education

If we determine that we can serve the educational needs of this child, the reading teacher evaluates the severity of the problem and makes recommendations to the classroom teacher. The child also receives remedial teaching from the reading teacher, the quantity depending on his individual needs. These needs change with his progress, and he is gradually phased completely out of the reading clinic and into the classroom. There his reading can even, with further progress, go from remedial to enriching.

The basis for the entire program of mainstreaming is individualization, concern for the child and the ever changing needs of all children. The program involves frequent assessment and special awareness from each teacher. The reading teacher should also be available for enrichment and support.

Unfortunately I cannot take more space to discuss methods and materials, but professional libraries and regional conferences in reading yield a lot of information. The point is, it can be done; we have proved it over and over again.

Dream for the Future

A recurrent personal dream is to see special education classes for the retarded, blind and deaf within each Christian school, drawing on the student resources of regular classes for tutoring, providing a daily exercise in patience and compassion and nourishing the spiritual life of every child.

CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS AND THE EXCEPTIONAL CHILD

Jonathan Bradford*

Most teachers would agree that many, if not all, children must receive individual attention at one time or another. But how can one teacher attend to the individual needs of both the slow and the advanced learners in the class? Unless sizable financial resources are available, full-time or part-time aides cannot be employed.

Using a volunteer in the classroom can often go far toward solving the problem. Volunteers, although sometimes difficult to find, can be used in a variety of capacities in an educational setting. The one-to-one tutor is very common in many schools today. Volunteers are serving more and more as leaders of small groups, assistants in art, music and home economics classes, and as general assistants who, shoulder to shoulder with the teacher, work among the entire class.

To meet the needs of a class full of children who learn at various paces with various materials, each teacher must be prepared to individualize his approach. My use of *individualize* means something more than different learning programs, with each child working at his own pace. Complete individualization of a learning program must include the ability to work with and support each child so much that he can progress as a total person. I am not implying that the open classroom is the only way to go or that traditional teaching methods must be discarded. I am emphasizing the importance of being able, practically and physically, to work with each child. The teacher who enlists the help of competent and dedicated volunteers will better fulfill the responsibility to recognize each child as a unique person created in the image of God.

* Jonathan Bradford is a graduate of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich. He is the director of the K.I.D.S. Program, Calvin's student volunteer program.

It's Easy to Forget the Advanced Learner

Often the advanced learner is patted on the back and then left to satisfy his own curiosity and interest. Consequently he drifts along with the class, having done the required work but still unsatisfied. He wants to do more, and often will, but it may be unproductive. The classroom can meet the advanced learner's needs and allow him to use full potential if there is sufficient and well integrated supplementary help.

Volunteer tutors or teacher aides have worked with much success as guides. They work as consultants for the advanced learners, helping them pick new subject matter, resources and related special projects that interest them. The volunteer must also encourage and direct the child toward areas of study productive for the class as well as themselves. They work closely with the teacher in striving to prevent the gulfs of resentment that can develop between the slow and advanced learners. Numerous creative projects are possible when volunteers, who have more time than the teachers, help the advanced learner in such a project as tutoring slower learners.

There are many approaches to the use of volunteers to guide the advanced learner. One such approach can be found in a program called "Curiosity Course." In 1973 the Motivational Tutorial Program in St. Paul, Minnesota, instituted this program so that some of the social as well as academic needs of "high ability" children might be met. By employing the volunteer services of nearby college students, the "Curiosity Course" has enabled many advanced learners to productively use and understand their gifts. Volunteers work with the children in such projects as writing a skit in a new language (Spanish), conducting small research projects in local elementary schools and various interest oriented field trips. Significant social adjustments and academic accomplishments made by participating children testify to the success of this program.

The advantage of volunteers for advanced learners is unmistakably clear. Volunteers have interests, abilities and time that the teacher does not have enough of. They can be of tremendous benefit to the learner who, though bright, does not get enough individual recognition and guidance to realize his abilities.

Slow Learners Demand and Deserve Much

It nearly goes without saying that the slow learner also needs individual attention. Volunteers in one form or another have served to help the slow learner for many years. This is good. Their activities should be expanded, though, because it takes more than one pair of hands to help a slow learner through the snowdrift of a slow learning process.

Each child in a classroom, as I said, is unique. That means that each one has, for example, his own set of interests, his own formative experiences, his own abilities, and his own fears. When these ingredients total up to a learning deficiency, ready help must be available. Individual recognition from a teacher or volunteer is a key to surmounting problems and allowing the child to grow.

Volunteers can be of priceless value to the teacher who seeks to recognize the child as unique. The slow learner may be unique because of various perceptional problems. Inadequate social adjustments made earlier in his life may be contributing to his learning difficulties. His problem may be based at home or rooted in previous education. Whatever the cause, volunteers have scored tremendous successes with children who need extra recognition. This extra recognition means first that the volunteer must be a friend; the rest will follow. This recognition from a friend can take many forms: detailed explanation of subject matter, encouragement, a suggestion or maybe just a smile. These and many other forms of recognition are important both in and out of class.

There are many less obvious reasons for using the services of volunteers in working with the slow learner. Volunteers can, for example, complement a set of reading resources a slow learner might use. Cassettes, film loops, and picture cards cannot do the job of recognition.

Positive sex role identity is important in any classroom. In some cases for example, a fourth grade girl may view her male teacher as 'untouchable.' Or a fourth grade boy with trouble adjusting socially may view a female teacher as inaccessable. Volunteers can serve very effectively in these types of situations. Teachers have told me several times of surprising progress achieved by slow learners who have received individual attention from a volunteer of the same sex.

Every slow learner is unique. Teachers have the awesome responsibility of recognizing that. Volunteers with good supervision, can provide the extra attention the slow learner needs to grow academically and socially.

It Takes Administrators

To implement volunteer assistance for the exceptional child takes planning. Volunteers are in every community. The school administrator is responsible for finding them and uniting them with the teacher.

Volunteers come in many packages. High school students are a ready resource, particularly if the high school is near an elementary school. College students often have time and a genuine desire to help. Women and men who are not working and those with flexible schedules are also potentially valuable resources. Retirees, with their myriad experiences, are often very successful volunteers, besides they often need and want such opportunities to be helpful to someone else.

Basic volunteer requirements need not be hard to meet. For example: The woman who is a college graduate and a mother is certainly acceptable, but many other persons are also equally qualified. Three requirements however, must be met: (1) The volunteer must have available time on a regular basis, preferably the same time block every week. (2) The volunteer must have the willingness to commit himself to absolute diligence within that time block. (3) The volunteer must have genuine concern for the academic and social needs of children.

Administrators must get the ball rolling in their

communities by advertising the need for volunteers. As the willing ones present themselves, a reference bank containing pertinent information on each perspective volunteer should be assembled. Included in such information should be: name, address, telephone number, educational background, work experiences and preference for exceptional children of a particular age and type. The teacher who wants volunteer assistance can then refer to this information, contact the volunteer and make the appropriate introductions.

Administrators will find that a small amount of time invested in a volunteer project will pay great returns in the form of increased educational services for the exceptional child. Also a welcome by-product of any volunteer program can usually be found in the increased amount of public awareness of the educational process.

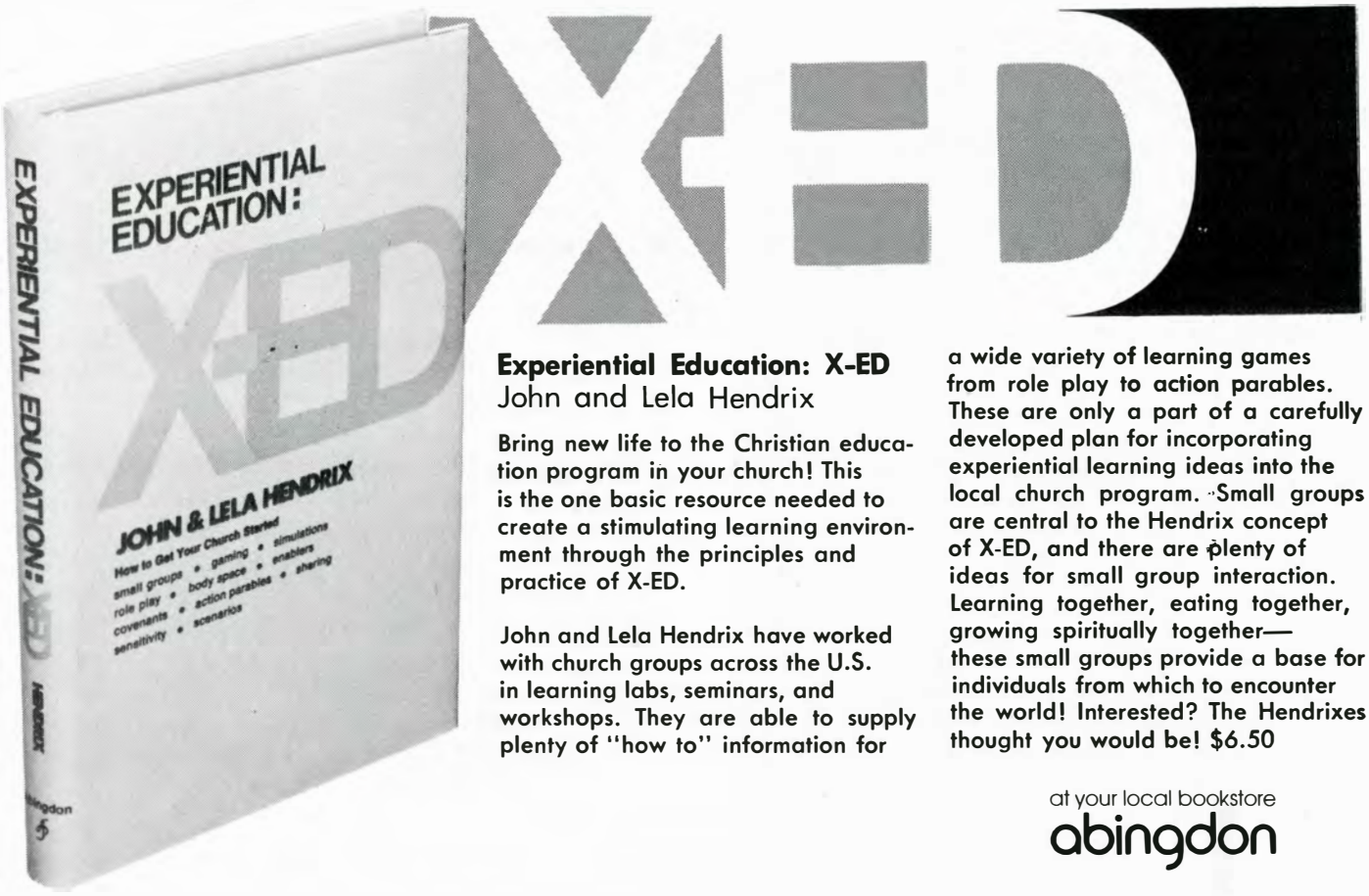
The Teacher's Role

Although volunteers can contribute immensely to the task of nurturing both the slow and the advanced learner toward higher levels of accomplishment, the process is not automatic. The teacher must always have control over the nature and frequency of recognition that a child receives. This, then, means that supervision of the volunteer is important.

Ideally all teacher-volunteer relationships start with the teacher describing the whole class to the volunteer. This includes a brief summary of the social and academic background of each child the volunteer will work with. Also included in this orientation should be an explanation of the methods and resources employed in the classroom.

The mutual need for daily exchanges of information is very important. The classroom is dynamic. Only the teacher, present at all times, can keep the volunteer posted on the progress and development of each child. The volunteer has an equal responsibility to the teacher, especially when observing something the teacher should know about. Therefore, at the beginning and end of each volunteer session the teacher and the volunteer must reserve at least a couple minutes to exchange observations and plans.

Both the slow and the advanced learner are complex. It is nearly impossible for a teacher alone to provide the recognition necessary for every child's progress. With enough communication and trust between teacher and volunteer the unique needs of the slow and advanced learner will be better fulfilled.



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Kids at the Door?

by Arthur Ruiter*

Dear God

I've got two ears,
But just what for?
I never hear
Kids at the door.

Can you imagine a child praying like that? Could you imagine it if you were a deaf child?

Why doesn't the deaf child hear kids at the door? First, because he is deaf to many sounds. But most of the deaf are not totally deaf; many hear loud sounds and would therefore hear the noise of kids at the door. But there is another reason they fail to hear the kids; they just aren't there. Because deafness greatly reduces communication skills, the deaf child is often out of it. This is usually true until someone helps to change it.

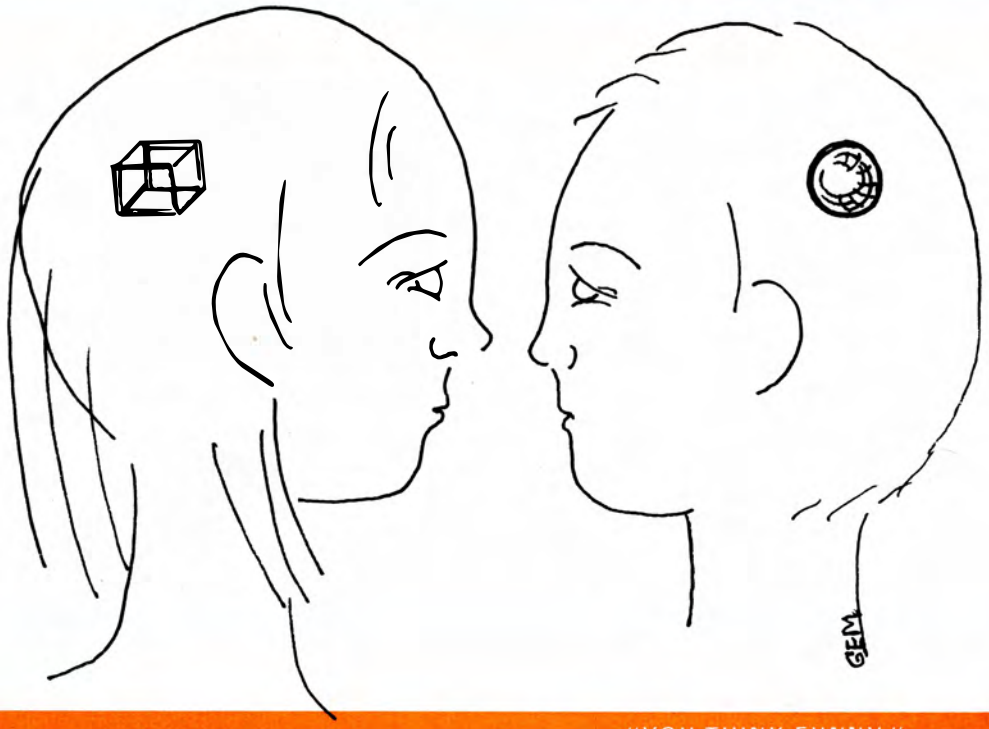
Special Students in Regular Classes

Mainstreaming, the term now often used for the integration of special students into regular classes, is a great idea if implemented properly. And there are ways of doing it so that many normally intelligent deaf students will succeed. All the methods which could be described involve training, preparation, and readiness; in many cases they involve support too.

Training, Preparation and Readiness of Student

Preparation involves training in lip reading as potential allows; developing an inner language;

*Arthur Ruiter is the Director of Children's Services, Hope Haven, Rock Valley, Iowa.



"YOU THINK FUNNY."

teaching speech and/or total communication; teaching how to use residual hearing and a hearing aid; initiating basic academic studies; and establishing good discipline so learning is possible. The time of preparation varies for every child; the degree of hearing loss, the type of loss, the age at which the loss began *and the cause of the loss* also vary. Intelligence, maturation, emotional security, home or foster home background, past experiences, and innate ability all affect the length and intensity of training the child will need. And, although I am not trying to include all the variables, I have to include as a very important one the age at which good training was initiated. A deaf child should learn the basics as early as possible; that is, he should learn speech and language as near as possible to the time the normally hearing child does. That means that a two or three-year-old child should be in school—a special school or a special classroom. Maybe then in kindergarten or first grade he can be mainstreamed, though it may take more time before he can be considered for placement in a regular school. It is extremely vital that he be really ready for this placement, and also that the regular teacher, in turn, be ready for him.

Preparation of Classroom Teacher for Special Students

No teacher should expect to have a deaf or hard-of-hearing student in the regular class without planning to do some special things. This student should have a special place in the room for optimum viewing of the teacher's lips; this is not a bad idea for the other students either. The teacher should learn to face the students when speaking—always—and should deal with difficulties in language and vocabulary. I trust we are moving past the stage of desiring total homogeneity. Teacher, you want a challenge, don't you? Then try to assist a deaf child become vibrant as his world opens because of what you, his classmates and his parents do with and for him.

Interpreter for Special Students

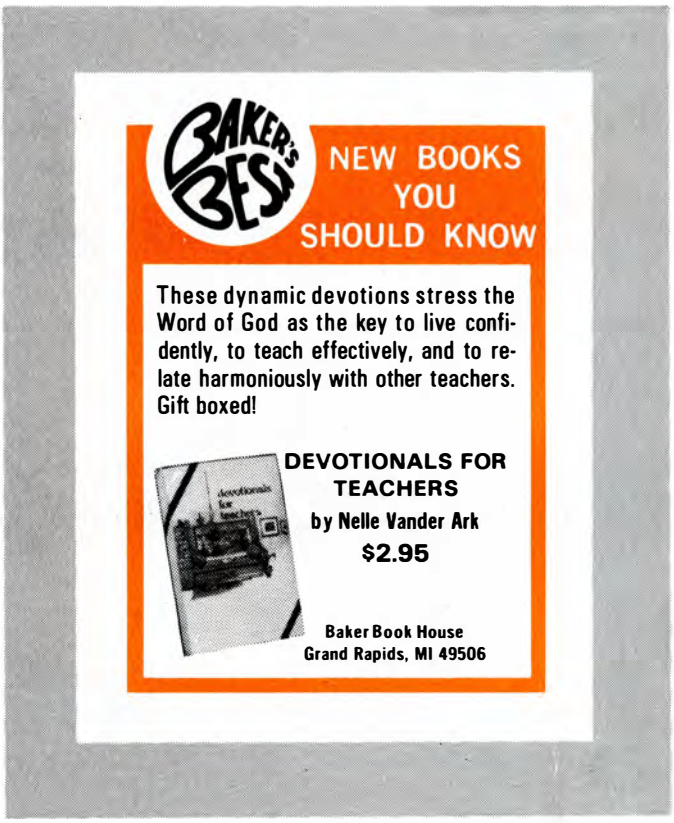
Even after good preparation, before the move to the regular classroom, a deaf student will need a lot of help. Total communication, which involves lipreading, speaking orally, signing and/or finger spelling, has proved very advantageous for many deaf students. Many of us who were taught that signing is an evil slowly admit that many educators for the deaf recognize total communication as beneficial. For some students, signing remains necessary for adequate communication. Therefore, in some cases an interpreter is required. Of some 23 students at Hope Haven and now in regular classes, eight require an interpreter. The other fifteen, with several others who have finished their education, can communicate on their own.

We at Hope Haven feel that integration or mainstreaming of the deaf and hard-of-hearing is great. We enjoy serving deaf students by themselves, but we enjoy even more seeing them with their normally hearing peers. Acceptance by their peers has recently been demonstrated in four separate research projects. The deaf child can be very acceptable socially, but that depends upon us, as parents, teachers, administrators, peers, and other interested Christians.

The deaf kid can have kids at the door; yes, his prayer can be:

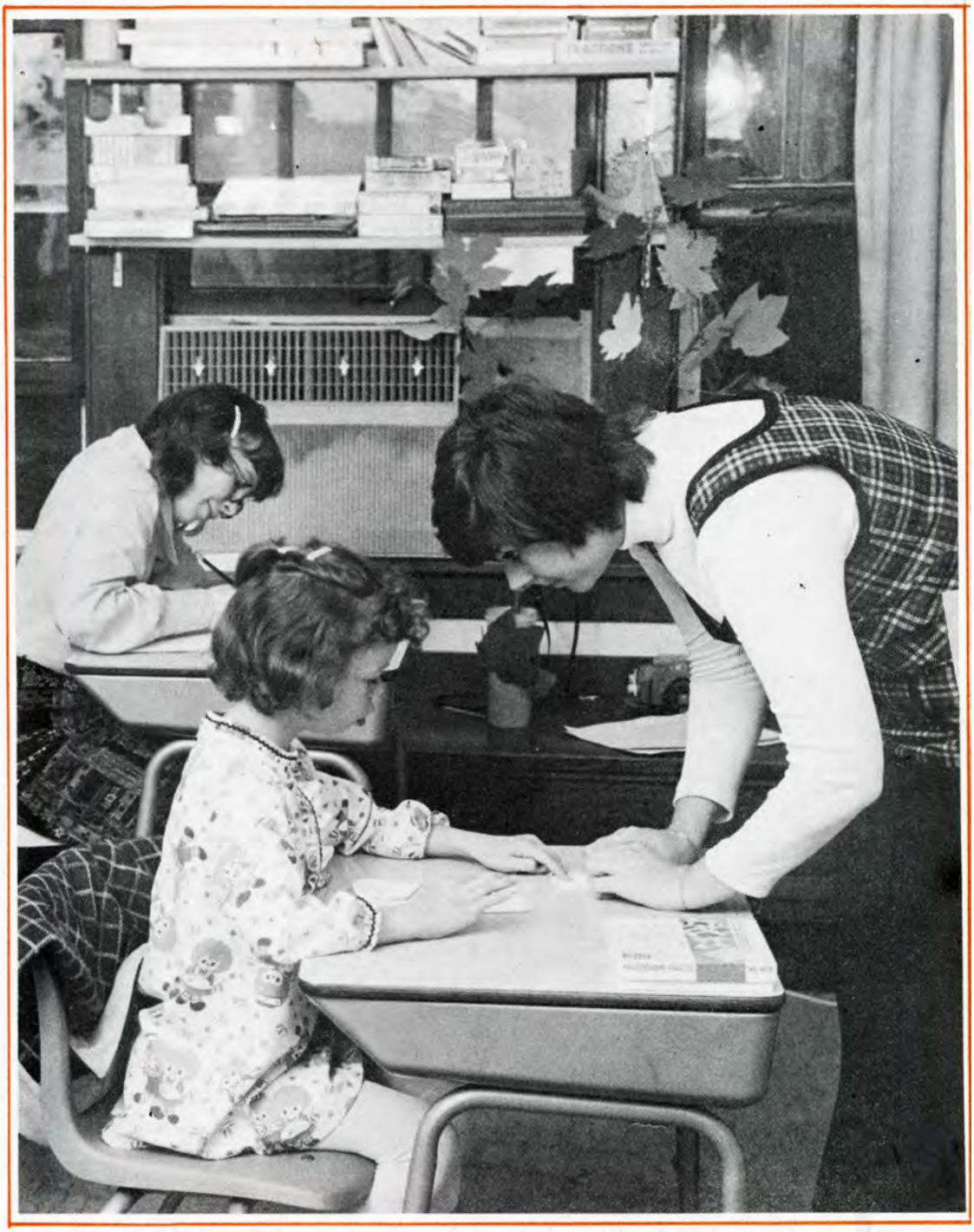
Dear God

I've got two ears
But I can't hear,
Yet friends and teachers
Are so dear.



SECTION II.

THE EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER: IN SPECIAL CLASSROOMS



THE HANDICAPPED:

It Is More Blessed to Give

Sidonie Brooks*

Not a Place for Everyone

A few years ago the Peace Corps ran an advertisement which showed an empty glass. Water was then poured into the glass until it was half full. At this point a voice announced, "If you believe this glass is half empty, the Peace Corps doesn't need you. But if you believe this glass is half full, the Peace Corps has a place for you."

This statement says quite simply: Look at what is there, not at what isn't. Build on the abilities that you see and help create a positive situation instead of worrying about what is commonly thought necessary to structure a beneficial environment.

Our Educational Philosophy

Though this statement is not aimed specifically at teachers or handicapped children it is well suited to the kind of philosophy each of us must adopt when seeking to establish a positive educational experience for our students. And how much easier it is for Christian teachers to apply this principle when we know that God has a plan for each person's life and that it is partly up to us to arm our students with the maximum possible amount of education, perception and awareness for fulfilling God's plan.

Far too often people look at the physically or mentally handicapped person and see only the handicaps. They feel distressed about those seemingly less fortunate ones and try to make their lives happy and comfortable, always giving and never really expecting much in return. This was basically my attitude before I became a member of the staff of the Christian Opportunity Center and began working with mentally handicapped children.

A Change in Attitude

My previous experience had been with children who were emotionally disturbed or had learning disabilities, children who had average or above average I.Q.'s but because of emotional or perceptual involvement were not able to function adequately in academic and/or social situations. Most of these students had the hope of remedy for their specific difficulties and the promise of a normal productive life in society. The children at C.O.C., I believed, had no such hope.

I soon began to see, however, that the philosophy basic for the very existence of C.O.C. was the Christ-centered approach to working with their students. It's not the *measure* of their intelligence that counts, but their *ability to use* that intelligence, to be the most they can be, for the glory of God.

This philosophy leads Christian teachers to view their students in a different light. Focus now is on their assets and the teachers plan from the beginning to strengthen them. This in itself is a boost to the students who, possibly for the first time, can look at themselves positively, who, possibly for the first time, are given the room to use their abilities and produce results, and who, again, possibly for the first time, are able to grow in self-esteem, a feeling some handicapped persons have never had the privilege of experiencing.

Their religious training becomes much more meaningful and real. Not only do they have a Saviour, but He expects things from them. They have to be testimonies of His love and life to all those around them and are expected to use their abilities for this. They have purpose, meaning and dignity in their lives, and they believe it.

Application of Philosophy in a Classroom

In my class I have tried to implement these tenets in various ways. I have eight students ranging from 9-17 in age and from late kindergarten to the beginning of the eighth grade in socio-academic level. One student is physically handicapped, having the use of only one arm and needing a wheel chair. Each student has individual planning and scheduling, and each works at his own rate. Seat work geared to increasing individual academic

*Sidonie Brooks is a teacher of the educably mentally retarded at Christian Opportunity Center, Pella, Ia.

strong points is given out on Monday morning to be worked on and completed by the end of the week. Other work introduced throughout the week is remedial. Depending on the situation, they work in small groups or individually.

In all areas of the curriculum the material must be made as concrete as possible, so the students will internalize. Thus, when we study other countries, we adopt their customs, art, food and, at times, even part of their language. All this is great fun and helps considerably when we discuss how these countries and cultures have influenced our own. Since a lot of this involves doing things, art projects, displays or cooking, even the youngest students can get involved and gain some knowledge of the different peoples of the world.

Service projects also serve as an important part of our curriculum. For us this usually means making something for the elderly in one of the retirement homes in our community and/or going to visit them. We enjoy these experiences and also feel a real sense of pride because we can do for someone else something that is very much appreciated. We also increase our awareness of others and develop not only a sense of community responsibility, but also of Christian responsibility toward one another.

We have developed a work study program for our older students. Businessmen in the area provide part-time employment for about six weeks. This shared work and study time gives the students a chance to put into practice what they have learned in the classroom and at the same time gives them the opportunity to work in various types of community situations. They not only increase their poise in working and dealing with a variety of people, but also get some idea of the kinds of work they enjoy doing and are best suited for.

Advice to Others

This is a look at a philosophy underlying the program now in progress at the Christian Opportunity Center in Pella, Iowa. It is, I believe, a philosophy which should prevail in any school where handicapped students are enrolled. It is essentially a matter of attitude. Two things are necessary: (1) an acceptance of each for what he is and for what he can become, and (2) an intense caring that each be given the opportunity to reach full potential, whatever that might be.

As Christian teachers we must demand that our students strive to be the most that they can be. As they strive they will become responsive, contributing Christian persons, and that, after all, is what Christian education is all about.

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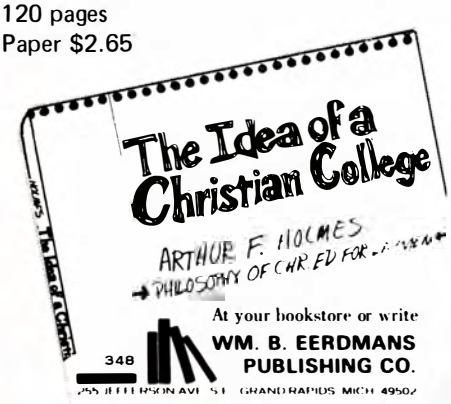

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BOOK REVIEW

Teach Me, Please Teach Me

Teach Me, Please Teach Me by Dorothy Clark, Jane Dahl and Lois Gonzenbach. Elgin, Illinois: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1974. 141pp. $2.95. *Reviewed by Edward DeVries, doctoral student in special education at Michigan State University.*

This book is a timely sequel to the publication by the same authors entitled *Look at Me, Please Look at Me.* With the changing national trend to integrate the retarded citizen into the community, often from large, impersonal and atheistic institutions, it is imperative that the Christian Church seize the opportunity of witnessing to a segment of our society long neglected. In this regard this detailed "how-to" volume provides an important step in the right direction. The book is written from the perspective of establishing a religious training program for the severely mentally retarded usually not included in the traditional education program of the church. However, because the book is written to meet the level of the mental ages of the severely retarded, it may also have appeal to the teacher of the younger students with normal intelligence levels.

The book appropriately begins with an introduction to the things to consider in implementing a religious training program for the retarded. It is complete with helpful reminders for implementing a positive teacher-student interaction format for this population. It also contains programatic considerations for establishing a program in the community. There follows 12 chapters of "lessons" in the Christian life well suited to the needs of the retarded citizen. Representative topics include Self-Acceptance, the Need for God, Faith, Prayer. Each chapter of the book consists of a similar format. Each presession activity carefully described is an appropriate, relatively easy individual art project designed to introduce the lesson concept to the students in a very tangible manner. The lesson development sections are written as a teacher's script and follow through on the relationship of the presession activity to the central truths of each lesson. One untrained in teaching could seemingly use these sections of the book verbatim to teach the didactic part of the lesson. Each chapter suggests additional enrichment activities to further impress on the students in very concrete ways the theme of each lesson. As in a few instances in other sections of the book, some of the suggestions may be somewhat above the level of the students the book is designed for. In addition, some of the suggestions may take more time than is usually available in a typical class hour, but would be very advantageous for a subsequent meeting time. On the other hand, it must be noted that there is a decided emphasis on integrating the retarded into the mainstream of the church program wherever possible—a commendable attitude.

In addition to the thematic content, the book contains a bibliographic listing of additional resources for the teacher. The listing includes resources about the mentally retarded, resources on programs and activities for the retarded, and a few general references to art, crafts and activities beneficial for any teacher. The book finally contains a topical outline of the 12 lessons for the more experienced teacher or for individual instruction.

This book has value for any church or school planning a religious training program for the retarded citizen. The level of the book is obviously intended for the untrained teacher, but the experienced may also find helpful hints for conveying the often very theoretical concepts of the Christian life to young minds. It would be an excellent resource handbook for all church school teachers faced continually with the challenge of conversing with the spiritually inquisitive child. The fact that this book is in print should present a constant challenge to each of us in planning innovative programs to share the message of Christ in our own communities with the young as well as those many handicapped individuals we have long overlooked in our Christian education programs.

Christian Schools and Special Education

Carol Brink*

Special education, what's it all about? I once read this statement: "If we accept the premise that all people are special, we are better able to deal with individual difference in different individuals."

We as Christians surely ought to be able to see and deal with the "specialness" of all students. God has given some parents children with special problems, such as mental retardation, physical handicaps, brain damage, learning disabilities or emotional disturbances. God does this within His will and with a definite purpose. Many parents not only find equal room in their hearts for their special child, but some I have talked with are convinced that this experience has strengthened their faith. We as Christians and educators must provide equal room in our schools for these special students with special problems.

I am aware of the limited finances available for Christian education, but I am also aware of the problems that can develop because of limited facilities for these special children of God within our schools.

It is time that we provide adequate education for our special students, not letting them struggle and experience unnecessary frustration until their parents in desperation pull them out of the Christian school and, often with feelings of guilt, place them in a public school that can provide an adequate education.

I have two recommendations for dealing with these special students. The first is to have a diagnostician consultant available to all Christian schools; this consultant could be shared by a number of Christian schools and would be used mainly for spotting problems. He should have a basic broad background in special problems, and if he cannot deal with a given problem, be a liaison with the community to make outside referrals and seek special help as it is needed. Perhaps he could be employed by the NUCS (or someotherorganization) and shared by sponsoring schools. The sponsoring schools could support this specialist according to individual enrollment. He does not need to be trained to make a specific diagnosis, but only to determine whether or not there is a problem. One mother recently said to me, "Once we knew for sure there was a problem, it was a lot easier to deal with it."

My second recommendation is that our Christian schools develop special classrooms for our special students. Special students need adequate educational opportunities as much as if not more than any other students. Providing these opportunities may demand extra facilities. Perhaps a school resource room with a teacher trained in special education can accomplish this task. Such a room could deal with many problems beyond the time and training of the teacher in the regular classroom. Some students might need this room only for an hour or two each day for crisis intervention or special tutoring; other students might need it for the entire day. To be effective this room must be limited in the number of students; it might also require the assistance of a teacher's aide. Adult volunteers or high-school students from study hall could serve.

I realize that it is not feasible to begin special programs in all schools at the same time. However, it might be possible to locate classrooms centrally within a given area and transport students to them.

We may well encounter difficulties in beginning special education in our Christian schools, but it is high time we begin dealing with these difficulties, no longer assuming that there is nothing we can do. With much prayer and the help of God we will be able to overcome these difficulties.

*Carol Brink is in her third year as a classroom teacher for children with emotional disturbances at Children's Psychiatric Unit, Pine Rest Christian Hospital, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Christian Special Education: AN OPTION

Leon Wassink*

The Problem Student

The Christian community has never proposed that one child is worth more than another because of his ability to learn. Genesis 1:27 tells us without qualification that we are created in God's image. Why God chooses to bestow physical and mental abilities so arbitrarily, according to our standards, we cannot understand, but we are called upon to work with students whose abilities vary greatly.

What of the child trying to compete in a class of twenty-five or more students? What of the teacher of this class who is staying in at noon and working nights trying to individualize? Is such a teacher successful? It is my belief that we can generally say, "Yes, look at the first-class citizens leaving our schools." However, my concern here is not for the general success stories, but for the specific student on the lower end of the continuum. My focus is on the child who cries easily, fights, has temper tantrums, is generally unhappy, and is often a discipline problem because he strikes out at those who tease him. My focus is also on the quiet, withdrawn child who is not chosen for games, refuses to try new assignments because of repeated failure, has few (if any) friends, will not read voluntarily, and will not look at his report card until he has reached the safety of his own home.

Empathy and sympathy do little to alleviate the situation for these students who pose a special problem for the class, the teacher, and themselves. They need more teacher time/smaller classes, less competition, and work on their level of ability. Then their self-concept will have more opportunity to develop so that they can put part of their personality into their work, without fear of failure or ridicule. As adults we have a solution to situations that we perceive as injurious or threatening; we leave or modify the situation. The child in school cannot do this because society makes his choice. We must be sure we are making the choice in his interest and not for our own convenience.

Children's Retreat

At the Children's Retreat Day School we are attempting to meet this challenge of the problem student. Our classes have from five to twelve students, depending on the activity, and each child's program is individually planned. There are nine thirty-minute classes in each school day. Students move from one classroom to another as in most high schools. The teachers are never assigned the same students for the entire day. This allows students and teachers an opportunity to leave a sometimes trying experience for a new activity and a fresh beginning, usually with other personalities. Changing classes does not pose a problem for the student because the small class size enables the teacher to build in success more easily. Students soon learn that a meaningful trust relationship can be made with more than one person, with the other students as well as with a number of teachers.

The curriculum includes the usual reading, arithmetic, spelling, penmanship, social studies, and science, but also woodworking, engine repair, mechanical drawing, physical education, art, sewing, baking, typing, activity room, and classes in socialization. A work training room is also available for students who need to develop skills of manipulation before leaving school. The students are grouped according to ability and function with the possibility for change as the situation warrants.

The above is our attempt to meet the needs of students with learning problems. Success is sometimes evasive and often slow, especially if the student has spent years failing in the regular classroom.

By now many of you are thinking that our program is only for severely limited children. I would like to share some general statistics about our student body. We have 70 students enrolled, 46 from the surrounding communities and 24 residents. They are seven to eighteen years old. The I.Q. of about 25% of our students is above 70, of 35% between 50 and 70, and of the remaining 40% below 50. These I.Q. figures are really not important to us, but will give you a point of reference for understanding the type of student we are educating.

Some students stay with us for years and graduate; others have gone back into regular schools with a self-concept strong enough to deal with their learning difficulties. It is not our goal to enroll every student with learning difficulties, but

*Leon Wassink is the principal of Children's Retreat Day School, Pine Rest Christian Hospital, Grand Rapids, Mich.

only those who need the support and structure given in smaller classes by specially trained teachers.

The current public school trend of integrating physically, mentally and/or emotionally impaired students into the regular classroom should not be viewed as the only solution. Integration should be viewed as one method in meeting the needs of some exceptional students, not the method for the needs of all of them.

Our curriculum and methods are revised as the need arises; new materials are available, and new methods are discovered. We do not claim to have solutions to all learning problems, but only share what is being done with the students in our school. Perhaps our program has helped many children and families largely because of our philosophy of education.

Philosophy of Education

The education provided at the Children's Retreat Day School is Christian and special. It is Christian because it is founded on the belief that the children with whom it deals are children of God. As such, they are children with eternal souls, children who must be responsibly nurtured and trained. It is special because it offers clinical education and is geared to individual needs. Although all education should be clinical, it is obviously mandatory for children who have a limited intellect, specific learning disabilities, and related emotional problems. Furthermore, this special education must be implemented by trained personnel as well as special techniques.

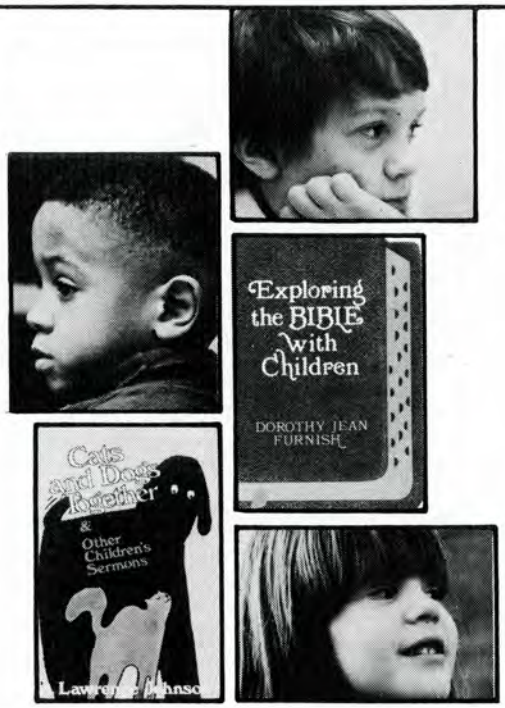
The education and training provided at the school, therefore, is comprehensive in scope, including the child's spiritual, psychological, social, intellectual, and physical welfare. We are committed to helping him cultivate a personal relationship to God, his Father in Heaven, who loves him, handicap and all. We try to promote the maturation of individual personalities and the development of a more positive self-concept. We try to promote positive relationships with authority figures as well as with peers. And we try to provide the environment for developing not only skills for health and safety but also an alert and healthy body.

As we educate in a frame of reference which acknowledges God as the creator and sustainer of all of life, we seek to honor Him by providing the opportunities for each handicapped child to live a life as full as his potential will allow.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE WITH CHILDREN

by **Dorothy Jean Furnish**
Associate professor of Christian Education at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Church school teachers, parents, anyone who strives to make the Bible message come to life for boys and girls will find this book an excellent resource. It includes information about the Bible, its nature and background; characteristics of children at various stages; some "how-to" techniques; children in a changing world; and life-centered, Bible-centered, and child-centered teaching methods. An exciting, challenging book that can help you revitalize your Bible study with children. Paper, $3.95



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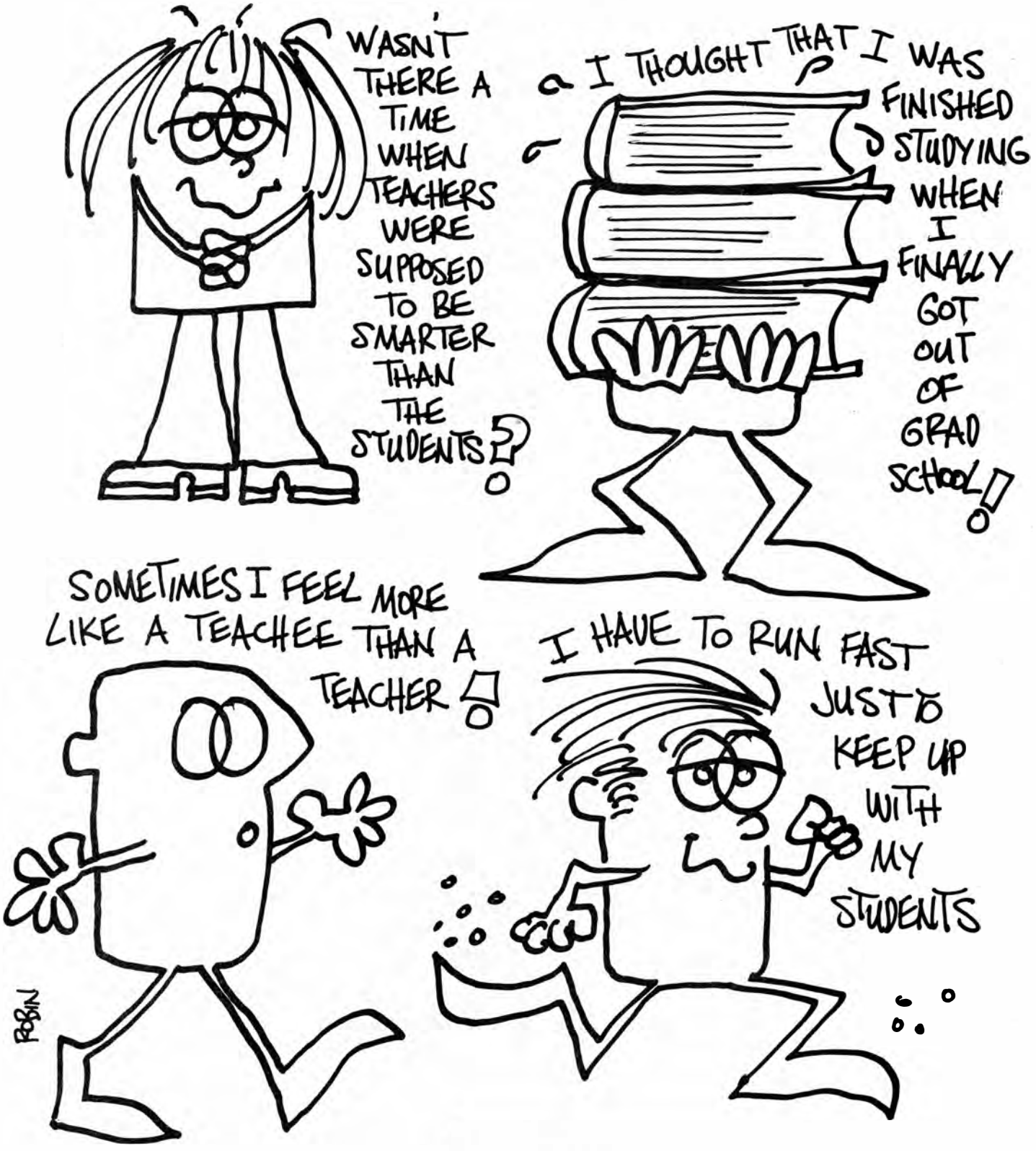


Fast Learners–Fast Teachers

SECTION III.

THE EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER: PARENT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS

I Don't Want to Send Him to School

Barbara Hudspith*

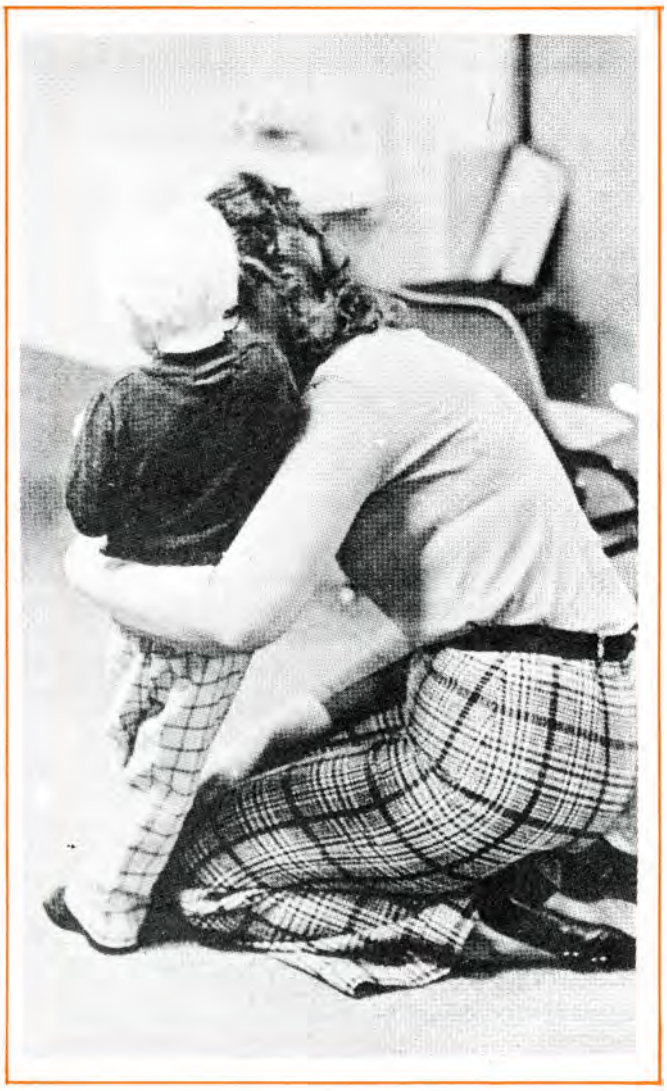
Don't get me wrong. I'm not one of those over-protective mommas who wants to keep him a baby forever. I'd love to send him off to a place where he'd be stimulated and challenged. So often he drives me wild with his unanswerable questions and irritates me with his uncontrollable energy. Quite frankly I need a rest.

But my child is exceptional in his own way. He's not a genius by any means, but a bright boy, eager to learn and create and still full of the joy of discovering God's magnificent creation. I don't want that crushed.

I don't want some harassed first grade teacher to stick him into the third seat of the middle row and try to fit him into her neat schedule of math one half hour, language one half hour, spelling drill 15 minutes and so on into infinite boredom. It happened to me. By the fourth grade I was, like many children, stagnant, dulled both to the joy of discovering our world and the accomplishment of skills that would open it up even wider. As a preschooler I was creative. Because I was an only child, creativity was born of necessity. He is the same. A never-ending stream of wooden-block castles, villages, caves, and houses adorn our house. The living room is never meant for sitting, it seems. Caves, tents and hills block every doorway. Talk is incessant, and ideas range from the absurd to the highly inventive.

I was the same in a much quieter and more passive sense. But the highly structured, highly disciplined school system of the forties and fifties pounded me down to a lazy, fearful, unproductive

*Barbara Hudspith is a former teacher, now a mother in Carlsbad Springs, Ontario, Canada. She and her husband have just moved into the area and are wondering if their son should enter the first grade at the local Christian elementary school next fall.



child. I did not rediscover my creativity till twenty years later. The same could happen to him.

By now, I probably have most grade school teachers highly indignant and insulted. That's not what I meant. It's not you I'm blaming. I've been a teacher too and know what it means to have a room full of thirty children all learning at different speeds, with widely varying personalities and interests. You want to get around to every little desk and spend half an hour with each one on his long division problem or his confusion over long and short vowel sounds. You try to spend time on animal lore because Joey and Cindy and Bruce love animals, but only half an hour is allotted, and you have to stop just when they're getting keen. Two hyperactive boys vie for attention and upset the smoothness of your science lesson by blurting out irrelevant questions or wiggling under their desks. I know how it is.

So what can I do, as a mother? Do I keep him home and tutor him myself (as parents we're both capable), or do I throw him into the system and let my heart sink when he comes home frustrated from sitting cramped all day in a tiny desk (intended as a torture chamber for active six-year olds)? How should I react when he stops asking penetrating questions because his thrill of discovery has been thoroughly trounced?

He needs other children, he needs other adults, he needs the sense of community a Christian school offers. But he is also entitled to the freedom and joy of discovering God's world.

What can I do?

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An Exceptional Frog

One of the frogs
A gentle sort
Sat on his pad

Zap, zap, glup, flies for dinner
Contentment
Peace

A frog is a frog, nothing more than a
Frog.

"He is one of us you know
Leaps no higher
Croaks no louder
Sleeps no longer

And is no greener."

One day quite by accident
He by reflex jumped high upon
Startlement

Peering on his expanded
View
He saw more than he ever had before
And
Tasted glories no other frog could savor
And unsettled the other
Frogs.

"No longer is he one of us who
Leaped higher;
Now
Croaks softer."

Still filled with awe he
Sleeps little as
Newly filled soul
Sifts new images. . .and

The other frogs are now more
green.

L. Van Poolen
Engineering Dept.
Calvin College

My Brother Sherman

by Gordon Wiersma*

I have a sister and two brothers. My younger brother Sherman is mentally retarded. Sherman has been influential in my life because even though he is mentally retarded, I have learned so much from him. Before Sherman was born, I misunderstood what retarded really. I thought that if someone was retarded, they would sit around doing nothing and act weird. I haven't been so wrong in my life before. I have found out and learned that when someone is retarded he is just a little slow in learning. Sherman is about the nicest guy you would ever want to meet. His vocabulary is a little hard to understand, but because I have lived with him for over seven years I can almost understand him fully. He has his bad moods and good moods like anyone else, and has a couple naughty words of his own.

Sherman goes to school and is learning the alphabet and his numbers now. Sherman probably has about the best table manners of us all. He is always willing to help too. He is very talkative and loves to play with imaginary friends. Sherman loves television (don't we all?), but we of course don't let him watch too much. His favorite shows are probably "Gilligan's Island" and "Captain Kangaroo." Sherman is a good runner and is going to participate in the special olympics this year. I was sort of scared when I was younger and knew Sherman was retarded, but I have learned so much and have a better understanding of life. Sherman has really influenced my whole family. My mother has made folders and gives lectures to mothers of retarded children, and is also on a board for retarded citizens. All in all, Sherman has been a real blessing to me and my family.

*Gordon Wiersma is a sixth grade student at Oakdale Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He wrote this essay for Mr. Robert Geels in response to an assignment to write on: "The Most Influential Person in My Life,"

preschool teacher

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HOW TO HANDLE THE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT

by Daniel G. La Berge*

In many ways the exceptional student is stigmatized. School for the bright child is a place which lacks intellectual stimulation, so he spends time daydreaming or in outright mischief. The less bright student, for a different reason, might react the same way. Bored because he cannot seem to do even passable work, he gives up in desperation.

These students are very important, for if education fails them and fails to solve their problem, they have a strong inclination toward deviancy in a negative and socially destructive manner. The most important reason for dealing with the exceptional student is his concept of self-worth. If he feels that he himself is worthless, then he will also feel that he is worthless to society and society is worthless to him. Resentment and hatred can set in, with the deviancy taking on militant forms.

However, there are several ways to deal with these students. First, they should take psychological tests before they go into each new grade. The testing would accumulate the following data: (1) ability to interact socially, (2) ability to handle concepts, and (3) view of self, family, and outside created world. The data would help in these ways. First, if a student is able to interact well with his peer group, then it would be fairly safe to assume that a strong personal identity has been established. Poor interaction would most likely point to some internal identity problem. Second, the older (intellectually) the student, the better he handles concepts. The concept of conservation of mass (Piaget, 1970) demonstrates this well. Piaget's cognitive developmental theory can provide many insightful ideas into this part of the testing program. The test analysis would simply show where the child is in relation to: the rest of the class and any other group the teacher or other school personnel might wish to evaluate. The third area of testing will

*Daniel G. La Berge, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada, is a parent and a student in developmental psychology at Wilfred Laurier University. His wife teaches in a Christian school.

provide the most information on whether the student will or could become an exceptional learner. Knowing what he feels about himself, his family and the world around him helps predict how he will act and react in a school situation. Once all the information has been collected and evaluated, *separate* classes can be structured in a pass-fail, nongraded, informal classroom situation. One class, in extreme cases, could be totally committed, for the first year, to overcoming psychological difficulties; the main theme would be that the student "find himself." It might include statements with intellectual as well as psychological difficulties. Students with primarily intellectual difficulties might form another class. A class for the gifted student—without psychological difficulties—could take the first year to find out in which areas he is weak. If materials are available, he will, in his own time, concentrate on the areas he does well in. In every class the students will be free from the competition of the regular classroom.

Then there is the undiscovered gifted student, one who does average or below average work in most areas but excels in one or two. This student should be worked with to discover why he does not excel in more areas; he may have psychological difficulties.

Since a young student is in the formative stages, he is building points of reference or analyzing the believable and non-believable. The Christian school can do a great deal to help him define who he is and of what worth he is to himself, his family and his world. Showing Christ's love and concern, plus how we fit in precisely where God has planned us to be, will do much to help the exceptional child realize that there is valid reason for trying to do well.

The exceptional student, though in separate classes, should be able to interact with other students, have the same recess and lunch periods. The school should make every effort to eliminate any feeling of stigma on either side.

On a small scale, a school that has five to ten exceptional students can have a program structured, as I mentioned before, as a pass-fail, nongraded, informal system. All students should be made to see that learning provides exciting experiences and helps them understand the world around them.

In conclusion, the exceptional learner is a very important person. He must be looked on as a person not a problem. He must be helped to understand himself and be provided with interesting learning experiences. Then we can help him become a productive student.

The Asylum

An Exceptional Child

H.K. Zoeklicht turns the spotlight away from the teachers' asylum—but not too far—to focus on one student who passes that faculty headquarters many times each school day. The student's name is Linda (that's not her real name, though "Linda" is a real person); this has been her first year at Omni Christian High. She tells her story largely in her own words; only here and there has the enigmatic Zoeklicht made some emendations.—Editor

Omni Christian is my school, but I can't say I have felt very much at home here. I hardly have any friends at all, which makes me feel pretty depressed because I seem so different and I don't know what I do so wrong to make me the way I am.

I miss junior high. There I almost always talked to kids in the seventh or even to kids in the sixth grade. But here I talk to almost no one. I just can't seem to associate with kids who are my own age. They think of me as an immature person, and I guess I act like one. I don't think other kids know how to act towards me either because they treat me and talk to me like I'm a younger person. It makes me feel bad because I want to be treated like an older person, but I don't know how I can act that way. I guess everybody knows that I'm out of it. So I mostly walk through the halls all by myself or stand by a group of girls talking to each other. Sometimes I go to Mr. Den Denker's room during lunch hour. When he's there I talk to him. He's nice and talks to me like I'm really important. I know I'm not of course, but it makes me feel good anyway.

I'm not good at school work either, and I just hate to do it unless there's something I can understand. I was pretty scared to come here because I knew I wasn't ready. Maybe high school isn't for somebody like me, or maybe I should go to the public school because they say that's a lot easier. But then I wouldn't learn anything about Bible anymore, and I would miss that. Still, I don't think I can make it here. There's a lot in my textbooks and what the teachers talk about that I don't get. In junior high the teachers would often make the assignments and the tests easier for me, but they don't do that here. It's so big here, I guess they almost have to treat everybody the same. But I can't stand to be so bad in everything. Two things I've always been good at, though, and those are writing and spelling. I always get my best grades on them, and that always makes me feel pretty good.

I don't really like playing in sports because I'm afraid I'll make a fool of myself. I am not at all coordinated and I'm a little on the fat side too. I was almost eight already when I finally learned to ride a bike because my sense of balance isn't so good. So I usually just watch when everybody else is playing ball or so. I would like to play but I make too many mistakes and then everybody starts yelling at me. Then I just feel worse, so I would rather not play at all.

There are problems at home too. If something won't go right I get discouraged and irritable with everyone, and then my family gets irritable with me. I used to be a good-natured person and didn't have much of a problem getting along with people. But something has happened to my personality and I don't know exactly how to change it back. My brothers and sisters don't seem to have that problem, maybe because they're smart and good at almost everything. They don't get mad and cry as easily as I do, and I wish I could be like that too. But too many things bug me. About the only thing that makes me feel good lately is when I get a babysitting job and the kids I babysit for like me.

My dad tells me that I worry too much. But I can't seem to help it. I don't feel very confident about anything and I guess that's part of my problem. I worry about getting and keeping a good friend, about tests and assignments in school, about what I am going to be and do in the future, and about a lot of other things like my complexion and weight problem. I sometimes feel sorry for myself for being the way I am, and I wonder what my purpose in life is if I'm so unhappy. I do continue to pray for a better personality, and I know that God is always my friend and I can always go to Him in my needs. But I still need others too.

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