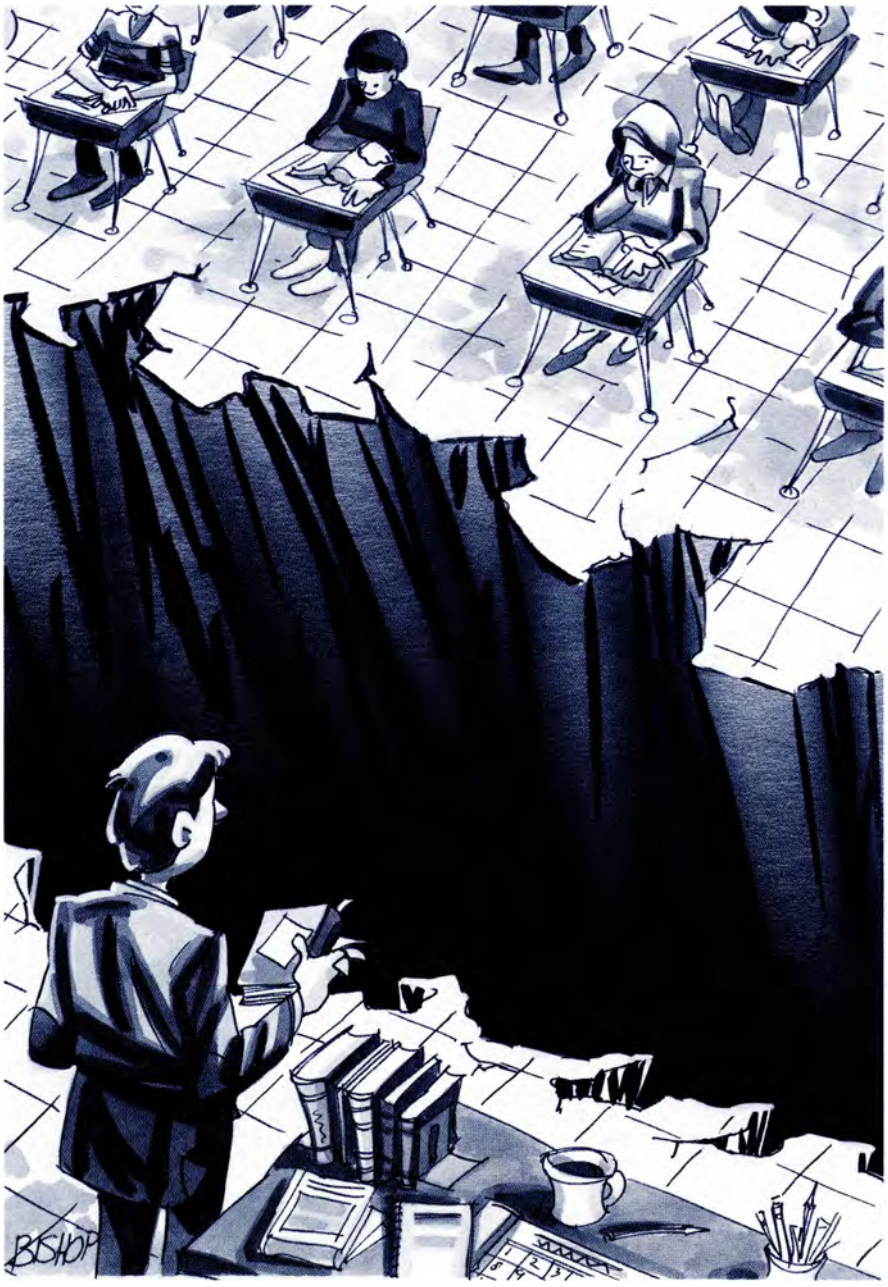
JOURNAL
CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS



WHAT I WISH I HAD LEARNED ABOUT TEACHING WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE

April-May 1989
Volume 28, Number 4

Editorial.

Red Ink and Other Regrets

BY LORNA VAN GILST

One hot June day while serving as counselor at Hi-Camp, I was planning to ease into the swimming pool. Suddenly I found myself spluttering in the chlorinated water. "That's for writing my parents a letter when I was in eighth grade," a former student yelled good-naturedly from the edge. "I can understand why you had to write the letter, but did you have to use red ink?"

I rarely use a red pen any more. Red ink raises too many regrets about my first year of teaching.

Besides writing the letter, I committed other abuses with red ink that year. I spent hours demoralizing students by stalking their every writing error with my red pen. Some of my comments were useless. Some were even cruel: "Any first grader could do work like this" or "This looks like encyclopedia writing instead of your own ideas." How often since then have I wished I could remove those awful red scars.

My first-year teaching errors are not pleasant to recall, but perhaps the following hints can help new teachers avoid my mistakes:

Get all the facts before making a judgement. If a student says he or she has turned in an assignment that you can't find, agree to look once more through your folder and suggest the student also look again. You may be absolutely sure you are innocent, but unless you allow the student one more opportunity to turn in the missing work, he or she will have to invent an excuse. Once in a while you yourself may have misplaced the paper. Besides, confrontation does no good unless you have obvious evidence of wrong and unless the student knows you are more concerned about character than grades. Respect for you will grow when students know that you demonstrate fairness rather than power.

Practice saying "I was wrong." No one is always right; students will respect you more if you can admit failures simply—without long-winded justification—and forgive yourself graciously.

Be gently honest but sensitive when you talk with parents about their child's study habits, personal needs, or behavior. Parents want the truth, but they are deeply hurt by their children's failures. While you have the advantage of a more objective view of their child within the whole class, they know better than you how upset their son or daughter feels when the dog dies, when a classmate offends, when life at home is falling apart. Usually a parent already knows the child's problems, and to hear more about them seems depressing, so you should concentrate more on what the parent can do to encourage the child.

Sometimes the parent is unable to correct a home situation, and teachers should try to understand. My colleagues and I were thoughtless the time we pressed a mother to get her daughter to an orthodontist, only to learn afterwards that the father had refused to pay for dental care. Though we meant well, we actually added to the mother's burden by failing to bring up the matter tactfully enough, instead giving the impression that she was neglectful.

Realize that a student who constantly misbehaves is likely sending another message. When students irritate you with loud burps, drumming on the desk, horse laughs, throwing of little pebbles through your classroom, or nasty black streaks on your floor, they are probably more interested in your attention than your anger. You will have to choose whether to humor them, to ignore them, or to talk openly with them, but anger rarely solves your problem or theirs. You will have to endure a certain amount of testing when you are new. Students will try to learn how far they can push you, but patience, love, pleasant firmness, openness, and humor will serve you well. Try to determine the real reason the class clown needs your attention.

Get the students involved in a lesson before you try to explain why they need to learn it. Show rather than tell whenever you can. Let the students discover whatever they can, so you don't destroy their initiative and interest. Your job is

to set up the situation so they can experience the joy of learning and the satisfaction of applying what they learn in new ways. Then they will take more responsibility for their own learning.

Ask the students to help you decide how to plan and evaluate some units or how to solve a class problem. I saw beautiful cooperation in a previously unmotivated class when the students themselves helped plan a program based on their mass media unit and presented it to the Parent Teacher Association. The year we implemented a personalized grammar study the class took pride in figuring out a better way to arrange the schedule. One class gave new spirit to our Christmas celebration when they were given the opportunity to plan major changes. We should remember that students prefer orderly activity as much as teachers do, and they appreciate being needed to solve some of their own problems.

Learn when to say "No." I teach now in a place where new teachers have one less class than veteran teachers and no major committee assignments the first year. Usually the opposite occurs in elementary and secondary Christian schools. Whereas veteran teachers develop the courage to say they have no time to coach another sport or sponsor another club, new teachers often naively accept whatever extracurricular assignments get dumped on them. New teachers would be wise to ask first to develop their courses and see how much time and energy they have left to devote to extra involvements.

Pray daily, even hourly, that you may be God's instrument in his service. Don't try to impress either God or the parents with your fine ability to teach. Rather, ask God to fill you with his spirit that you may be his faithful servant. You will be humbled, surprised, and blessed by the way in which he uses you in the lives of your students.

May you teach with joy! **CEJ**

"Okay, Impress Me!"

BY W. DALE BROWN

"The Christian, called to teach, must see as fundamental that the call is to service, not to power."

The first day of school, so threatening when we were children, is even more daunting now that we are trying to be teachers. We've all heard the rhetoric about first impressions, a stern beginning ("Don't smile 'til Christmas!"), establishing rules, guidelines, and on and on. I suppose all of that has relevance, but the genuine challenge in today's schools, at least in the upper levels, is a deeply ingrained student attitude toward the entire process. Ironically, it is this challenge for which many of our best new teachers are completely unprepared. All those hours of arduous study and those dreams of imparting knowledge to eager students often seem chillingly ill-directed in the bell-ringing reality of the high school classroom.

In fact, to use the word "student" is to abuse it. The majority of young people in local high schools view themselves as attenders—people who have to go—and they try to make the best of it by enjoying the social involvement and enduring the educational busywork. Even our Christian students have adopted the survival skills of the veteran system player. Oh, of course, there still exists the occasional student who, because of some extraordinary motivation, really wants to learn. Thankfully. But the overwhelming majority will be those who file in on the first day, slump down in their seats, and dare you to teach them anything: "Okay, here I am; impress me!"

By virtue of your position, you are immediately lumped into the "teacher category," which translates into "the enemy." Most junior and senior high schools are drawn up along these battle-like lines. The teacher is the Argos-like sentry trying to keep the students from doing what they really want to do, and the student's basic assignment is to get away with everything pos-

sible. The first roadblock in teaching is not teacher knowledge in content area or skill in decorating bulletin boards; it is the challenge of breaking through an attitude that school is a prison-like place to be endured and teachers are jailer-like people to be avoided. Such problems can even be multiplied in a Christian school where young people have learned to mimic the outward pieties they have observed in adults and where religiosity can sometimes provide one more excuse for avoidance of the genuine probing into the human heart which is education.

Quite simply, the problem is intensified at the outset, because the policies and procedures that have led to the development of these attitudes persist as "the way things are" in many school systems. We run the school like a prison and are shocked when the kids act like prisoners. We are taught to avoid being "overly close" to our students, and administrators communicate, early on, that the teachers whom the students despise are probably the ones "doing the best job!"

As Herbert Kohl says in *On Teaching*, "To teach well, one must risk being rejected by many of the adults at one's school for caring too much about the students." Administrators and teachers have often come to expect and accept boredom and apathy as the normal student response. Beginning teachers will face the constant temptation to simply fall in line with this expectation. A good teacher will not be satisfied with military-like efficiency and puppet-like obedience from students. Beyond the structures of classroom discipline looms the question, "Is anybody here learning anything?" The good teacher will never be able to walk away from that question.

Ted Ward, a curriculum researcher at Michigan State, in arguing that schooling is "a defective approach to education," lists, as one of the central sources of weakness in schools, the "unearned status" that is simply ascribed to the teacher and the resulting hierarchy of authority that tends to stifle student growth. Ward rightly sees that the distance between the rights and expectations for the teacher and those for the learner creates a formidable barrier. Teaching ought to be an earned right. The Christian, called to teach, must see as fundamental that the call is to service, not to power. That is, teaching can never occur where there is not, first of all, relationship, respect, and service.

Students quickly recognize the teacher reveling in authoritarian power. Teachers who wield despotic power will, generally, get the grudging obeisance of the students, but it is education in fear. Instead of instilling in our youth a desire to know and be more, we are, with this approach, driving them into viewing schools as frightful places where playfulness and humor might bring down punishment and where the things of real life are to be temporarily shelved.

We teach this early, of course, when we punish young students by making them read through recess or stay after school. By using school to punish and reading as a thing to do when you've broken rules, we implicitly accept the student's evolving conception that school is the sort of place one ought always to avoid. John Holt's essay "How Teachers Make Children Hate Reading" treats the issue of how we have made schools into joyless and dangerous places for our students. The new teacher's first task, I fear, is to attack the deeply entrenched mentality of drudgery.

Students who are told, "You do it because I said so," and "I'm the teacher!" will perform as the reasoning of those statements suggests—intractably, unwillingly, unhappily. Given the current situation, developing relationships with students is a tricky business. Some have been so well-trained in war techniques that overtures of friendship bewilder them. Others have learned the art of feigning friendship in order to ingratiate themselves to a teacher and get special treatment and privileges. The teacher who offers to respect and care about students will be taken advantage of, walked on, tricked, and conned. So what? Over the long haul, the teacher who displays a deep love for the quest for knowledge and a deeper love for those with whom he or she is sharing that quest will have an opportunity truly to teach.

Students themselves, in their honest moments, recognize that an attitude of apathy ranks among the major contributors to failing public education. In unguarded moments, generally away from the school facility, these young people will be open about their boredom, their survival skills, their duplicity and fearfulness. Attacking the problem of student apathy will imply not only teachers with interesting presentations but teachers who are willing to come down off their authoritarian pedestals to involve the learners in an atmosphere of friendliness, honesty, and respect. This does not, however, imply a free-for-all. Developing relationships with students never means undisciplined chaos. By discussing the implications of respect (a requisite for the first day), guidelines of orderliness can be established. Emphasize for the students that your respect for them implies a like response toward you and the other students in the classroom. Don't allow ridicule and put down to be practiced in any form. And always remember to appeal to your one dominating guideline—respect. Respect for one another, respect for the material to be studied, respect for oneself, respect for faith that ties all of this together.

One of my great joys as a student was to trick my teachers into a digression. In hearing about some escapade or experience of theirs, we were postponing some of the drudgery of the work that the teacher was momentarily forgetting. Now, one of my great joys as a teacher is to allow myself to be "tricked" into a digression. In hearing about who I am and why I respect knowledge, my students are gradually deciding, I hope, that learning can be useful and even exciting. Perhaps we have developed too much fear as teachers—we must not talk about religion, politics, schools, family problems, sex. Even our so-called Christian schools have to exist in an atmosphere of litigation and "tricky subjects." No wonder so many potential learners become mere attenders. Can you imagine anything more dull than such contentless

drivel?

Don't be afraid to let the course flow into the real lives of your students. Stop treating school as if it were all preparation for more school and a job at the far end of somewhere. School has to do with now, as well. Those teachers loved by the administration because the kids are "so quiet" in their rooms may be great disciplinarians. They get an A+ in classroom management. But if they are hated by students, one might be suspicious of the quality of the daily learning experience for students. These teachers are orators, disseminators of information, organizers, authority figures, and directors. They control; they often do not teach.

In my first year of teaching, I had a ninth grader named Rusty. He was an average student with the usual reluctance to do more than get by. But Rusty and I "supplemented the curriculum." We played chess before school and often shot baskets during my conference hour. We were close enough for me to say, "Have you read your *Great Expectations* for tomorrow?" without sounding like a policeman. It made a difference.

Suggestions:

1 Talk freely about yourself on the first day of the class. Tell the students why you teach, and why you love what you teach.

2 Avoid the temptation to manipulate students. Don't trick them into doing the work. Talk to them as people capable of making responsible decisions. (After all, we let them drive at sixteen; can't we let them think a bit as well?)

3 Don't gossip. Friendliness and openness with students doesn't imply meddling into personal arenas of their lives.

4 Make respect the dominant motif of your approach to teaching. You'll be surprised at the response.

5 Do special things to break the conventional atmosphere. (Perhaps, you might have an intermission as does Donald Elkins in his agriculture classes at Southern Illinois University. Says Elkins, "I believe there is a 'you against me' barrier in every classroom situation. If you don't dissolve the wall and brush off the chips on the shoulders, you'll never be an effective teacher." Therefore, Elkins uses music to open classes, often brings along refreshments, and provides a short break based on the premise that the average student's attention span is about twenty minutes.) At the same time, remember that gimmicks can never take the place of sound teaching.

6 Don't let the administration cow you into following established patterns of failure. Show that you know your area and are working to be a teacher. They can, usually, be convinced.

7 Digress. Do so with the intent of developing student awareness of the importance of learning.

8 Don't use battle terminology or appeal to students on the ground of authority. You will be given authority as you earn it by being a quality teacher. If you try to take it, unearned, you will reap only obstinate obedience.

9 Remember that years of negative experience have contributed to the attitudes of indifference. Swift change and unqualified success will be rare. If you write "welcome" on your forehead, some people will walk on it. Don't worry about it.

10 Always be able to laugh. Admit that a test was poorly constructed, an assignment mere busywork, or an expectation too ambitious. Be reasonable. They don't expect perfection. They deserve honesty.

In your new career as a teacher, you will learn how to eat in twenty minutes, how to absorb strange public perceptions of your job and its "long summer vacation," how to deal with hall passes and pep rallies and outrageous demands on your endurance. You will also be tempted to learn how to "just get by."

Your greatest task in your new job will be to generate wakefulness and discovery in classrooms where passivity and dullness have become standard. Our students, their imaginations impoverished and their inquisitiveness put to rest, have become statues. They need a coming to life experience. Refuse to let them simply "sit through" your classes. If you do not awaken them, they may "sit through" their lives as well. **CEJ**

W. Dale Brown is a member of the English faculty at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan

"Learning in the Trenches"

BY H. K. ZOEKLICHT

Lucy DenDenker, alone in the teachers' lounge, stared disbelievingly at the note she had just fished out of her mailbox. Scrawled across a page torn from a spiral notebook were words that gave Lucy an involuntary shudder: "Let us sport like amorous birds of prey, and tear our pleasures through the iron gate of life."

Her first impulse was to scream, to run, to rage in tormented fury. The leering words from Marvell mocked her cruelly. Which of her students in English lit would stoop so low! Who would be so grossly offensive as to equate her recent widowhood with the needs of a coy mistress! What maniac would do that?

Oh, she hated her students, hated teaching, hated fate that had robbed her of a husband after only a few years of marriage.

She'd find out who had sneaked the note into her box! Jenny Snip must've seen him in the office. Or she'd trace him through the notebook paper. Or the handwriting. But the scrawl looked intentionally distorted. Maybe the ink color then. Oh, she'd get him all right. And then—then she'd have him kicked out!

Lucy's face was twisted with bitter indignation.

Then the moment passed.

The smells of spring and the excited chatter of small children playing across the street drifted through the open window. "C'mon Lucy, pull yourself together," she muttered grimly. She stuffed the note in her book bag, got up, and slowly walked to the window. The two flowering crabs in front of Omni Christian High stood in full bloom, the lush pink blossoms flaunting their beauty and promise of a new growing season.

"Oh God, don't let me hate. Forgive me." Lucy paused, then forced herself to continue, "Forgive my student too." There, she'd said it; maybe the feeling would follow. As an afterthought she added, "Maybe he didn't know what he was doing."

The door behind her opened. She didn't turn around until she heard the voice of her student teacher, Ed Smart, quaver, "Mrs. DenDenker, may I talk to you?"

What Lucy saw was a lanky young man whose face at the

". . . what teachers and students share in common is the textbook, if you use one, *and* basic humanity."

moment was a study in frustration and confusion. She had appreciated him. Always eager to learn and to improve, he had made her feel needed and useful. And he was so obviously in love with his subject that she had even felt reinspired. But that made him vulnerable too, vulnerable to all the griefs that a young idealist is heir to when encountering a typical class of high school students who're not exactly taking English lit because they wanted to.

"Sure Ed, let's sit down over there." She sensed his need clearly, and that need momentarily displaced her own. She led him to a pair of easy chairs in a corner far from the door.

"So how did *Macbeth* go last hour?" Lucy tried to smile encouragingly at her student teacher. But he didn't smile back. He pushed his glasses up, and Lucy noticed that his hand trembled. He was silent, staring at the wall, fighting back the inner turmoil.

"Do you want to tell me about it?" Lucy nudged gently.

"I'm sorry," Ed croaked finally, "but I don't think I'm cut out to be a teacher."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. I don't know. Nothing turned out."

"Tell me about it."

"I wanted them to see something of the *weltschmerz* and existential *angst* in the 'Tomorrow' speech, right?"

Lucy barely suppressed a smile. "Yes, go on."

"So I had them memorize the soliloquy. But less than half of them did it. And those who did memorize it didn't understand what it's trying to say. When I tried to explain, they wouldn't listen. One student said that no one who's just heard that his wife died would launch into the delivery of a philosophical oration."

"Not such a bad observation," Lucy couldn't help but interrupt.

"But what was I s'posed to do with that?" groaned Ed. "Others began to chime in; Petey Lachniet said it was all about madmen and idiots and that it 'didn't make no sense' to him. The others started laughing. It was a mess. They were resisting me all the way. So I got mad and started yelling that they had a bad attitude and wanted to stay dumb. I know. I shouldn't have said that. I blew it. I blew the whole thing. I can't face them again."

Ed sagged back in the easy chair, defeated; he was not looking at his mentor now. But he listened when, after a pause, she responded softly to his tale of woes.

"I too once sat where you now sit. I'd been an English major for four years, and a good student. I was going to turn my students on to the epigrammatic wisdom of an Emily Dickinson and the cultured wit of a Jane Austen. And yes, especially to the dazzling genius of Shakespeare. I was going to shine! I was going to turn my students into the best English majors a college ever got from any one school! But do you know what happened my first year? I'd often cry myself to sleep."

Lucy paused, then added softly, "Still do sometimes."

Ed Smart looked at Lucy DenDenker as she continued.

"Students can be tenderhearted and even sentimental slobs. But they can also be cruel. Terribly cruel! Believe me—I know. I didn't learn about that in college. And a lot of other things I now know I didn't learn there, and maybe I couldn't have. When I started teaching I still had to learn that most students are forced to take English and that before you can start teaching it, you have to turn them into willing learners. I had to learn that you can't take all the good stuff from your college courses and try to teach it to your senior lit students. I had to learn that lecturing them is not the same as teaching them. I had to learn that my agenda and the students' agenda often didn't match."

Lucy looked away, remembering the hard lessons of learning in the trenches.

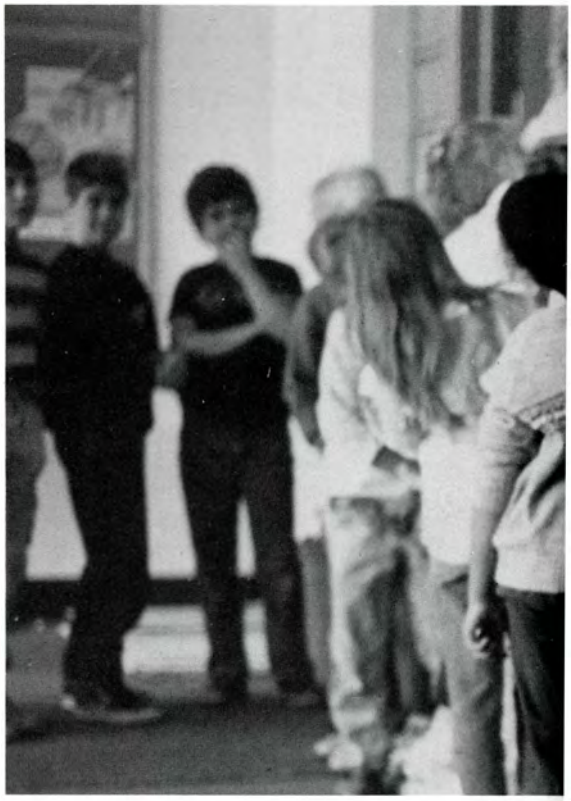
"You know," she continued, "what teachers and students share in common is the textbook, if you use one, *and* basic humanity. Then the first thing you have to do is forget that they are students. My husband Bob helped me to see that eventually. They're fellow human beings. They're not just some Lilliputian academic rope-dancers whose training we supervise. They may be younger, they may be interested in different things, they may be uninformed about many things—but they're not inferior, not even the cruel ones. They know a lot about some things, they've had deep feelings, they're eager to learn when they become interested and think it's important. And that's what you build on. 'Bridge building' Bob called it. 'Bridge building comes first in teaching,' he'd say. In history, when you want to make the Civil War period real to kids in the 80s, you have to build bridges. You have to make the connecting points. Do you understand what I'm talking about?"

Ed leaned forward now. "I'm not sure yet. I'm going to have to think about it a lot more, I guess."

"Of course. And we need to talk about it more. The need for bridge building is the hardest but most basic lesson to learn for a beginning teacher, believe me. It means you have to determine the essence of the *Macbeth* soliloquy, its human significance, and then map out the experiences or examples that are needed to connect students to those words. But the longer and better you know your students, the easier it gets. In the meantime, don't get down on yourself. What's good about teaching is that you always get another chance—there's always tomorrow."

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. . . ." Ed was almost smiling now.

"Right," laughed Lucy. Then she thought back to the offensive note. She considered briefly whether to share it with her student teacher. But she dismissed the idea; she'd let it go for now. Instead she reached for the *Macbeth* text, pulled her chair closer to Ed, and said, "Now let's take another look at that speech." **CEJ**



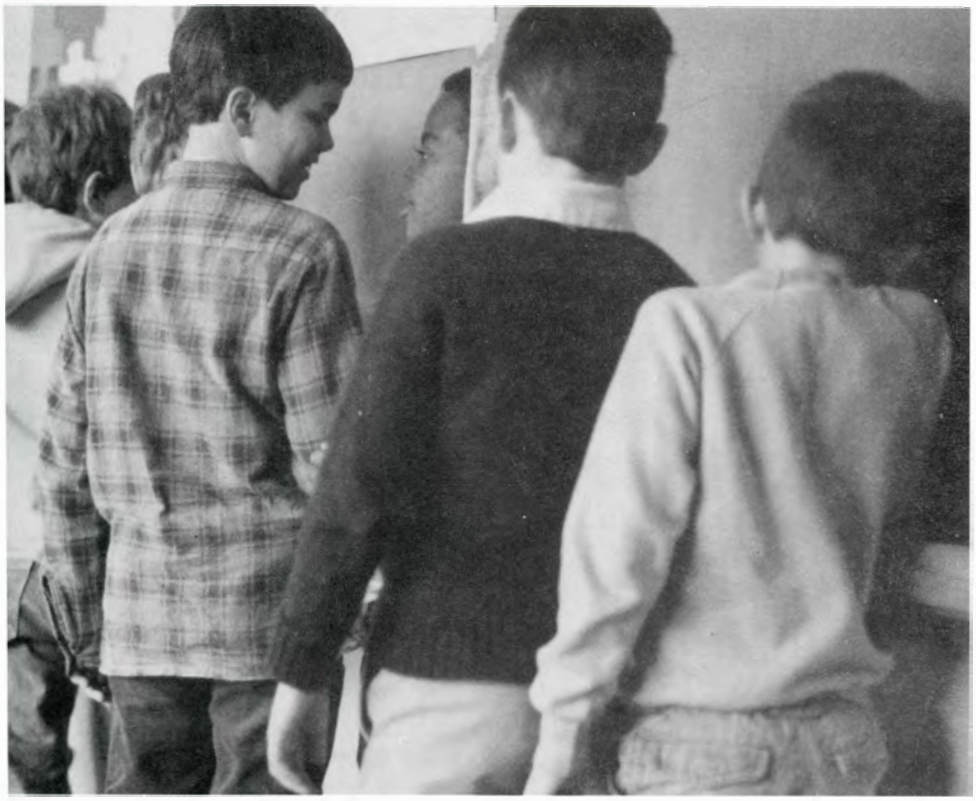
Idealistic or Uninformed?

BY JAMALEE MORET

When asked "What do you want to be when you grow up?" my answers would range anywhere from private investigator, social worker, artist, or mad scientist all the way to child psychologist, depending on my mood and current area of interest. Teaching was ranked rather low on my list of possible career options, somewhere down there with physics and computer science. However, I had a major change of heart when I realized, in college, that teaching incorporates the same kinds of talents needed for all of the previously mentioned occupations, plus many more (including computer science). What an exciting prospect it seemed to employ such a diversity of skills and interests into a career.

Somehow the jump from collegiate academia into a new community and my own classroom was filled with more than creative exploration and excitement. My initial years of teaching also included frustration, disillusionment, and heartache. Fortunately these negative aspects were balanced with a positive attitude, commitment, will-power, pleasant surprises, and above all, prayer support. Presently, in the midst of my fourth year as an educator, I finally feel as if I can apply some of the idealistic and creative ideas that I believed in as a college student. It has not been an easy road. Within the first week of my first year I discovered that teaching involves much more than any formal education and training can offer.

Little did I realize the multitude of challenges that lay ahead of me as I bounced along 3,000 miles of national highway to take on the responsibilities of my first teaching "job." Of course I knew that it wasn't merely another "job" but the launching of a professional career. What a prospect after being employed in a wide variety of minimum wage jobs during my college years! As a college student, I was amazingly inspired at the prospect of educating young people and I came up with endless ideas to use in a classroom. Writing units and lesson plans was a challenge of craftsmanship like painting a picture or sewing a garment. The actual process of teaching, as I found out through my mini-teaching and student-teaching experiences, involves much more than the writing of lessons and unit plans. Papers needed to be graded and scores averaged. Many things, however, like taking on the role of



BETH VAN REES

"teacher" along with the task of setting up a classroom, are difficult to "teach" or "student teach" and instead must be experienced and practiced. Though many things cannot be taught, I can think of some specific areas that I have felt were lacking in my own formal training.

To begin with, in Education 101 we were forced to explore our philosophy of education and asked to solidify this in writing. This thought-provoking exercise was valuable, but within our rather provincial community many educators tended to believe that all agree on the same principles and that all Christian schools basically agree in philosophy. This idealistic assumption needs to be balanced with the reality of the existence of conflicting perspectives within the constituency of the Christian school community, particularly when this support system is made up of a variety of church denominations.

College students need to be made aware of the philosophical differences of schools and the possibility of controversy and instability that often lead to low morale and frustration among school faculties. For example, some schools believe that it is their mission to evangelize. They have an open enrollment available to any who will abide by the school's regulations and pay the tuition. As a result, many parents have low commitments to the idea of Christian education, which in turn may lead to conflicting values in the home and school and between parent and teacher. Teachers need to be aware of their school's mission and should be able to share this with present and prospective parents.

Some schools also have unwritten rules as to preferred and even required church attendance. Churches may or may not play a major role of power within the political system and running of a school, something which was never really brought to my attention until it had an actual impact on me personally. A basic course in the philosophy of education may be helpful, but learning about other kinds of church denominations along with a geographical study on what I dare to call "social mentality" could greatly benefit a rookie educator who is in the midst of finding the ropes in the classroom and, at the same time, attempting to understand the mentality of the school community. Both can be overwhelming tasks in themselves.

Learning basic lesson planning and studying specific subject areas in further depth are definite imperatives to teacher training. However, experienced educators and professors tend to take for granted the mundane day-to-day practiced items that consume time and complicate life for the rookie teacher. Handling such common things as taking daily roll, keeping track of paperwork, reading illegible handwriting, writing notes to parents, and preparing for daily morning devotions can at first be difficult hurdles. These are often overlooked in education classes. Such activities eventually become a natural part of the day, but until they do, they can also be a primary cause for mental disorganization and frustration. Some coaching in the diversity of ways that these activities can be handled could alleviate the initial trauma of teacher "overload" in the first day and even month of school. For example, a first-year teacher needs to realize that even such a task as having twenty-eight first graders sharpen their pencils takes careful thought and planning the first time around. No matter how thorough a job description and interview may be, countless tasks remain unmentioned in the blank spaces between the lines.

Student teaching does provide practical exposure to the daily routine of teaching and brings to life its practice. Unfortunately, it does not incorporate the task of setting up a classroom and curriculum. Though stepping into someone else's shoes is not easy, student teaching is usually set within the confines of a protected environment with preconstructed rules and a ready-made curriculum. However, the area of curriculum is also one of concern. Again, some people assume that schools come with self-made curriculums that have been successfully implemented. More frightening yet, others assume professionally trained college graduates innately have the skills to develop the necessary curriculum. Though this may be true, it is not always so. Besides, juggling teaching for the first time and developing or revising a curriculum is exhausting. How to even begin mapping out a year's plan at

any level is an activity I was never trained to do.

Are college students being practically exposed to the variety of programs that exist in education and the implementation of each? Schools greatly vary in programs. For example, at Phoenix Christian Grade School the Spalding program is used as an introduction to reading, handwriting, spelling, and phonics in the primary grades. I had never heard of this very structured and rigid program. The Montessori system still fascinates me, and though I have read about it, I have never seen a Montessori classroom in practice. Are we stuck within the walls of a classroom simply regenerating the common practices employed by those who taught us? Teacher education students need to explore the various educational programs available today.

Education for grade specialization also seems somewhat nebulous. Being certified to teach grades K-8 is an extremely frightening concept. The range of needs at the various levels is incredibly diverse, and each grade has its own unique area of speciality. Reliance on textbooks is prevalent but not always appropriate. It may be helpful for college students to identify age groups to appropriate skills lists, along with a specified sequence of order. Neither textbooks nor skills lists can be used as prescriptive methods of determining specific grade level learning activities, but coming into teaching with a knowledgeable idea as to age-appropriate academic expectations can certainly aid in a first year teacher's endeavor to understand what students may or may not be ready to handle. This also demands clear and open communication between teachers within a school system, for each age level has its own rate of skill development, which can vary from one class to the next.

Evaluation of a child's work is an area of endless controversy but is inevitably present in our educational system. A college education student should be exposed to a multitude of grading processes and evaluation procedures to aid his or her first-year attempts. Also, book tests seldom suit our personal needs, and the writing of tests is a craft that takes practice. Reviewing some of the basic steps could prove invaluable. Test writing takes time and wisdom regarding test objectives, even when done by an experienced teacher.

"Once the fear of entering the busy six-lane intersection of teaching is overcome, the joy of changing lanes begins."

Stepping into a mid-year classroom setting, as most student teachers do, is different from establishing an initial atmosphere of rule and order. Rules must be implemented in an age-appropriate fashion as part of the curriculum. There is absolutely no way around this, and particularly first-year teachers need to have training in this area. Students not only need to be taught the basics of reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, but also the basics of socialization and civilization. Incorporating these as part of a child's education is essential today, particularly since many children do not receive such instruction at home.

Other sideline areas of concern include community opportunities, continuing education, and benefits. Every school has its own flavor, influenced greatly by its surrounding community. I feel college students must discover their personal needs and interests and then search for a complementary community. Of course, sometimes the options are few, depending on individual situations, but jumping into a teaching position simply because a contract is offered is not a wise move. Does a city make you feel claustrophobic? Do small towns drive you stir-crazy? Is it important that mountains are in plain view or that a lake is nearby and available for water-skiing? Will it bother you to be apart from family and familiar friends until Christmas? Even though a teacher's life tends to revolve around school and its activities, emotional stability is extremely important, and so are recreation and social activity.

Concerning continuing education, each state and school has its own set of requirements. Being knowledgeable of these expectations could also benefit a bewildered beginner. A teaching degree is certainly not the end, but rather the beginning of one's educational career.

How many teachers really know and understand insurance policies and benefit plans that are or are not attached to a contract? Who pays for the necessary continuing education classes? Understanding how to interpret "packaged plans" can help to alleviate unnecessary surprises. How overjoyed I was to discover that I had dental insurance. For two years I has needlessly put off dentist appointments due to such ignorance.

Once the fear of entering the busy six-lane intersection of teaching is overcome, the joy of changing lanes begins. As duty calls, a teacher becomes part of the cycle of faculty meetings, paperwork, averaging grades, ball games, new unit plans, concerned parents, spelling quizzes, Bible memory work, field trips, rainy day noon hours, along with a few needed breaks, followed by SUMMER . . . school!??! When accepted and understood, the once overwhelming duties and expectations of teaching become a lifestyle as days, weeks, and soon years mesh together. The good helps to balance the bad.

I still may romanticize about becoming an author or a famous painter, and I don't ever rule out the possibility of other career options, but now that I've worked through those early frustrations, I can truly enjoy the challenges of teaching.

CEJ

Jamalee Moret teaches language arts in the junior high grades at Phoenix Christian School in Phoenix, Arizona.

My First Day

BY JANIE VAN DYKE

My desk was my best friend. It protected me from looks that went from head to toe, shielded me from squirming bodies, and supported me when I needed it on that first and terrifying day of school.

The night before, I ran over the lesson plans for the next day while ambulances wailed in the neighborhood, shrieking that I was in California, not Iowa. Barking dogs reminded me that I slept under the windows burglars had recently used as access to the house. Between the sounds of California and my paranoia about my first teaching day, I didn't get much sleep.

The next morning, sitting in the teachers' lounge, I counted the minutes till the bell and checked my over-prepared, down-to-the-minute list of activities for the first fifty minutes of my teaching career: open with devotions, go over class list, talk about myself, pass out books, talk about rules, read a story, and have the students write—that should take up fifty minutes. What if it didn't? Suddenly I had that let's-pack-up-now urge to go back to college; even walking beans for the rest of my life seemed appealing when compared with standing in front of thirty unfamiliar eighth graders and actually talking to them—teaching them. I had to go to the bathroom.

Through the teachers' lounge window I could see my classroom door. Since there were no halls and the lockers were outside, the kids huddled around my door, waiting for me to open it.

The bell rang.

As I walked to my room, holding my classroom keys as if ready to be attacked, I greeted my first class, big and little bodies all with weird haircuts.

"Good morning," I said opening the door. Thirty pairs of eyes followed me into the room. California eyes were checking out the new Iowa teacher. I stood behind my desk.

The devotions went well, I didn't mispronounce any words, didn't stutter during prayer. For a minute I almost felt like walking to the front of my desk. Reading the class list made me stay behind it. I had received one hundred fifty names in my box that morning, but in my nervousness I had forgotten to rehearse the names. Now I'd have to wing it.

"Anderson—Steve?"

Front and center, the boy with the cowlick waved his hand. Belt, Brock; Burch, Carlson; Cook followed. They were simple names, until the L's: Lee, Lewis Lloyd, and then Lorphanpibul—Than-a Thon. I looked at it twice, it had to be a typo.

"Ah, Than-a-Thown Lor-fan-pie-bull?"

I searched the room, hoping my pronunciation was somewhat close to the name.

The owner, an oriental boy, rose, smiled and nodded. "You may call me Tom." He smiled and sat down.

"Thank you, Tom," I said relieved, hanging on to my desk.

Following my list to the dot, I talked about myself after reading the class list. "I'm the youngest of six and I left them all behind in Iowa," I told them.

The mafia kid, with dark hair, eyes, and clothes, rolled his eyes and snickered. "Is that where you grow potatoes?" he blurted.

"Potatoes? No—I think you mean Idaho," I said emphasizing the difference in the sounds of the two states.

"What do you grow in Iowa?" asked the girl whose mouth seemed to be all braces.

"We grow corn and beans," I replied, suddenly feeling like a geography teacher.

"Green beans?" she persisted.

"We grow them in our gardens. The farmers plant soy beans."

"What do you do with soy beans?"

It stumped me. I didn't know. I had lived in Iowa my entire life, walked bean fields for eight years, and still didn't know what farmers did with the beans. "Some of them bring the beans to elevators." I knew that part was true.

"Elevators?" several asked in unison.

"Yes, elevators," I repeated, leaning on my desk.

"Iowa people use elevators for beans?" The kids looked at each other with open mouths and lifted eyebrows.

"Oh, not elevators like you have in a hospital, but a big building used for storage." They seemed to accept the explanation but I was sure Iowa wasn't on their list of vacation spots.

In case they found other things to snicker about, I decided to cut the story of my life short. I passed out books, rambled about rules, read them the story of Alexander and his bad day, and had them write about their worst day. I flopped into my chair behind the desk. Two minutes to go.

I had survived that first period but, I told myself, there were five more classes of nameless faces that I'd have to stand in front of, struggle over names with, and talk about myself to. Maybe I could change my lesson plans. No—only one minute left!

At least I had my desk. **CEJ**

Janie Van Dyke is currently teaching English at Southwest Christian High School in Edgerton, Minnesota.

What I Wish I Had Learned in College about Teaching

BY STEVE HOLTROP

The hard lessons of experience, of course, can never be adequately *taught* in a teacher-education program. When we contemplate the world of teaching from outside of it, we worry about things like grading on the curve vs. fixed standards, whether to teach the history of the English language or other esoterica, and whether we'll have the wherewithal to be arresting officer, jury, and judge simultaneously within three seconds after being hit with our first spit wad.

Realism vs. Idealism

In the real world of teaching the idealistic dreams of college life fade and crack, leaving many veterans burnt out and bitter. In college my fellow education students and I were terribly idealistic. But ideals are absolutely necessary not only to survive but also to constantly work for improvement in daily classroom, lunchroom, and faculty room. Ideals are what our Christian schools are built on—we must perpetually reexamine and reform our beliefs, our goals, and our methods. If we do not, we stagnate and our students suffer.

Education in general—not only Christian education—is dependent on experimentation, reevaluation, and idealistic striving for better, more efficient ways to reach more students at greater levels of ability. As Christian educators, we should be even more aware than non-Christian teachers of the needs of the low achiever, the dyslexic, the emotionally needy, the creative, the kinesthetic learner, the hyperactive student, the lazy student, or the stubborn set-in-his-ways student—for we believe that each is made in God's image and is loved and saved by God. Our ideal for these students and for all our students should be very high indeed.

However, no teacher-training program can simulate the daily ins and outs of the confrontation between the real and the ideal, the year-after-year struggle between heaven and hell, between salvation and sin, between potential and paralysis. Both we and our students are saved by grace and dearly loved by God but born in sin and unable to measure up to God's high ideals.

The realization of this tension was, for me at least, a recurrent process of cynicism, abject realism, and bitter feelings of failure, which were—after summer courses, teachers' conventions, or stimulating discussions with colleagues or other interested parties—in turn replaced with optimism, high standards—albeit not always attainable, and feelings of grandiose expectations for the faultless blank slates God had blessed my classroom with. Alas, neither extreme is real. But what is real cannot be the only focus for a teacher.

Depth vs. Breadth

Committed teachers typically strive to do far more than they are compensated for or even trained and able to do. The dyslexic student who suddenly comes to your attention two days before the first big test, the depressed student in study hall, the pregnant student, the foreign exchange student, the high-strung high-achiever who needs some calming down—these are the squeaky wheels of the school day. And the teacher—someone who took the job for idealistic and philanthropic reasons—naturally responds to the challenge as best he or she can, despite any shortcomings in professional preparation for these specialized tasks. And the reward for such outreach is there, even if the actual compliments and thanks from the clients themselves are rare.

However ready and eager I may have been for this kind of diverse activity—"working with people" is how I put it on my applications—I could never have been prepared for the exhausting breadth of experience the typical school day would involve. My first year was spent trying to come up for air—and constantly reevaluating my ideals, for my mental images of teaching involved far greater depth in everything I did than was possible with so many things to do. In contrast to a college professor with nine to twelve class periods per

"Teaching cannot become Political, with a capital "P", in the sense that the people-pleasing impulse overwhelms the divine calling and heartfelt dedication to challenge, to model, to exhort."

week, I, with thirty-five, can come nowhere near her possible intensity and depth. The time and energy I have for dealing with my students must be divided among every one of my classes, clubs, activities, conferences, and casual out-of-school contacts with students.

Burnout comes from trying to do it all. Something I could never learn about teaching in college is how to balance depth—doing my best, offering excellence to the Lord—and breadth, accomplishing as much as I can in as many places as I can for as many people as I can.

100 Percent Teacher, Not 50 Percent

One maxim I heard in college about the distinctions between teaching in elementary and in secondary schools was this: elementary school teachers teach the students more and subjects less than secondary instructors, who teach their subjects and their students about equally. If this is true, I would guess that college instructors teach their subjects even more and the students even less.

Well, I was ready and willing to teach my subject to the max. After all, if college professors are in fact teaching their subjects more than their students, what is the most recent model beginning teachers have to follow? The compromises between real and ideal and between breadth and depth had to be reckoned with, but something that took a while to sink in was the fact that I was a teacher of students one hundred percent of my time on the job—whether in front of classes, in the teachers' lounge, at home grading papers, or on the phone with parents.

I can have my love of my subject, like a favorite hobby, as a necessary example to the students and a backdrop to what I am trying to accomplish with the students. Yet, the primary goal of every minute as a teacher has to be focused on the students. Teaching can't be just a golden opportunity to wallow in a hobby—like auditing one last class in some interesting department before leaving the college scene. Teaching does keep one abreast of his or her discipline; it does give opportunity to continue education in a favorite field; but it cannot be primarily this, for then the students and the educational process suffer like a patient with so many hospital interns perforating her arms looking for veins.

Teaching Is *p*olitical but Not *P*olitical

Me play politics? Never! But teaching is public service, a social contract between parents and the educational institution. Although teaching is a spiritual gift and an activity that should be seen as a calling from God, the fact of the matter is that we teachers are human too and cannot possibly be infallible ambassadors from on high with the purest and highest of motives and the most heavenly challenges to set before our charges. We must constantly strive for exactly this, yet we have to serve in the situation and circumstances God has seen fit to surround us with. And we do well to work *with* people, not alienate or insult them.

This means dealing with sinful people, proud people, people with different ideas of your job, people who, even if you were perfect, would make your job a delicate balancing act. So teaching is political. Teachers do their thing *in loco parentis*, in place of the parents, and are paid by a school board made up mostly of parents. Like politicians, teachers must try to be aware of all the needs and desires of their constituency.

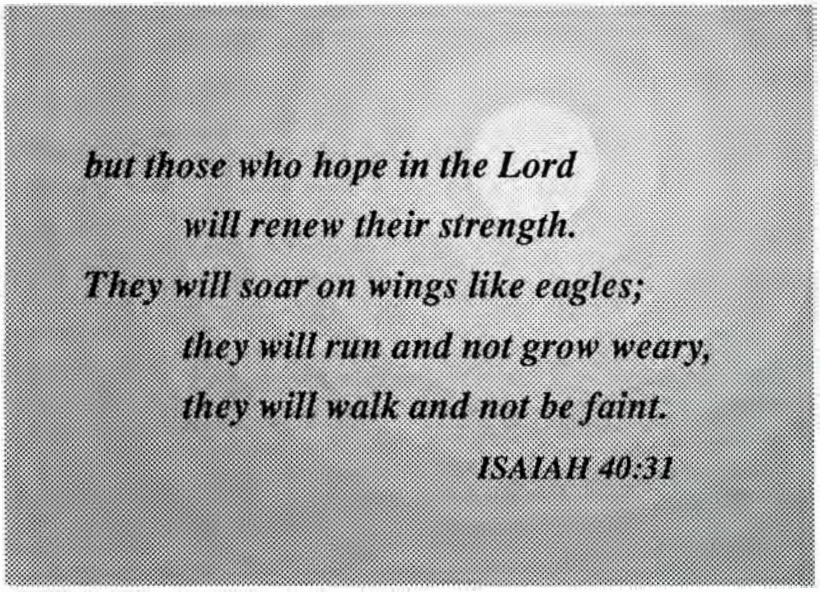
But teaching cannot become Political, with a capital "P", in the sense that the people-pleasing impulse overwhelms the divine calling and heartfelt dedication to challenge, to model, to exhort. A *P*olitician doesn't usually go out of her way to question and challenge her constituency's personal, family, and community values, mores, assumptions and prejudices. But a teacher must—in light of Scripture, recognizing the sinful nature and tendencies of human nature—in the community and throughout the world. A teacher is a moral guide, not only to the students but also to the community.

Just Say "No"

Can a mortal human being do all this? No. So how does one pull off being a good teacher—perhaps even an excellent teacher—a teacher who tries to heed the biblical warning about the gravity of teaching, who tries to humbly balance politics in his community with his convictions and moral vision, who is able to "get real" with his students while maintaining an unearthly idealism, who strives for depth in everything he does, no matter how spread thin he is, who exudes love of his subject and love of learning while putting love for his students first of all? Who can do all this? No one. But by God's grace many teachers can do a lot of it a lot of the time. No one can do everything God expects on his own strength.

So *just say "no"* means being realistic and somewhat assertive with yourself and with your administrator. But *just say "no"* also means being humble enough to say before God, "I can't do it by myself." From David to Moses to Jesus, incarnate flesh has had to say this, putting us in good company if we do too. **CEJ**

Steve Holtrop, who has been teaching English and advising publications at Unity Christian High School in Orange City, Iowa, will be continuing graduate work at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.



Growing Beyond the Rookie Stage

BY ROBERT W. MOORE

When Joel prophesied that "your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions," he probably did not have a teachers' college in mind, but his description is certainly appropriate. Professors, "old" men and women, in teachers' colleges have great dreams about what schools and classrooms could be like if only their pedagogical techniques were applied, while student teachers, "young" men and women, have great visions about how their classes will thrive under their enlightened tutelage. All this inspirational stuff is good; as Solomon says, "without a vision, the people perish." We need Spirit-inspired visions and dreams to fuel us forward, and to draw others into the fray. On the other hand, we also need to know what the fray will be like, and how we will behave when we are in the middle of it, but these realities are seldom talked about in teachers' college. Specifically, there are three lessons that must be learned by the teacher in growing beyond the rookie stage: principals are not professors; it is OK to worry about yourself; and you cannot always be yourself.

Professors deal in theory; they live, eat, and sleep theory. They are warm individuals who believe in openness and sharing and supportiveness and the development of their students. When they talk about managing a classroom and structuring the school, they talk about openness and sharing and supportiveness and the development of future students. They talk about Rensis Likert's participative System IV model of organizational structures and how it fosters higher motivation, better climate, more satisfaction, and greater performance within the group. They talk about the kind of classroom you always wished you could have experienced as a child, especially when Miss Mechelse made you stay in because you had knocked your crayons off your desk.

But principals are not professors. They have a phone call waiting for them, Johnny deVries is sitting in his seventh detention and is due for a suspension, the music teacher is livid because someone put Mr. Bubble in her tuba again,

"There are three lessons that must be learned by teachers: principals are not professors; it is OK to worry about yourself; and you cannot always be yourself."

and there is a board meeting tonight for which the budget is not ready. School students are not university students. All the participatory decision making and collaboration that a college prof idealized only works when time is limitless, and the nearest fire is in the faculty lounge fireplace. It is a different story when a 24-hour day is half too short, and there is a fire burning under a teacher's chair. Professors are back at central command; principals are in the trenches. I am not criticizing the professors for their idealism, but mature teachers learn to live with less than ideal organizational structures and to appreciate principals despite their lack of idealism.

In fact, as a rookie teacher, you will find that you are not quite as idealistic in the classroom as you promised in the PED 101 essay. You always thought that your first concern was for the student and the impact of your conduct and course content on that young person. By the end of your first September, however, you are realizing that your first concern is for your own survival! As Hall and Hord (1987) tell us, at the beginning of a new teaching experience, you are "uncertain about the demands. . . , [and your] adequacy to meet those demands" (60). By the end of October, you realize you are (and wish you could resign for being) allergic—to chalkdust, if not children. By Christmas time, you walk home in the dark, past the houses in your neighborhood, see that their televisions are on, and wish your life was so simple that all you had to do at night was flop on the couch and mainline your electronic Valium. A mature teacher does not feel guilty about taking care of himself or herself, or about approaching a principal in an occasional outburst to relieve pressure. After all, a teacher on the verge of burnout is not much help to the students.

Take heart. Memorize Isaiah 40:31. According to Hall and Hord you will outgrow the concern-for-self stage. As you learn about "efficiency, organizing, managing [and] scheduling" (60), your stage of concern will move up to the task of making the best use of the resources at your disposal. After five to seven years, you may mature even further to a concern for the impact of your curriculum on the individual students.

I can see you are shaking your head, "I'll never have those problems. I know myself; I'm not like that. My personality must be quite different from his." You are probably right on the last point, but personality is not the issue here; the role of the teacher is. Organizational theorists, such as Getzels and Guba (1957), point out that when an individual joins an institution such as a school, he or she must reconcile personality to the requirements of the role of the position and personal needs to the expectations of the employer. You are blessed if your role adjustments are as simple as wearing flannel slacks and a tie instead of blue jeans and a sweatshirt, but for many rookie teachers, role adjustments are perceived as moral and ethical problems like the use of coercion and manipulation—again, those things the professors rarely talk about.

One professor has. Dr. Fred Enns, while teaching at the University of Alberta, wrote a mature teacher is one who has learned that

> he is the instrument through which someone else's purposes are to be realized, and that if those purposes are to be real ized, then he must engage in behaviours which are not always compatible with what and who he thinks he is. He finds he is subject to the wishes of the parents, the principal, other teachers, the inspector, the framers of curriculum guides, and the people who devise the examinations. (4)

In other words, once you are a teacher, your actions are not your own. On the other hand, you are still accountable to the Lord for your actions and must decide which aspects of your role you can learn to like, which are allowable even if you have to hold your nose while you do them, and which aspects you cannot in good conscience fulfill, or at least should discuss with some colleagues whom you respect for the quality of both their Christian and professional commitments.

The rookie teacher moves on to maturity when he or she begins to realize that idealism about schools, priorities, and roles is necessary fuel to get them into the fray and to keep them fighting, but is not sufficient to protect them from the realities of frazzled principals, frazzling classrooms, and the qualms of institutionalized education.

Praise the Lord that we do not worship an ideal, but a living Person who can forgive and empower us when we are weak and who provides us with brothers and sisters who can encourage us by word and deed to grow beyond the rookie stage. **CEJ**

Robert W. Moore, ten years a teacher at Redeemer Christian High in Ottawa, Ontario, is now working on a Master of Education degree at the University of Ottawa.

REFERENCES

Enns, F. (1981). Some ethical-moral concerns in administration. *The Canadian Administrator, 20*(8), 1-8.

Getzels, J. & Guba, E. (1957). Social Behaviour and the administrative process. *The School Review, 65,* 429 (as cited in Hoy, W. & Miskel, C. [1987]. *Educational Administration.* New York: Random House.)

Hall, G. & Hord, J. (1987). *Change in Schools: Facilitating the Process.* Albany: State University of New York.

I Hear You, Curt; I'm Listening, Brenda

BY RON B. DE BOER

Curt slipped into the room quietly, after all the others, and seated himself in the back corner of the room. He never looked up when he entered the room, and seldom did he take his eyes off his desk once he sat down. On good days, he would grunt when he walked past my desk; on bad days, he chose to use his book of American short stories as a forehead rest.

Across the room, giggling with her girlfriends and fanning herself with her spiraled notebook, sat Brenda, elbow resting on the desk behind her, feet jammed between the bars in the book-carriage below the seat in the next row. She whispered about cute guys, worshipped the Bon Jovi stickers plastered all over her notebook, and attended varsity basketball games. Brenda was five months pregnant.

"Okay," I said, trying to look confident in my fourth week of teaching, tapping a stack of multicolored duo-tangs [folders] on my desk. "Settle down." Once I had made eye contact with a couple of jocks whose minds were on a last-second free throw in some noisy, sweaty gym a couple of towns away, the class was quiet.

"I finished marking your journals last night," I said. One of my requirements for English 301 is that each student completes ten journal entries a month. Students may write on any topic they choose, as long as each entry is well-written and at least a page long. "When you get yours," I went on, "look through it carefully and take note of some of the comments I've made. On the back page is your grade. Feel free to talk to me about your work after school."

Judging by the way each student was sitting—facing the front, straight, attentive—I knew their journals had become something they cared about, something that had become a part of them, or at least an extension of them. Teachers like to savor such moments of complete control, so I continued with some general comments about writing styles, before handing them their duo-tangs.

I hadn't slept the night before. Marking papers always ate into leisure time, but I had spent all night reading Curt's and Brenda's journals—and thinking.

Curt had written a book. In two hours time I learned that he hated school, couldn't stand his family, was struggling with an eating disorder, and was prepared to end it all with his dad's shotgun. I read, and I re-read, jotting down comments, pretending I knew what he was going through, that I understood why he felt the way he did. In college, I had read Victorian poetry and studied Robert Frost; Student Problems 101 was not listed in the course handbook. At the end of his journal, I asked Curt to see me, to talk. Somehow, seeing him in the back corner scowling at the graffiti carved into his desk-top made me doubtful whether he'd feel like chatting with a guy who gets as excited reading Shakespeare as he does watching the World Series.

I was wrong. Curt dropped by the same day, about two minutes after the final bell, after the other kids had exploded out the door, to their lockers, and into the school buses.

"You said to see you," he said, staring at the floor, his hands jammed into the pockets of his stone-washed jeans.

"I didn't say you *had* to see me," I said. "I said you could see me if you wanted."

Curt grunted, which was a good sign. After a few minutes of discomfort for both of us, we talked. I found out Curt read everything written by Stephen King, hated the Boston Celtics, and didn't care whether Reagan was a Democrat or a Republican. (Later I learned that Curt's father was a Celtic's fan and a born-and-bred Republican.) Getting this information from Curt was not easy. In the weeks that followed, I learned that he did not like to talk about himself because he did not like himself. He was anorexic and had been struggling with this eating disorder for a year and a half. I was a teacher all of four weeks and was pretending to be Junior Psychologist. Neither John Milton nor Flannery O'Conner could have expressed to me what I needed to know at that moment.

After Curt left that day, I picked up a note tucked under a paperweight on the corner of my desk. I recognized Brenda's handwriting: "Thanks for the vote of confidence," it said. "I needed that

today." In her journal, Brenda had written a series of letters to her unborn child about how she was coping with life after "your father" left. In them she expressed how much she loved her baby and how she couldn't wait for the child to be born, even though she knew life wouldn't be easy. I had also written for Brenda to stop by if she wanted to talk. She never did, although she left occasional letters under my binders when I was out of the room. These letters also spoke of the problems she was facing at home and would face in the months ahead.

As I completed my first year of teaching, more and more of the kids in my classes stopped by to talk. Mostly they came in groups of two or three and talked about the hilarious time they had at Burger King Friday night when Janice dumped her strawberry milkshake all over herself before the movie, or about the Michigan-Iowa basketball game on Saturday. But other times, they came alone and talked about school, where they wanted to go to college, and what was bothering them.

I listened, and I told them I understood where they were coming from, even though I had never taken Student Problems 101.

As time went on, I began to realize that Student Problems 101 was taught by Professor Experience, and that the main thing we needed to remember from that course was how to listen.

I listened to Curt; I understood where Brenda was coming from in a different way. I found I was listening to students every week, and that was fine with them. They didn't expect me to rattle off some solution to every problem they laid on me. They just needed a place to go and talk—whether that was in their journals or in my classroom. They needed to get something off their chests, and this teacher, I decided, would be someone they could trust, someone who would have the time for them . . . someone who would listen. **CEJ**

Ron B. DeBoer is a second-year English teacher at Chatham District Christian Secondary School in Chatham, Ontario. He also writes part-time.

RICH BISHOP

"I began to realize that Student Problems 101 was taught by Professor Experience, and that the main thing we needed to remember from that course was how to listen."

Critical Thinking and the Christian School

BY THEA LAWRENCE

For lack of knowledge, my people perish. Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee.

— Hosea 4:6

Today, Christian thinkers are in short supply. God's people are unprepared to challenge the assertions of media propagandists no matter how false. Perhaps this deplorable situation is the consequence of diminished use of the dictionary and the rules of logic in the classroom.

Christians not only accept media distortion of the English language but indulge in it themselves. A recent article appearing in several Christian magazines was entitled "Honest Cynics." The writer was making a case for Christian *skepticism*, not cynicism. The true meaning of the work *cynic*, "a misanthrope, one who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest," can hardly apply to any genuine Christian.

This sort of ignorance has caused us trouble, for instance, in the evolution-creation battle. Some Christians have bowed to Darwinism; others court ridicule by defending Six-Solar-Day Creationism; but the Scientific Creationism offered by Christian biologists is seldom considered.

Why should this be? Can we afford to reject the laws of logic because of their pre-Christian, non-biblical origin? If we do, we reject our God-given reason and disassociate ourselves from traditional Christianity—in fact, we ally ourselves with modern sociology.

If we are to settle the damaging sectarian conflicts of our time, we must begin to see our God as the God of all history. We must recognize the One who not only gave his Word to the chosen people, but also sent his Holy Spirit to the ante-deluvian patriarchs and the inquiring Achaians. A sectarian god is a small god, and our present family battles remind a disinterested historian of nothing so much as the pre-Christian Jewish sects who hated each other more than they hated Rome.

C.S. Lewis, whose books have converted thousands of unchurched college students by showing them that there is such a thing as a Christian mind, made much of the "good dreams" that God had given to the pagan Greeks. One, the myth of Dionysus, made it natural for them to accept the Resurrection while the majority of Jews were prevented by their legalistic view of "One God."

Where then is the danger to Christians today? In the non-Christian world? That world is no different from the one the first disciples faced. Acts 8 and 19 make clear to the careful reader that it was not chiefly Roman soldiers who threatened early Christians. The Apostles insisted that heresy was the worst offense against the common life of the Church. And yet, today's Christians seem to be less concerned about obvious distortions of biblical doctrine than they are about justifying their own social views.

Perhaps this attitude is due to a misapprehension of what heresy is and an understandable sympathy on the part of Protestants for those who were burned by the Inquisition. But, by definition, heresy is an emphasis of one part of doctrine at the expense of another part. Only believers can be heretics. St. Paul had his Simon Magus and his sons of Sceva. We have "gay" priests, "liberated" nuns, fornicating evangelists, bishops who object to the singing of

"Christian writers and speakers are nearly invisible in today's fight for intellectual integrity."

"Onward, Christian Soldiers," and the "Jesus Only" error. The heresies of the early Church are among us yet.

It is the mediocre quality of Christian thinking that differentiates our time from that which has gone before. As Christianity began to spread in the second and third centuries, intellectual giants such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen were called forth to answer those who were presenting a contrary gospel. In 325 A.D., the Church again found it necessary to battle heresy at the Council of Nicaea. Bishop Arius was excommunicated for his insistence that Jesus was merely a man. Yet today among professing Christians we find a strong and stubborn Arian contingent. Few Christians, even those who repeat the Nicene Creed every Sunday, know why it had to be formulated only three hundred years after the Resurrection.

During the so-called Dark Ages, the Celtic Church, through St. Columba and other monks, fought a mighty battle on doctrinal grounds against the principle of mass baptism. As a result, individual baptism is universally observed in the Church. In the Middle Ages the most brilliant minds—St. Thomas Aquinas, Peter Abelard, and Duns Scotus—were church-

men. In the nineteenth century Abraham Lincoln, Tolstoy, and Daniel Webster, the most towering intellects of their day, were believers. Even in the early twentieth century, ordinary parish clergy were usually the best-educated men in any town. Only a few years ago Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien demonstrated how intelligent Christians could be. Today, whom do we have of this caliber? Malcolm Muggeridge in England and Jacques Ellul in France. Yet, such Christian thinkers are not required reading in most American schools, either public or parochial.

One aspect of the problem was neatly stated for us as far back as World War II by George Orwell, an authentic modern prophet but no Christian: "I am not so much concerned about the influence thought has on language as the influence language has on thought."

Today most Christians have accepted a definition of *humanism* as the cult of godless materialism. They are unaware of the fact that leading humanists in the past two millennia have always been Christians or that Webster's definition would apply to Jesus Christ himself.

Why do we Christians go along with such desecration of the language God gave us? The slow, natural changes which affect words through general usage are no longer the norm. Since television exploded on the scene in the early 1950s, Orwell's most painful predictions have become naturalized in our world. Words such as "liberal," "gay," and "relationship" have been twisted out of shape in the media. Still other crucial terms are being restructured and programmed to be used by television commentators and newspaper columnists for propaganda purposes.

Christian writers and speakers are nearly invisible in today's fight for intellectual integrity. One of the few who stand in the breach is Chuck Colson, who contends that the Bakker scandal resulted from the preaching of false theology, the doctrine of prosperity. Another exception, Warren Wiersbe, in his book *The Integrity Crisis*, suggests that recent scandals are due to want of thought in the followers of popular personalities and an inability to ask the right questions. But few church leaders seem able to discern the spirit of bad thinking.

In the main, non-Christians are fighting this battle for us. For example, Allan Bloom in his best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, asserts that once "the Bible was the only common culture, one that united simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, young and old, and . . . provided access to the seriousness of books"(58). The National Endowment for the Humanities, in *American Memory*, warns us that in our schools today "we run the danger of unwittingly proscribing our own heritage"(7). Likewise, Leon Botstein, once the youngest college president in the nation, insists that "we must bring all students into contact with tradition, with the great books" (*Annandale Magazine*, Spring 1988, 46).

They are speaking of our Christian heritage and the great books largely written by believers. We have potential allies out there in the world, if we can only make contact with them. Though our opposition is united, and our ranks are in disarray, we Christians *can* come together to train our young for their role in the world. We *can* teach them the rules.

The first change that is indicated is the return to our curriculum of a subject that has been considered essential throughout Christian history. That subject is Aristotelian logic. Both the Old and New Testaments can justify such a decision.

If some may feel, as Peter did, that we dare not let such a pagan inside the temple, let us remind ourselves of the rebuke he received from our Lord. After all, classical logic is not something that Aristotle invented, but a formulation of the rules of right thinking that are always valid.

Does God dislike wisdom? If so, why Proverbs 3 and 8? If he is against reason, why Isaiah 1:18? If he condemns knowledge, why Hosea 4:6?

A course devoted to this subject in junior high would have incomparable value in a pupil's future schooling. On the secondary level, he or she would be able to attack knotty problems with thought and comprehension. In a secular university dominated by prestigious academics with axes to grind, a background in the basics of logical thought would be of enormous advantage.

Unfortunately, logical thinking cannot be taught today without first dealing with the prevalence of illogical thinking. One of the first things a teacher must do is to dispose of the modern notion that the piling up of evidence without regard to its quality or relevance is somehow valuable. Likewise, the inability to differentiate fact from opinion is a never-ending problem. Fallacies such as equivocation and over-generalization so pervade our newspapers and television programs that they have become accepted as valid argument. A course that scrutinized these common errors of thinking would have incalculable worth.

Basic equipment for such a course should be a classic text such as Musgrave's *Argumentation and Debate*. The teacher may supplement this book with newspapers, magazine articles, scientific reports, and, yes, Christian publications—all subjected equally to the same rigorous standards of logic. The typical class period would be one of discussion and argument, the final exam taking the form of classical debates.

In each exam, the class should be divided into groups of four and a controversial topic assigned to each group. The rest of the class assigns points and gives a critique of each debate. The examination grade reflects the teacher's evaluation of the critical thinking involved in the critique.

Such a design is not an impossible dream. The method is already employed by some few teachers, critical thinkers themselves, who require this kind of response from their students. Our faith teaches us that whatever we attempt, if it is in God's will, it shall prevail. And surely it is God's will that his future warriors should be equipped for battle. **CEJ**

Thea Lawrence, both educator and writer, resides in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Coaching

BY GORDON VAN ZANTEN

"You teach English and coach athletics?" a Drake University professor asked me. "Isn't that a strange combination?" In twenty years of teaching writing and coaching athletic teams, I have often been questioned about my involvement in those two seemingly dissimilar areas. Educators and non-educators alike believe that the English classroom and the gymnasium, baseball diamond, or football gridiron are worlds apart.

Despite attempts to overcome stereotypes, the English teacher remains the bespectacled, non-athletic, meditative person who enjoys bizarre novels. The athletic coach, on the other hand, is stereotyped as the former jock who delights in rigid discipline, organization, and a utilitarian approach to all of life. A person who accepts these stereotypes concludes that the coach and the English teacher exist in entirely different educational worlds.

I suggest, however, that we go beyond the stereotypes. The teaching of writing and the coaching of athletic teams are more similar than dissimilar. In fact, I will be bold enough to assert that my teaching—specifically of writing—has been more influenced by my coaching experiences than by any workshop or textbook. I believe that I teach most effectively when I think of myself as a classroom coach.

For many years coaches have recognized that coaching is a process of guiding athletes toward a desired goal. With careful organization of practice time, coaches have emphasized the drills, the conditioning, and the process that is required to be a successful athlete. In the past, writing teachers have placed an undue emphasis on the final product rather than guiding their student writers through the writing process. Many teachers, myself included, did not understand the process that produced the product.

In my early years of teaching, I actually felt that to tell a student too much about how to go about an assignment was to destroy a student's creativity. How foolish I was! I was often puzzled when my athletes made more progress in basketball and baseball than my students did in writing. Yes, I was giving enough writing assignments, but I was not coaching the process that is so vital to the development of the writer. In not coaching the process, I paralleled the athletic coach who gives the athletes a ball and says,"Okay, kids, play!" In essence I was saying to my students, "Okay, kids, write!" It just did not work.

Athletic coaches break down the process of preparing athletes for competition. A basketball coach, for example, uses drills to coach the post-entry pass, weak-side defense, or proper rebounding technique. Although athletic coaches have to fight the weak intellectual image, they have always understood that, in order to have a complete product, they must carefully put the athlete through an organized process. Watching an experienced athletic coach guide an individual or team through various stages of development should be an important model for the writing teacher.

Writing teachers must develop unique ways to break down the process of writing. Whether the stage be brainstorming for a subject, pre-writing, evaluating, or editing, the teacher must provide instruction and guidance. In a persuasive assignment, for example, the purpose of the essay and the audience must be established. Pre-writing activities include the study of prejudicial statements, hasty generalizations, and an analysis of inductive and deductive reasoning. Writing level activities include discussion of paragraph length and organization. Activities on the

in the Classroom

evaluating and editing level include questioning the method of persuasion and basic sentence structure. The writing teacher guides the student in each part of the assignment.

Our athletes and our writers do not improve without instruction and guidance. Both athletes and writers must be guided through the process that brings improvement. They must be taught to think that the process is the key to their success. If the process is taught well in both instances, we will have given the student and the athlete not only success but also a basis for continued success. With that perspective, perhaps the student and the athlete will someday put others through the process so that they can write and compete successfully too.

Coaching—for athletes and writers—is not just emphasizing process. It is also motivation. The successful athletic coach motivates his players. The writing coach should do the same. True, there is probably more reluctance to write than to play, but motivation must be present if there is to be success. Public praise, individual encouragement, and written evaluations are all techniques that the athletic coach uses to increase self-confidence. The writing teacher must use these same techniques. Motivating students to communicate effectively should be a major task of the writing teacher. Without motivation students will not make progress in either athletics or writing.

Another element that successful athletic coaches provide is variety. Athletic coaches have long recognized that skills must be practiced, and within that practice there must be variety to eliminate boredom. The same is true with coaching in the classroom. Teachers must insist that certain skills are practiced, but they should also provide assignments that stretch the imagination and thinking of the student. Just as a basketball coach teaches new drills throughout the season to provide variety, so a teacher must provide variety with a new approach, concept, or writing technique. For example, if students do a formal review of a book for the first outside reading assignment, the teacher should develop a new approach for the second one. Perhaps the students could write dialogue between two characters from the novel. Another idea is to have the student create a fictional interview of the main character. A major task of the writing teacher is to promote variety so that enthusiasm for writing is initiated and maintained.

Athletic coaching has taught me one final truth: overcoaching is dangerous. Some overzealous coaches have pushed their athletes to the point of mental and physical exhaustion by season's end. With that exhaustion present, successful performance is difficult to achieve. I have found that an occasional day off from practice is often beneficial to athlete and coach. The same principle is applicable to the classroom. Feeling that written communication is so vital, writing teachers often saturate students with too much writing. I do believe that we can never write too much, but an occasional day off—a break from the established writing routine—will often bring a new freshness which is so necessary in writing .

It is best to have a student-oriented plan in which the teacher can make evaluations of the progress and the pace. In coaching and in teaching writing, an organized but flexible plan brings the most desirable results. **CEJ**

Gordon Van Zanten teaches English and coaches at Pella Christian High School in Pella, Iowa.

"Athletic coaching has taught me one final truth: overcoaching is dangerous."

Profile.

Sandra Flim McRae– A Special Teacher for Special Kids

BY ARDA RINGNALDA ROOKS

Behind the staff room, tucked away in a corner of the school, is a small room. From that room come two voices, one of a child and one of an adult. The first voice is at times high and excited, at times, hesitating and frustrated. The second voice is low and firm, yet always answering, always encouraging.

The adult voice belongs to Sandra Flim McRae, special education teacher at Immanuel Christian School in Oshawa, Ontario. Sandra teaches sixteen learning-disabled children in cramped quarters among tables, chairs, and baskets stacked with pupils' notebooks and pencils. The shelves are laden with supplies, games and learning devices of every kind. There's an easel, a small chalkboard, Sandra's desks and manuals and resources, gaily decorated bulletin boards, and a doorway leading to the staff room.

You don't have to ask the children whether they enjoy coming to Sandra. Donny, the slight, blonde boy who moves like quicksilver and has trouble concentrating in class, works in the hall "in his office," as he and Sandra call it. "It's not a negative thing," explains Sandra. Donny obviously doesn't think it is either. He leaves his office, slips into Sandra's room, puts his notebook down on a table, and waits. Sandra stands behind him, an arm on either side of him, close to him. Together they study his work. She praises him just as he knew she would. "All finished. Great, Donny, and just in time. That's super!"

Donny continues to pop in and out of the room for directions, answers, and reassurance. Meanwhile, Sandra works with David. David dislikes reading unless, Sandra has discovered, his assignments are relevant, factual, and informative. Today David is slouching in his chair. "David," Sandra says crisply, "this isn't your living room where you can put your feet up whenever you feel like it." Then she goes off on a different tack. "David, this is something you'll learn in high school. But I think it'll be interesting to you since you like animals. So we'll learn about it now." David grows an inch taller right there in his seat. He sits straight and listens attentively. Later he willingly reads and edits the story he has written about Joey Fillion, the ten-year-old boy who was almost burned to death as he rescued his brother in a house fire. "Why is it important to edit like this?" she asks David.

He finishes his own story and edits other stories for the school bulletin. You can tell that he finds his job important.

After recess, Jonathon, Michael, and Jennifer come in. Their cheeks are flushed and Michael is bouncing up and down. When they learn that they are going to work on spelling, all three look pleased. Quickly, they take up their positions in three corners of the staff room. I am even included in the game. We spell the word together, each saying a letter and bouncing the ball to the next person. Later Sandra explains, "We're working on strengthening visual-motor connections." Jonathon, Michael, and Jennifer just think that spelling is more fun this way. Their teacher also lets them walk around while they read aloud and spell words to the ticking of a metronome. Spelling isn't all that bad.

Sandra often mixes work and play. Even the stories written on paper and cut into pieces are fun to sequence. Michael smiles at me as I watch him order the pieces and read aloud. He shouts "HOWDY!" every time he comes across the solution, but Sandra doesn't seem to mind the noise. He is, after all, reading intently. He finishes the story and laughs aloud, pleased with the ending. Proudly he tells me, "She (Sandra) even writes some of them herself."

After the stories are finished,

Jonathon, Michael, and Jennifer sit at a table facing Sandra. As they do so many other days, they must work on simple organizational skills. They practice skills that other children learn naturally, tasks like distinguishing left from right, piecing together puzzles, or following directions. "Jennifer, you have a good memory," Sandra encourages. "Can you follow all these directions carefully?" Jennifer nods, listens closely, and then does just as she has been told. She stands behind her chair, claps her hands twice, turns around, and then takes a pencil to everyone. Sandra praises her; Jennifer smiles. She has not always been able to concentrate on so many instructions at once.

Later on, they read the *Daily News* aloud together, all four voices sounding at once. They love to read this newspaper; it's about them. Some of the relevant news items: it's Jonathon's birthday Sunday, and Jeffrey, a fellow special education student, has just completed his latest project. Sandra writes another paragraph for them, and Michael instantly recognizes a word he has learned just that morning. "Hey, *wonderful*!" he tells everyone. "That says *wonderful*!" Later Sandra tells me, "They're so surprised they can actually read words we use in everyday life." Because it's hard for some of her students to read phonetically, Sandra tries to provide a strong context for them. Some will learn to read using context clues. If that doesn't work, Sandra will try other techniques.

Every child learns so differently; Sandra must get to know each child and uncover the mystery of how he or she learns. It is a challenging task, one that is not always successful. Last year, Sandra had a student who made remarkable progress, but this year "he's on kind of a plateau." She struggles to find a new approach that will work. "What works for one won't for another . . . . You [must] mold your teaching to the way each child learns."

Yet it is exactly this challenge that Sandra loves. That means she must get to know her students very well, something which happens more naturally in a special education classroom than in a regular one. "I love seeing a child relax and feel that he can be proud of the progress he is making," she says. She also loves to help these children "find their strengths," something which she does naturally. "God has made each one of them special and unique. I tend to see their good sides. If you do that,"—here Sandra's dark eyes seem to smile—"it makes them even more wonderful." She gives the example of a student whom she found defiant and disruptive. Determined to focus on his strengths, she began to see what creative and interesting thoughts this boy had. She saw that he too was unique and wonderfully made.

The students know how Sandra feels about them. In her classroom they feel good about themselves. They are given tasks they can master, directions they can follow, and constant praise. Patiently Sandra tries to fill in not only the gaps in their learning, but the holes in their confidence and self-worth. "I want them to get rid of the idea that they're stupid," she says. "I want them to realize their strengths."

In the tiny back room, Sandra and her students daily learn reading skills, practical skills, organizational skills, coping strategies of all kinds. But most important to Sandra, they practice the art of loving and accepting self. **CEJ**

Arda Ringnalda Rooks, along with her husband Jim, is CEJ regional editor from Ontario, Canada, and lives in Whitby.

College can't possibly prepare teachers for every facet of the profession; however, many teachers express a need for more realism in their education courses.

Personally, many years have faded the line of distinguishing what I was taught in college from what I learned on the job. Also, hopefully, the methods courses have changed since then. Therefore, I directed the following question to Wendy Grossmann, a talented four-year teacher who recalls with vivid memories her "on-the-job training" and recommends more practical teacher training.

What do you wish your methods course would have told you about teaching?

The door bangs shut at the end of a day marked by a pre-dawn alarm amid chronic weariness, chalk dust, an overhead's thwacking demise on a linoleum floor, and indigestion from the acidic coffee in the teachers' lounge. The question "Did any teaching happen today?" vaguely wafts through a congealed brain. Who knows? Who cares? Mom said there'd be days like this, but education profs probably didn't. They took these minor hassles for granted and thus left out some integral information.

Sure, they modeled that stellar unit plan, but did they ever explain what to do when you discover that the eighth grade history teacher covered World War I last year using the materials you've chosen for this year's ninth grade novel after you've ordered and paid for everything? Or what about the daily tightrope act one must walk when written plans have to be aborted for a spontaneous tangent or the less glamourous—a vomit victim in third hour?

There are many untold secrets to survival in the teaching profession that extend beyond the normal classroom methods fare one finds served up in colleges and universities across the U.S. Skeptics are saying, "Well, some things just have to be experienced." But the wide-eyed education major should take heed of a few hidden pitfalls of life at school, for it is a life style, not just a life of lesson plans, they are investing in.

Why don't methods profs tell students about politics and competition at work? Politics is a very real element teachers encounter both with their colleagues and with their administrators. A prospective teacher should have an inkling of how to simultaneously retain integrity and efficiency while insuring a positive working relationship. What sacrifice of time and emotional energy, apart from scurrying to prepare sixty worksheets, should go toward listening to faculty room banter or socializing with the P.E. teacher? When is it important to forget fatigue and attend weekend sporting events to demonstrate support?

Another compelling item in this would-be survival package is an elusive one called time. Education profs seldom tell future teachers that during the course of the average academic year they will have to jam committee work, coaching, conferences, banquets, and parent phone calling on top of classroom preparation, grading, and time to be a well-rounded human being that laughs and prays. They scarcely mention that supposed summer vacation is only a euphemism for course work, a second job, and curriculum revision.

An enigma one rarely hears about on campuses of higher learning is the disdain a teacher sometimes receives for being just that: a teacher. Regardless of subject area, students, parents, and the public at large tend to mince professional dignity with comments like "I'm not surprised you gave me a D. I hate this class anyway," or "Well, Tommy isn't good at science—it just doesn't run in our family," or "You teach English; I'd better watch what I say—I really hated that subject in high school." These comments arise with nauseating regularity, and to the unprepared neophyte, they can be devastating. Education professors could help neutralize these attitudes by telling young teachers how they have persevered in the face of social adversity.

Not too unrelated is something called "culture conscience." The voice of fame and fortune can sap motivation to pursue a teaching career in a heartbeat. How does a person stay committed to a vital job that so many underestimate? This topic should appear on the education syllabus right next to Summerhill.

Whether or not education profs undervalue practical insights deliberately, in favor of more lofty philosophical realms, is speculation; however, the first-year teacher will gain greater benefit from the practical stuff of knowing how to communicate the verbal phrase to a ninth grade mind and of making wise political alliances than by contemplating the nether reaches of Rousseau or Kohlberg. Teaching teachers practical information may be less officious and sanctimonious, but certainly no less amazing than communicating the mysteries of stanines or the insights of different theorists.

True, the reflective insights come after years of teaching, and they do have value; but initial school survival skills would provide more practical wisdom for our teacher-training programs. **CEJ**

You are encouraged to send questions on any topic related to the Christian teacher's role and response, regardless of grade level.
The editor will solicit responses from additional sources when appropriate.
Address questions to:

Marlene Dorhout
CEJ Query Editor
2135 S. Pearl
Denver, CO 80210

CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.

Query.

How to Remember Those Names

BY IRIS ALDERSON

When someone remembers my name, I am immediately gratified. I not only feel warm toward that person, but also warm inside. And no matter how much those who refer to me as 'what's-her-name' apologize for their absent-mindedness, I always feel taken down a peg or two. While this helps to keep me humble, it nevertheless hurts.

We had a teacher in college who memorized everyone's name before the first class was over. I was impressed and far more receptive toward her than toward any other teacher.

Regarding my own years of teaching, I wonder how many disappointed Marys and Johns were not Marys and Johns at all, but Janes and Pauls.

As the new year rolled around each September, I dreaded that first class with its sea of strange faces. I needed a way to connect the right names with the right faces before the fifth or sixth class session.

Over the years I tried many different ways, but nothing seemed to work until I finally discovered a simple technique that enabled me to know each student by name before the first class was over. Once I had their names, I also had their attention and respect, so the rest of my classes went much more smoothly.

I began each class with a brief introduction and wrote my name on the chalkboard. I then gave each student a large card that had been folded lengthwise. (The card had to be sturdy enough to stand on the student's desk without falling over. A large index card was sturdy and inexpensive, so it worked well.) I then asked my students to write their names with a felt-tipped pen on one side of the card. I asked them to make the letters clear enough so that I could read them from a few feet away.

Once this was accomplished I returned to the chalkboard and in large letters wrote, "I am special." This usually brought a few giggles and wise remarks like "Who does she think she is?" But when I asked them to do the same, a hush came over the room. When I had finished I asked the students to place the cards on their desks. Each student's name faced the teacher, and the phrase "I am special" faced the student. So throughout the first lesson I was able to connect each student's face with his or her name. This method proved to be far more successful than the one-time connection of student's name with the face during roll call.

The phrase "I am special" works well with high school students who often have a poor self-image and a low sense of self-worth. It helps them realize their specialness as God's children. An advantage for the teacher is that students find it difficult to misbehave when "I am special" is staring back at them. After all, special people do not misbehave.

With younger children you might want to try "Jesus loves me" or some other phrase they can easily relate to.

We must not forget how special we all are to God, who calls each one of us by name (Isaiah 43:1). He knows the importance of a name and knows how we "respond to" those who remember us and those who do not.

By taking the time and making the effort to know our students by name as soon as possible, we are planting small seeds of caring in a Christ-like way. **CEJ**

Iris Alderson is a free-lance Christian writer from Westfield, Massachusetts.

Idea Bank.

In Defense of

AN OPEN LETTER TO JOHN VAN DYK

Dear John:

Your article ("Christian Education: Is Our Talk Cheap?") in the December 1988 CEJ reminded me of Shakespeare's famous phrase, "Damning With Faint Praise." Christian education would be well served by a public dialogue on some of the questions you raise. I am writing this as a public letter because I think your attacks on the "boredom which stalks our classrooms" is unwarranted and thus detrimental to the general reputation of Christian school education in North America.

A great deal of good, solid Christian teaching is taking place every day in our schools across the continent. The expertise and dedication of our teachers produces variety, activity, excitement, and "experience" in many classrooms. You are yourself indulging in "cheap talk" by making such accusations on the basis of some school visits.

Before we can get to a comprehensive Christian theory about classroom practice, we need to clear away the rhetoric which you have strewn in the way of a clear and dispassionate investigation. We need to be up front about why we are interested in changing the schools. Is boredom the problem or conservative tradition? Do we want to improve the quality of Christianity as a whole? Is your real concern secularism of North America or the failure of the churches? Let me begin the dialogue with some critical observations on your recent articles.

Before we simply "get at it," as you so eloquently preach, we might want to see if we have diagnosed the illness correctly. I am puzzled about your characterization of CSI (Christian Schools International) schools as boring, uncaring, intellectual, in short, anti-educational. The implication of your recent articles is that our schools are staffed with intellectualists, dualists, deists, conservative—in our words—hypocrites who are blind to notice that they are sinfully separating theory from practice.

Instead of providing hard facts and detailed analysis, you carry on about "authentic Christian education" as it *seems* to exist in Australia. Every time you get specific you lapse into typical progressive slogans, such as "ownership of their own learning," "supportive living," "joyful," "meaningful," and so forth, as if these were self evident and only those sharing your ideas are able to develop classrooms with those characteristics. Come now, John, talking about cheap talk . . . Covering all the cliches with the notion of discipleship doesn't solve anything either.

Flaws in your logic may prevent us from making any kind of progress in the near future. Thus, for example, you have a *two-circle* view of Christian teachers (theory/practice compartmentalized), and that seems to me not only wrong but naive. Instead of giving everyone a guilt complex about not integrating theory and practice, you ought to answer questions like: "Do theory and practice ever meet?" "Are they intended to?" "How are theory and practice related to belief and behavior?"

There are a number of related but distinct questions at issue. Many beliefs have no theoretic structure to them, but flow from practical concerns about life. Many practices do not look good theoretically, e.g., student discipline, but they make sense in view of what we know about how teenagers behave in groups. Many ideals are not articles of faith but out-of-date theories, e.g., open classrooms. Finally, the Scriptures have a lot to say about human motivation and sin, in ways that have nothing to do with theory. So it seems to me that you may want to reconsider your simplistic categories.

Your solutions to the "boredom stalking so many of our classrooms" is problematic. You propose that only truly committed Christians can unite theory and practice. That, of course, is factually not true. Apart from the fact that this perfectionism is unbiblical, are you also suggesting that most of our present teachers are lukewarm?

Your apparent definition of lukewarm is not fair. Surely you are not serious when you identify academic excellence, virtually our entire North American way of life, and a satisfying career as idolatrous? What are your alternatives, moving to Australia? A well known author (J.T. Hospital) recently noted that "Australia is a land of hedonistic philistines"!

Classroom practice is not deductible from theory, but from educational goals. Unfortunately, you did not point out that any practice, whether it is homemaking, dishwashing, mining, bricklaying, or bookwriting, is not deducible from any theory whatsoever. Philosophers over many centuries have continued to point out, as Aristotle did, that theory is derived from experience but is not like it. It is a different creature.

Your claim that we can "teach discipleship skills" seems to me rather problematic, especially since you define "discipleship" as the

Christian School Teachers

essence of the Christian life. Is this a new form of Methodism? Are you opposed to the contemplative life? Would it not be nice if Christian schools could guarantee 100 percent *hot* Christians, not just lukewarm ones, by the end of a college career? We could dispense with the sanctification of the Holy Spirit and the communion of the mature saints and concentrate instead on "*shared praxis* techniques." Do you really want these conclusions?

Let me note a mistaken inference in your own answer to the question about why there seems to be a gap between theory and practice. In the article you clearly assume that all of us accept the fact that Wolterstorff, Steensma, Van Brummelen, and yourself, represent *the* clear, complete Christian education theory which all ought to accept and promote. This rather un-Calvinistic presumption is factually wrong. Further, the problem is *not* that we are not practicing what we preach, the problem is that quite a few of us are practicing a different "theory," quite convinced that it is essentially Reformed and Christian in the same way that you are in favor of the theory that you seem to be proposing.

I hesitate to put a philosophic label on your position at this time, even though it would be very easy to do so on the basis of some of your longer articles. At this time the only comment I want to make is that your presentation of the essentialist position is a caricature. It is one of several Christian theories available to Christian educators.

Further, my guess is that you also endorse a hidden social theory which you are not willing to put up front. Part of your criticism of teachers has nothing to do with their classroom practice, but a great deal with your view that they are not anti-American enough. If you plan to define "commitment" as the use of the classroom to subvert North American culture, then say so openly. But if you want to turn the school into a missionary institution, don't mislead everyone by talking about theory. Instead, talk about ideological bias—theirs and yours.

So, John, the focus of our dialogue ought to be on the fact that we may espouse different Christian theories. Many teachers in the system may be quite happy and determined to continue on with their present practice in the conviction that they *are* integrating theory and practice. And if that is indeed the case, then it may explain why *you* see a great deal of boredom whereas many *others* may see it as serious learning. Whether or not a certain level of self-evident "joy" ought to ooze from every classroom is something that surely needs theoretic clarification and practical justification. Perhaps if you were to stop confusing the issues with wild generalizations, then we could get on with the real dialogue about the ways and means of improving CSI schools. Debilitating the teachers who are doing an admirable job and who don't need the confusion of yet another sermon on educational sainthood from educators using "popular" slogans is not necessary.

Yes, indeed, we are *all* aware of God's presence, deeply disturbed about the ravages of sin, and willing to follow the Lord; otherwise we would not be Christians. Wisdom, however, is not teachable, even though Christian teachers hopefully model the Christian pursuit of biblical knowledge and insight. Perhaps if we focused on the key issues which are important in the classroom, then a dialogue would indeed be helpful to the teachers. Yes, John, we can all get frustrated when other Christians around us don't live up to our *ideals*! However, it seems to me that our Christian duty is to first explore whether our own expectations are biblical. After that, we can set about determining how to encourage others to be disciples in the way that God leads them.

Adrian Guldemond
Ancaster, Ontario

RESPONSE TO ADRIAN GULDEMOND

Dear Adrian:

Thank you for your open letter. I am grateful to you for taking the time and making the effort to initiate dialogue about what I know to be vitally important to both you and me: the welfare of Christian education. You raise many significant (and legitimate) issues. Since at this time space restrictions prevent me from adequately addressing your letter, I shall limit myself to two related points, then make a proposal.

First, I do hope that you do not *really* see my "Cheap Talk" article as an attack on teachers. Attacking teachers is farthest from my mind. You correctly remind me of the many good teachers who are doing a fine job. But I also see many teachers who would like to be more effective as *Christian* teachers. My aim has been (and continues to be) to help and support, not attack, teachers.

This raises the second, related point. My concerns about boredom, teacher frustration, and other problems are *not* based on just an isolated visit here and there, as you suggest. In my work for the

Dordt College Center for Educational Services during the past few years I have visited hundreds of classrooms in many different parts of the U.S. and Canada. During that time I've also had the privilege of interacting with over three thousand teachers at conventions, at workshops, at inservice programs, and in personal consultation situations. Again and again it comes through to me: Christian school teachers are busy, overworked, and often frustrated people. They get too little feedback and have too little time to reflect. The help they get is often insufficient and inadequate. It's the teachers themselves who have made it clear to me that we need to help and support each other, seek new and creative ways to improve our teaching effectiveness (certainly not by returning to the "open classroom!"), and continually ask, "How can we be more distinctively *Christian*?" Much of what I say and of what I write about these things reflects what I have learned from teachers.

And now a proposal. It would be helpful to me and to the *CEJ* readership if you could outline your views on some of the questions you raise. For example, what is *your* understanding of the relation between theory, educational goals, and teaching practice? On the basis of what criteria would you judge an educational philosophy to be acceptable or unacceptable? And what role does discipleship play in the instructional strategies of the Christian school?

It may well be the case, as you suggest, that we espouse different Christian theories. I have tried to be up-front about mine, perhaps too much so. I'd love to get a better understanding of your own approach.

Thanks again for writing. I hope *CEJ* will give us space to continue the dialogue.

John Van Dyk,
Sioux Center, Iowa

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Affirmations is a manuscript summarizing ideas generated by 120 Christian school educators who chose to gather in Chicago the past three summers to grapple with the needs of Christian education for the 21st century. This summer Baker Book House of Grand Rapids, Michigan, expects to publish the manuscript compiled by Chicago Conference planner Steven Vryhof along with Joel Brouwer, Stefan Ulstein, and Daniel Vander Ark.

Intended as a discussion starter, *Affirmations* is recommended reading for every Christian school staff and board. The manuscript is particularly well-suited for faculty in-service days or retreats prior to opening day.

Affirmations presents the Chicago conferees' ideal Christian school perspective, centered on compassion rather than competition, on service rather than self. "Education for an imagined future" cultivates an international/global interest which encourages participation in real-life experiences that integrate life and learning as opposed to a 19th century mindset in which education consists primarily of lectures and multiple choice responses to intellectual content. Thus teachers become change agents, who guide and coach, rather than dispensers of knowledge.

The manuscript calls every teacher to pursue growth through reading, travel, conferences, and academic coursework, but even more, it calls every teacher to build a sense of Christian community that develops a stu-dent's concern for the question "What did you give?" rather than: "What did you get?"

CHICAGO CONFERENCE

The Chicago Conference planners would like to expand their network of people interested in Christian schooling for the 21st century and learn of people's present and future strategies for implementing the Affirmations. They expect to convene a fourth Chicago Conference in June of 1990 conference, please mail your request to the following address:

GLCS
P.O. Box A-3220
Chicago, IL 60690-3220

LANGUAGE ARTS/ENGLISH TEACHERS

Language Arts/English teachers are encouraged to submit ideas regarding a framework document for teaching of elementary/junior high language arts to be developed by Christian Schools International. Please send your input to:

Robert Bruinsma
Associate Professor of Education
The King's College
10766 - 97 Street
Edmonton, AB Canada T5H 2M1

TEACHERS WANTED

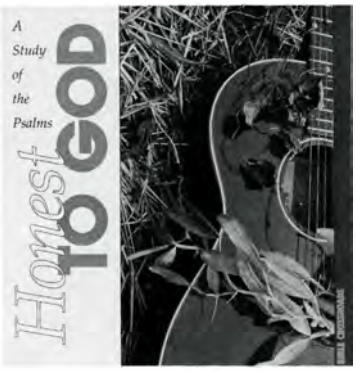
Cedars Christian School, situated in the center of British Columbia in the industrious city of Prince George (CSI Dist. 11), is seeking applications for two elementary positions. One position is for grade 1 and the other position is tentatively for grade 3/4. Inquiries may be sent in care of the principal to:

Cedars Christian School
701 North Mechako Road
Prince George, British Columbia
V2K 1A2 Phone 1 (604) 564-0707

FAREWELL OPEN HOUSE

Calvin Christian School of South Holland, Illinois will be honoring Dr. Harley D. Ver Beek for 20 years of faithful service as their administrator. The open house will be held in the all-purpose room of the school on Friday evening, June 2, from 6:30 - 8:30. All are invited.

Announcements.



Honest to God–A Study of the Psalms

BY DAN VANDER ARK

Bible Way CRC Publications Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, 100 pp. student manual, $4.95; instructor's manual $8.95
Reviewed by Ruth Donker
News correspondent for *The Banner*
Modesto, CA

Bible Crossroads is an eight-course curriculum for seventh and eighth graders published by Christian Reformed Church Publications. *Honest to God*, one of those courses, is a delightful study of the Psalms offered this year for the first time. The one hundred-page paperback book is a devotional treasure chest, chock-full of beautiful multicolored illustrations by Paul Stoub and all wrapped up in an eye-catching spiral-bound cover.

The course is written by Dan Vander Ark, a professional teacher and principal of Holland (Michigan) Christian High School. One immediately senses that the writer knows by experience what makes teenagers tick and how one can gently break through their bewildering world and some of their self-imposed barriers to get at the heart of their emotions and feelings. Fortunately, the students learn right away that the Psalms are emotional responses to life, and they are presented a smorgasbord sampling of the wide variety of feelings expressed in the Hebrew poetry.

The intent of the study, as stated in its introduction, is "to familiarize your students with the Psalms as expressions of trust in God's love and faithfulness, and to stimulate them to respond to God with their own feelings, honestly and freely. . . ." The emphasis is obviously not academic, but rather devotional and reflective.

During the course, students study sixteen Psalms in depth, memorize all or portions of five, and use another forty or more as reference and resource reading in the written assignments. The Psalm for each lesson is printed in the student manual, as is a musical version of each. A tear-out page for each lesson is included in the back section of the book. These pages can be used for daily devotions with the family or for students alone as they fill in their responses and return the page to class the following week.

The instructor's manual will convince you that the writer of the course must have a mind swimming with projects and ideas. Explanations of each Psalm, a critique of its mechanical structure, a listing of lesson truths and goals, and a procedural step-by-step outline with alternatives could make the most wary teacher feel he or she could handle the course. In addition, there's a cassette included with various readings and choir numbers and a pamphlet to send home to the parents to explain the course and give hints on how to help the teacher help the child.

Who could ask for anything more?

I have recently taught the course and must hasten to tell you that a lot more is needed—but not from a manual. If you are unable to share emotions with junior high students and to place yourself in the vulnerable position of baring your soul, this course is not for you to teach. The material itself is excellent and includes everything you need for an objective presentation of the Psalms—their history, structure, meaning, and poetic devices included.

What Vander Ark does not give you, and cannot, is heart, soul, sensitivity, and a sympathetic, listening ear. He cannot make you share with the class your own doubts, moments of anger or depression, your grief and tears. He cannot help you go to the classroom so excited you can hardly wait to teach a new lesson. He cannot give you the "high," the feeling of euphoria when the class responds positively. Nor can he make you spend three to four hours a lesson in study and in anticipation of helping students dig deep into their souls and express newfound feelings to the Lord.

Teaching the course involves study and meditation, use of resource texts, creativity, and hard work. It also takes the ability to inspire the students to trust you and one another. Once that trust is established and you become a student yourself—doing all the things you ask them to do—you're in for a rich experience.

I had a class of ten students, all from Christian backgrounds. I found, however, that their worries and concerns were not unlike those of their unchurched counterparts. One talked about suicide, another about the pain of a broken home. Still others confessed deep-seated anger and fear. All needed God to improve their self-images, resolve their doubts, forgive their sins, accept them as they are, and be close to them.

Did the students like the course? In their own words, they "loved" it. They wrote to their hearts' content—Psalms, prayers, meditations, even confessions. Their joint Psalm of praise and the sentence prayers they wrote on the last day of class confirm their positive response to the study. Their prayer follows:

> Dear Father,
>
> Thank you for letting us learn about the Psalms, that we could find how important it is to bring our prayers and thoughts to you.
>
> Please help us to be open about our feelings. Thank you for helping us to better understand the Psalms and how they affect our lives.
>
> Thank you for letting us study together and have fun in this class. We had a great time studying the Psalms and learning more about them.
>
> Lord, thank you for this class. I thank you for this study.
>
> And thank you also that we could gather here today and worship you with one another. You've been so good to us.
>
> Amen.

Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan: Evangelical Schooling in America

BY SUSAN D. ROSE

New York: Routledge, 1988; 253 pp., $25.00

Reviewed by Harro Van Brummelen
Trinity Western University, Langley, B.C.

Christian elementary and high schools have proliferated to the point that they are attracting the attention of professional educators. In 1986, Alan Peshkin detailed his experiences as a non-Christian participant in the life and world of a fundamentalist Christian school (*God's Choice*, reviewed in CEJ, Feb.-Mar. 1987). Last year, Paul Parsons summed up four years of research in his critical but balanced overview, *Inside America's Christian Schools*. And now, in the Critical Social Thought series edited by Michael Apple, sociologist Susan Rose evaluates two more Christian schools and their communities.

In general, she finds Christian school practices and beliefs reactionary and limiting rather than liberating (220). Her criteria, however, need to be examined carefully; for her, a successful school is one which enables students to achieve upward mobility. More of that later.

In good ethnographic fashion, Rose describes two very different schools thoroughly and fairly. The first school, supported by a middle-class charismatic fellowship, shuns mere memorization and stresses individual responsibility and mutual cooperation, together with interpretation and application. It operates with few external rules, emphasizing instead inner motivation, "the attitude of the heart." The school uses secular textbooks but integrates the materials of the disciplines with Christian principles.

The second school is an Accelerated Christian Education school (ACE) sponsored by an "anti-intellectual" blue-collar Baptist congregation. It adopts the highly-regimented ACE program, with its military-like rules and routines to implement its regurgitation-based, teacher-proof curriculum. She discerns two ironies in this educational ethos. First, the school rejects all state control, but then adopts a program in which neither church nor parents have any say. Second, Fundamentalist Baptists stress conformity and equate mature Christianity with good American citizenship. Yet, they have chosen an educational model that diverges widely from traditional ones favored by government bodies.

More significant than her perceptive descriptions, however, are Rose's deeper analyses. She shows, for instance, how these Christian schools inculcate parental values in their students. She concludes that, contrary to parents' expectations, the schools help reproduce America's "worldly" social structures. She attributes this phenomenon to the homogeneity of students' and teachers' backgrounds, and to the schools' emphasis on obedience as a virtue. Therefore, Rose claims, the schools reproduce restricted language and thought patterns that limit social status and employment opportunities and encourage students to accept what seems to be their assigned lot in life.

Rose's work leaves something to be desired. First, she falls into a classic ethnographic research trap. She generalizes prematurely on the basis of two cases. She attributes the differences between the two schools, for instance, to the theological and perspectival differences between Baptists and charismatics. Yet the majority of charismatic schools I have experienced are much like her Baptist school. Again, she seems not to be aware that many ACE schools have re-examined their assumptions and have modified their programs substantially. And not until the last page does Rose concede that public schools also fail frequently to provide upward socio-economic mobility. Her extensive criticism of this aspect of Christian schooling needs a great deal more comparative and longitudinal study before most readers will be persuaded of her claims.

Most CEJ readers believe that Christ calls his followers to transform society and that Christian schools can contribute to this summons to discipleship. Apparently understanding this, Rose's last chapter asks whether Christian schools do, in fact, "re-create society." Unfortunately, however, her final criterion for the success of such re-creation is limited to whether Christian schools overcome society's supposedly unjust stratification. Regrettably, she defines the transformation of society as the achievement of economic equality. The book challenges Christian school supporters to ascertain to what extent Rose's ideological and socio-economic analyses reflect their own schools—in how far we also buy into secular structures, intentionally or not. Finally, however, her measuring stick is too short to fathom the full impact of Christian schooling.

RECENT TITLES

Lopez, Diane. *Teaching Children: A Curriculum Guide to What Children Need to Know at Each Level Through Sixth Grade.* Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, 60153. 1988. 299 pp., $11.95.

Mulder, Karen and Mary Pride and Bill Pride. *The New Big Book of Home Learning: The Basic Guide to Everything Educational for You and Your Children.* A mine of resources for all who love learning—children, parents, teachers. Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books (A division of Good News Publishers), 9825 West Roosevelt Road, 60153. 1988. 382 pp.

Christian Education For Every Nation

World Wide Christian Schools

4095 Chicago Dr. S.W.
Grandville, MI 49468-0851
Phone 616-531-9102

Impact Report 1988

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION is changing the lives of thousands of children and adults in partnership with the Christian Church around the world.

The Holistic Approach To Education and Christian Leadership Development

These centers are multi-purpose facilities constructed for training and equipping the indigenous community, without regard to race, color or creed.

For more information contact: Rev. James Lont or Bill Sytsma

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CENTERS INCLUDE:

Day School Centers
For the academic, physical and moral instruction of children, equipping them in the knowledge and love of the Lord so that they might become the future leaders of the church.

Adult Literacy Centers
To train adults in functional reading and writing skills equipping the local community to provide effective leadership.

Vocational Training Centers
To provide practical training of marketable skills for economic self-sufficiency.

Christian Literature Distribution Centers
To provide for the systematic availability of Bibles, evangelism materials and other Christian literature in the local languages.

Child Food Centers
Usually with the cooperation of other agencies, children attending remote rural schools will receive one basic balanced meal a day to promote healthy minds and bodies.

Spiritual Growth Centers
For regular worship services, Sunday School, Bible study, youth clubs, VBS program, etc.

Community Health Centers
To improve local health and hygiene standards and to provide basic health services.

India
Madras

Less than 3% of her 800 million people are Christian. Christian schools have become a very effective way to integrate a Christian mindset and values into the youth of this great nation. Christian leaders are desperate for 40 new schools in this area. World-wide Christian Schools has accepted the challenge at $6250 per school as funds become available.

First School in Village

Kenya
Alale

In partnership with the African Inland Church and the Reformed Church in America, World-wide Christian Schools has a unique opportunity to construct several Christian Education Centers for the Pokot tribals. The current project will invest $95,000 in a multi-purpose center.

A Dream Becomes Reality

Zaire
Warega

Christian church leaders believe that God has provided an open door through Christian education to reach the young people for Christ. The Warega tribals have an income of $95 per year and no opportunity for education. World-wide Christian Schools is committed to help develop 46 schools at a cost of $7,500 each.

"Thank God" Education At Last

Dominican Republic
Los Alcarizzos

65% of the adults are unemployed and 70% of the children in this depressed city of 200,000 have no opportunity for any education. World-wide Christian Schools in partnership with Youth For Christ is developing a critically needed Educational-Vocational Training Center for a total cost of $90,000.

"Project Serve" Volunteers

Sample Project Requests
Please Help

Madras—India ($18,800)
Laguna—Philippines ($61,500)
Kauriong—Kenya ($39,900)
Bainet—Haiti ($4,000)
Gboko—Nigeria ($14,000)
Paraiso Infantil—Columbia ($7,900)
Roseau—Dominica ($27,800)
Gweru—Zimbabwe ($35,000)
Venda—South Africa ($24,000)
Yekepa—Liberia ($5,000)
Brewton—Alabama, USA ($25,000)

BUILDING A CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION THROUGH CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Why RBC?

Education and Training for:

- ministry
- missions
- Christian living

DOUG HIGBY
Towaco, New Jersey

Although I was raised in a Christian home and school, it wasn't until my junior year in high school that I realized I was holding back my life and future goals from Christ's Lordship. As I felt His call to missions, God directed me to RBC where I could cultivate my relationship with Him and be exposed to many different service opportunities.

BRUCE TEBBEN
Clara City, Minnesota

Through discontentment with my previous job, a tug from a special friend, and economic uncertainty, I feel God has led me to RBC. This has helped me grow in my spiritual walk through studies and friends. This is expanding my vision for a world that needs to know Christ.

ANGIE VOGHT
Vancouver, British Columbia

A couple from my church urged me to check out RBC. I didn't want to go so far away from home but I was very interested in missions. The support, excellent teaching and practical advice I've received here has given me a clearer vision for the future.

JIM JOHNSON
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

RBC is an opportunity of a lifetime for me. I wanted to serve God in specialized ministry and He's showing me how through RBC. The classes, professors and curriculum are exactly what I was looking for.

BERNY SLOMP
Lethbridge, Alberta

After spending nine searching years in the work force, the opportunity arose for me to attend RBC and pursue a challenging career in missions.

JEFFREY A. RUBIN
San Jose, California

RBC is a community in which we are a family who care about each other. RBC helps us grow spiritually as we learn about God. We are related to each other as God is leading us.

RBC

Reformed Bible College
1869 Robinson Road, S.E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506
616-458-0404