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**Christian  
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Journal**



**CEJ**

# DON'T DRAW THE LINES

**“W**HAT this school needs is stricter discipline,” a parent informed me recently. The remark angered me. That was the last thing I needed to hear from the mother of an often “difficult” eighth grader.

Anger has a way of encouraging creativity. I considered a creative retort like, “Next time your son calls his teacher an idiot I’ll make sure he gets suspended.” Fortunately, I passed up the opportunity and settled for twenty seconds of reflective silence, but my mind began to work on the real problem: inadequate teacher-parent communication.

Teachers often believe they have done everything possible to communicate with parents. After all, teachers give parents handouts of course outlines at Back-to-School sessions, mail out midterm deficiency reports, distribute PTA notices (and pick the stray ones off the floor after school), send report cards home, hold Open House, and contact parents by phone or by mail when students disrupt the peace excessively. Obviously the parents are at fault if they fail to use these means of communication.

I can excuse that kind of thinking in others, but having a couple of years of experience in editing this journal, I have come to realize that even very careful people experience difficulty in conveying information accurately. No journalist I know sets out to write wrong information, but all of us realize that inaccuracies appear in print. People quite naturally give and receive information from their personal perspective, but of course, no two people perceive exactly alike. We should not be surprised then, that our students perceive differently than we do. Furthermore, by the time they report to their parents—if they do—the event or message will have taken on at least a shade of difference from the original. If we expect the student to provide the main communication be-

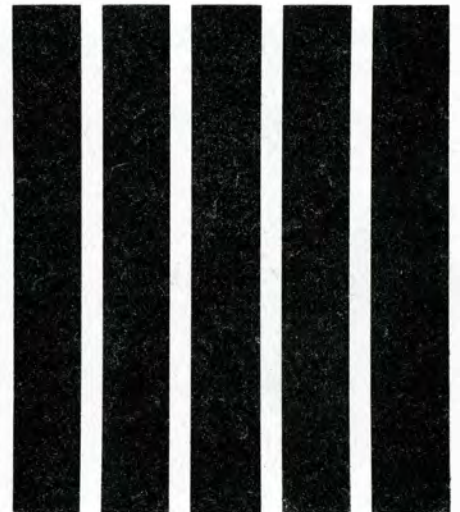


tween teacher and parent, we are placing undue responsibility upon the student.

An additional problem occurs when well-written handouts remain in students’ back pockets until wash day. Equally disturbing to teachers is the fact that parents fail to read and respond to messages that do get into their hands. In this age of mass mailings, our mailboxes are inundated with junk mail, and we quickly learn to discard messages which fail to grab our attention. Perhaps parents as well as schools are victims of this paper paranoia.

I believe teachers can do more to improve the teacher-parent communication. Furthermore, I believe teachers, rather than parents, must initiate improved communication because their role enables them to better understand the value of such interaction. Teaching is their professional responsibility, and all education, but particularly language arts, depends on effective communication. Teachers need to provide clear, effective messages that will attract parental attention.

If we teachers really want to reach parents, we must find as much time to



send positive messages as we do deficiency reports and discipline letters. A teacher who habitually looks can find something positive to say about each student, even if the student makes only slight progress. Positive notes take only a few minutes to write, perhaps during commercial breaks during the late news. The payoff in parental and student response is well worth the price of a stamp. Some teachers prefer to use the telephone, provided they can reach parents at convenient times.

Teachers can do more to encourage parents to visit classes and special assemblies, whether at the elementary or secondary level. I remember the pleasure I experienced on that rainy day every year when my parents made their annual visits to each of their children’s classrooms. Perhaps we teachers should encourage parents to reinstate that valuable custom. We do, of course, run the risk that some parents will judge the quality of teaching on the basis of that one visit, but in most instances the results have proven more positive than negative. In the one negative instance I have experienced where students were uncooperative during the visit, the parent was able to

# REPAIR THEM



better understand the reason for our way of handling discipline.

Students' original writing, printed in school newspapers or newsletters, provide another positive method of touching bases with parents. Teachers can encourage students to include personal opinions or reports of their extracurricular activities. Parents appreciate the students' own work whenever possible, but the teacher needs to accept the responsibility for coordinating and encouraging effective messages.

Parents *do* care about what goes on in school. When we give parents the proper encouragement, we find that they want to support us. They would be foolish not to—we see their children during the most productive hours of the day. When they misjudge us, we must remember that we could be as guilty as they in breaking the circuit that connects us.

We have the tools to repair the broken lines of communication between teachers and parents. Those tools are called understanding, compassion, and encouragement. Now let's get busy and use them—creatively and carefully.

LVC

# YOUR SCHOOL'S AMBASSADORS:

ROSALIE B. ICENHOWER

*The Christian school need not fall into the trap of thinking that an advertising media blitz will generate great public response and approval for the school.*

**I**T sometimes comes as a shock to boards and administrators that a school's reputation may stand or fall not because of academics, but because of parent-teacher relationships. The commitment may be there for sound Christian education, the teachers may be well qualified, the facilities may be excellent—yet where are the students?

In an era of declining enrollment, the Christian school need not fall into the trap of thinking that an advertising media blitz will generate great public response and approval for the school. The conscientious efforts of teachers will build relationships with parents in a number of ways which will bring far longer lasting results. I would like to suggest five ways Christian teachers can (and do) make a difference in the lives they touch.

## **1. Show courtesy and sincere, Christian interest.**

If parents visit your classroom for any reason, take time to speak to them, listen to them, and respond. Incredible as it may seem, at least four families last year placed their children in the Christian school in which I teach because public school teachers refused to meet with parents or to talk with them about their children's academic programs or problems. Though your time for conversation may be extremely limited, this brief, but caring encounter will lay a foundation of rapport which can be built upon at a later time during parent-teacher conferences, school functions and programs, or even a casual meeting in the grocery store. A visitor to the classroom should never be made to feel awkward or uncomfortable in being there.

The Christian school that has an outreach ministry to unchurched families is especially attractive to parents who are "shopping around" for a private school, *if* the teachers show a genuinely friendly attitude. Through contact with a Christian school, whole

families have been won for Christ and his kingdom!

## **2. Keep parents informed.**

The first week of school I send home a copy of our daily schedule. Parents like that. Many have told me that they appreciate knowing what their Amy or Mark is doing at a particular hour. Some parents like to pray for their students at particular times when "hard" subjects are being taught. For others, a glance at the schedule can tell them when it would be a good time to drop by with the lunch that was forgotten or to pick up homework for the child who is ill. A class information letter written in a newspaper format (e.g. "Third Grade Times," "Fifth Grade Update") can be used to inform parents of field trips, special projects, or upcoming chapter tests. In addition I send out a progress report for every student three weeks into each quarter to provide information, encouragement, or awareness of deficiencies. A personal note or phone call to a parent to express concern or pleasure about a child's progress is another way to keep open communication.

## **3. Allow parents to be involved.**

Room mothers and classroom volunteers should be welcomed with open arms! In every school there are dozens of mothers who want to get involved—and sometimes fathers, too. Our school grounds are kept immaculate by a fireman who works four ten-hour days at his job and volunteers his two free days each week to the school.

When room mothers ask how they can help, have specific things to suggest. Several mothers may take turns coming in on different days of the week. One may grade math tests. Another could assemble all the math assignments, history review sheets, and science handouts for the following week and put them in file folders for the teacher. Another might circulate

# THE TEACHERS

from room to room to find if the teachers need anything run on the copy machine. Room mothers may like to plan class parties and help supervise field trips. The possibilities are limited only by our reluctance to accept help.

Parents are also excellent resource persons. One mother may demonstrate the building of a gingerbread house at Christmas and assist while students try their hand at making one of their own. Art specialists, story tellers, and drama buffs may be among your school community. Parents who have lived or worked in other countries bring history/geography alive when they furnish the class with firsthand accounts of life in another part of the world.

Allowing parents to assist us often results in our ministering to them as well. One non-Christian parent, who often volunteered in her children's classrooms, eventually responded to the gospel she saw lived out before her in the day-by-day activities, and is now a valued employee of that same Christian school!

**4. Speak positively of their children.** Nothing raises the hackles of a parent quite so much as criticism of his/her offspring. No matter how obnoxious or lazy a child may be, he or she also has at least a few good points. Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of the child's character or disposition, the wise and diplomatic teacher will first say something positive to the parent coming to a conference. (One should, of course, be truthful in complimenting the child.) Then, in as positive and helpful a way as possible, the teacher can present the problem as she sees it and suggest ways the parent can help the child to correct or modify his or her behavior. One should not refuse to receive suggestions from the parent as well. If any teacher—in any school—can show genuine love and concern

for the child, the parent will, in all likelihood, respond with cooperation and goodwill. Christian teachers, grounded in the love of Christ, should naturally and particularly manifest that concern to a richer and fuller degree than their non-Christian public school counterparts.

**5. Treat the children fairly and compassionately.** In this matter, we see that successful parent-teacher relationships usually come back to this: the child as the focus of concern. No parent wants her child to be treated unfairly, and when there is a basis for complaint in even one classroom, the entire Christian school may be written off as catering to a select few. Again, satisfied parents are a school's best advertisement.

Perhaps it is difficult to feel the same about every student in the classroom. But the teacher's personal feelings must never interfere with her actions. By that I mean that every child is to be treated as equitably as possible, to the extent that no parent has the slightest grounds for thinking that his child is discriminated against.

One teacher still recalls the blatant favoritism practiced by her own first grade teacher nearly fifty years ago. As a result she makes a point of remembering every child's birthday with a small gift of equal monetary value. Likewise, she makes sure that Christmas gifts for her class are of the same value.

Parents also appreciate Christian compassion. (Yes, there are times when professionalism must give way to expressions of compassion and love.) When a fifth grader came to school distraught because her mother had been hospitalized, and sobbed out, "I'm so afraid she's going to die," her teacher laid aside professional status, held the child on her lap, comforted her, and prayed with her. Professionalism must never make

Christian teachers stand aloof from the real hurts and heartaches of the children they serve in Christ's name.

On a personal note, as a mother, I was deeply touched when a Christian elementary teacher went regularly to see my seven-year-old daughter who was hospitalized for a month many miles from home. My daughter and I today look back upon that time some 18 years ago and thank God for that lovely teacher.

In summary, a school's reputation can be made or broken by parent-teacher relationships. The individual classroom teacher is a vital ambassador establishing rapport with parents by showing courtesy and a sincere Christian interest in them, keeping parents informed, allowing them to become involved in the classroom, speaking positively of their children, and treating their children fairly and compassionately. God has called us to teach. Let us do it in a manner that reflects his grace as we deal with both parents and the children.

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# THE CASE FOR NEWSLETTERS

ELEANOR P. ANDERSON

**W**OULD you like a tool to help you reach into the homes of your students, something that will increase your influence as a Christian teacher? Newsletters—simple mimeographed sheets sent home every month—provide a vital link between school and home. They can inform, ask for help, offer praise, and teach.

Newsletters inform parents about your curriculum, remind them of important dates, and tell them about changes in schedule. One spring newsletter stated, "We are learning the numbers between 10 and 20. We have added sets of things and are learning what is left when we take away part of a set. We use objects like plastic counters and sticks for such activities before trying to do them at the board or on paper."

Our May newsletter reminded parents, "Checking and testing is going on right now in several areas. Progress reports will show these results."

Our fall newsletter might suggest the course content of the Bible class and give the memory work assignments for that month. Ask the parents to help their children learn the pledge to the Christian flag for those early morning assemblies.

To explain some work papers sent home, I wrote, "Much of our work now is dictation. If you see a letter circled, it means your child has seen his mistake and corrected it."

It's easy, in a newsletter, to publicize special dates, give information about school pictures or field trips, or offer a reminder of health rules. It's a handy place, too, to advertise the spring musical program and urge parents to bring others to hear the Gospel message presented.

Teachers of young children often ask parents for help during the school year. For example, "Wanted: Plastic Covers" appeared in one of our spring newsletters. "Please gather up any plastic covers from spray cans and

send them to school in the next week or two." In another issue I asked for a shoe box or similar size box for making houses. At other times parents were asked to send margarine tubs, paper bags, and spools for various projects. They always responded generously.

Of course, the newsletter is an ideal place in which to thank parent volunteers, home-room mothers, and others who have given help in some special way. It's the place also for praising children who have achieved something special—perfect attendance for the month, completion of reading books, Honor Roll students, good citizens. Some years I have noted arrivals of new children and departures from the class.

One of the most important functions of a newsletter is to provide ideas for extending learning into the home. Suggestions of this nature get into every home, not just to the parents who come at conference time.

In a winter kindergarten newsletter I suggested these: "Quiet blocks can be made of sponges. Perhaps you can find a big bag of assorted sizes. Cut some into different shapes. When they are flattened out from use, your children can 'sponge paint' with them or help you clean house this spring!"

"Talk about opposites at home. Your child and you can make a collection of pictures of things that are opposite: hot and cold, wet and dry, dark and light, open and closed."

"Help your child make a picture of one of the parables found in Matthew 13. We have been studying these in first period. The pictures will be shared with Miss Nelson's class as well as our own."

"Have a winter garden. Try growing tops from carrots, turnips, and pineapples, or plant the seeds from your breakfast orange or grapefruit."

In a September newsletter I mentioned that the children were learning

the names and appearances of shapes like circle, triangle, and square. I asked the parents to help their children look for these shapes in objects at home.

The old-fashioned pastime of stringing buttons was suggested with a new twist. "Use a pattern: large, small, large, small, or red, blue, red, blue, etc. This patterning is important in math readiness."

Other suggestions stressed looking for pictures of objects beginning with certain letters and pasting them all on a piece of paper or part of a brown paper bag. Or the mother was asked to cut out a few ads for products she needed to buy and let the child match these at the store.

Here, too, is the place to stress the spiritual values the class is striving to learn. "We've talked about sharing this week. Read again with your child the story of the boy who shared his lunch (John 6:5-13). We plan to share some of our lunch money for a month for hunger relief in Africa."

Just before summer vacation the newsletter can carry a number of suggestions for things to do at home.

Parents have told me that they like knowing the kinds of things the children are learning at school. They like suggestions of ways to implement them at home. Not every parent will try every idea, of course, but the newsletter gives direction to those who want to do something.

The mechanics of the newsletter can be as simple or complex as the teacher desires. Sometimes the letters are typed neatly in columns with headlines for articles. Sometimes they are handwritten in columns or across the page as a letter might be. Usually simple line drawings enhance the paper. Before starting to type, draw a Christmas tree, a snowman, or a spring flower over the whole page for a festive look. Special dates or information can be highlighted by placing this ma-

terial in an outline of an animal or a geometric shape. In one of my newsletters each outline of a shape conveyed information about a separate area of curriculum. Another time leaf outlines were used the same way.

As a medium for reaching into the

home, a newsletter stands near the top of my list. It is a strong link between the teacher and the parents. Christian values can be shared with parents through the newsletter. That is a big return for a few hours of your time each month.

*Eleanor Anderson, a retired public school teacher, writes from her experiences with parents of her kindergarten classes in Boone County, West Virginia.*

## CAN WE REVIVE THE P.T.A.?

CAROL SLAGER

**T**HE first PTA meeting I attended went something like this: two hundred parents representing grades one through nine sat in rows of gymnasium chairs to hear a man speak about Christian education. Afterwards people chatted over coffee and cookies. The first grade won an ant farm because the students garnered the most signatures of attending parents.

Fifteen years later, not much has changed at the PTA meetings I now attend except for the attendance. Now when a PTA meeting is announced, my colleagues and I groan about another night out and, the next day, attempt to figure out how many parents were there once the teachers and board members, their spouses, and retired ministers are subtracted from the 75 people who were present. Two years ago I got quite vocal about the kinds of programs that were scheduled. Although entertaining or interesting, that's all they were—programs. The parents and teachers didn't *associate*! There was no dialogue except when, over coffee, some parent would mistakenly use PTA for a parent-teacher conference. Frustrated,

I acted: I volunteered to be on the PTA Planning Committee. My outspokenness there seems to have led to the solicitation of this article, an article based more on rumination than research.

"What's the worth of PTA?" I asked a number of parents. All of them had to think about that one. Some said it had outlived its usefulness. (I forgot to ask *what* usefulness.) "It's an organization that should die," they added. Others thought it had potential, but shrugged when I asked how that potential should be tapped. I'd like to tackle those two reactions together: Why might PTA in the Christian school be dying? By implication, what changes could promote its survival?

**1. Perhaps PTA is dying because it does not have a clear mandate.** I suspect that Christian school PTAs developed as a copy-cat reaction to the National Congress of Parents and Teachers which was founded under a different name in 1897. Some early goals of that organization included examining curriculum and providing reading lists for parents on the issues of children

and education. The organization now has more than eight million members in every state of the U.S. who are active at local, state, and national levels. Its three major areas of concern are child advocacy, service, and parent education. A closer look at its record shows, according to encyclopedia references, that it has, to name only some accomplishments, helped to pass laws, developed study-discussion groups, organized field trips, set up tutoring programs, and conducted health examinations. It has established juvenile courts, public-school kindergartens, and school lunch programs and has encouraged juvenile-delinquency research and control. More recently, as schools suffer budget cuts, public school PTAs have become heavily involved in fund-raising. The December 5, 1983, *TIME* magazine ("Why Schools Are Passing the Hat" 97) reported that "PTA membership jumped by 70,000 in the past school year, reversing a 20-year decline" once typically uninvolved parents came to see fund-raising as a way to demonstrate concern over their children's education. Some PTAs reported yearly budgets between

*continued on page 10*

\$10,000 and \$40,000!

Although every local PTA, public or Christian, has its own constitution and goals, practice speaks louder than print. Christian school PTAs seem to provide speakers on topics of interest; but they plan no programs, no follow-up, and precious little dialogue other than a question and answer session at the close of the speech. With so many options to choose from, what does your PTA hope to accomplish?

**2. Perhaps PTA is dying because its programs are passive.**

Adults who attend plays, programs, movies, concerts, and church services will not quickly seek out yet another evening during which they will mostly sit and listen, then leave. I believe people can tolerate only so much passivity, only so much "playing the audience" before they cry out to *act*. Humans are made to create, to make decisions. They enjoy labor. They glory in accomplishment. If people understood that PTA required something more from them than faithful attendance, that it demanded they give of their brains and bodies for good purpose, I believe they would join the organization and work for it. The old adage is true: One finds time for what one desires. I believe parents care about their children's education. There is evidence in my own school that parents are eager to get involved, but the way must be opened to them.

**3. Perhaps PTA is dying because people are busy doing PTA-type work under the auspices of other school organizations.**

A school uses many parent-volunteer efforts. Many of these were not initiated by a PTA and would probably find it difficult, if not useless, to now organize themselves under the control of a PTA. In my school, for instance, fund-raising is actively and successfully handled by the Mother's Circle,

the board Finance Committee, and the Livestock Auction group. Promotions, building expansion, and maintenance are managed by other board committees. Teacher aides and activity chaperones are arranged on an individual basis between teachers and interested parents. All of these activities could be handled by PTA, but they probably never will be. However, schools constantly see the need for expanding old programs or creating new activities and PTA could be the place to organize and control the volunteers needed for such efforts (i.e. tutors, monitors, library aides, bus drivers).

**4. Perhaps PTA is dying because it has not belonged to parents, but to teachers and administrators.**

This past year our Planning Committee finally took a stand: we would not sponsor a seminar which the administrators had previously engaged. With only three meetings per year, the committee wanted to decide on its own how best to use that time. PTA meetings would not become slots others could program!

The committee's planning meetings also became occasions where vocal teachers (we all are!) dominated the discussions, and where parents, many of whom were not used to committee conversation, were reticent. Furthermore, discussion time at PTA meetings was often cut short if the silence became uncomfortable, rather than the chairperson facilitating contributions. Later parents confided that they had wanted to speak, but hadn't dared.

"Association" requires communication whether or not there is agreement. Teachers and administrators must refrain from viewing parents as uncaring or uninformed. The very name of the organization implies parental priority. View PTA as a place where school personnel take a back seat for once.

**5. Perhaps PTA is dying because it lacks strong organization, management, and communication.**

There are persons who possess the skills needed to run any organization. Finding them and encouraging them to lead may take effort, but without such people no organization will last long. PTA is an *organization*, not an "event." It should have a board of directors, not a "planning committee." It should become and remain informed of the workings of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers even though it is not a member. It should establish regular contact with other Christian school PTAs. It should publish a regular newsletter informing the constituency of its activities. It should promote and interpret the school to the larger, public community. It should have at its disposal an adequate, but not unreasonable budget. However, it should not become confused with the School Board whose activities of admissions, finance, staffing, curriculum, and physical plant are primarily the Board's.

**6. Perhaps PTA is dying because habit breeds boredom, and planners lack the experience or daring to introduce a variety of program formats.**

No one can accomplish anything lasting by attacking it three times a year for an hour each time. Despite the frequent complaints we hear about "time away from the family," the concerns of PTA *are* family concerns. I believe people will meet, will plan, and will attend programs of importance. PTA needs to offer not merely program nights, but work nights (put together that school newsletter), study nights (teach new parents what Reformed education is all about), and planning nights (field trips, here we come!). These must ob-

viously be scheduled more than three times a year! The PTA should also use a variety of communication genres—small groups, panels, forums, brainstorming, not just public speakers. PTA members could be grouped according to demands and interests of the group—by child's grade level, by shared concerns (drugs, dancing), or by needed skills (teach your child to study). Time could be planned variably—perhaps evening meetings will give way to day-long workshops or weekend retreats. Flexibility and possibility should be part of PTA planning.

**7. Perhaps PTA is dying because it functions in isolation from its community.**

The beauty of public school PTAs is their involvement in their neighborhoods. Joining together with other community action groups, they bring about change in neighborhood health and safety and even affect federal law-making. Although I can remember several petitions available for signatures "on the back table," the PTA, which could have provided a forum for study and discussion of the disputed action, didn't.

Students could benefit by planned involvement in community, state, national, and world affairs. Parents whose contacts "in the world" are often greater than those of the school personnel could be valuable sources of planning, support, and aid to accomplish projects of magnitude and wit-ness.

Furthermore, as Christian schools seek to admit children from outside the ethnic and Reformed communities, we will need to address ourselves to a variety of home and neighborhood environments different from our own. The PTA could provide the organization necessary to create healthy, wholesome environments for our children once they leave our front doors. The PTA could establish pro-

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grams that would use the school facilities for neighborhood programs and community educational growth.

Perhaps PTA is dying for some or all of these reasons, but it is not yet buried. Parents who care might dare to revive it. It will take a great deal of vision and work. But an alive PTA could transform a potential school constituency into a thriving, driving agent of the community and kingdom!

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*Carol Slager is beginning her tenth year of teaching at Ripon Christian High School in California. She teaches English, speech, and church history.*

# AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL EASTERN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS

Dear Teachers,

As I send you my daughters for another school year, I feel compelled to write. Perhaps, especially, because my firstborn is embarking on a new journey into high school, I wanted you to know that I think you're really someone very special. You are a Christian school teacher. You carry on just as much of a tradition from Christ as I do as a preacher. Oh, I know that your subject material is varied. Some of you teach music, some of you teach math, and others teach biology, English, history, art, or physical education. However, as Christian school teachers, your function is the same as that of Christ's—to help people be reconciled and become obedient to God through the transfer of knowledge received in faith. Every fact of the universe is about and connected to God. Please remember that when you teach. Whether you're teaching triads, equations, valences, adverbial clauses, flora forms, or how to kick a soccer ball, it's about God. That's the uniqueness of your position as a Christian school teacher.

I would just like to challenge you to excellence in your position. There are a lot of people counting on you. Administrators and board members have hired you. Your fellow teachers expect you to do your share. Ministers, with confidence, take for granted that you have covered certain material. Parents have loved, labored, and even sacrificed a great deal in order for you to share with them the task of instruction. Students carry with them to the home, the shop, the office, the church, and still other classrooms the things that you give them. And, most important of all, God has called you to a task minimized by no other.

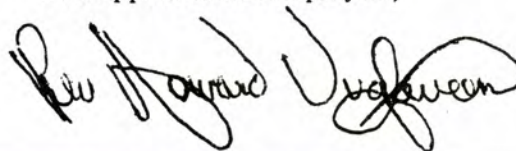
You're someone special all right! Every hour, in and out of the classroom, you are called to excellence. It's up to you whether you are going to meet that challenge or not. Your challenge to excellence takes place not in an antiseptic or sterile vacuum, but in a world of movement and hectic activity. You will face students who are apathetic, lazy, and rebellious. Some students will love you and others will hate you; some parents will be supportive and some will seem bent on destroying all you attempt to do. There will be fellow teachers and administrators with whom you feel harmonious and others who match their sandpaper surface to yours. There will be board members whose vision is an inspiration and others who are set on a return to the Dark Ages.

And what makes your excellence so crucial? Your product—immortal, eternal souls for whom God has paid the price of the precious blood of Jesus. He asks you to be a part of changing them from gravel road rocks to precious gems, from floundering lambs to guides of the lost, leaders of the blind and tenders of the flock.

Idealism always seems to be set in the abstract. But I don't want you to think of it that way. I would rather have you strive toward excellence when you look over last year's lesson plan, or lack of one; when you have corrected the hundred and tenth assignment; when the class seems interested in everything but what you have to say; when the kids are so interested in each other that everything else is a distraction; when you are tired, disillusioned, and ready to throw in the towel. Then, especially then, I challenge you to excellence.

God has a storehouse of grace so great it knows no bounds. His understanding is unsearchable. He can make you the best teacher it is possible for you to be. So never let down. Never settle for good enough. Never just do the job or put in the hours. Practice discipline, love every kid, open yourself as a channel for God's use, strive for excellence. You're someone special! We need you at your best! Take good care of my girls! God bless.

With appreciation and prayers,



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*The Rev. Howard Vugteveen, pastor of Faith Community Christian Reformed Church of Wyckoff, New Jersey, gave us permission to reprint this letter which he addressed to his daughters' teachers on August 30, 1984.*

# AND HOW IS JOHNNY DOING?

BEN BOERKOEL

**D**O these conversations sound familiar?

"Mr. B., This is the third D that Johnny has received on a test during the past two weeks. He's also been very uncooperative at home. I know he can do better. I just don't know what's wrong."

Or, on a lighter side, "Shelley said you were going to have a party and that she needed to bring one hundred cookies. I'm just not a baker, and I didn't have a car to get to the store. I hope it wasn't a problem."

"I believe I said she could bring one dozen cookies but that it was strictly optional."

The preceding conversations illustrate the importance of communication between the home and the school. Close communication not only clears up misunderstandings but also helps to spot and define problems before they become too severe. One key method of such communication is the parent-teacher conference.

Attitudes toward parent-teacher conferences on the part of both parents and teachers range from grudging acceptance to enthusiastic endorsement. Some parents see them as an opportunity for an early exit for vacation while some teachers view them simply as a time-consuming obligation. Some see them as a meeting time for opposing forces while others regard them as an avenue for cooperation. I would suggest that in the Christian school community, parent-teacher conferences should be a significant occasion for dialogue about a common concern—the student's growth.

Certainly, conferences should not be the only form of communication between home and school during the year. But they do represent a significant part of that effort, especially if the conference is truly a dialogue. Too

often, conferences become a lecture by either the parent or the teacher with the other party feeling left out of the process. To be genuinely effective, conferences should provide both teacher and parents with an opportunity to share as well as to listen.

As a result of experiences with conferences, contacts with colleagues, and reading, I have discovered several guidelines that help make conferences productive and positive. It is important to remember that each parent as well as each teacher is unique in personality and problems, and, therefore, not all situations and solutions will be the same. However, these guidelines should apply to most situations.

1. Responsibility for the success or failure of a conference rests primarily with you, the teacher. It's important to remember that success is relative, and each conference must be judged according to its own circumstances and results.

2. Be prepared. Although you shouldn't plot the course of the entire conference ahead of time, you should be aware of the areas you wish to explore. Also, be able to back up with concrete evidence any statements you make.

3. It is crucial to arrange to have no interruptions during a conference. Nothing is more disturbing to the serious attempt to think through a problem than being interrupted at a critical moment. One possible solution to part of the concern is to have appropriate books or magazines available for siblings to read outside your classroom during the conference. You might also have available a set of classroom textbooks for parents to peruse while waiting for the conference.

4. It is easier to build a cooperative relationship if you are not seated behind a desk. Your desk not only forms a barrier but also suggests authority rather than partnership. Sit-

*Parent-teacher conferences should be a significant occasion for dialogue.*

ting around in a circle is much more conducive to cooperation.

5. You should greet parents in a friendly and relaxed manner. A parent will immediately sense any tension or antagonism. It's almost impossible for parents to open up to you if you act as if you can't wait for the conference to end so you can get home.

6. The serious discussion should also begin on a positive note. Even if a child is having severe difficulties in the classroom, try to find something positive to say. Parents are almost always aware of their child's problems and, while it is important that these be discussed openly and honestly, beginning on a positive note creates a more cooperative atmosphere for the entire discussion.

Most parents expect you to structure the time, so it is helpful for you to make an opening statement or short presentation and then give parents an opportunity to respond. Make a short statement and ask the parents to react, or ask a leading question about the student.

7. Listen, and then listen some more. You aren't holding conferences in order to deliver a lecture to

*continued on page 14*

each set of parents; rather, you are trying to get help as well as to provide it. Encourage the parents to talk, and then listen to what they have to say. Accept their comments (even the complaints) without showing surprise or disapproval.

8. Find out how the parents think and feel about their child. This is important because you cannot completely understand the child's behavior until you understand the parents' attitudes.

9. If parents are worried about the child's behavior, find out why. Do not presume to know. It's very likely that you and the parents do not feel the same way about the child.

10. If the parents suggest a reason for the child's behavior, accept it, but lead the discussion to a consideration of other possible factors, not just one.

11. If parents suggest a plan of action, accept it if at all possible. One of the goals of a conference is to try to motivate parents to take the initiative. If their plan fails, it is always possible to suggest others that may strike nearer to the root of the difficulty.

12. Be sure to make the plan of action a cooperative venture in which parents, teacher, and student are involved. Avoid a plan in which one of the parties has to do all the work.

13. If parents cannot suggest reasons for a child's behavior or ways to deal with it, you should suggest some options. Avoid becoming prescriptive, but say things like, "This might be a possibility. What do you think?" or, "We might try this and see what happens. It may take a while to find the source of the difficulty." Such an approach allows the parents to participate in the decision and gives them some "ownership" of the plan arrived at.

14. Do not get into an argument.

Arguing will arouse resentment and resistance. Try, instead, to emphasize the cooperative nature of the conference and of the entire educational process.

15. Most parents cannot be totally objective about their own children. Therefore, do not criticize, either directly or indirectly. Criticism is fatal to the building of a cooperative relationship. (It is also difficult for teachers to be totally objective about the students in their own classroom. We tend to personalize our classroom, claiming each student as our own, as an extension of ourselves.)

16. Avoid giving direct advice when a parent leans back, saying, "Tell me what to do." Let any advice or suggestions grow out of mutual discussion and a growing sensitivity to the student's needs. Do not get ahead of the parents in their thinking.

17. Try to be aware of sensitive spots, and avoid causing the parents to feel embarrassed. Pay attention to parents' facial expressions, gestures, posture, and voice; these all give a clue to the parents' emotions.

18. Just as you began on a positive note, it is also helpful to close the conferences on a constructive, pleasant, or forward-going note. This might include a plan for further consultation, a definite date for the next conference, a statement of encouragement or reassurance, or a restatement of a plan for cooperative action.

For conferences to be successful, therefore, a positive relationship must exist between parents and teacher. It must be a relationship that permits both teacher and parents to express thoughts and feelings with the knowledge that they will be listened to by sympathetic and accepting people who are committed to seeking what is best for the child.

Most school systems schedule conferences twice a year, once during the fall term and once during the spring. While both conference times are appropriate for sharing information, the kind of information shared at each may differ slightly. The fall conference is a time to discuss initial observations and information as well as plans for instruction throughout the rest of the year. The spring conference is a time to review the child's performance during the year and to make plans for the next year.

Consider the type of conference you would like to structure for each time of the year, using the checklist below.

1. The student's progress in classroom subjects
2. Responsibilities that the student assumes at school
3. Evidence of initiative in school
4. Work habits at school
5. The student's relationship with adults
6. Relationships with other children
7. Response to rules and regulations in the school
8. Special interests and abilities
9. Spiritual training and growth
10. Evidence of any special problems
11. Results of achievement tests

You might want to send some of the following questions home before the conference in order to give parents an opportunity to prepare for the discussion.

1. What is your child's reaction to school?
2. What responsibilities does your child assume at home?
3. How does your child spend time out of school?
4. Does your child prefer to play alone or with others?
5. What kind of relationship does your child have with family and neighbors?
6. What is your child's response to

# TO KNOW THE TEACHER

DONNA M. VAN ELDEREN

rules and regulations at home?

7. What hobbies, special interests, and abilities does your child have?

8. Are there any health problems or handicaps?

9. Are there any problems at home that might affect performance at school?

10. What kind of spiritual training is the child receiving at home?

Finally, there may be times when the student should participate in a conference. I have found that it can be very beneficial to include the child, particularly when discussing a specific behavior or plan of action. It is often valuable to get the student's perspective on a situation. The student should not have veto power, but he or she should have an opportunity to react to the discussion about behavior or the plan of action. Including the child in the decision-making process gives him or her a sense of responsibility for the solution. Rather than having the solution imposed by others, the student becomes part of a cooperative venture. On the other hand, there are also times when it is best that the student not be present so that parents and teacher can privately discuss more sensitive matters.

Conferences, then, can and should be a valuable part of the educational process. Only when approached with an attitude of cooperation and care for that special part of God's covenant community will this prove to be true. It is the Christian duty of all of us as teachers and administrators to do our part to make that happen.

*Ben Boerkoel teaches fifth grade at Oakdale Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

**I**F my child's teacher is teaching and my child is not learning well, I must meet the teacher. Frankly, this is not the best of circumstances for us to meet each other. On the other hand, many parents will never be required to meet a teacher to discuss a learning problem. However, rapport should be established between all parents and teachers. Parents need to know the teacher. What should they want to know from the teacher?

As a parent, the more familiar I am with the teacher's over-all program for the year and the day-to-day classroom activities of my children, the better able I will be to support the entire process of the education of my children. The key to that familiarity is the teacher. I would like to share with you various teaching techniques which we, as parents, have experienced and appreciated, and comment on a few areas of concern which may help a teacher to understand how parents react to the schooling of their children.

**T**HE newsletter provides one of the more valuable mediums for relating to me what my child is doing within the classroom. I am assisted immeasurably by being informed about curricular and extra-curricular activities. When I interact with my child during off-school hours, I will know what he has been doing at school. Instead of just asking, "How was school today?" I can also inquire, "How are you doing with fractions?" "Have you started to study for the social studies test?" "Do you need help with spelling words?" "How do you like tumbling?" or "What is your place on the new seating chart?" I am also helped when I know the daily (or weekly) class schedule. Teachers, make this available at the beginning of the year. If I must contact my son or daughter or wish to call the teacher,

it's helpful to know which time is better than another. On Wednesday morning I can remind my son to bring his trombone to school. I've even checked such a schedule because I wanted to know what his class was doing at that particular moment, and have offered a little prayer for them on occasion.

Parent-teacher conferences, which most schools have at least twice a year, are beneficial. An agenda form for discussion prepared by the teacher to indicate a child's current performance and behavior has proved for us to be an efficient way to handle a fifteen-minute conference. Because both parties know that the goal is to cover the items listed on the sheet, chit-chat is eliminated. Certainly not all areas need to be discussed, but an agenda does provide an organized format for both parents and teachers to share concerns and/or accomplishments. At these conferences I appreciate honesty from a teacher. I'd like her, when possible, to tell me some specifics, or unique characteristics, about my child. I need to know that the teacher knows my daughter; it shows the teacher cares about my child. And it does wonders for lessening my feelings of intimidation when I face my daughter's teacher.

Informal events like a Back-To-School Night for parents and an Open House for parents, grandparents, and others also reduce the gap that can exist between a teacher and parents. At the beginning of a school year a Back-To-School Night provides an opportunity for teachers to present their goals and methods for attaining them, and it encourages parents to ask questions while they experience a particular classroom environment. An Open House is an occasion during which the children not only proudly display their accomplishments, but their parents can interact with their teacher and other parents. We have enjoyed both events.

15

*continued on page 16*

*Sometimes  
I don't know  
if teachers  
are fully aware  
of the many  
and varied demands  
which are made  
on a child's time  
outside of school.*

A few practices of individual teachers have impressed me over the past number of years. I like the V.I.P. (Very Important Person) for-a-week display. It's a wonderful way for children (and teachers) to relate their personal interests and activities to the class. By means of pictures, descriptions of hobbies, and various objects of interest or meaning, a child (and a teacher) talks to the students about his or her life outside the school setting. Parents could be encouraged to assist their children with this non-graded project, for it provides the teacher with information about the student and his relationship to his family. During the first semester one teacher we know visited every child's home. After school she spent about an hour to enjoy a cup of tea and a chat. The teacher met the brothers, sisters, and family pets, and she saw her pupil's bedroom. On another occasion a

teacher showed thoughtfulness by checking with us after a mutual problem had been solved. We then shared that teacher's concern with our child and appreciated the follow-up.

These are a few methods which have helped us to know the teacher during the school year. I am aware that some of these have not been suited to the secondary program, but we're not parents of high school students yet. It does seem to me, however, that basic principles do exist and can overlap for any parent-teacher relationship.

**R**EPORT cards are sometimes the only communication a teacher has with a parent. Unfortunately, a report card tells me what my child has done, not how he is doing. I don't like to be shocked by a lower-than-anticipated report card. Pleasant surprises are fine but a drop in a grade from a *B* to a *D* indicates a problem, and I need to be forewarned. If possible, I would appreciate a call at the first hint of trouble—academic or otherwise. Then the report card will confirm my expectations, not disturb them.

Generally, parent-teacher conferences are held after the report cards have been issued. Perhaps, the student should be present at one or some of these meetings. An opportunity could be given to the teacher to recount the child's progress and behavior; the parents could describe their reaction to their child as a student; and the child could participate with his response to the comments of his teacher and parent(s) and he should be able to describe how he perceives his performance in school. During any conference a teacher should strive for balance. I expect to talk about my child's weaknesses; I'm pleased to hear that he does exhibit strengths—i.e. my child is creatively destructive. Therefore, limit the negative evalua-

tion and emphasize some positive attributes of the student.

Some additional thoughts and suggestions: Do parents visit classrooms during the day? I think they have in the past. Although I'm sure I may visit, I suspect that student *peer pressure* would not condone this practice for most classes. If the teacher feels comfortable with it, he could indicate some times when a visit by parents would be appropriate and beneficial to all.

Sometimes I don't know if teachers are fully aware of the many and varied demands which are made on a child's time outside of school. When introducing a schedule for the year, the teacher might ask the students to describe how they spend before-and-after-school time.

No one expects teachers to be perfect—especially parents! Parents have been blessed with the job of raising children. We each approach that task differently. Sometimes our efforts are successful and other times, our imperfections shine through. However, we love and value our children. When we entrust our children to your care, we have high expectations of them and of your ability to help them realize their full potential. I know that there is not any one type of teacher, student, parent, or any combination of the three whose relationship is best for all kinds of learning and related learning experiences. What works for one teacher may never work for another. However, teachers are gifted, competent, professional, God-fearing educators. We are Christian parents who desire that our children learn about God and his universe. Let's get to know each other. We have an awesome challenge before us. I pray that God will help us meet it.

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*Donna Van Elderen and her husband, both former high school teachers, are parents of three children. They currently live in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

# A WASTE OF TIME?

H.K. ZOECKLICHT

**J**OHN Vroom, Bible teacher at Omni Christian High, sat at the Asylum lunch table munching sadly on a dry granola bar and muttering about the strict diet Minnie had imposed on him. As he raised his eyes and caught sight of Matt DeWit's lunch across the table, he saw Matt lean protectively over the egg salad sandwich in his right hand and pull his new sweeter Coke closer with his left.

With one hand leisurely groping in his lunch bag, Steve VanderPrikkel, the biology teacher, had been reading the latest faculty bulletin that was posted near the door. His eyebrows were knitted in concentration as his lips mouthed the words he was reading. He turned to the other teachers, irritation in his voice: "DenDenker has a question here about the success of our parent-teacher conferences last night; he wants some input on the subject. Well, I for one think they were a waste of time!"

Matt DeWit, teacher of science and math, licked some yolk from the corner of his mouth as he nodded and responded, "I agree. Only ten parents stopped by to see me and I have about 120 students. That works out to a—hm,"—he calculated quickly—"only about an eight percent average, and that's not very good."

Ren Abbott broke in. "I didn't see many either but one conference certainly was an eye-opener. Did you know that Cheryl Watson is diabetic? I've had the kids working out pretty hard in P.E. and wasn't aware of Cheryl's problem. • •

Some of the other teachers shook

their heads in surprise as Ginny Traansma, the motherly home economics teacher, clucked and said, "No wonder the poor girl often looks tired. And she's so terribly shy, she probably wouldn't tell anyone herself to save her life."

"Isn't that written in her records somewhere?" Steve VanderPrikkel asked. "We should be informed about these things. What if a student had a history of epilepsy or something? Lucy, check it out with Bob, will you?"

Lucy Bright DenDenker chuckled as she retorted, "I'm not going to be reduced to a messenger girl for the principal! But I do think it is worth bringing up. Why don't you jot it down to relay to Bob later?"

"All right, all right." Steve VanderPrikkel grumbled as he grabbed the bulletin and a black Bic. "I suppose that I started this topic so I might as well be case recorder too. Anyone have anything else for your humble scribe?"

John Vroom had been licking his fingers for any final crumbs of his granola bar before going on to his apple, but he paused as he spotted DeWit's apple-walnut bars. He stealthily began walking his fingers across the table toward the bars while Matt DeWit launched into his account. "One of the few parents that stopped by was Mrs. Van Essen. She was worried about son Jim because he's failing math. But you know why he's failing math? Both mother Berdie and father Pete failed it too—with me! Of course she thinks I've got it in for the whole

family. What can I say? Defective genes?" As an afterthought he added, "At least she showed some concern about the boy though."

Rick Cole, the English and psychology teacher who had stayed on even after Lucy's return from maternity leave, questioned slyly, "Are you really teaching a second generation crop now Matt? I had no idea you were getting so ancient!"

"Yes, I am," snapped DeWit and looked down to see Vroom's fingers within an inch of his apple-walnut bars. He snatched them quickly and retreated to a seat across the room.

Rick quipped, "It looks like Vroom is again stalking his prey, 'seeking something to devour.' I think that's from Peter; check it out John."

Most of the other teachers either snickered or chose to ignore this little interchange until Lucy steered the discussion back to parent-teacher conferences. "Well, Matt, you at least had a problem student parent come to see you. I think I saw only the parents of my good students."

The business teacher, Bill Silver, cut in. "Isn't that the truth. I don't need to worry about the A and B students, but it's their parents who come wanting to hear how the kids are doing. Why don't the C and D parents come in?"

John Vroom finished licking his wounded pride and bit into his apple before remarking pontifically, "It seems to me that the attitudes of the children reflect the attitudes of the parents. 'Train up a child,' and all that. Good Christian parents set high

*continued on page 18*

standards. And they come to confirm results. The parents who don't come are the more worldly-minded ones, concerned with material gain or athletic prowess, and their children live up to those standards. Just a basic biblical principle operating here." Vroom briefly clasped his hands together in smug self-satisfaction with his wisdom. Then he once again chomped on his Golden Delicious apple and munched with gusto.

Bill Silver nodded decisively. "You're probably right, John."

"But what do we do to change things?" pushed Lucy. "I admit that I do enjoy some of the perhaps unnecessary conferences too, however. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Matthews came by about Carl, who is doing fine with his writing. They also thanked me for teaching Tammy, who is now majoring in education at King's College. It was a pleasant perk in the evening."

Steve VanderPrikkel sputtered, "That's very nice for you. I, on the other hand, found out that Stacy Delgado is scared to death of me. Her parents didn't know what to do about it, and I must confess I don't either!"

Ginny Traansma soothed, "Just talk to her personally some time and let her find out what a nice guy you really are."

VanderPrikkel groaned but acknowledged the suggestion as a good one. Then he turned on Rick Cole and queried, "What was going on between you and the infamous Lionel Peters? It sounded like he was really reading you the riot act with all that expounding and gesturing!"

A number of the teachers tuned in now, for most of them had noticed the commotion but had been hesitant to ask about it.

Rich chewed thoughtfully a moment before replying. "Well, you see, we've been reading *Grapes of Wrath* in my psychology class, and he just

had a few complaints."

Lucy nodded sympathetically. "I once had a run-in with the Peters over *Huck Finn*. They'd rather have their children reading *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Little Women*."

"I never read *Grapes of Wrath*," harrumphed John Vroom, "but I certainly heard some spicy and unChristian language being quoted rather loudly by Mr. Peters."

"Yes, I know," Rick responded. "He must have looked through the book very carefully to find the most purple passages. I tried to get him to see the literary qualities and the psychological effects of the hardships on the Joads."

"He certainly needed a lot of convincing," VanderPrikkel prodded. "He was going at it for at least fifteen minutes. Did you get anywhere?"

"Well, I tried. 'A soft answer turneth away wrath,' you know. I finally ended up inviting him to sit in on our class discussion on Monday. We'll see if he comes. I think he will."

Matt DeWit smiled encouragingly, "You're going out on a limb, but who knows, you may turn into a Lionel tamer, and we'd all be grateful!"

Sue Katje, Omni's librarian, had been listening quietly with a sour expression on her face up to this point. Suddenly she spat out, "On the whole, these parents are totally ignorant about books and their literary value. There's just no interest in reading anymore. Do you know that I sat in my library the whole evening without a single parent stopping by?"

"How about a married one?" DeWit wondered with a grin. But when he noticed Katje begin to bristle in anger, he soothed, "That is rough, Sue. But you don't really have to be here for conferences, do you?"

"No, I don't," she snapped. "But I always hope the parents will show some concern about their children's reading!"

Bill Silver joined in again. "That's just what we were saying earlier. Too many parents don't care enough about the real value of a good education. And that's why parent-teacher conferences are a waste of time."

"I'm not so sure," Ginny Traansma said. "It seems to me that we still find out some important things about our kids from these conferences."

"Mm-hm," Lucy agreed. "The conferences aren't really a waste of time, but I do think they could be better. How can we get more of the parents to come out for them?"

Before anyone had a chance to respond, the bell announced the end of lunch. The teachers began to gather up the remains of their lunches to toss into the trash. John Vroom had finished his apple down to the stem and twirled that a moment before flicking it into the can.

Steve VanderPrikkel glanced over the list of items he'd jotted down during the discussion and announced to the waiting group, "Looks like Lucy's right, gang. I'll take back what I said earlier. Those conferences weren't totally a waste of time, but we've got to make them better somehow. As ole' Peter Rip would say, 'Maybe we should create a committee to work on a solution.'"

The teachers grinned and shook their heads as they wandered out of the Asylum and back to their students. Soon Christian education at Omni Christian High was in full swing again. And it would remain for Principal Bob DenDenker to ponder how all parents could participate more fully in this Kingdom work.

LAURA NIEBOER

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF . . .**

Parents like to know what is going on in their child's classroom. Make a slide-sound presentation of a typical day in your class for the parents.

Take pictures of the various activities of the day and have them made into slides. It might work well for someone to visit your class one day and take the pictures, or let some of the children take the pictures. Then have the children make a sound presentation on tape to correspond—including narration, singing, reading, lunch and recess sounds. Show this presentation at Open House.

If you wish, you may want to put the pictures together in an album and have it and the corresponding sound tape set up outside your room for parents to enjoy while they are waiting for parent-teacher conferences.

**PARENT LIBRARY**

Set up a parent-lending library. Stock it with magazine articles, books, and pamphlets dealing with parenting, special learning problems, ideas for helping children with learning, and so on.

**GAME CHECK-OUT**

Let your students check out some of your skill-reinforcement games to take home and play with their parents.

**SUPER STUDENT AWARDS**

Whatever type of discipline system you administer in your classroom, remember to reinforce positive behavior. Make weekly, "Super Student Awards" available to students who have met the criteria you have established. If you routinely hand out these awards on Friday in an *enthusiastic* fashion, a simple award paper you've designed is enough to motivate younger students to strive to obtain them through proper behavior. Make sure to tell the parents to look for these awards on Fridays. Then they will know each week whether or not their child deserves a pat on the back or somewhere else for their classroom behavior!

**BASEBALL FUN**

October is World Series time, and while the kids are buzzing about baseball it's a perfect time to sneak a little related map work in. Here are some activities you might like to try:

1) Find the states of the major league teams, 2) Locate the cities of the major league teams, 3) Calculate distances between major league cities, 4) Locate the hometowns of favorite players, 5) Calculate how far these players live from their team's city.

You may wish to do these activities as a whole group or set up a learning center around a baseball theme, equipped not only with maps, but also with baseball cards, reading material and so on to allow for various areas of study related to baseball.

**I'M THANKFUL FOR . . .**

The month of November is a time to give thanks and to reflect on our blessings. Let the children express their thankfulness to various school personnel who have an important part in their education.

On various days during the month of November, tack up a large sheet of colored paper or posterboard that says, "I am thankful for Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ because . . . ." Let each student write down his response and his name, then present it to that person. Be sure to remember the principal, secretary, music teacher, resource room teacher, janitor, and other special personnel at your school.

**INTERVIEWS AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Here's a way for students to get to know each other better during those first few months of school.

First, pair up all the children so that each child has a partner. Then have partners interview each other asking questions about family, hobbies, favorites, etc. Also make a microphone (aluminum foil works well) and a TV set out of a large appliance carton. When the children feel that they have learned quite a bit about their partner they love to come on the TV show "Interviews and Introductions" to introduce their partner to the rest of the class.

### SCHOOL SAFETY

The reopening of school means that many children will daily be walking, riding bike, and taking buses. This is a good time to brush up on safety rules.

Have children in the middle or upper grades review the safety rules by allowing them to dramatize real-life situations on video tape. Some students will be needed to write the scripts, some to edit, others to act, and some to actually run the camera. This tape can then be shown to lower grade students to teach them some of the facts about safety.

### ADOPT A TREE

Many lower elementary science programs include a unit on the four seasons. Here is a season-related activity which students can participate in throughout the year.

Near the beginning of the school year, scout out a tree on the schoolgrounds or nearby park which the students can "adopt" for the year. By observing this tree throughout the year students can follow the changes of the tree throughout the four seasons while engaging in numerous multidisciplinary activities. For example: introduce students to the process of voting by choosing a name for the tree, sketch the tree in each of the seasons, write stories about the tree, memorize poetry about trees, plant flowers around the tree, measure the circumference of the trunk, look at leaf cells under a microscope, learn about the various parts and functions of trees, read stories about trees, make bird-feeders and string popcorn for our feathered friends . . . the possibilities are endless!

If you wish, students may compile these activities in a booklet entitled "Our Tree."

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*We are pleased to introduce our new Idea Bank editor, Laura Nieboer, from Pella, Iowa. After five years of teaching in first and second grades, Laura is now taking a break from classroom teaching so she can care for her infant son and also pursue a masters degree in developmental reading.*

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# TO FIGHT AN ARMY

LORI KORT

**T**HE first time I met Anthony, he was sitting in the outer office looking very dejected. He was a big kid—heavy, I mean—for a seventh grader. He wore jeans with a rip in the left knee and a flannel shirt that was dirty. In fact, he always wore those same clothes. And he always looked straight at me too. I didn't figure he'd break easily. But still, one does learn to love these kids (if you know what I mean) in time.

"Looking for me?" I asked. Principals are supposed to be tough, especially in an inner-city school like this one. It's actually a nice old building, solid brick, but a few years ago we had to put a chain-link fence all around it. Some trouble with the kids from the "wealthy" school across the street—someone got hurt, or so they said, and we had to fence our kids in. We can't even let them out for recess now, but it doesn't matter since there's no yard to play in anyhow.

At any rate, I have to be tough on these kids. And I am—I mean, I can be after the years I spent in the army. I didn't want to go, not at all, but one does his duty, right? If I could do it again, I wouldn't—wouldn't have gone through all the pain just to wreck the landscape and never really know whether we *did* prove anything. Now back here with this job, and comfortable at home with my wife, things are good. I have two sons, but I don't send them to this school; I don't want them to grow up that tough. That is how it is here, though, and I can handle it.

"What's the problem, Anthony?"

"Miz" (he always said it that way, "miz," as if it had a bad taste to it—"Miz Hall don't like me.")

"What makes you think she doesn't like you?" I asked. You know, those therapeutic questions and all that stuff they teach you in college psychology classes.

"I wasn't doin' nothin'."

"Are you sure she didn't send you here for a reason? What *were* you doing?"

"Writin'."

"Anthony, Mrs. Hall teaches math. Why were you writing?"

"I was writin' my story. It's a good story."

"Anthony, you will have to try to do math in math class. You know you have to learn it before you can go to eighth grade."

I don't think Tony learned any math that semester. He waited in the outer office nearly every day. About the middle of first hour I'd come out of my office to give the daily announcements to the secretary to type, and there he'd be, kicking the carpet with his heel. You can see it's worn there now—from him and all of the other little rebels who have had to sit there awaiting my iron fist—but mostly from Tony. He'd always look up, straight at me, and as time went on I began to feel as if maybe he *could* be hurt.

"C'mon in, Anthony." He'd sit down, right at home and all. I try to make my office comfortable, unimimidating. I want students to relax so that we can talk out their problems. I have plants in the corner and pictures of farm country on the walls, and a sort of swivel chair across the desk from where I sit (kids like swivel chairs). Anyhow, Tony was pretty comfortable, like I said, but he wouldn't start up any conversation.

"How are things in Mrs. Hall's class today?" I asked.

"She's a bitch," he said without hesitation.

"Anthony, she's concerned about you."

"You like these new shoes, Mr. Conrad?" I nodded. "We got a new teacher aide today. She said she liked my shoes. Just ugly shoes, but she said, 'Must feel good to have something new.'"

"Miss Westra is aiding in your class, right?" I said, checking the list on top of my desk.

"Yeah. That's what we're s'posed to call her, 'Miss Westra,' but Nuria found out her name was Beth, and I called her 'Beth'—just like that—and she didn't mind. She's in college."

Mrs. Hall had said that Beth was dependable and that the "unsocialized behaviors" of the students didn't seem to upset her at all. I hadn't talked to her—aides are out of my jurisdiction. Tony liked her. He'd come in for swearing at Mrs. Hall, or throwing his books on the floor, or something. Sooner or later he'd talk about Beth. One day he told me that Beth was unhappy with his swearing. That upset him, *her* disliking it. Afterwards I didn't see him for a few days. He was trying to be better, for Beth, I guess. Kids will do that sort of thing. Eventually, of course, he was back.

"What is it today, Anthony?"

"Writin' again."

"Anthony, we've talked about this before. You're failing math class. You have to find a better time to write."

"I tried to. I been writin' at night. But Miss Westra wants to read my story. She said so, but after Christmas she won't be back, and I have to finish."

"She wants to read it?"

"She says it's good to write. She thinks I have a good story to tell."

What could I say? I mean math is important, but does a kid have to be bored every day when there is something he really wants to be doing? Maybe writing would be a way out for him.

The thing about these kids is that hardly any of them have a chance. Take Tony. Half of the time he doesn't even go home at night. No one knows where he is. His parents don't care. They don't have time after a day's work and an evening's booze to discipline their son, or to love him. So

they buy him shoes, little more. He goes to school, so they think he must be okay. Take his friend Nuria. She's been here in my office twice already for possession of drugs. Seventh grade. I yelled at her. What else could I do? I didn't know what to do. Then one day Tony came in with his hand in a cast.

"What happened?"

"Got my finger cut off."

"All the way off?"

"Almost. Had to have surgery. It will be okay, the doctor said. Beth—Miss Westra—asked about it. She said she was sorry. Don't know why she was sorry. It wasn't her fault. She wasn't even there."

"How did it happen?"

"Got slashed with a knife."

"Were you fighting?" You never know with these kids. They want to be like their older brothers and sisters, on the streets making excitement. If only they would believe me when I tell them that school is the way out.

"No, I went to the store. It was late, but my mom wanted aspirin. I wasn't scared. But the lady gave me the aspirin in a plain bag. I should've known better. I should've put it in my pocket. Kid jumped me, cut my finger trying to get the bag—probably thought it was drugs or something. Lot of trouble to go to for some stupid aspirin."

"How long do you have to wear the cast?"

"For a week. Then I get another one. That's what they do when you have surgery."

I didn't worry about it much. He would be okay. Beth worried about it, though. She came to my office the next day after school.

"Have you talked to Tony lately?" Beth asked. She was so concerned. Just like a rookie. You learn to be tough.

"Of course. He's in here nearly every day."

"He can't conform to Mrs. Hall's

rules. I'm not sure he should."

"No, I'm not so sure either. But there are lots of kids in that class. If we ignore the rules for one student, no learning will ever go on."

"But I'm worried about his hand. And he said he didn't go home last night. Where does he go?"

"Friends' houses, hideouts, you never know. No one cares."

"He wrote a story."

"He told me. Did you read it?"

"He wrote about his pet puppy. I guess he had a pet puppy when he was little. He loved it. Cute and helpless and all that."

"That sounds a little sappy for Tony."

"I thought so too, at first. But it was run over—run over and crushed under the wheels of a Rolls-Royce of all things. What was a Rolls doing in his part of town anyway?"

"Out-of-towners coming through to see how ghetto people live, no doubt—coming through without ever understanding."

"I don't want to be like that."

I told her it was no use trying. There was nothing we could do. There are so many kids. What else could I tell her? I had a feeling she might not listen to me though. She looked me straight in the eye—something about her was very much not a rookie.

The next morning Tony was back. "You and I have got to stop meeting in this way," I said.

"You're right," he said and he laughed.

"What is it now?"

"Miz Hall said I was not to call Miss Westra 'Beth.' I was to treat her with respect."

"You don't agree?" Therapeutic questions again—I'm pretty good at it by now.

"Beth is my friend. She told me how to make my story better. She smiles at me right in the middle of class. She has pretty hair, and she's

not old like 'Miss Westra.' "

"I see. How did she say to make your story better?"

"She said the people should talk to each other. She said things people say have meaning. My story has meaning too, and people will know it when they read it."

"She's right."

"She said something else too. She said the people should keep talking at the end."

"Why?"

"She said you have to go on."

Of course I didn't punish him. He was making it very difficult for me to be tough, but what else could I do?

After the weather turned cold and the classroom bulletin boards were full of the appropriate snowflakes (no two alike, you know) and bright red leaves, things seemed to quiet down. Tony didn't sit in my office more than once a week. I was surprised, then, when Beth came back to talk to me one afternoon. She smiled mischievously because she had something hidden in her coat.

"You won't tell anyone?"

"Well, I don't know."

"Say you won't."

"Okay." Like I said, it was getting harder to be tough.

"Look—" She laughed and pulled out a puppy, not six weeks old, all floppy and slobbery like puppies always are. "Couldn't you just fall in love with him?"

"Maybe, but why?"

"He's for Tony, for Christmas. Isn't it a great idea?"

Well, I told her how favored students get abused by their peers. I told her puppies don't survive long in the ghetto. I explained to her that it was like fighting off an army with a broomstick.

"I'm going to bring this poor broomstick to Tony's house tonight."

"Bring it— No way. You don't know—"

"That's just it. I don't know. I love these kids. I want to help them and I don't know where to begin. I don't know where they come from."

I saw her point. "I'll go with you."

She laughed at me, and she left. What could I do—what could anyone expect me to have done? She would have gone no matter what I said.

When I was a child, my parents couldn't afford a newspaper. I heard the news on the street, and I didn't miss much. But being a school principal, I am required by profession to read the news. So I get my paper every morning, early, and drink coffee and read it. That morning I read about a large wreck on 19th Street and a small outbreak of terrorist violence in the Middle East. I read that the stock market was up and gas prices down. And I read the comics. I also read about some drug pusher cruising around in an expensive car in the city. Dealing his stuff cheap to our school kids, no doubt. I was glad to read that he was found by the police, chased, caught, and doing time. Unfortunately, someone had been hit during the chase, hit and crushed under the wheels of the car. "Dead on arrival at Memorial Hospital West." It happened so often in that part of town—people drunk or high or running away, the roads narrow and poorly lit, people hurt all the time.

I was late getting to school. The kids, who heard the news on the street, already knew. Things were pretty quiet. Tony was not there.

We had a special assembly. It was pretty quiet there too. There wasn't much else we could do. I took Tony's name off the list for math and assigned him to a writing class in case he would come back.

He did come back. He wasn't sent to my office any more. I figured he was being good just to avoid me, and I couldn't take it. Finally I sent for him.

I came out of my office and there he

sat, not even kicking the carpet. He was still wearing those jeans with the rip in the knee. "Come in here, Tony. How are you?"

"I'm okay. I'm writing another story."

"For writing class?"

"Yeah."

"Do you still write in the evenings?"

"No," he smiled, "play with my puppy. His name is Broomstick, but I just call him 'Broom.' " He laughed.

"You're not mad at me about . . . ah . . . what happened?" I couldn't believe it. Here I was stammering in front of a little kid, and he still looking me straight in the eye. "You know it was my fault. You know I didn't stop her or go with her. And you still talk to me. Don't you care?"

He was quiet for a minute. He didn't smile then. "She said you have to go on, Mr. Conrad."

Tony hasn't been in my office again. I checked at the end of the year and saw that he got through his classes with C's. I guess that was about all anyone could ask. But there are other kids waiting in the outer office now, waiting and widening that skuff in the carpet.

---

*Lori Kort has spent the past year teaching missionaries' children in Mifawa, Japan. She is currently doing advanced study at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

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PROFILE

# HENRY HEINEN

EVELYN STERENBERG



## GUIDING SPIRIT OF IMMANUEL CHRISTIAN

At Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, most of the students look up, both physically and figuratively speaking, to their vice-principal, Henry Heinen. He strolls casually through the junior and senior high halls giving a friendly gesture here and there, admonishing someone to pick up a bit of trash or breaking up a scuffle or two. Henry has been the guiding spirit at the secondary level of Immanuel for the past eighteen and a half years. Besides tending to his duties as vice-principal for the 650-student school, he teaches junior high French.

As I sit in his office talking with him, we are interrupted several times by students and teachers. In the way he deals with these interruptions he illustrates the complexity of the job he handles every day and the manner in which he puts his principles into practice. He graciously agreed to the following interview.

**Q** *In dealing with teen-agers, what do you feel is your greatest challenge?*

**A** To see them through. I will do nearly anything to help a student complete a program. If a student is serious, I'll bend the rules and work the angles. We should allow kids an opportunity to make mistakes, but they must learn from their mistakes. We have to pick up the pieces, direct and guide them, and see them through. We're here to serve the students, not to create our own little kingdom.

**Q** *You've been seen in some rather bizarre costumes at school. For example, last Friday you sported large bright red checks with a startling sky-blue shirt. Has this something to do with your philosophy of education?*

**A** Yes. In order to be in tune with students you must keep in mind your own youth. The clothes were in keeping with Junior High "Clash Day." To quote a colleague, however, "It's never difficult for Heinen to clash." I'd give this advice to any teacher: Keep things in perspective. Frivolity can be in keeping with Christianity when we express our joy. On the other hand, it is important for teachers to dress well and set an example. Philosophy is not all; image is also important. Education is caught rather than taught.

(Here we are interrupted by the bell and several students requesting change. The coins are supplied along with good-humored comments.)

**Q** *In March of this year, you supervised an eight-day exchange trip between a group of high school students from Immanuel and a group from rural Quebec. You must feel such an undertaking to be of great value to put in the sustained effort required.*

**A** I defend and promote the concept of the exchange for two reasons: the experience of using the French language after eight or nine years of study, and the contact with the Quebecois culture and lifestyle. Of the two, the linguistic aspect is more important because each student must use French to cope with living in the home of his or her Quebecois twin. It's only a short period of immersion, but still a taste of reality. The trip gives the participants renewed enthusiasm for the study of French language and may induce them to return to Quebec and study there in the future. The participating students each reported on the experience. These are some of their comments. "I found the Quebecois to be an open, friendly people and I believe that if we are to live in a nation that is bilingual, it is a good experience for people to see both sides so they realize everyone has the right to his heritage." "Living with a French family was a challenge worth accepting. Our French vocabulary was broadened, as was our experience."

Personally I think it's improved my own accent and made me feel we have nothing to be ashamed of in our school's French program, which consists basically of classroom instruction. The kids are so high about taking this trip there's no problem motivating them to keep up their other school work. There are some questions asked in terms of the lifestyle of the Quebecois students. We found that discos, alcohol, attendance at Catholic mass, and different styles of home life presented a challenge in decision-making on this trip, but it is still important that the students stay at the homes of their twins at night rather than staying together while touring a variety of places.

(Interruption: A senior stops in to get a late slip for his next class. Shortly thereafter, the teacher of his class checks out a discrepancy between his perception and the student's of what constitutes an acceptable excuse for the lateness. A few incisive questions bring out the whole story and the student is reprimanded firmly but with understanding.)

**Q** *Should there be a selection policy for students admitted to Christian high schools?*

**A** Ideally, only those students who have committed their lives to the Lord should attend, in the broad sense including all children of parents who are committed. Students unsure of where they stand need the chance, but those who are a detriment should be asked to go elsewhere. Some screening mechanism is needed. Parents (and kids too) should demand value for their money.

**Q** *Accusations have been made by those in the public system that it is unfair for private schools to receive funding and yet maintain selectivity. (Private schools in Alberta, including Immanuel, are partially funded.)*

**A** The public school has to serve the public at large, but here parents are interviewed and we are not selective about whom we interview. All schools have the choice of removing students. I maintain that an earlier school leaving age—15 years of age instead of 16—would help. Also, discipline problems arise among students who take too few courses.

**Q** *You've seen many new teachers begin at Immanuel. What advice do you have for them?*

**A** Be prepared, be fair, be honest, make your students work hard. Work hard yourself, that is, return assignments on time. Not doing so destroys a teacher's image. You can't pull a fast one on the students.

**Q** *What changes in education have you observed during the time you've taught?*

**A** When I started we "made do." Today we expect resources like media and teaching materials to be in place for education to be effective. Then, the teacher was on his own and spent the whole day in the classroom, often with larger numbers and combination grades. Students are more demanding now and knowledgeable in the ways of the world. A teacher has to stay up-to-date to maintain credibility.

The Christian schools today have a more diverse supporting community, with a smaller percentage of Christian Reformed supporters and more other-faith groups. This is a good thing for our CR students in that they can learn from the other groups how to express and live their faith.

We are also seeing a proliferation of new Christian schools. This has caused some loss of enrollment in the older schools. The new schools have a spark, an excitement, that we lose in an established school. The Christian schools have attained a high profile in the province of Alberta and perhaps are just too successful for their own good.

Here at Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge, we have striven for excellence because the Lord demands the best of teachers and students. One shouldn't hide under the label Christian or become competitive. We must maintain a vision that this is not just our work but that it is the Lord's work.

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*Evelyn Sterenberg is librarian at Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge, Alberta.*

# FREE WILL AND THE IMAGINATION

RANDY VELLENGA

**A** loved one dies. A son falls short of a father's expectation. A marriage shatters over petty differences. One fails to attain a new career opportunity. After years of struggle and hard work, an Olympic athlete fails to complete a race because of an inadvertent trip. A young girl comes home in tears after being cut from the basketball team. The effort spent all summer falls short of the mark. In frustration a man cries out, "Why me?"

When such experiences occur, a man might project himself into the future, dream a new dream, deny the importance of past dreams and goals, regress into the past and think of better days gone by. Perhaps he will reassure himself that things can only get better. All such activity reflects man's ability to imagine.

Imagination represents the ability to create mental images, to fantasize; it allows one human being to empathize with another. Imagination is more intuitive than logical, more ethereal than temporal. It gives meaning and order to the world when reason falls short. More importantly, imagination prompts one to reason rightly.

Analytical and logical thought alone seldom provide a meaningful understanding of God's world. I believe Christian education must transform the heart of the learner.

**T**HE best way to touch the heart and root religious center of our students is to play upon, foster, and develop the child's imagination. Reasoning skills and the process of imagination must work hand in hand if learning is to become truly meaningful.

William Beveridge's book *Seeds of Discovery* provides an excellent model to accomplish the above-stated goal of education. I use his model to demonstrate how one might teach the Reformed view of free will imaginatively 26

to a thirteen-year-old.

For discussion only, Beveridge divides the thought process into four categories, although in practice they work together.

The stages are (1) Collection of information, (2) Contemplation, (3) Conception, and (4) Criticism of the new idea—the four C's of Creativity. If during the last stage the idea is rejected, as it is in the majority of cases, one reverts to stage 2 or even right back to stage 1 (Beveridge 6).

I would like to examine each step with you.

**T**HE student will seldom be willing to collect information just to broaden intellectual horizons. A teacher can spark such a desire by making a strong case for determinism as articulated by B. F. Skinner. Begin, for example, by asking students if they believe they have free will. Based on my experience, I think you will find that most students believe strongly in free will. After all, everyday experience suggests that we do have free will. Or does it? Offer someone a choice between a pencil and your coffee cup. After the student selects, ask if she or he believes the choice made was a free one. The student will say that it was.

Next, point out that B.F. Skinner would disagree. Explain how Pavlov's dog was conditioned to respond to a bell. Now tell the student who made the choice earlier that she or he simply responded to some conditioned stimulus learned earlier in life. Have the class help think of factors that influenced the student's choice. Ask how many have ever found themselves laughing during a movie at something they did not really think was funny, but they laughed just because everyone else was laughing. Then quickly ask, "How many ate breakfast this morning?" Inevitably hands shoot

up. Make the point that they were not asked to do this but conditioned over the years to respond this way. Ask if they ever found themselves raising their hands at the dinner table to get a chance to speak. Rhetorically ask, "What do you mean, you have a free will?" Ask them to define the term if they are so certain they have this thing called free will. Point out that all our choices are influenced by some factors and hence are never really free in the true sense of the word.

Confronting students with this radical viewpoint challenges their preconceived notions regarding human choices. Such a challenge creates greater motivation within students to collect information. As a consequence you will find them consulting dictionaries and parents, and occasionally someone may even bring a psychology text to class.

I conclude this step by giving the following assignment:

Read the following verses and write the main point of each verse in your own words: Gal. 5:17, Gal. 5:11, II Cor. 3:17-18, Rom. 7:18-20, Phil. 2:13, Rom. 8:2, James 2:12, Rom. 3:10-11, 23. Based on the above passages, write a one-page paper on what the Bible means by free will.

**A**FTER examining the above biblical information on free will, the student is now ready for the act of contemplation, the next step in Beveridge's model.

Analogies help immensely during contemplation. Analogies help the student see an old problem in a new way. Beveridge aptly describes four very helpful types of analogies: personal analogy, direct analogy, symbolic analogy, and fantasy analogy.

By personal analogy I mean imagining oneself as one of the key components of the problem. Direct analogy is relating the problem to a comparable situation in another

context. . . . Symbolic analogy uses poetic imagery. . . . In fantasy analogy, members of the group let their fantasy run wild and picture in their minds quite fanciful situations, for example having a team of insects working under one's direction or having magical powers as in fairy tales (*Seeds of Discovery* 16).

One can see how the process of imagination impinges itself upon the act of contemplation.

Turning back to the example of teaching free will, the teacher might now ask the following questions:

1. Can you give an example from everyday life where you make a choice free from any influencing factors?
2. Does your pet dog or cat decide to act in a certain way without anything influencing those actions?
3. What truth or falsehood is reflected in the following verse taken from a poem: "Man cannot direct the wind, but he can adjust the sails"?
4. Suppose you were given the power to create living creatures. What kind of characteristics would you give these creatures?

These four questions, respectively, reflect Beveridge's types of analogous situations. Such questions foster and influence the student's ability to imagine.

**H**AVING collected and contemplated information, the students must now arrive at some conclusions. When people reach conclusions, the act of conception has occurred, according to Beveridge.

The teacher must now help the students realize the value of mentally stepping back as they attempt to come to some conclusion. The teacher might challenge some student whose hobby is running to let her thought process run wild while physically running. The next day in class ask if the topic of free will entered the student's

mind. Make the following proposition: "Would you be willing to try and experiment just for the fun of it? The next time you run, attempt to empty your mind of all thoughts and see if you gain any insights regarding the issue of free will."

When the student returns to class the next day, ask her to relate the experience to the entire class. At times the student will return with a flash illumination that helps in establishing a sound conclusion. Other times the experiment flops. The failure can be turned to the teacher's advantage by his pointing out how one can gain a flash insight when working on some problem. Ask the class if they have ever experienced, for example, working on a math problem that seemed impossible to solve, when suddenly the answer appeared in their minds. Physical diversions or hobbies help foster such "eureka" experiences. Einstein once said that his theory of relativity just floated into his head while he lay on a hillside (Beveridge 8). At this point help students come to some conclusion regarding free will by assigning a second paper giving a Christian perspective on free will supported by at least three biblical references.

**O**NE step remains in the framework of theoretical thought offered by Beveridge—criticism. The student ought to reason out the consequences of accepting a tentative conclusion. During this step the teacher helps the student realize the biblical implications and consequences of choosing a solution. If students conclude that people lack free will, then the teacher asks how God could possibly hold men accountable for their actions. If students conclude that man has free will, then ask how fallen man gains such freedom when the Bible states, "For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and desires of the spirit are against the flesh, for these

are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would" (Gal. 5:17). The first question forces students to go beyond superficial answers to complex problems. The second leads the students to new avenues of inquiry regarding redemption and election.

Some may argue that the above methodology will undermine the students' value system because students begin to question articles of faith they always assumed to be true. Such a danger exists, but risks must be taken if the Christian educator hopes to transform the life of the learner. I accept a point clearly established in Reinhold Niebuhr's book *Children of Light and Children of Darkness*, that one can only hope to find "proximate solutions for insoluble problems" (118). The Christian teacher must humbly admit with Paul, "Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (I Cor. 13:12, NIV).

Jacques Ellul strikes at the heart of the issue:

Parents then must be willing to allow their children to be placed in danger, knowing that there is no possible education in Christ without the presence of the real dangers of the world, for without danger Christian education is only a worthless pretty picture which will not help at all when children first meet up with concrete life. (*Money and Power* 121).

Exercising the child's ability to imagine presents real risks, risks which must be taken to transform the life of the learner. Children must develop a world-life view which stems from the fruit of their own unique relationship with God and fellow man. A transformation of the heart will never occur if students simply mimic what they believe teachers want to hear. Imagine that!

*Randy Vellenga is teaching Bible in his first year at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Michigan. He has also taught Bible and social studies at the junior high level.*

# SPITWAD PEDAGOGY

JAMES C. SCHAAP

**N**O one has a perfectly pristine past. Black-garbed memories lurk like ghosts in the pages of our unwritten diaries, peeking out only to laugh at us—a shrill, high-pitched witch's laugh—when we resolve, as we often do, to be nice people, decent, friendly, and loving. We've all got gremlins back there in the gritty dirt of our lives, so I'm going to make a confession. Let him, or her, who is without sin cast the first spitwad.

This dirty memory has a lot to do with spitwads. Spitwads were something of a fad when I was an eighth grader; big and messy, they required a specific recipe if they were to be made right. The really fine spitwads were soggy globs of the right kind of paper, not dittoed sheets—they were far too shiny and didn't absorb a thing. Notebook paper was better; the blue lines didn't leave any stain on your lips either. But the best paper for spitwads was actually the cheapest paper available, the kind of paper handed out to first graders, the thin stuff in which you could still locate slivers of wood. Kleenex might have been best, of course, but once you got it wet, it had no consistency. Spitwads must be functional; a mass of sloppy kleenex was an un-wingable glob. You had to have the right kind of paper to make a classic spitwad.

It was a Friday, I remember—3:30, or so, that dangerous time just before dismissal, the time when teachers, surrounded by chaos, make an oath to themselves that they will attain classroom order once again starting next Monday morning. Our class had just completed some art project during which most of us had been out of our seats most of the time, either playing critic to our friend's creations or running out into the hall to clean our hands, joyfully, in the washroom. It was general bedlam time.

One more aspect of the spitballing art needs an explanation, however.

When I was an eighth grader, we weren't vicious spitwaders. We never whipped them at each other, or at least not often. The idea of perfectly accomplished spitwadding was to get them wet and doughy and then stick them up in strategic places, maybe on the ceiling, where they'd eventually sit in little colonies between the lights, or better yet, on the chalkboard or on Abe Lincoln's bust, someplace where the teacher would suddenly spot them—fat, ugly carbuncles like a wet blight on his dignity.

So this particular Friday afternoon, I was brewing up a beauty, chewing away on a cheek full of wet paper like a New York Yankee catcher. As I remember, it was a classic—globby, round, perfectly soft without being a mess. I rolled it out of my mouth and took aim at the window right up next to the teacher's desk. He was plagued by students anyway. Figuring he'd never spot me, I took aim and whipped it. No one stepped in the way, so it flattened up against the window in almost perfect silence. Spongy and soft, it stuck right there like a mushy plug.

But I was wrong about the teacher. I'm not sure how, but he saw me. "Jim!" he yelled. He raised his voice in a way that stopped Friday afternoon's chaos dead.

"Jim," he said, rising from his chair, "did you do that?"

I assumed the question was rhetorical.

"I can't believe it," he said. "I just can't believe that *you* would do it—*you*, a *Schaap*!"

I need a footnote here to explain that my Grandfather Schaap, recently deceased, had occupied the pulpit in a local church not that many years before, in an age when pastors were *Dominies*. What's more, my father was the incumbent town mayor. My teacher's astonishment, thus, had something to do with my parentage,

and what he considered the unlikelihood of such behavior in a child endowed with noble genes.

As I remember, I had to stay after, probably to clean the window and do other penance, as well as receive the traditional sermon. But I remember little of that. I've forgotten what he had to say when the other kids were gone. All I really remember is the indictment he laid on me in front of them, his obvious shock at my behavior, the perplexed admonition he gave me, as if one spitwad had disowned me from a proud familial heritage.

At that, I was enraged. I felt an injustice had been done to me—not that I didn't deserve punishment for throwing a lousy spitwad, but that somehow my teacher should so publicly lug in my entire family tree, as if one wet piece of paper would make my own Reverend grandfather shiver in his grave.

That afternoon I walked home fuming at the idea that I should be anybody other than who I was: an eighth grader just like any other eighth grader, responsible only to himself and not to some judicial board of family governors. I felt horribly put upon, because I knew that he wouldn't have reacted like that to anyone else. It seemed unjust. I was singled out for acute wrath on his part, simply because, in his estimation, I had profaned a good family name. That afternoon, I confess, I hated my teacher.

All of that I remember perfectly, but not one other incident from that entire school year, not even eighth grade graduation, hangs so vividly in my memory. I'm sure my eighth grade teacher taught me history, math, science—all kinds of facts that have become part of my understanding of God's world. But those things are part of my understanding; they are givens. Learning who gave his sword to whom at Appomattox is not a vivid memory

of my eighth grade education, even though I'm glad I know the story of Lee and Grant.

In my memory my eighth grade teacher has only one line—the one he delivered, like Jeremiah, one Friday afternoon. That's the one that sticks, not unlike that spitwad, to the walls of my consciousness.

But after so many years, I can't help but wonder why that incident is the only living memory of an entire year of education? What is it about that spitwad and that remark that give the moment permanence in my mind? It's not because his attack changed my behavior. I'd like to say that I never again winged a spitball, but it wouldn't be true. It would be nice to say that his words made me change my ways, made me a darling forever after. I'd like to say that, but I can't. It didn't. Obviously, the memory remains fresh for other reasons.

Maybe it stays there because I was done an injustice. Being a teacher myself, I sometimes wonder about the ethics of what he said. Was it right for him to say what he did—call into question my fitness for inclusion in what he considered an upstanding village family? Let's extend him the courtesy of admitting that none of us can be truly responsible for our most heated reactions to anything that grieves us. If, in fact, what he did makes war on good educational psychology, I'll forgive him his anger. Even David asks God not to punish him in wrath, to wait instead until things have cooled down.

But even when we forgive him, what must we say about his denunciation?—after all, it's the words that are there in my mind yet today. Was it right for him to admonish me the way he did, lay on the guilt from a dead grandfather? Some educational psychologists, I'm sure, would say that such an outburst, no matter what the provocation, could have destroyed my

spirit—that his reaction was uncalled for and patently unfair, not only to me but to those kids whose blood lines he may have considered less noble than mine. After all, his indictment implied that such indecorous behavior could be expected from kids of lesser stock.

If his scolding was not good psychology, I forgive him. After all, his anger so many years ago has at least spawned this essay, not to mention the joy I've had from so many years of speculation on the memory.

Even if it were wrong, I've forgiven him—basically because what that teacher did for me on one Friday afternoon, despite what any sweetsie educational psychologist might say, was build for me a private rite of passage. I am convinced, these many years later, that in laying before me the burden of an honored familial legacy, he was outlining, in a startling red magic marker, the manner by which this student of his was a part of a family, part of a promise, part even of a community. That teacher made painfully clear that I was not a free agent, that I didn't have the option of discarding an identity, and that I didn't have the luxury of thinking that my responsibility started and ended with my own person. His outburst, however ill-timed, was a sharp lesson in maturity. It stuck, and—pragmatic as this may sound—because it worked, it was right. That's at least part of the reason the spitwad incident stuck in my mind.

Some writers say that our most acute memories are sharp because we still haven't decided what to do with them. They make good stories, not because we understand them, but because we don't. And I know this much—there's still more to the spitwad story. If I had just made my peace with my teacher, his words would have long ago slipped from my attention.

*The most deeply felt lessons we wish to impart to our students, those classroom moments we want to leave with them forever, may not finally be the moments that stick.*

But there's something else rattling around in my mind from the incident, something, finally, about our own meager efforts to be something that we can't be on our own. Chances are, if my teacher reads this story today, if he remembers that he was, in fact, my eighth grade teacher, he will probably turn to his wife and say, "For the life of me, I don't remember that." Perhaps his memory of that year includes some other incidents involving an eighth grader named Schaap, but it's likely, I think, that a spitwad isn't one of them.

Here's the puzzle to me as a teacher. The most deeply felt lessons we wish to impart to our students, those classroom moments we want to leave with them forever, may not finally be the moments that stick. Those quiet discussions we plot out to impress them still must be picked up, must be heard, because a tree falling in a forest has no sound. Try as we might, we can't select the pitch of a student's attention—that is something almost certainly beyond our control, and, if my dogma sustains me here—something even often beyond theirs.

My eighth grade teacher, saying what he did to me on that Friday afternoon, affected my life in ways he will

never know by a remark he almost certainly has forgotten. That is the mystery. How many of my students remember things I've said to them, lines that long ago have escaped my own memory? And here is the fear in such a mystery—that somehow we aren't controlling much at all when, in fact, we think we are plunked securely in the driver's seat of our lives. It's odd and it's scary to be faced with the reality of that confession.

That a teacher can form character in his or her students is no great news. What's shocking and scary is that we may be doing the most effective job of character-forming in those moments not pre-recorded in detailed lesson plans.

Perhaps this story continues to haunt me because its strangeness is a kind of precise proof of the mystery of God's control of our lives. While we all can eschew the kind of mathematical certainty behavioralists use to define cause and effect in the lives of human beings, there are times when we can't but marvel at the tenuous nature of our own free will. Sometimes, it seems, we aren't in control. My eighth grade teacher had no idea that his admonition would be his personal, notarized legacy in my life. But that scolding remains the one moment I remember from eighth grade.

The story stands, I think, as an argument for God's rule in our lives. We think we're our own best architects,

the creators of our lives' puzzles, but it's the Master Artist who draws the sometimes silly cartoon lines of our lives. He is, after all, Jehovah, and we are—despite heads full of ambition—but human.

There, now I've said it. I feel better already. Confession, they say, is good for the soul.

But there's still this gnawing in me, an echo, I suppose, of my teacher's ringing admonition: I can't help wondering what my mother is going to think—even now—of my throwing that spitwad.

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*James Schaap teaches English at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.*

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#### PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

## **IF STUDENT JANICE IS PREGNANT, WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS SHE?**

BEN BOXUM

I do not intend to turn the Principal's Perspective column into a "Dear Ann Landers" column. Ann is doing well, I suppose, and you may correspond with her directly.

I do intend, however, to present some thoughts concerning student pregnancy and abortion and school responsibilities in relation to these sad situations.

I dare say that many of you remember when a student's pregnancy ended her formal high school education. Usually the girl would tearfully inform the principal that she was pregnant and would be dropping out of school. Today that procedure is unlikely in the Christian high school. Nor should it be used, in my opinion.

Because of the infamous 1973 Su-

preme Court ruling which legalized abortion, some procedure and policy should be a part of every school board's manual.

The potential for abortion during the pregnancy of a Christian high student is very real. Even though a high school girl is physically able to become a mother, emotionally and psychologically she is rarely ready to

handle the increased emotional trauma of pregnancy.

A second consideration of the school in its student pregnancy policy is "the party of the second part," namely the father. It is highly probable that the boy involved is free to pursue his education with no other concern than his own conscience and the wisecracks from his peers. This practice is not wise, in my opinion.

Admittedly, any dealing with discipline has the risk of being punitive, though that is not the intent of Christian school boards. No perfect policy can be written, whether it deals with athletic codes, attendance, or pregnancy. Regardless, we need to do the best we can in using pooled, sanctified, common sense as board, administration, and faculty in establishing a procedure.

Hence, a plan of action is incumbent. Here is one such procedure:

**Policy Regarding Students Who Become Expectant Parents.** Attending a Christian school is a privilege. Student conduct that dishonors the school and the name of Christ may result in a withdrawal of this privilege by the school board.

Reasons for a policy regarding students who become expectant parents include the following:

1. The make-up of a high school student body does not include parents. It is not a normal or desirable situation to have the high school student body populated with expectant parents.

2. Disapproval of pre-marital sex and pregnancy outside of marriage is based on the scriptural teaching that God established marriage and families and God commands against fornication.

When students who are expectant parents are permitted to attend school with little or no reproof, it appears the school authorities are indifferent to

this sin.

If expectant parents are denied attendance for a period of time, this policy will emphasize to students and school community alike what is the school's stand and may serve as a deterrent for other students.

3. Compassion is shown to those involved by enabling them to complete their high school requirements as outlined in this policy.

### **Provisions for Completing Graduation Requirements.**

1. That attendance at school by expectant parents, whether male or female, be terminated at the end of the quarter in which knowledge of expectant parenthood is known to the school.

2. That after the birth of the child the expectant parent may be considered for readmittance to school providing the student has received spiritual counseling from the student's pastor and gives evidence to the pastor and administration of a genuine repentance before God concerning this matter. In case the student has no pastor, some mutually agreed upon Christian adult capable of spiritual counseling may serve.

3. That the student receive the benefit of school counseling when desired.

4. That when possible, arrangements be made to enable the student to continue academic work through personalized instruction.

5. That because of the emotional intensity generally associated with a student bearing a child out of wedlock, the faculty shall be reminded to strive diligently to demonstrate the love of Christ in all matters associated with the situation toward all persons involved.

This policy provides opportunity for the parent(s) to complete their high school education. It provides help through counseling during and following the special situation.

### **Position of the School Board.**

1. The school regards a student at this school who becomes an expectant parent, as having sinned against the seventh commandment. The school will deal with the person(s) involved in cooperation with the home and church to promote repentance before God and restoration into the Christian community.

2. The school is committed to the moral law given by God in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and further interpreted by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:37-40.

3. The school is opposed to and will take appropriate action on matters deemed immoral or illegal over which the board determines it has jurisdiction.

4. The school's position is that abortion is sin against the sixth commandment.

Perhaps the reader believes that the school has no jurisdiction over matters which do not occur at school. However, behavior which is clearly immoral and/or illegal can negatively affect the school community. The school, then, needs to consider the influence on the student body and also to work with the church in bringing repentance and restoration.

Maybe you have much better methods of handling difficult matters where so much potential exists for helping or harming the persons involved. If not, I personally hope these thoughts can help your school.

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*Ben Boxum, editor of Principal's Perspective, is the superintendent of Lynden Christian School in Lynden, Washington.*

# MEMORIES NOW PSALM 144

RICHARD FRENCH

What is man that you should be mindful of him?

He smiled at her over the newspaper.  
The sun that flooded the tidy kitchen  
Gave the ivy and the linoleum and the yellow tablecloth  
An unexpected freshness and beauty.  
Married seventeen years.  
Still not forty.

May our barns be full.

Remember? she said.  
The rainy day we decided to get married.  
Our books got soaked on the way to class;  
The covers bled.  
Mine was Victorian Poetry.  
And mine, he said brightening, was physical science,  
Which I'd already failed twice.  
It was in the shelter of a chestnut tree,  
Cutting class,  
That we decided to marry.

I will sing a new song to you, O God.

How young we were!  
How different our backgrounds!  
How wise our feelings!

A new song.  
May your sheep bear lambs in thousands and thousands.

What busy people we've been!  
Children. The house. Your clients.  
We've kept the same friends.  
(Who can say that?)  
The phone rings all the time.

May our sons grow up as the young plants.

But I know what you're thinking, she added.  
Jobs changing suddenly.  
The excitement of trying to do  
Something great with our lives.  
And the disappointment that never fades.

Man is nothing.

His time passes away like a shadow.

He put down the newspaper.  
Remember? he said.  
When the Beatles first came out.  
The University Tap on Friday nights.  
And how much beer we used to drink?  
You used to drink, she countered.  
I kept you company.

Whose mouths talk of vanity.

I know what you're thinking.  
Life tears at you, pulls you apart.  
You're sorry you gave up your dream.  
What dream is that?  
I was thinking of the University Tap.

My hope and my fortress. My deliverer.

The memories of school days.  
I think of those wonderful years, too.  
But we also have now, don't we?  
Don't we have now?  
Yes we do. I want to go back to that dream.

Who teaches my hands to war  
And my fingers to fight.  
Cast forth your lightning: tear them.

I want to go back to that dream, he said again.  
Will you help me?  
Of course.  
This time we won't give up.

Listen: there's something in the breeze. Can you hear it?

Happy are they!  
Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.

## BOOK REVIEWS

DONALD OPPEWAL

### **TOWARD CHRISTIAN MATURITY, K-6: A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR TEACHING HUMAN SEXUALITY.**

**Author: William Hendricks**

**Christian Schools International, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1981, 148 pp. \$11.00**

**Reviewed by Marilyn J. Wierenga, Christian school board member, Tri-unity Christian School, Grandville, Michigan**

After carefully reading the curriculum guide *Toward Christian Maturity, K-6*, I am pleased to report that this book shows sensitivity to both parents and teachers. Because my background has been that of book reviewer of public school textbooks, I am accustomed to writing reviews critical of modern secular humanist texts. For me, it is pleasant to write a review which is nearly entirely commendatory.

First, I would like to comment on the format. Concepts and goals build consistently from grade to grade, giving valuable emphasis and continuity in the learning process. The book aims at doing a great deal more than just teach physical facts of sex. It is really a text on family living, with social, emotional, and moral maturity integrated with physical facts of sex. For example, time is spent on getting the child to accept his own individuality, to take interest in grooming, to respect authority, to build interpersonal relationships, to acquire babysitting skills, and to recognize and avoid vulgarity and drug/substance abuse.

The curriculum guide gives specific suggestions for parent/school cooperation to assist the child's learning in the sensitive social areas. Also, the author shows consistent sympathetic regard for the one-parent families, giving suggestions to the teacher of ways to adapt projects and discussions to protect the feelings of the child from such a family.

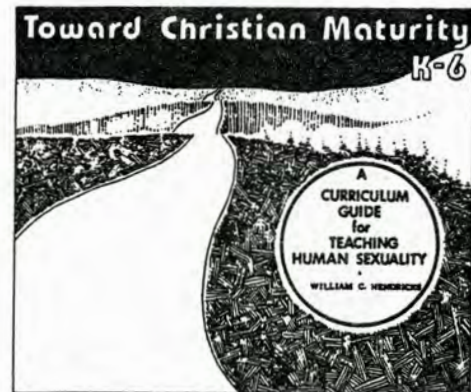
One refreshing and notable difference between this text and that of the secular humanists is the presentation of traditional, biblical, male and female sex roles. Teaching respect for

one's parents and siblings, sharing, helping, and communicating in the family, and valuing one's family heritage are all included.

The text provides generally good integration with biblical principles, and other literature and audio-visual resources are suggested. The fruits of the Spirit are taught as exemplifying virtuous character. Also, repeated emphasis is given for the child to trust and accept the sovereignty of God in regard to acceptance of one's body, sex, and appearance. There is also very positive presentation of the sanctity of life, implying the evil of abortion and suicide.

The physical sex information included in this book is very basic. In early grades, discussion and projects involve observation of plant and animal reproduction. There is also early introduction (first grade) of proper anatomical terminology and discussion of obvious physical differences between boys and girls, including discussion of modesty and polite use of restroom facilities. First graders also learn about good nutrition, physical fitness, and growth patterns. Grade by grade, the sex facts increase until, in the fifth grade, where provision is made for extended discussion of physical changes in puberty and the anatomical facts of human reproduction. Finally, in Grade 6, the students discuss venereal disease and abortion, with emphasis on the moral and spiritual implications.

The philosophy of the book is openly Christian throughout. Doctrinal treatment of infant baptism is presented, but this could be omitted without difficulty for use of the book in a Baptist-affiliated school. Also, a subtle bias exists regarding hospital births as opposed to home deliveries—very minor, but noticeable twice in the book; again, this could be omitted without any damage. With only one or two exceptions, the author is very



careful to guard against "invasion of privacy" in recommended discussion topics regarding a student's family life.

The book is exactly what its title suggests: a Christian perspective to psychology, physiology, sociology, biology, anatomy, and ethics for the purpose of aiding our children toward Christian physical, emotional, and moral maturity.

## Tuition Tax Credits for Private Education

AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS



Donald E. Frey  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS  
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

## The First Christians

An Illustrated History of the Church

From the Beginnings to A.D. 100  
Illustrated by Antonio Molino



### TUITION TAX CREDITS FOR PRIVATE EDUCATION: AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS.

Author: Donald E. Frey

Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa. 1983,  
119 pp., \$10.50 pb.

Reviewed by George N. Monsma, Jr., Profes-  
sor of Economics, Calvin College, Grand Rap-  
ids, Michigan 49506.

In this book Professor Frey uses econometric techniques (the application of statistical methods to the study of economic data and problems) to estimate the elasticities of demand for and supply of private education in the United States.

Frey then uses the elasticities to discuss the costs, distribution of benefits, impact on racial composition of private and public schools, impact on local support for public education, and the efficiency in meeting various announced goals of a hypothetical federal tax credit of 50 percent of the tuition and fees paid for private elementary or secondary education, subject to a \$500 maximum per student. Chapter two, in which Frey estimates

the elasticities of demand and supply will be understandable only to persons with a background in econometrics, but most of the book can be followed by those who understand the definitions of the elasticities used and who are familiar with basic algebra.

Frey's work is important since the elasticities are major determinants of the costs and effects of any tax credit that might be passed. He clearly shows that many estimated costs of such credits by proponents are likely to be considerably below the actual costs of the credits because the estimates are based on the assumption that the credit will not change the number of students enrolled.

Unfortunately, the data Frey works with is so aggregated that it does not inspire great confidence in his results. His data on tuition and enrollment in nonpublic schools is based on 1976-78 state-wide averages of all nonpublic schools. He also works with 1968-70 state-wide data for only Catholic ele-

mentary and secondary schools. In spite of limitations and the fact that Frey occasionally seems to interpret his results in ways not fully justified by the results, his econometric technique is fairly sophisticated and his results are more useful than the often-used zero elasticity hypothesis.

Frey also estimates that a tax credit subject to a fixed dollar maximum would increase segregation in the public schools, but not by a "large" amount. While on average this is probably true, it may cause considerably more white and middle-class flight from school systems where racial prejudice is high or where school conditions are relatively poor. He also concludes that the institution of a credit is not likely to result in a large decrease in taxpayer support for public education.

Based partly on some rather inadequate data, Frey estimates that low-income parents will receive a lower proportion of the benefits than their proportion of students in private schools. It does appear that this would be true, even if Frey's estimates of the magnitude of this are inexact.

In spite of its limitations (many of them beyond the control of the author) this is a significant book for those who are interested in the issue of tax credits for private education. It shows the complexity of the problems of estimating the effects of tax credits and the need for better data on which to base estimates.

## AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Creator and Producer: Jaca Book

Winston Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1980,  
10 Volumes, \$16.95 ea., \$119.00 set, hb.

Reviewed by Lyn Newbrander, Masters student,  
Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

*An Illustrated History of the Church*, based on Hubert Jedin's *History of the Church*, is an impressive attempt to make church history accessible and alive to junior high school students. The full-color, large illustrations on each page, the brief large-type synopses before each of the fifty, two-page chapters in each volume, and the readability of the work invite students to take a closer look at the content. Imaginary families in each period of history briefly integrate daily living with history to give the reader a picture of what life and worship would have been like for his own family had they lived at that time in history. The integration of secular history with church history throughout each volume helps students see the church in historical context and relate events in secular history with movements in the church.

The producers claim that these volumes also serve as reference tools for high school students. To that end, an outline of the content of each volume is found on the inside back cover with approximate dates, and, in some volumes, recommendations for further reading are given. The writers have also done an excellent job of defining words in context.

Several serious drawbacks, however, make the books difficult to use. The absence of a glossary is frustrating for young students encountering many new and unfamiliar terms. In addition, none of the volumes have page numbers, so teachers and students must reference with chapter numbers. Another difficulty students encounter is the lack of any indexing.

Perhaps the most serious drawback of the work, however, is the perspective of the authors. Although they attempt to be objective, their Catholic views come to the surface again and again. The emphasis upon the importance of works of charity as necessary for forgiveness (the "sacrament of Penance") comes through clearly, as does veneration of and prayer to the saints, the view of Mary as sinless, the Mass as a sacrifice, and transubstantiation. The authors' definition of humanism, placing man rather than God at the center of life, seems clear, but humanism is held up as something positive and "Christian Humanists" are praised for their high view of man. The contradiction between definition and application is confusing.

The authors do give good explanations of the heresies, church councils, and basic teachings of the church fathers (such as Augustine). They also give a wide perspective on the history of the church in Europe after the founding of America. Later they incorporate discussion of the spread of Christianity to other countries and show what was happening in the church in each country at a given time in history, ending the last volume in South America rather than the U.S. These works also expose students to a Catholic view of church history and answer many questions about Catholic traditions, tracing them from their beginnings to the present. The explanation of the development of the rosary, for example, or the role of church tradition in the Catholic church, is helpful in broadening the view of students who have had little exposure to Catholicism.

The Catholic slant of the book, however, is definitely a source of concern. Predestination is defined and condemned as "mistaken" and as "heresy." Icons, sacred images, and relics are seen as helpful in worship,

with no negative judgment passed until closer to the Reformation, and then only abuses are criticised. More emphasis is placed on the Counter-Reformation than on the Reformation itself. There is only a passing mention of the great revivals in Protestant history, and more attention is given to liberal Protestant theologians than to any evangelical theologians. Few Protestant missionaries are given credit other than several outstanding men like Livingstone or Taylor, but many Catholic missionaries are highlighted.

The similarities of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are stressed, and Islam is especially praised for the sincerity of its followers. It is never presented as false, but merely as different. There is little focus on anything as right or wrong, although living a simple life and doing acts of charity are held up as positive characteristics to strive for in life.

Finally, the definition of the word *Christian* is broad and sweeping. Renaissance art was "Christian" because of its subject matter, not because a particular world and life view was represented that is consistent with the Christian faith. The book refers to "Arian Christians," "Christian Humanists," and "Christian Existentialists." Contrary to Reformed thinking, the word *Christian* does not include a strong sense of the gospel, regeneration, and the covenant, but is seen as mere association with religion. These drawbacks make *An Illustrated History of the Church* impractical for classroom use.