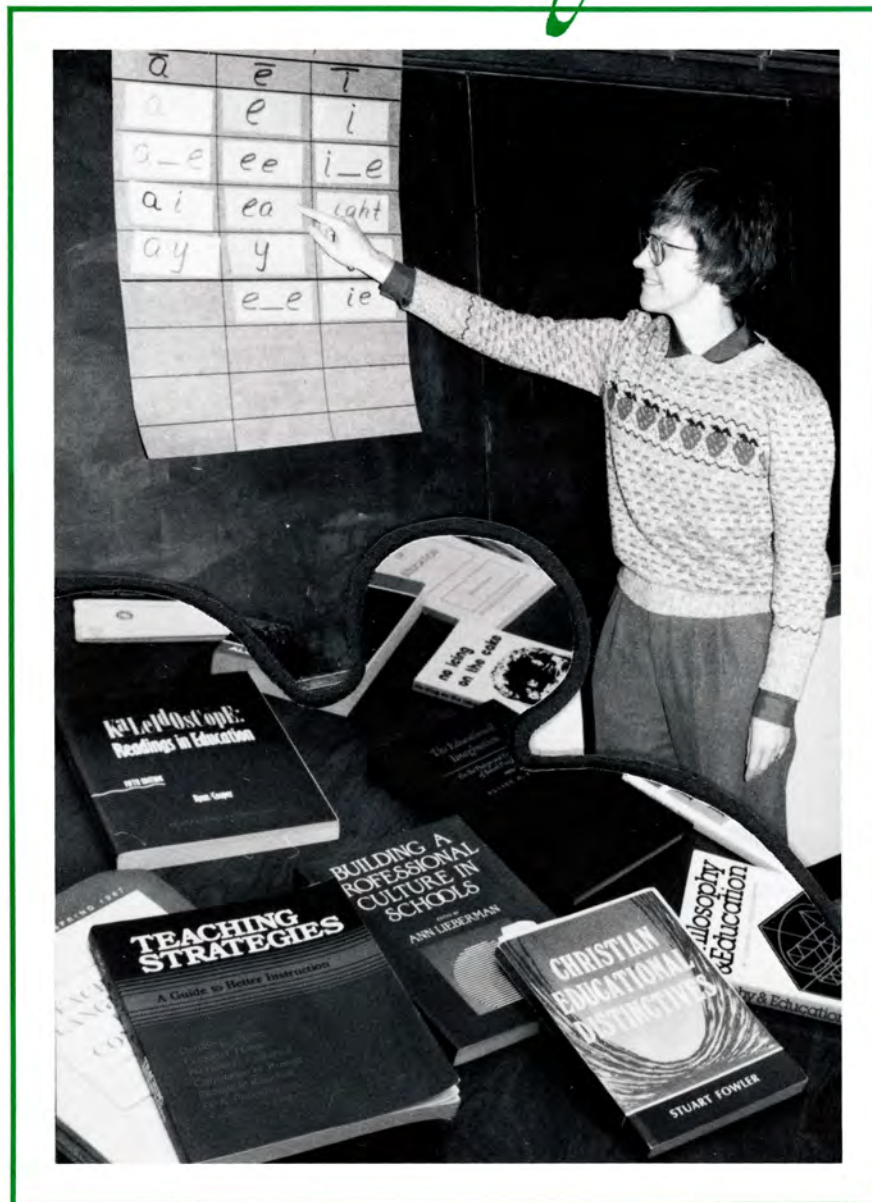


CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS *Journal*

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The Interface of Christian Theory and Practice II

—Guest Editorial by JOHN VAN DYK

The Collaborative Classroom: An Old Idea with New Legs

This past summer we visited Living History Farms in Des Moines. It's an interesting place, full of memories of Iowa's agricultural past. One of the exhibits is a one-room schoolhouse of the 1800s. About forty desks—some single, some double—are crowded around a big black pot-bellied stove. There are dunce chairs in the back corners and *McGuffey Readers* on the teacher's desk. The windows in the school are placed well above eye level, so as not to distract the students. For realism, a young woman "teaches" various lessons to successive groups of visitors.

How did teachers in such schools manage to handle eight grades simultaneously? To be sure, iron discipline, exercised with swift, often harsh punishment, was the order of the day. Teachers then, as now, knew that all is lost once classroom control falls by the wayside. But besides discipline, there was another way in which teachers managed the kids: they turned these multi-grade situations into collaborative classrooms. The students often worked together. They taught and corrected each other. They played games requiring participation by all. They depended on each other.

The collaborative classroom, then, is indeed an old idea, an idea now gaining new legs and new vigor, displaying a remarkable, regenerated capacity for moving about in the world of education. In fact, the larger educational scene is alive with talk about cooperation. Universities have established centers for research in cooperative learning. Various organizations and networks designed to promote cooperative learning have sprung up and are flourishing. And today every educational conference of note includes some sectionals on the topic.

This flurry of activity leads some of us to believe that cooperative learning is but a passing fad. Most of us become very skeptical when we hear claims asserting that cooperative learning is the cure-all for every educational ill, and nearly all of us become indignant when it is suggested that a teacher who is not into cooperative learning cannot really be a *good* teacher!

closely interconnected with other participatory teaching strategies, for example, *shared praxis*.

In its strictest sense, shared praxis refers to teachers and students sharing their questions, insights, and experiences through meaningful dialogue, thereby building up each other's knowledge, competence, and commitment. Within the Christian collaborative classroom, shared praxis

The genuinely collaborative classroom, then, is first of all an atmosphere, a setting permeated by a spirit of community, mutual support, and trust.

I believe that cooperative learning may well turn out to be just one more fad, especially (1) if it is viewed as merely a technique and (2) if it is not placed within a larger, Christian context. What is this context? It is a vision of a school in which teachers and students collaborate in learning to be knowledgeable and competent disciples of Jesus. I see the collaborative classroom as a place where students and teachers strive to enable one another to be committed servants of the Lord, a place where everyone is a co-laborer with God (cf. I Cor. 3:9; Col. 3:16a). The collaborative classroom is a place where the Body of Christ comes to expression.

The genuinely collaborative classroom, then, is first of all an atmosphere, a setting permeated by a spirit of community, mutual support, and trust. Such a classroom involves more than merely the implementation of cooperative learning techniques. In fact, I have come to believe that cooperative learning needs to be

involves mutually supportive relationships, willingness to listen to and learn from each other, and eagerness to serve each other as disciples of Christ.

In my work with teachers, I have proposed to translate shared praxis into a "first-step approach." This term is most easily understood when we contrast it with the "second-step approach." The second-step approach typically sees a teacher walk into the classroom at the beginning of the semester and announce: "Okay, kids, this is the material I am going to teach you—and you're gonna learn it even if it kills me!—and this is how I will evaluate your performance." The second-step approach, in other words, is an approach in which the teacher makes all of the decisions, often without adequately taking the needs of students into consideration.

The first-step approach, in contrast, seeks to obtain student input from the very beginning. This approach consists of at least the

following two components: (1) Doing careful inventory work to get to know where the students are, not only academically, but also in terms of their backgrounds, their emotional life, their faith life, learning styles, interests, experiences, and so on. This kind of inventory work goes far beyond a quick reading of cumulative files. (2) Giving the students some voice in the design of the classroom, of the course material itself, and of student evaluation procedures. Shared praxis encourages students to participate in deciding on the rules for the classroom, on the questions to be explored, and on the evaluation procedures to be followed.

Sometimes, when they hear about the shared praxis approach, teachers think that all of this is but a return to the "open classroom," a permissive place where kids run the school and, as a result, where little or no learning takes place. But the impression that shared praxis equals open classroom is mistaken. Remember that good teaching consists of guiding, unfolding, and enabling. The teacher, as office bearer endowed with authority, always remains the guide. The teacher must remain in control.

Actually, all sorts of teachers use shared praxis strategies without recognizing them as such. Last summer, in a seminar in Pella, Iowa, I asked the participants (some thirty teachers representing a total of well over 400 years of teaching experience) to identify the first-step practices they had actually used. The total list came to one hundred entries. They ranged from kindergarten and first grade classroom helpers, and class decisions about sequencing activities, to active student participation in deciding how to grade term papers and book reports.

The first-step approach is eminently Christian in character. It treats the children as individual, unique image-bearers of God, takes account of the distortions in their (and our own) lives, gives the students ownership of what they are learning (consequently, they will learn better, with more enthusiasm and commitment), and creates a sense of belonging, a sense of

"being members of each other" (cf. Rom. 12:5).

This brings us back to cooperative learning. If cooperative learning is to be Christianly successful and not turn out to be a mere fad, and if it is to contribute to establishing an effective collaborative classroom, it must be closely associated with shared praxis. I mention only one point. True cooperative learning requires careful selection of heterogeneous groups. Clearly, a thoroughly conducted first-step inventory is a prerequisite for such heterogeneity.

Both shared praxis and cooperative learning are indispensable to the genuinely collaborative classroom.

Both shared praxis and cooperative learning are indispensable to the genuinely collaborative classroom. At this time I shall not write about cooperative learning. Cathy Vander Heide and Agnes Struik described it well in this journal one year ago. Suffice it to say that I have observed many exciting and effective cooperative learning classes in Christian schools, including a class conducted by Cathy in the Toronto Christian High School. I interviewed some of her students, among them both the academically gifted and those for whom learning does not come easily. Expectedly, those who generally struggle with schoolwork and end up at the bottom of the grading scale spoke very positively about Cathy's class. I say expectedly, for in well designed cooperative learning classes the less successful students—often overcome by feelings of failure and rejection—suddenly feel much more highly motivated and enthusiastic about learning than they are in traditional classrooms.

Striking, however, were the responses of two students at the top of

Cathy's class. I asked them: "Be honest now, can't you learn this stuff just as easily and much more efficiently on your own? Don't you feel held back by being forced to work with the 'slow' students?" I shall not easily forget their reply. "We feel good about this class," they said, "because it's fun! And we learn just as well as in any other class because here we learn everything twice over, once for ourselves, and a second time when we share with others." They continued with genuine, matter-of-fact humility, "We realize that the Lord has blessed us with more talents than some of the other kids. We feel good about being able to share our blessings."

Answers like these show that cooperative learning is not just an idealistic theory far removed from the realities of classroom practice. Such answers testify to the power of cooperative learning to change an individualistic, often boring classroom into a buzzing place, alive with a spirit of sharing and concern. Conducting such a classroom, it seems to me, is one way in which the Christian school contributes to the development of discipleship. It's not the only way, of course. Nor is it an easy way—there are no easy answers or shortcuts. The longer I work with teachers in the classroom, the more I am impressed by the complexity of their task. The road is long and difficult. But some steps seem to lead in the right direction. Establishing a collaborative classroom is surely one such step. **JVD**

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Are Calvinists Always Rationalists?

Twenty-five Theses on Theory and Practice

The need for reform of Christian Schools International (CSI) schools is becoming a popular topic among Christian educators. If recent articles in the *Christian Educators Journal* are an indication, most of the proposals throw out old practices and ideas and adopt new ones. Some are the result of personal dissatisfaction while others are being advanced to correlate theory and practice in a more Christian way. Many of them simply adopt current fashions in education without serious examination of the hidden theories.

John Van Dyk and others have argued that educational reform will come about if we follow *three* steps. First is a theoretic move: the elimination of "*intellectualism*" and the perennialist-essentialist philosophy of education. This latter theory is believed to be the dominant one in Christian schools, following the legacy of W. Jellema, W. Zylstra, and H. E. Runner. This broad philosophy of education is to be replaced by a new view of discipleship, which still needs to be fleshed out. The progressive proposal begins with a new paradigm, namely, "hearing and doing," as opposed to "seeing and acting."

Second is a perception about how teachers operate. Van Dyk has identified a three-separate-circles view. The first circle contains theoretic constructs, presumably learned in philosophy and psychology classes at Dordt College. The second circle contains all of the practical things that teachers are supposed to do to earn a living. The third circle is the ideal of spiritual nurture. Van Dyk proposes that these circles must be broken so that the one integrated view of discipleship can

function in all areas of school life as a single circle.

The third proposal is the reconstruction of a teaching model based on a new theory: guiding, unfolding, enabling. These steps are not only intended to reform the Christian school, but also are supposed to encourage students to become better disciples of Christ. These students will then attempt to reform this "ungodly" North American Society.

My first problem is that the new epistemological paradigm will undermine the ability to conduct social reform. Second, very little thought has been given to the complexities of educational reform. Third, replacing the liberal arts tradition with a progressive model is a revolutionary move, not a mild reform.

MIND OR HEART PARADIGM?

My first thesis is that the academic emphasis in Christian schools is appropriate if we expect social reform from Christian adults. The formation of a Christian mind in the Christian school is an essential prerequisite for social action by the Christian community. Consequently, anyone who destroys the academic forms sabotages the possibility of social action in the next generation. Please consider these following elaborations.

1. The school is by nature a culture-initiating institution, not a culture-transforming institution. In the Kuyperian tradition, the (old) view is that *adults* ought to form special organizations in order to fulfill their cultural mandate. Hence we have Christian labor, business, and political organizations. The fact that we have Christian schools is culturally formative.

2. Many critics of Christian schools sloppily equate the traditional "stuffy" school with the existence of rationalism. This is an unfortunate confusion of bad pedagogy with a philosophical label that is poorly understood.

3. Blaming the ills of schooling on traditional intellectualism is the oldest trick in the book. It is dishonest because it hides the fact that another view of schooling is being advocated.

4. Calvinism can certainly be scholastic. However, scholasticism is possible in any major tradition. American progressivism has itself degenerated into a scholasticism. Its slogans are routinely parroted by professional organizations, bureaucrats, and government officials, while "everybody" knows that this is not what is really going on in the schools of the nation.

5. Eliminating "rationalism" would not necessarily reinvigorate the "true" Calvinistic heritage. There are other ossifications, such as legalism, formalism, dogmatism, and activism. All have different causes and all can occur in all churches.

6. One of the strong points of the Christian Reformed* tradition has been

its clear doctrinal emphasis. It has encouraged tough intellectual honesty and scholarly depth, something that is sadly lacking in many other denominations. Any significant political or cultural leadership requires not only outstanding intellectual ability on the part of the leaders, but also a community willing to engage in the difficult, continuous dialogue necessary for political action. The self-examination without which communities die requires *informed* members.

7. Some Reformational educational theorists seem to have given up on intellectual pursuits as the purpose of the school because they perceive modern society to be rationalistic. As a matter of fact, North American society is *irrational* to the core, as Muggeridge, Bloom, MacIntyre, Nisbet, and Schoeck have pointed out. Modern technology is not rational but mechanical. It is dehuman, as Ellul has noted for some time. For Reformed Christians to give up on the mind and to demote intellectual pursuits in favor of social concerns with *emotional* appeal, such as service projects, is to surrender to the spirit of the age!

8. A good dose of old-fashioned "rational" rigor would lead to the kind of critical thinking that would do more to undermine the control of the nihilistic modernism rampant in our world today than sporadic, if well-intentioned, prison visits by high school students.

9. All human decisions and activities involve judgments of the mind. All responsible actions presuppose choice and meaning, inherently intellectual considerations. It

is our calling as educators to model the pursuit of wisdom by encouraging serious learning, to disclose the creation order by exhibiting the truth, namely the Christian mind, and to enable students by equipping them with a Christian mindset to fulfill their own vocation in God's good time.

CLASSROOM REFORM

My second thesis is that the well-intentioned efforts at reform are shortsighted because they are entirely classroom based. While that is understandable, since Van Dyk has concentrated on teachers, it is a one-sided and incomplete approach. A number of other facts about educational reform need also to be considered by CSI reformers.

10. The classroom is not an island; it belongs in the school, which in turn fits into a supporting community. Teachers are professionals and employees, not Old Testament prophets. Students are not the property of teachers. They are not guinea pigs for the latest social, pedagogical inventions or experiments coming from the various Christian teachers' colleges.

11. Teachers are persons with specific personality types, ambitions, and abilities. They must work together as a team and model Christian community standards. Teachers do not have a God-given duty to "reform" parents, any more than pastors can preach outside of the parameters set by the church council and the denomination.

12. The Christian school is effective if it promotes its proper creation-order task in a manner that honors the biblical norms for human well-being. This requires the development of the appropriate theory for each of the commonplaces and all school functions.

13. Schooling in its twentieth-century form is an institution shaped by liberal ideology. Educational theory is a branch of political philosophy based on five ideals: progress, technology, freedom, equality, and reason. These define the "just" society that the public

school promotes. No significant educational reform has taken place in North America without prior changes in political theory. *All educational views contain political assumptions and visions, including progressivism!*

14. One of the deficiencies in the Reformed, Christian community is the lack of a thorough alternative to the prevailing political ideology. Christian educators who have tried to develop alternative educational theories have moved directly from moral philosophy (discipleship) to psychology (teaching/learning by an individual). Has anyone yet dealt with the Christian school as an institution with a primarily political (formative) role?

15. The lack of a significant political-legal theory in Calvinism means that the social philosophy based on sphere sovereignty (pluralism) has weak foundations and has been unable to create a new vision for North America. Hence, little planned reform has taken place in CSI schools. Instead, change has been a haphazard adaptation of "good ideas" from elsewhere if they fit Calvinistic moral constraints. The culprit for this is not materialism, as is generally assumed, but incomplete political ideas.

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Inherent in the position of Van Dyk and others is a major shift from essentialism to progressivism. The progressivist view has been a secondary stream in CSI schools since the days of Jaarsma and De Graaff and now is being revived.

Suffice it to say that I am neither persuaded nor impressed by the claim that "hearing and doing" is more biblical, i.e., less Greek, than "seeing and acting." I suspect that the continued fixation on this so-called "Greek dualism" is more of a smoke screen than an actual analysis. It is also a caricature of the liberal arts position. Rather than making generalizations about the history of philosophy, or even Reformed theology, let us proceed instead to examine the relevant issues one by one.

*Editor's note: The author assumes here that the Christian community supportive of Christian schools is equivalent to the membership of one church denomination. Covenantal Christian education, which is the focus of *CEJ*, is neither parochial nor exclusive to one denomination, although churches of Reformed persuasion are highly supportive of covenantal Christian education. LVG

16. Calvinists have traditionally thought of philosophy of education as a subdivision of philosophy proper, e.g., of Thomism or pragmatism or even Dooyeweerd's cosmonism. In order to decide what to do, one simply deduces the proper ontological principles and applies them in the school by order of the Board. Instant solutions! This is an erroneous view of educational theory and a moralistic view of practice. It is a large part of the explanation for the fact that there is a lot of Christian rhetoric about reform, but little action.

17. Philosophy of education is a branch of political theory, not of ethics, and is the systematic analysis of educational practice for the purpose of establishing principles to guide the operation of schools in order to design institutions where *education* takes place. The resulting theory may or may not utilize knowledge from related academic disciplines.

18. Education is defined as a function of world view and religion (ideology). Education is the norm for schooling, not its task.

19. The point of departure for the analysis of educational practice is *not* the psychology of pupil-teacher interaction, but the function of the institution. Anyone who ignores the five main functions of the modern school—custodial, social, economic, academic, and personal—is doomed to irrelevance as a reformer. This is one lesson the progressivists learned while the traditionalists ignored it. So far there is little evidence that CSI educators are dealing with all of these functions.

20. A favorite doctrine in Reformed circles is that "ideas have consequences." That is true. Most philosophers and theologians have thought that, especially about their own ideas. It is also the prayer of teachers. However, as Dewey noted in 1938, "It sometimes requires living through the consequences to find out what the ideas really are and to understand the rhetoric on a deeper level." The consequences are rarely those imagined by the preacher.

21. One conclusion of current educational research is that theory has very little, *if any*, direct impact on

teaching decisions. That is not because teachers are dumb, but because their decisions, like those of everyone else in the school systems, are determined by the institutional setting. Schools are very complex social organizations with many tasks. Anyone who thinks that mere definitions of teaching are going to have an impact on the institution is dreaming.

22. The real difficulty in CSI schools is that we set almost impossibly high standards for ourselves as Christian educators. We accept the confusing demands from all parts of the community, including ones that don't belong there. When I visit schools, I see many dedicated, but tired, people. This must change.

23. The attempt to "integrate" theory and practice is an erroneous strategy. Theories are attempts to formulate the lawfulness of creation so that we can understand it. However, much of the knowledge we use to conduct our daily affairs is not theoretic, but historical, i.e., based on experience and tradition. And properly so! Even if we had a thorough Christian theory of learning, that would not by itself lead to good teaching.

24. Good Christian theories are necessary to help us understand better the kind of healthful order God intended—e.g., a dynamic marriage, an exciting classroom, an uplifting sermon, or an inspiring concert. Good theories benefit good practitioners, but good practice cannot be taught from theory, only guided and improved. Good practitioners grow in traditions of excellence led by wise leaders. And, as the Scriptures note, where wise leaders are lacking, a people fails for lack of vision.

25. No, Calvinists do not need to be rationalists, but they have always emphasized Christian *rationality*. And that is necessary because a community that takes the biblical cultural mandate seriously *must* develop a Christian mind. Hence, Christian educators may foster the heart (creative response) but should concentrate on the mind. Cultural formation is the communal form of responsible action. It requires not only wisdom, but masses of information, fundamental knowledge of

society and human nature, and the discipline to channel that into institutional form and organized action. That is what the Christian school is all about. Hence, the shift to political theory is critical.

THE FUTURE

The Reformation was led by scholars, as were most of the other reform movements in the history of Christianity. Protestant Christianity has been the religion of the book, and book learning is essentially rational. One of the major concerns for the Christian school ought to be the promotion of the habits and characteristics of literacy in an age that is becoming illiterate. Our teachers need to start grappling with the revolutionary changes now taking place in the communications technologies; that in itself will refocus and revitalize their commitment to academic learning, which in essence is the fundamental rationale for the Christian school. Being able to read the Bible sensitively, formatively, critically, both as God's Word and as outstanding literature, is still the primary source of social action and personal piety. **CEJ**

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TEACHING AS A RELIGIOUS CRAFT

North American educators often think of teaching as a *science*. "Direct instruction" and "mastery learning," for instance, show us how to learn rather narrow bits of information and skills quickly and painlessly, although recent research casts doubt on their long-term efficacy.

Step-by-step teaching methods are sometimes useful for mastering specific routines. Ultimately, however, viewing teaching as a science fails. It does not allow teachers or students to function as full, responsible images of God. Rather, it treats them as sacrifices for the altar of technological efficiency. Behavioral objectives and related technological teaching practices have contributed to the pointless, harried hurriedness of today's society. Teaching no longer is a living encounter with other humans. Worse, teaching as a science mocks Romans 12. It almost inevitably *conforms* children to the pre-determined pattern of this world, rather than *transforming* them by the renewing of their minds.

In reaction, some educators have swung to the *teaching as an art* metaphor. It includes an emphasis on creativity in pedagogy and student activities. Lessons are staged using drama and surprise. Teachers are actors; classrooms, theaters; students, creative responders. The attractiveness of this alternative is understandable, also, for Christians. Enacting our belief that children are images of God should lead us to give them many creative opportunities for personal response.

We have done too little of this in Christian schools. In kindergarten children want to explore, to push out their horizons, to experiment with what they are learning. However, when I give Christian school graduates open-ended assignments in which they need to make their own decisions and individual responses, they are uptight and insecure. Teaching as an art captures a crucial but oft-lacking dimension.

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Yet, teaching as an art also falls short as a metaphor, since the medium is *not* the message. If it were, notables such as the Apostle Paul or John Dewey would never have become influential. Style without substance, in the end, is an empty shell. Teaching needs meaningful content as well as aesthetic style.

Metaphors and imagery affect our attitudes and practices. Identifying teaching as a science or an art already implies metaphor. Consequently, we need to work with terms that reflect our beliefs and aims. I believe we must consider teaching to be a *religious craft*.

First, teaching is a *craft*. Craftsman teachers, as Alan Tom has

said, are diligent, skillful, and perceptive. They reflect constantly on how their classroom presence affects learning. They hone tried-and-true approaches and develop others as the need arises. Craftsman teachers, even when experienced, deliberately and consistently evaluate their teaching, keeping abreast of new methods that fit their philosophical framework, personal characteristics, and needs of their students.

No two craftsman potters make identical pots. Their products depend on their raw material, their expert knowledge, their skills, and their creativity. Similarly, no two craftsman teachers will teach in the same way. But all have a keen perception of their students' pedagogical needs, effective interpersonal group skills, and dispositions to try something new and creative from time to time.

But calling teaching a *craft* is not enough. Teaching involves not just molding or making objects. Rather, it leads students in certain directions, enabling them to take on their life's calling according to their abilities and insights. Teaching is a *religious* activity in that it guides on the basis of our deepest convictions of the cause, nature, and purpose of life.

As such, Christian teachers continually delineate and model a Christian world view in their classrooms. They choose "knowledge-that," "knowledge-how," and creative experiences not as ends in themselves, but as ways to enable children to

experience the greatness of God and to live obedient lives. They help students develop attitudes and dispositions on the basis of biblical principles, encouraging them to commit themselves and their way of life to God. They use scientific structuring, artistry, modeling, and pedagogical nurturing in reflective and skillful ways, always helping children to be or to become responsible disciples of Jesus Christ.

Three years ago I had the privilege of returning to the classroom after a nine-year administrative hiatus, but at the college level, a different level than my previous teaching. In some ways, college teaching is easy: concerns with classroom management are minimal. But in other ways, it is difficult. How do you help students respond in personally meaningful ways when you face a group of forty students only twice a week for one semester?

My teaching continues to change. I do far less lecturing now than in my first semester back in the classroom. As much as possible, I have shifted the responsibility to the students through small group work, discussions of assignments and issues, student presentations, and so on. At the same time, I spend more time outside of class with individual and small groups of students, giving them help and direction for their in-class work. Looking at teaching as a constantly honed religious craft has proven time-consuming but rewarding. As students take on responsibility for their own learning, they implement and execute various learning methods, and they develop meaningful products, including teacher resource units that often are included in the unit resource bank of our provincial Christian school association.

What kinds of things should religious craftsman teachers consider for their classrooms? Besides the general principles described above, let me point to a few specific considerations that may well fit our philosophical framework.

How and to what extent should we incorporate *cooperative learning*? This approach is not a panacea. Yet the group dynamics involved and the striving for common goals with assigned individual roles can improve

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classrooms as Christian communities of learning. It helps to break the self-centered individualism and isolationism of our North American society and can be an excellent training ground for New Testament community and communion.

How can we use *learning centers* to help children take on responsibility for their own learning? In kindergarten and grade one children often spend a daily activity period at well-structured learning centers, usually keeping track themselves of what they accomplish. We can also use them effectively at higher levels, both to meet needs of special students and to structure large parts of some units. With this we must aim for proper balance with whole group instruction and discussion.

What is the role of *Whole Language* in the Christian school? I have seen excellent Whole Language results in kindergarten and grade one. Students learn reading in meaningful context and write imaginative, personally relevant journals and stories. At the same time, the term is often not clear, and its approaches may well be most effective when teachers teach skills, including phonetic ones, as students are ready for them. Craftsman teachers are trying out some of these approaches to see which ones are effective in their situation. Teaching writing and reading with materials that are personally meaningful for children certainly fits the goals of Christian education more closely than the mechanical decoding of some basal readers.

How can we implement *heterogeneous grouping* at the high school level? Not only does research consistently show that students, especially weaker ones, achieve more in heterogeneous grouping, but such grouping also fosters the concept of

Christian community. Can craftsman teachers provide a core suitable for all students, with different optional activities for different subgroups or individuals? Would we use more group work? While more demanding, such steps are being implemented by craftsman teachers.

In what ways can we encourage *critical thinking*? Here Christian schools may find themselves on slippery ground. On the one hand, we want our students to think through societal issues. On the other hand, if a substantial number fail to accept the supporting community's ethos, that community may soon no longer support the school. Yet, if our students are to be truly renewed by the transforming of their minds, also through the influence of the school's teaching, they will reject aspects of the "pattern of this world" that have traditionally been accepted by Christian school supporters. Craftsman teachers cannot resolve this inherent tension. Yet they must search for ways in which students can grasp eternal biblical guidelines and norms, but apply these to everyday situations in fresh, thoughtful ways.

These are just a few examples. If we look at teaching as a religious craft, we consider such approaches seriously and adopt the ones that fit our goals as well as our particular situation. We will then continue to reflect on our own teaching. While we don't just copy how others teach, we are on the lookout for ways to improve our teaching. As teachers, we too are God's image-bearers, called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling in and through our teaching. **CEJ**

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The Role of **PERSONALITY** in the Classroom

Certain individual differences among learners in the classroom have been the focus of much discussion over the years. We recognize that differences in intelligence, culture, and age affect the way the teacher presents material. For example, teaching students from the inner city of Philadelphia requires a different approach than does teaching students from rural North Dakota. Additionally, teaching in a Hispanic community requires sensitivity to language, customs, and social mores.

differing" among the servants in the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8). This uniqueness enables us to identify individual strengths. On the other hand, when observing God's children, one can see similarities in personal styles of functioning. It is this individuality peeking through the commonality that invites teachers to pay attention to personality in the classroom. To value the personality of students is to value God's creation.

Although the models of personality are many, one model in particular is

◆ The first preference (where one gets energy) is the *extrovert/introvert preference*. Extroverts get their energy from other people and from things. There are "after thinkers" in that they speak, then think about what they have just said. They prefer to be around other people, and they have breadth in their interests. Their goal is to change the world. Introverts, on the other hand, get their energy from concepts and ideas. Rather than changing the world, they prefer to understand the world. They are "forethinkers" in that they think, then speak. Their interests are not as broad, but they have depth of thought.

This extrovert/introvert preference has many applications for the classroom teacher. Extroverts love to talk in the classroom. Because the extrovert has not thought through what he or she has said, the teacher will need to help clarify this person's thinking. Extroverts are action-oriented, and many have trouble sitting still for long periods of time. Classroom activities need to be designed so that the extrovert can be with and around other students.

Introverts, on the other hand, get "turned on" by individual activities, such as workbooks and individual reading assignments. While they may appear to be disinterested on the outside, they are developing the teacher's thoughts inside their heads. Teachers will have to ask what introverted students are thinking and encourage them to express their thoughts. For example, the parable of the Sower is a good story for the introvert to begin to express succinctly the meaning of the parable. The teacher can encourage the introvert student to

God paints an infinite variety of personalities from a palette of primary personality colors. This creation makes us both similar and unique.

However, the role of personality in the classroom has received little open consideration. Personality partially determines how a student takes part in discussions, how a student interacts with the teacher, how a student acquires the learning content, and even how a student makes decisions relating to classroom activities. A teacher, at any grade level, can use principles of personality to more effectively design content, sustain class discussions, generate interest, communicate with students, and assess performance.

Our personality is an expression of God's manifold creation. God paints an infinite variety of personalities from a palette of primary personality colors. This creation makes us both similar and unique. Saint Paul expresses this uniqueness well by speaking of "gifts

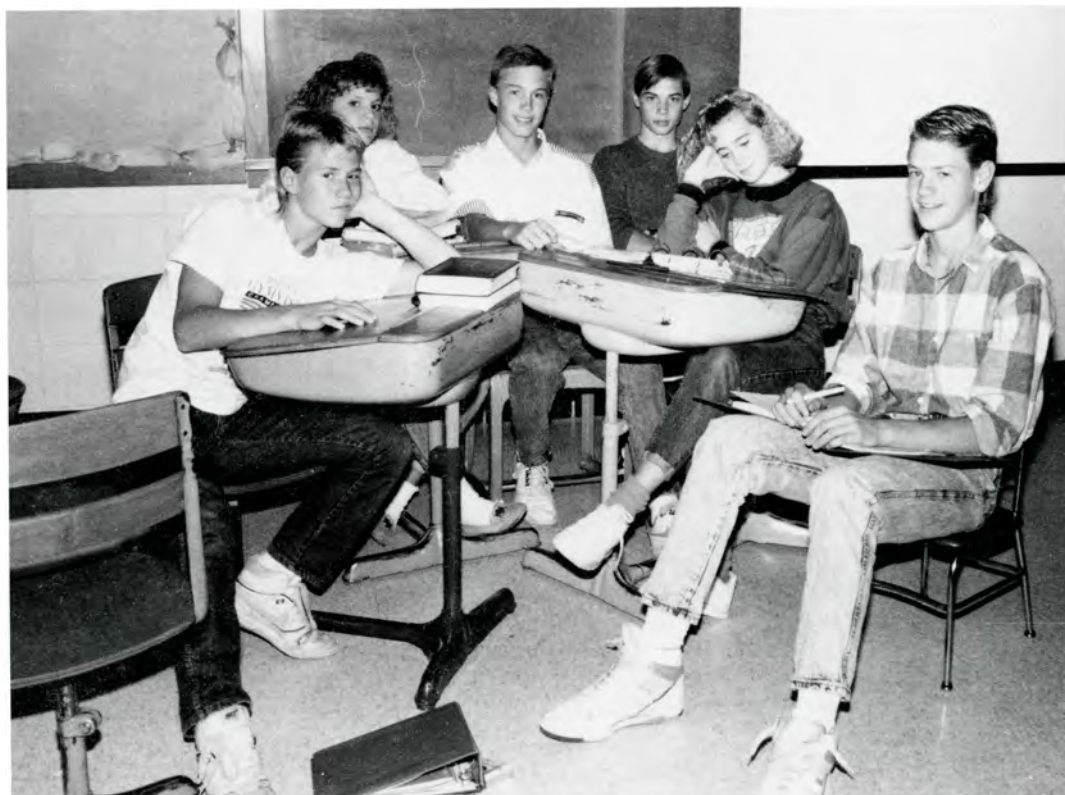
useful in the classroom and consistent with the biblical notion of God's gracious creation. This model is non-judgmental, well researched, rich in theory, and intended to be used with a variety of people. It involves preferences toward four dimensions of personality. "Preferences" can be described in the same manner as the preference for right-handedness or for left-handedness. Most people prefer using one hand over the other hand; but when they develop skills, they can use either hand. The model's distinctions refer to differences regarding 1) where one gets energy, 2) how one collects data, 3) how one makes decisions using that data, and 4) how one relates to the world outside of self. Let's describe these preferences and how teachers may use them in the classroom.

verbalize the parable in a few sentences or even to act out the parable.

◆ The second preference (how one collects data) is the *sensing/intuitive preference*. Sensing students collect data by their five senses—in other words, through their experiences. They love details, pay attention to details, are patient with details, and make few factual errors with details. Intuitive students, on the other hand, collect data by their "sixth sense"—in other words, through the development of possibilities. These students look at the same data but look for patterns and potentials. They look for the "big picture" rather than the details and are patient with complex models. Sensing students live life "as it is," while intuitive students change and rearrange life.

Sensing students will respond to practical applications of material. For example, they will appreciate the detail and clarity of the Ten Commandments and Jesus' Great Commandment. The teacher should not insist that the student concentrate on abstract reasoning, theories, or models. Teachers need to provide illustrations, pictures, films, and other "hard" data. Because sensing students dislike novel problems, teachers need to help them develop routine ways of solving them. Teachers should encourage sensing students to use skills already learned; the teacher needs far more patience when developing new skills in sensing students.

When teaching intuitive students, on the other hand, the teacher should choose activities that explore meanings behind the facts. Methods that integrate data and use imagination for new approaches to novel situations should be encouraged. For example, when reading the Psalms or other biblical poetry, the intuitive student can interpret and appreciate the color and the richness found in the imagery of this literature. Repetitive exercises should be avoided. "Show and Tell"



activities are not nearly as important to intuitive students as they are to sensing students.

◆ The third preference (how one makes decisions) is the *thinking/feeling preference*. Decision making comes after the gathering of data from the sensing/intuitive process. Thinking students need logic and order to their lives. They seek truths and principles in their studies. They enjoy intellectual criticism and love to critique other people's thinking. Solutions to problems are important and must be found analytically and logically. Other people view thinking people as impersonal and "businesslike."

Feeling students, on the other hand, need tact and harmony in their lives. They seek personal, friendly relationships. Human values and needs play a significant role when feeling people make decisions. They usually bring zest and enthusiasm to the classroom. Whereas the thinking student makes decisions that are "fair" to others, feeling students make decisions that treat others the way they need and want to be treated.

When teaching thinking students, the educator must be orderly in his or her approach. Teachers must use logical analyses when working with these students. The encouragement of critical

thinking will be well received by thinking students. When assessing performance, teachers must use objective and impersonal criteria. Teachers who enjoy cause and effect relationships, such as in historical settings, will receive positive feedback from thinking students. It might be easier for the feeling student than the thinking student to apply the parable of the Good Samaritan to the contemporary problems of the "street people." To work with the thinking student, the teacher will have to develop logical reasons for helping "street people" rather than appealing to feelings alone.

When teaching feeling students, teachers must realize that the feeling student appreciates a personal relationship between the student and teacher. The rejection of an idea by a thinking-preference teacher from a feeling student can cause the student great stress. He or she may take the rejection personally. Group exercises, role playing, and "fish bowl" exercises are important teaching techniques for developing feeling students. Teachers should avoid having feeling students critique other students' work. Whereas thinking students prefer long-answer questions, which permit space to develop logical thinking, feeling students prefer short-answer questions,

which are less objective and permit them to introduce values. Multiple choice questions are preferred least by feeling students because of their forced objectivity.

◆ The fourth preference (how one relates to the world outside of self) is the *judgment/perception preference*. Students with the judgment preference are comfortable with a planned, organized, and orderly life. They are decisive and hence desire closure on matters before moving on to something different. They prefer to regulate and control events around them.

Students with the perception preference, on the other hand, are comfortable with a spontaneous, flexible way of living. Decisions do not have to be made immediately. Perception students avoid fixed plans and decide things slowly. They start many projects but may have a difficult time finishing because they do not need closure on one project before beginning another. Rather than regulating and controlling events around them, as do judgment preference students, perception students prefer to continually gather data about life and adapt to new situations.

When teaching students with judgment preference, the teacher must have a plan and have things decided upon before the class begins. Stories, experiences, and anecdotes must be finished before starting new ones. Grading standards and schedules should not be changed too often. Lesson plans should be well developed and articulated to these students. Hidden agendas and last minute changes disturb them. Teachers who pose open-ended or ambiguous questions may create conflict in students with a judgment preference.

When teaching students with the perception preference, the plans of the teacher may be flexible, even organic, in their development. Unexpected events can be introduced freely with these students. Because perception students have trouble with closure, however, teachers must give and insist upon deadlines for the completion of projects, papers, and assignments. Definitive classroom plans, activities, and structure, while probably not important to these students, must be

encouraged—and even stressed—by the classroom teacher.

From the teacher's point of view, judgment students may have an easier time getting closure on faith issues by immediately integrating Christian principles into their lives. Perception students, conversely, may want to read more, to ask more questions, and to think more about how to apply Christian values to their lives.

From this description of personality types and their application in the classroom, one can see the importance of considering individuality in the classroom. We should note, however, that teachers also have distinct personalities. The dilemma between the teachers' needs and the students' needs presents an added dimension to the teaching process. Teachers will have to develop behaviors that may be inconsistent with their type. For example, thinking-preference teachers will need to develop and use feeling behaviors. Additionally, teachers with perception preference will need to develop their judgment preference to work effectively with all of their students.

While it may be difficult to think of students in these personality types, and while it may be difficult for teachers to alter their teaching methods, there are considerable payoffs that far outweigh the additional time and effort required to do so. Furthermore, these differences make Christian teaching exciting and stimulating.

Christian educators desiring more information on personality types may want to read two publications: *Gifts Differing* by Isabel Briggs Myers (Consulting Psychological Press, Inc.) and *People Types and Tiger Stripes: A Practical Guide to Learning Styles*, second edition, by Gordon Lawrence (Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc.). **CEJ**

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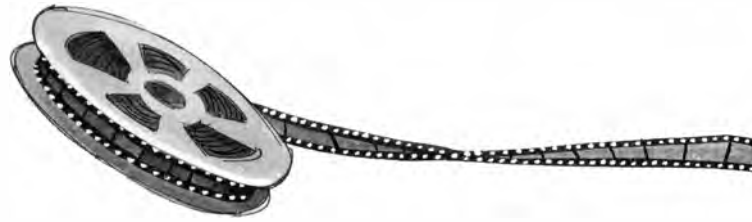
I Drank the Wine

*I drank the wine
and ate the grape
so cool but soon
I drank more wine
and crowded grapes
too cool but hurriedly
to choke down
all the hot and bitter
thoughts that were nearly here
and there they lie
beneath the mixture
cool and sour
like Vesuvius hot
to laugh with thunder
as I stare now like a fool
at my empty goblet
and quiet bowl.*

—by Mary Dengler

—by H. K. ZOEKLICHT

"PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE"



The knock on the asylum door quieted the lunching teachers within. Their peace and privacy was seldom violated by knocking, for students knew better than to disturb their teachers during the noon hour siesta. Thus all eyes were focused on Ginny Traansma as she went to answer the door.

"I would like to speak to Mrs. DenDenker, please." The voice was loud and commanding. Ginny turned to look at Lucy Bright DenDenker, who had just taken a piece of leftover pizza out of the microwave. She put it on the table by her chair and then walked over to the door. Again the teachers heard that peremptory voice, "Mrs. DenDenker, I would like to talk to you privately, please." Then the door closed behind Lucy.

"It was Lionel Peters!" exclaimed Ginny with a strong note of concern in her voice. "That's going to be trouble for Lucy, you can be sure of that!"

"Any idea what it might be about?" inquired Matt DeWit.

"With that Peters it could be about anything," grumbled Steve Vander Prikkel. "I think he lives in a world of phantoms that frighten him into constant warfare."

"And I think he hates women," added Ginny. "He looked at me with those codfish eyes as if I were dirt under his fingernail. There's no way I'd want to talk to him privately."

"Well, if anybody can stand up to pompous Peters, it's Lucy," contributed Rick Cole. "Wish I knew what it's

about, though."

"I think I have a pretty good idea. I wouldn't be surprised if some Peters poop—excuse the expression—will hit the fan and dirty up the place for a while." Jack Ezel, history teacher, looked at his colleagues with a knowing expression.

John Vroom, who had been busily slurping the sweet peach juice from the bottom of his tupperware container, now paused and stared at Ezel. "I take offense at that, first because it's language unbecoming of a Christian teacher—and in front of ladies, too yet—and second because I know Peters to be a good conservative Christian man, a true watchman on the wall, so to speak, who—"

"Tell us what you know, Jack," interrupted Ginny. "What has Lucy been up to?"

"Well, you remember that she took her media class to Cinema Corners the other day? So, maybe Peters' kid is in that class, too, and we all know that the man is against all forms of entertainment that show more than a bare ankle or use something stronger than 'oh my stars'."

"And he's darn right!" vociferated Vroom, stuffing the tupperware back into his black lunch box. "He sees what all you—you Ezels—are blind to, and that's the devil grabbing your—your tails and—and having his fling with you!" John Vroom glared at his worldly colleagues in righteous judgment when the door opened and Lucy re-entered, calm and collected.

"Wow, that was quick!" Ginny exclaimed with relief. Then with irrepressible curiosity and concern, "Are you in trouble?"

Lucy picked up the pizza to re-warm it in the microwave. She punched in the time and turned to face the asylum group. A smile flirted with her lips when she said, "I dismissed Mr. Peters; I told him I had to eat before my next class."

Spontaneous applause, punctuated by the microwave bell, signaled approval of Lucy's *chutzpah*. She sat down to enjoy, at last, her re-warmed slice of homemade pizza.

"You gonna tell us what this was all about, or is it none of our business?" pressed Ren Abbot.

"Oh, it's your business all right; it's about the business of Christian education—Peters' version or ours."

"What do you mean by that, Lucy?" probed Ginny.

"It's like I said, isn't it?" injected Jack. "Peters didn't like that movie excursion, right?"

"And he's right, by gum!" Vroom, still agitated, was eager to pick up the cudgel again while eyeing the disappearing pizza with an intensity that only the very hungry and very addicted experience. "What does going to the movies have to do with Christian education anyway?"

"C'mon, John, give Lucy a chance to explain. Here, have an apple," said Steve, and handed his shiny red Delicious to his colleague, who instantly set his teeth to it.



"Okay," offered Lucy, "let me clue you in. Remember that we spent a week before school started articulating our vision of Christian education in the form of goals and objectives? We contracted with each other that we would try to teach for compassion, commitment, creativity, and all those good things. Those objectives also included discernment, remember—the ability to distinguish between the good and the bad? After all, there's no use in being committed to the good if you can't tell good from bad.

"Well, I've been trying to put into practice what we said we should try to do. I've had my seniors read both *Wuthering Heights* and a Harlequin romance. Nearly all of the seniors saw *Breakfast Club* a few years ago; last week I took them to see *Dead Poets Society* for comparison and contrast in method and message while we're dealing with a unit on 'Freedom and the Individual.' By the way, I made sure I explained all this to the parents and to our principal and got their permission. So here comes Peters, whose daughter

isn't even in my class. But he says I'm doing the devil's work in taking these Christian students to see the filthy works of satanic Hollywood movie-makers, and he wants to stop that."

"Yup, just like I thought," responded Ezel. "He doesn't know of course that eighty-five percent of our students go to see all those awful *Friday the Thirteenth* flicks and think they're awesome."

"But our Christian school has no business exposing these children to such things!" boomed Vroom. "Do we have to become evil to learn about evil? Do you have to crawl inside a garbage can to discover that it's filthy?"

"That's not what Lucy is saying, John, and you know it," defended Ginny. "Anyway, what did you tell him, Lucy?"

"I told him that I am serious about educating the Omni Christian students as members of God's world for the present and the future, and that I would be glad to discuss our philosophy of Christian education some other time when the principal and other concerned

teachers could be present, too."

"And what did he say?" asked Matt. "I bet he wasn't ready to be dismissed with that, was he?"

"He looked as if he were ready to fire the whole staff, if not shut down the school. I just got up and thanked him for coming and caring. He glared and said that he would not let this matter rest until it came to an acceptable conclusion, and we would hear from him. I wished him a nice afternoon, and I hope to have one myself."

Matt stared at Bob's widow in admiration. "He's rich, you know," he said softly.

"Yes, so what?" responded Lucy, her brown eyes looking at Matt quizzically.

"That means he has power, that's all."

"Yes, and we have conviction. Right?"

The one o'clock bell called the Omni Christian teachers to practice.

CEJ

GROWING TOGETHER

"It's hard to care for something so that it grows," the student commented looking at the wilted marigold. It was Monday morning, and she had only been gone two days. Her comment echoed what forty-three of her school mates and we, their teachers, became keenly aware of after three weeks of a combined grade two and grade six plant unit. Nurturing growth takes a lot of patience, effort, and careful observation.

The unit, which pooled the resources of the teachers and students of two grade levels, came about as a result of conversations dealing with bridging the gap between the theory and practice of teaching Christianly. We teachers were struggling with concretizing for the students their responsibility toward growing things (creation) and toward the people they live with (community) so that God's grandeur would be experienced.

Together, we two teachers began to play with ideas, looking for the suitable method to meet our goals. We found that we had opened a bag full of possibilities. Eventually this led to allowing our students to interact without the invisible barriers that often exist between grade levels.

We designed a framework within which students would be paired off, a sixth grader with a second grader, to explore the wide variety of plants and factors affecting growth. Several different activities were planned. A main focus of the entire unit was the ecology type of research experiment that each pair of students was required to carry out. Each couple was given a different experiment ranging from exploring the effects of acid rain, car exhaust, or varying amounts of water and light on plant growth, to trying to detect what exactly had caused the

death of dead plants found on the playground.

The first week's activities included having a plant scavenger hunt in a nearby woods, setting up the experiments, and working through a variety of centers integrating the plant topic. Throughout the week the students learned the format within which they could work. In the days following the set-up of their experiments, the students were required to record daily observations. When this had been done, as a pair they selected and completed an activity at a center. A variety of fourteen centers that integrated various curriculum areas provided students with an overview of specific plant parts and their functions. The students' responsibilities included keeping each other on task, sharing the work load, keeping daily records and journals, and, for the sixth graders, checking that their partner understood the concepts presented.

During the second week the students continued making observations together, which took approximately ten minutes a day. For the rest of the time the grades continued their plant study separately to meet specific objectives laid out for their different grade levels.

After many observations, the students again paired up, for the third week of the unit, to interpret their discoveries according to their original hypotheses. Their conclusions were compiled in poster-display form to prepare for our culminating "Creation Celebration." When all displays were ready, on the day prior to this celebration, the sixth graders were required to familiarize themselves with at least half of the experiments so that they would be able to teach their partners the concepts discovered by others.

Our final morning was spent celebrating creation and community.



Detecting the cause of a plant's death.

The students became teachers when their experiments were displayed in the gym, so that they, their parents, and other classes could come and see what they had discovered. Later, we dedicated the new school planter by having each pair plant their healthy experiment results, reciting Psalm 8, and singing a song of thanksgiving. After playing some games and watching the film "The Giving Tree" (Shel Silverstein), each student gave his or her partner a surprise plant snack, and we ate our lunches together.

How did the students respond to this method? From our observations, the students seemed enthusiastic and happy. Second graders were thrilled with the undivided positive attention they received from the "big" kids. The sixth graders enjoyed their new role as mentor, basking in their partners' admiration of their abilities, but at the same time they were struck by the responsibility they carried. When we asked them about their experiences, we heard these comments: "I liked to work with my partner." "I'd like to do it again." "We had a lot of fun." "We learned a lot about plants." "We got to know our partner." "We liked talking together." One sixth grader summed it up in these words: "We learned a lot from them, too."

We also received feedback from the students' parents. Several were surprised with how much the students knew about the effects of environment on plants. Others commented on the enthusiasm they heard at home about how their child's partner was teaching them new skills ranging from measuring in milliliters to designing different lettering styles. Some parents noted the attachment that had developed between partners, shown by the care taken in choosing just the right surprise treat for our celebration lunch.

These rewarding observations and comments came after a couple of weeks of planning and hard work. Initially, the organization of the unit took much time because we both had to be fully aware of what was going to be done. After coming up with the method, we set about finding and writing up suitable research experiments and center ideas. Once the experiments were chosen, we paired off our students, working to match students with compatible



Exploring the effects of car exhaust on plant growth.

personalities and academic abilities. In situations in which pairs didn't work well together, we took the opportunity to teach the partners interpersonal skills so they could continue to completion.

The initial work load we had as teachers relaxed once the unit was under way. While the students worked, we conferred with each group to be sure they were staying on task and completing the tasks as required. Our roles as teachers were balanced between clarifying concepts at the centers and projects, and guiding the communication process between partners. In reflecting, we now realize that we also should have been involved in an experiment, using our project as a model exercise for the students. The model would probably have clarified for the students some techniques and skills required to properly carry their activities to completion.

Sitting down to plan the unit and then to write this article made us realize in part what our students had experienced for those three weeks. Personally, we both felt we had grown in our teaching skills because we could bounce ideas off of each other and see into each other's teaching style. We were more courageous in attempting new ventures because we were going through this idea with each other. The unit itself seemed to take on more depth and variation because each of us

was bringing in our own ideas and visions for the unit. The responsibility we felt toward each other as partners resulted in greater motivation and a challenge to stay on task.

Initially, we felt the students' comments, "It was fun," or "We liked talking together," were trite. Then we sat down to write this article and discovered that those elements were what made the unit special for us, too.

We had struggled with making concrete for each child his or her responsibility toward growing things (creation) and the people around us (community) so that God would be experienced. What we discovered was that it is hard, *but fulfilling*, to care for something so that it grows—plants, children, and teachers alike. **CEJ**

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SOCIAL STUDIES

Time to Turn the Trend

In recent months many articles and books have been written deploring the level of cultural literacy in America. Ed Hirsch, in his book titled *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, argues that students have been taught basic skills at the expense of acquiring common knowledge. While the author cites scores of examples of cultural ignorance, several of the better examples come from his son, a high school Latin teacher.

Hirsch's son mentioned that Latin is no longer spoken. A student challenged his statement by asking, "What about Latin America?" He also tells of the high school student who believed Toronto is in Italy. Others thought Socrates was an American Indian chief or that Christ was born in the sixteenth century.

Hirsch argues that students must be familiar with basic facts in order to assimilate and use higher-level information. He states that too often schools teach reading as an isolated skill that will supposedly transfer to other subject areas at a later date. However, he contends that the basal series of today contain little content matter that will enhance the transfer of learning.

While learning reading skills, students should be reading materials that present the basic facts of our culture if they are to serve responsibly in our shrinking global society. More than that, they should note how those facts give evidence of God's faithfulness throughout the generations. Our textbooks and our use of them are not adequately meeting this need, however. Thus, it becomes imperative that teachers use other methods to meet this basic goal.

If North American students are truly suffering from cultural illiteracy, where does the fault lie? May educators blame parents? Should we blame student failures on economic factors?

Many times we criticize the educational institution below ours, but whom should the elementary teacher blame?

Teachers in both public and Christian schools could better stop blaming each other or outside forces and begin assuming the responsibility for teaching appropriate knowledge to children at the youngest possible age.

My fifth grade students could understand basic geography. They were able to comprehend how and why our country was formed, who were the "founding fathers," and what are the basic premises of the United States Constitution. Because they were academically ready to begin studying such concepts, it was my responsibility to teach them.

How is such a goal best accomplished? My contention is that a lecture-discussion method should be used quite frequently.

As a college student of the seventies, I was taught that good teachers did not spend much time lecturing. Effective teachers were facilitators of knowledge. They showed their students how and where to find answers. However, the "open classroom" philosophy that saw a resurgence in the seventies is no longer a prevailing force.

Because of *The Nation at Risk* report, school boards are demanding a more specific curriculum (Doll 1986). To meet this mandate, teachers must carefully and systematically decide

what vital concepts are to be taught at each grade level. However, this is not an easy task, given teachers' preferences for emphasizing certain subjects over others. Administrators and curriculum directors must become actively involved in ensuring that social studies receives its fair share of the school day. However, simply spending more time on social studies will not ensure that it will be successfully taught and received.

The data overwhelmingly suggest that school-age children prefer to avoid the discipline of social studies (Haladyna & Thomas 1979). Perhaps the reason is that too many teachers have taken a tedious approach to lecturing. The traditional method has not allowed active participation of the students.

If the assumption is correct that lectures are an integral part of the curriculum, teachers must actively work at improving their motivational techniques. Teachers may use lecturing as the primary catalyst behind each unit, but supplemental activities must also be used. Students need to interact through lively discussions and group activities.

"SELL" YOUR PRODUCT

For instruction to be successful, Girod and Harmon (1987) offer the following strategies as a means of "selling" social studies:

■ **Persuasion.** Teachers are often asked by students why certain information must be learned. Although explanation is a difficult task, successful teachers are able to impress upon students the personal value of acquiring knowledge. Bragaw and Hartoonian (1988) state that a major function of teaching social studies is to develop an information base in history and the social sciences and to make connections between previously learned and new information.

■ **Reinforcement.** Reinforcement, with statements of support and comments of praise, is likely to influence a student's attitude. A child who dislikes social studies must be convinced that success can be attained. The social studies teacher must recognize that students learn at different rates and that some students respond better to more creative methods. Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard reported in his book *Frames of Mind* that we all have at least seven intelligences. These include linguistic, logical/mathematical, intrapersonal, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal. We must avoid the tendency of using only a linguistic or a logical/mathematical approach to instruction.

■ **Improvised Argument.** This strategy challenges students to debate the importance of studying given topics. Individual students are forced to give serious thought to the value of studying social studies. The students are asked to analyze the impact that a historical event has had on our society. For example, the Russian launch of the satellite Sputnik in 1957 escalated the space race and seriously affected our scientific community. If students become aware of the many ramifications of such an event, they will see that understanding history is more than memorizing facts and dates.

INVEST YOUR ENERGY

The following additional suggestions for improving lectures may also help increase students' motivation and achievement in social studies:

■ **Be Prepared.** Adequate preparation is imperative. The students must sense that the teacher is knowledgeable in the area that is being presented. If the teacher is not prepared, it is highly unlikely that the students will be convinced of the necessity of learning the material.

■ **Demonstrate Enthusiasm.** Haladyna and Thomas (1979) found that enthusiasm from teachers who believe that what they are teaching is important promotes a positive student response.

Teachers must persuade students that learning the content is worth their time. This in itself is a very challenging

task. Many students would rather be passive participants while watching television or listening to music. Allan Bloom (1987) states that American students had never come to college with the book learning of their European counterparts, but prior to the 1960s they did arrive as "natural savages" full of fresh curiosity. But he claims that even this openness to ideas has since been lost (48-51).

■ **Use Trivia.** Trivia questions can pique students' interest. For example, when introducing a lesson on Abraham Lincoln, one can ask a question such as, "Did you know that Abraham Lincoln played baseball?" Such a question brings out an element of human association that students may not have considered.

■ **Allow Questions.** Recently a tremendous amount of educational literature has dealt with the proper use of questioning. Because teachers have been inundated with materials concerning Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy, higher-order questioning will not be discussed in this article.* Bloom's point that effective questioning takes our students beyond mere memorization of facts must be stressed. The importance of this factor cannot be minimized.

Allowing students to ask questions that they are interested in may be as important as teacher-directed questioning. While discussing the

assassination of John F. Kennedy, my students were baffled why someone or some group might want to kill the President of the United States. Their questions afforded me the opportunity to share several of the theories surrounding Kennedy's death.

■ **Gauge Attentiveness.** All of us have experienced the frustration of sitting through a long, "boring" lecture. Good teachers sense when they are losing the attention of the class. When this occurs, different material should be presented or a different teaching strategy used.

A recent study at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York found a correlation between college teachers rated high by their students and the amount of time spent lecturing. Highly-rated teachers appear to know how much time can be spent in lecturing each day. They are aware that lecturing too often and for too long a period of time is detrimental to student achievement (Phoenix 1987).

Using the above strategies may improve the quality of lecturing and thus help combat the low level of literacy among social studies students. If this goal can be achieved, our students will be better equipped to actively participate in democratic society. **CEJ**

*For those interested in reading more about this subject, I recommend the article "Questioning: The Essence of Good Teaching" in the May 1987 issue of *NASSP Bulletin*.

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Philippi, Sweetwater, and Good Schools

How do you "improve" education? Simply increasing bad education is no improvement. You must first know what good education is.

Remember the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi? For many days, they were followed around by a girl with an evil spirit.

"These men are servants of the Most High God," she kept shouting. They "are telling you the way to be saved."

Finally, Paul became very troubled. In the name of Jesus Christ he commanded the evil spirit to come out of the girl.

Isn't that odd? After all, the spirit was telling the truth—wasn't he?

Does Satan ever tell the truth? The Father of Lies wants people to think he is telling the truth. And his words often sound true.

Education is just like that. It may seem to tell the truth. But unless it honors God, it never does.

On May 10, 1989, Tennessee Meiji Gakuin (TMG) High School opened its doors in Sweetwater, Tennessee. TMG is a fully-accredited Japanese high school—the first in America. It was started by Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo. Why?

Hundreds of Japanese companies operate in the United States. They bring hundreds of Japanese workers with them. There are seventy-one Japanese-owned businesses in Tennessee alone.

But Japanese parents are not happy with U.S. schools. They say they do not prepare their children well enough for entrance into Japanese universities. Hence, TMG.

This news story, in similar but more detailed form, was published last spring in *It's God's World* (upper elementary) and *God's World Today* (junior high). The preceding italicized passage is an excerpt from the editorial published with it.

IGW and *GWT* are two of five editions of the God's World current events magazines for Christian schools. The others are *God's Big World* (K), *Sharing God's World* (grade 1), and *Exploring God's World* (grades 2-3).

Their combined weekly circulation is approximately 190,000. *World* magazine for adults is also available for Christian high schools.

The history and purpose of God's World Publications (GWP) are, in two ways, related to the story of TMG.

First, they are *generally* related to all the current events in God's world. The purpose of GWP is Christian education. It is to honor God. On the one hand, it is to promote education in the truth—education that views all things through the eyes of Scripture. On the other hand, and more importantly, it is to teach and encourage Christian students to apply that vision to current events, that is, to the world around them.

Current events involve the issues of life. God's World strives to be discreet but not bashful in dealing with those issues. From the fourth-grade level on up, editorials confront students, teachers, and parents with a wide range of topics. They have included abortion, balance of trade, debt, obesity, safety laws, Miranda rights, the electoral college, gun control, *perestroika*, race, television, UFOs, peace, freedom, animal rights,

criminal justice, education, and many others. Readers are encouraged to think things through and discuss them in the light of God's Word.

Second, the history and purpose of GWP are *directly* related to the story of Tennessee Meiji Gakuin High School, for at the hearts of both GWP and TMG are world-and-life views applied to education.

What is the issue at the heart of the TMG story? "Good schools." Two words of great import to chambers of commerce, county governments, taxpayers, and parents. And certainly to the Japanese. Bond issues are passed in the name of "good schools." Taxes are levied in the name of "good schools." People move on the basis of "good schools." Officials are elected for the sake of "good schools."

What are good schools? You, the Christian educator, have pondered that question. Perhaps you have even agonized over it. We at God's World Publications have. For "education . . . may seem to tell the truth. But unless it honors God, it never does."

That editorial statement provokes discussion. And our purpose is to do just that—in a Christian context. Isn't

2 + 2 = 4 true even in the Albanian Directorate of Education? Well, yes. God's laws of mathematics happen to be true in spite of the Canaanites who use them. But ultimately, the editorial statement is true. All truths are servants to the ultimate Truth of eternal God. Apart from that Truth, apart from Jesus Christ, there is ultimate meaninglessness.

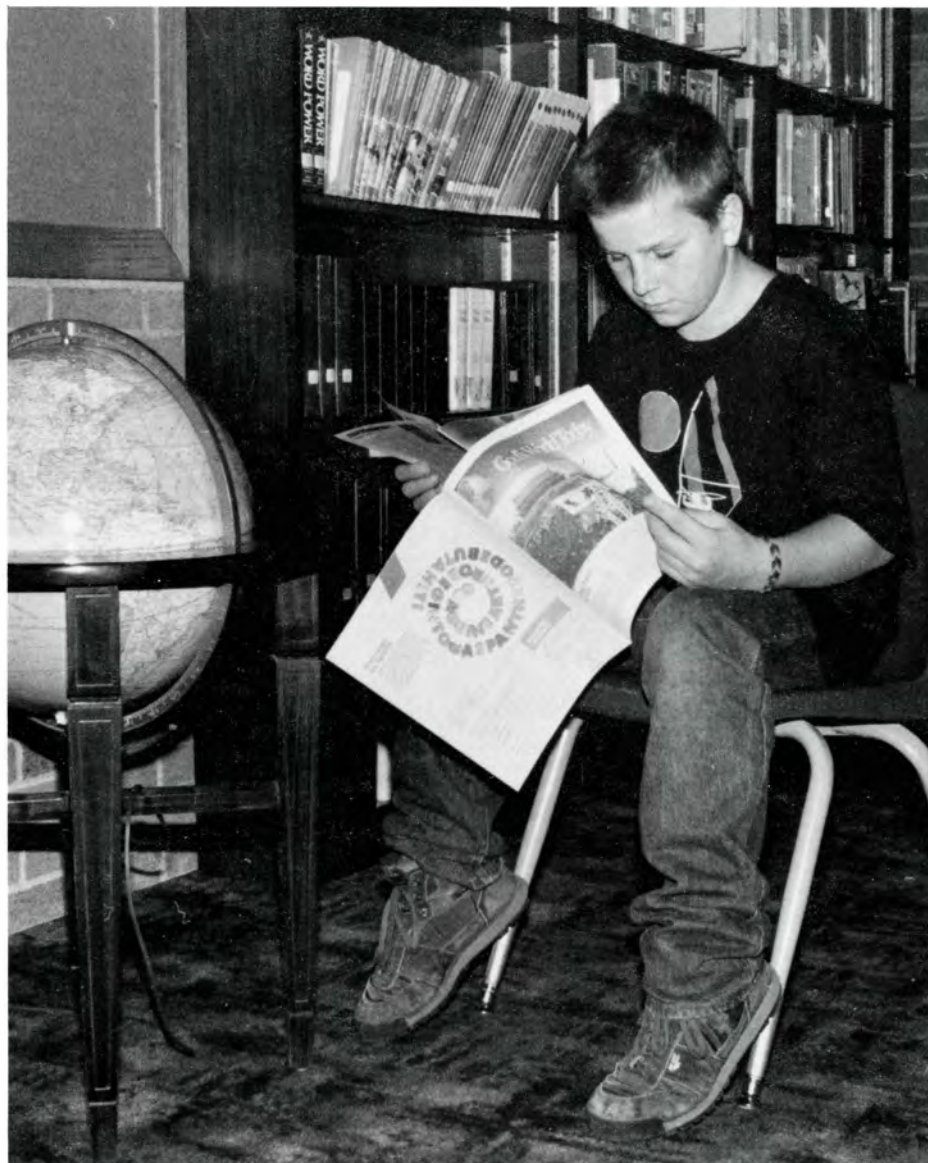
How do we, in a world full of TMGs, maintain *that* distinctive world view as a practical reality in education? Where do terms such as Reformed, covenantal, antithesis, cultural mandate, and kingdom fit in? Can there be Christian education without them? That's where the pondering and the agony sometimes come together.

We are learning that terminology does not ensure success. In fact, it is often a stumbling block—even an offense. For example, the particular terms just mentioned are red flags to some Christians nurtured in "fundamentalist" churches. But it's a problem that can be easily avoided. At the same time, those words are no more than clichés for some Christians in "Reformed" circles. They have the vocabulary, yet they opt for Godless schools and colleges for their kids. They, adopting a world view like that of TMG, want "good schools." That's a problem harder to resolve.

Good education is apparently more than words. It is the preparing of our children, first, to understand God's world and, second, to serve God and others in all things. Apart from God's Word that two-fold task is never realized. And apart from that two-fold task there are no "good schools." Not even good "Christian" schools.

Commitment to integrated Christian education is, praise God, flourishing across the whole spectrum of evangelical Christian communities. Biblical substance and practice make good schools. Buzz words don't.

From its inception in 1981, God's World Publications has focused more and more keenly on the substance of Christian education. Editorially, we avoid altogether such divisive doctrinal issues as eschatology and mode of baptism. Buzz issues, like buzz words, are irrelevant to our purpose for publishing. Our roots have been nourished by the preaching and



teaching of a Christian world view. We have been able to share that rich heritage with thousands of Christian schools and home schools that are not accustomed to hearing it from their local pulpits. And God has blessed our efforts in Christian education.

There are only two world-and-life views. There are only truth and falsehood. Where there is no light, there is only darkness. Where there is no belief, there is only unbelief. Therefore, there are only two kinds of education. TMG is part of the man-centered kind. It is unique only in its manner of applying that world view. In contrast, our challenge—our ambition—is to provide and promote Christian education—a God-centered world view.

That challenge is straightforward

and difficult. It is a challenge we must face with renewed insight and zeal every day. And it is a challenge you must continue to accept in your classrooms and your schools. We at God's World Publications and you in your Christian schools have the name. How fully do we have the game? **CEJ**

*Norm Bomer is editor of
God's World Today, published in
Asheville, North Carolina.*

EVEN THE TEA IS DIFFERENT

A Look at British Primary Schools

"Just place the tea bag in the bottom of the cup and I'll pour hot water over it." We were getting ready for a seminar to be led by our host, the head of a primary school. "But," said Joy, "if I do that, how will I ever get the tea bag out? There is no string. And what is that strange white stuff in the bottom of the cup that makes the tea turn grey?" She sat down with a sigh. "What a country. Even the tea is different!"

A group of nine prospective teachers accompanied me to Great Britain for the January interim to study primary schools in that country. Westhill College in Birmingham is a teacher preparatory institution; two members of the faculty arranged our seminars, school visits, and teacher-aiding placements.

In spite of the fact that we speak the same language (or at least variations of the same language), and in spite of the fact that many of our customs and traditions are similar, we found that basic, important differences exist between the U.S. and Britain, and these differences influence the way schooling is carried on.

In England 43% of three- and four-year-olds receive education in school. In addition, another 40% attend informal pre-school play groups. During the academic year in which students will turn five, they are considered to be "rising fives." Compulsory education begins then and they enter infant school. At the age of seven the children go on to what is called junior school and remain there until they are eleven, when they move to the secondary school.

Although most of the children in the first year of infant school are only four years old, their education during that year, much like our kindergarten, is designed to help them learn to attend to school instruction, to work alongside

each other, and to participate in activities that will prepare them for learning to read. Reading instruction does take place for those four- and five-year-olds who are ready, usually beginning with the language-experience approach and moving into "reading schemes," which is their term for what we call the reading systems or basal reader approach. On the other hand, some of the children clearly will not be ready to read for some time.

As the children move into the first book of the reading series, they do so on an individual basis. They are never placed in reading groups as we know them but work independently through the series. The same thing is true of math instruction in the junior school; the children work independently through the math series at their own rate. While it is true that such instruction leads to a "textbook-driven" curriculum, with the writers and publishers of the textbooks becoming the instructors in the classroom, it is also clear that the children become independent learners at a very early age. It might seem that this scheme for classroom management allows little opportunity for small group work or for cooperative learning. However, exactly the opposite is true. The children learn to turn to each other for help rather than constantly relying on the teacher.

In England both government and independent schools are required to provide religious instruction, and pupils must take part in a daily corporate act of worship unless their parents choose otherwise. The religious education is education *about* different religions rather than education in a particular religion. The guidelines stipulate that religious education must be an educational activity, not a religious activity. It must be multi-faith in context, with the goal that children develop an understanding of the place

of religion in society. While religious instruction has always been required in government schools in England, it is particularly important now because the new wave of immigration within the past ten years has brought children of many different races and religions into the schools. If the British society is to continue to function as a democracy, it is important that the children grow up to become adults who understand and appreciate each other's different values and beliefs.

The act of worship is usually an assembly focusing on some kind of moral behavior. Christian songs are sometimes sung at the assembly. Several times we heard the school head ask the children to "sing this hymn with meaning," which seemed to us an interesting request, given the fact that the population of the inner city school we were visiting included a large percentage of Sikh and Muslim children.

It is impossible to gain a complete, clear picture of the educational system of a country within three weeks. One can do little more than gain impressions, which I would like to describe. We visited many different kinds of schools, and my students aided teachers in other schools; yet we rarely saw a teacher instructing an entire class at one time. Teachers did gather the children together for story reading, but not for instruction. In every class there was a continual murmuring undertone as the children worked independently; when they ran into problems with their work, they checked with their neighbor. The teacher moved around the room helping with problems that arose.

The school buildings we visited were old but generally well-maintained. One inner-city school in particular had been constructed in the Victorian era, and the staircases with wrought iron railings looked as though they came

straight out of a Dickens novel. However, the walls of the halls and classrooms were covered with large colorful splashes of the children's art work. Resources often seemed limited to those of us who were used to the typical North American school with large library centers and interesting teaching kits and games in most classrooms.

In every school we were struck by the ethos of caring on the part of the head and the rest of the staff. This caring was almost pastoral in nature and was particularly evident in the inner-city schools. In schools with large populations of recent immigrants a teacher was assigned half-time to the task of arranging discussion groups and social hours for the parents so that they would feel like part of the school community and understand the purposes of the school. Since many of the new families had come from the Middle East, where the role of the woman is different from the role of the woman in England, these meetings of parents were especially important not only to help the mothers adjust to the new community, but also to help them understand the kind of lives their sons and daughters would be living in this new culture.

Although in many schools the curriculum showed breadth and creativity, it was not consistently structured. At times it seemed that the content of a given school curriculum depended more on the strengths and interests of particular teachers rather than on the specific goals and objectives of the school. Curriculum concerns in the United Kingdom have recently led the government to take control of curriculum away from the local education authorities and to put into place a national curriculum to be followed by all schools. (Such an action could not presently happen in the United States, where the role of the Department of Education is simply to advise and persuade. State governments have the right to do so, as in the case of California, which has introduced a core curriculum that specifies 55% of what is taught.)

While the British teachers we talked with generally agreed with the need for a national curriculum, they also expressed concern about the loss

of curriculum breadth and creativity that might result. In addition, they are concerned about the role that a national curriculum might play in religious education in the schools. At present, religious education usually reflects the needs and wishes of the local school community. Teachers fear that, if the national curriculum specifies what must be taught, problems may arise concerning whose interpretation of different religions will be considered appropriate.

The abundance of literature on effective schools indicates that the effectiveness of a school can be achieved through a variety of means. Although the British schools seem to lack clearly stated goals and means of assessment, they appear to be effective because of their tradition of schooling and because of their ethos of caring. The problem, however, is that curriculum content and instructional techniques are left open to any educational wind that blows.

North American schools must maintain the importance of having a clearly stated view of the learner along with clearly stated educational goals. Education for us must never become a

matter of finding and simply adopting any clever idea that seems to work for someone else. We must constantly examine our curriculum and methodology to ensure that they fulfill our statement of learning and our educational goals.

The "ethos of caring" present in the British schools is a matter that needs careful examination by all North American schools, but particularly by Christian schools. An environment of caring is not too difficult to create in smaller communities where the parents have grown up together, know each other well, and feel a vested interest in the school. But such an environment is much more difficult to develop in schools that exist in large communities with new populations. Regardless of size, creating a caring environment is a primary responsibility of Christian schools. In Christian schools, more than the tea should be different. **CEJ**

Gloria Goris Stronks is professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In the summer of 1988 a group of inner-city British teachers from the Birmingham area and a group from New York City and Washington, D.C., spent two weeks in each other's schools. The following report resulted from the visit.

British teachers commenting on U.S. schools:

- A highly structured curriculum with clear school goals and objectives set by the school districts
- An emphasis on continuous testing and results
- Parents more directly involved
- Many U.S. teachers from minority groups providing positive role models
- A high level of resources in most schools
- Official teacher evaluation and compulsory inservice education
- Strong programs for underachievers and for gifted children
- Teachers only teach their subject; discipline, administration, counseling, substitutions carried out by the other qualified staff
- Religious education not allowed to be taught in schools

U.S. teachers commenting on British schools:

- Curriculum with breadth, creativity, and integration, particularly at the primary level
- An emphasis on individual/small group work
- Excellent written and creative work
- A strong pastoral care system
- Outstanding teachers with a variety of roles
- Strong multi-cultural programs (Taken from the transcript of *The Education Programme: A Big Apple for the Teacher*, transmitted on BBC on December 12, 1988.)

The British teachers expressed concern about the emphasis on testing in U.S. schools, which they believed resulted in a narrowing of curriculum. The American teachers expressed concern for what they saw as a lack of clearly stated goals and objectives in the British schools, along with very little measurement of achievement. The Americans also were concerned about the lack of resources in the schools.

—by QUENTIN J. SCHULTZE

Does TV Viewing Affect Students?

In his provocative novel, *Being There*, Jerzy Kosinski depicts the unimaginative life of a man raised by television instead of by real parents or guardians. Appropriately named Chance, the protagonist lacks the ability to interact with people. He watches life around him as an unreflective, moronic, genderless, and sexless being who is human only in appearance. In Kosinski's fictional world, Chance represents humankind's ultimate regression to pre-Fall innocence, when people supposedly lacked the will to transform the world around them for good or for bad.

Kosinski's implicit theology is highly suspect, but his view of the impact of TV on humankind captures the spirit of popular concern. Best-selling authors such as Marie Winn (*The Plug-In-Drug*), Neil Postman (*Amusing Ourselves to Death*), and Jerry Mander (*Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*) are among the well-known prophets of gloom and doom who echo Kosinski's fears throughout the land: TV viewing turns minds to mush, induces passivity, and stifles the imagination. In short, the boob tube undermines the intellectual foundations of the cultured, civilized life.

Last year two highly respected research psychologists set sail across the turbulent seas of social science to see if the popular folklore about the evils of TV have any basis in empirical fact. Aided by a grant from the office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, they reviewed over one hundred studies of the impact of

... Two highly respected research psychologists set sail across the turbulent seas of social science to see if the popular folklore about the evils of TV have any basis in empirical fact.

television on children's education (Anderson & Collins). Although hardly supportive of the alarmists, from Kosinski to Winn, the latest round of scientific inquiry was widely and wrongly interpreted by the popular media as a verdict of "innocent" for the one-eyed monster.

Among the conclusions of the study were the following:

1. "There is no evidence that television has a mesmerizing effect on children's attention. . . ."
2. "Programs produced for young children consisting of brief segments are readily understood by preschoolers, who can understand some longer . . . programs."
3. "Contrary to popular assertions, children are cognitively active during television viewing and attempt to form a coherent, connected understanding of television programs."
4. "There is no evidence that children generally get overstimulated by television."
5. There is little evidence that television viewing "displaces" valuable cognitive activities, including study. Instead, TV viewing generally displaces movie attendance, radio listening, comic book reading, and, to a lesser extent, participation in organized sports.
6. Contrary to the concern about

TV reducing viewers' "attention span," a number of studies suggest that "television may increase attention focusing capabilities."

7. There is "no clear evidence that television influences imaginativeness," and "no evidence that television makes children cognitively 'passive'."

8. There is only "some weak evidence that television availability reduces reading achievement. . . . Relative to other factors, such as family encouragement of reading, the effect of television on reading achievement appears to be small if it is in fact real."

So speak the social scientists, challenging the common-sense notions of many parents and especially teachers. What sense shall we make of the latest scientific trial of TV?

At the end of the "executive summary" of their findings, the psychologists briefly but openly address the limitations of their own report. "For a number of reasons," they write, "it is difficult to conclude that television has no major effects." First, the existing research covers some areas of public concern but is silent about others. Second, "considerations of what is known about television viewing suggest possible negative effects (for example, on listening skills) that have not been explored in research." Third, some of the existing research is methodologically weak, thereby casting doubts about its findings.

All in all, the latest round of scientific inquiry sheds little light on the effect of TV on formal education. Once again, as happens about every decade, the U.S. government funded a major reconsideration of the existing



research. And once again, the lack of proven negative effects was mistakenly taken by the media to be a clean bill of health for the tube.

The fact is that no one knows for certain how television affects people, including students. This is precisely why, in my judgment, Kosinski's fictional story about Chance is more compelling than the sea of obtuse and ambiguous laboratory studies and surveys. Kosinski explores the complexity and variety of human experience while the television researchers have tended to reduce the wide range of human motives and actions to a few measurable "factors."

For this reason I disagree with the report's optimistic conclusion that "television's cognitive influence is tractable and solvable by new research approaches." Such eternal social-

scientific optimism about an enormously complex issue flies in the face of past research, which was generated similarly out of a spirit of great hope.

I'm inclined to believe that truth lies somewhere between the hollow conclusions of the psychologists and the desperate sirens of the popular alarmists. The writings of people such as Marie Winn appeal to the public largely as confirmations of what many people want to believe. Similarly, Kosinski's compelling tale about mindless Chance warms the literary hearts of the educational establishment. And for those who champion TV, nothing exorcises the demons from the medium better than the cross of social science.

Perhaps the best barometers of TV's impact on students are the

everyday experiences of educators and parents. Unfortunately, personal anecdotes carry little scientific weight unless they are collected, interpreted, and disseminated by people. We need someone such as Robert Coles, known and respected for his ethnographic studies of children, to focus on the educational consequences of television.

CEJ

Quentin J. Schultze is professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and project coordinator for a year-long study of "Youth, Popular Art, and the Electronic Media" at the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship.

REFERENCE

Anderson, Daniel R. and Patricia A. Collins. 1988. *The Impact on Children's Education: Television's Influence on Cognitive Development*. Working Paper No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education).

Some teachers seem to 'wing it' and play games in their classrooms to the detriment of us other teachers who put so much work into our lesson plans. Those teachers are obviously more popular with their students, making the hard-working teachers appear dull and boring. How can we convince our students, parents, and administrators that 'fun and games' is not education?

If a teacher is "winging it" for any length of time, the students and others will eventually know. Lack of preparation and quality communicate an uncaring attitude. Creating lessons or generating programs spontaneously doesn't allow for fair evaluation of the process and the results. More time is spent thinking on what to do and less attention is given to what is going on; therefore, listening and responding decrease, and kids realize they are not the focus. Personality alone cannot deliver over the long run; continuity and purpose disintegrate.

Granted, heavy demands and busy schedules make "winging it" attractive, and probably every teacher has resorted to that cop-out occasionally; however, if it becomes habitual, the results will surface later. The tedious commitment to planning and preparation pays off in the lives and futures of our students.

"Playing it by ear" during a planned lesson is practiced by many experienced teachers who've discovered a feel for that special moment when creative experience exists and continuing as planned would be stifling an adventure. They also realize the risk of failure involved but are willing to accept that for the possible results.

Perhaps, though, certain activities are being

misinterpreted. Even a successful game requires detailed preparation. Interesting anecdotes leading to or centered around the lesson goal demand forethought and expert transition for the students to grasp the connection. "Fun and games" *can* be real education. Scott Noon, a youth pastor from Illinois, says, "The answer, I found, was to inject fun into my 'serious' activities and have a serious purpose for my 'fun' activities." Keeping the balance is important.

Regardless of the teacher's style, personality, and methods, the students will respond if the passion for teaching and learning is present. Certainly those elements varied with the teachers in *Stand and Deliver* and *Dead Poets Society*, but both made an impact on their students. Popularity isn't the goal; education is. Sometimes the "end" does justify the "means." Kids are too smart to be fooled for long. Respect is earned.

Ideally, Christian educators should have the advantage. Based on trust, we should be able to lovingly confront, openly discuss, noncompetitively share, and professionally grow to further God's kingdom work. Learning to appreciate the special and varied talents on staff and recognizing God's wisdom in effectively challenging and fitting us together can be part of the joy of teaching in a Christian school.

In spite of alarming statistics and educators' efforts, our students are watching even more television today. How can we compete with such sophisticated entertainment and convince our students to read instead?

Statistics vary but do reveal the fact that kids watch a great deal of television. The prevalence of the VCR and Nintendo may increase the numbers even more so. We no longer live in a word-dominated society, but an image-driven one. Just as the printing press changed oral communication to primarily written, so television has changed

written to visual. Even periodicals, such as *USA Today* and *People*, have resorted to the public demand for pictures versus words. The problem for us as teachers is that, if our teaching is primarily word-driven, we're fighting against cultural forces.

We really cannot compete with the media; we're ill-

equipped in technology and untrained in methods. However, we can examine the elements of entertainment on television, using some of the techniques the students find so appealing, such as competition, drama, humor, and passion. The new, popular term *infotainment*, combining information and entertainment, differs only in process, not results, if proper balance is maintained. Tabloid television has resorted to that style, and even the most watched news channels often insert "happy talk" between the anchor, weatherman, and/or sports reporter.

Always though, the entertainment in education must be used as a means or transition to accomplishing our educational goals (as indicated in the other Q/A). If *People's Court* can take ordinary aspects of everyday situations and make them entertaining, teachers can learn to take subject matter and make it dramatic as well. Many teachers should be complimented for already doing so with "show and tell," game show quizzes, courtroom storytelling with kids as plaintiffs and jurors, improvisational jeketelling about current events, displaying work for public recognition, converting stories into videos or vice versa, and cooperative learning for participatory involvement. The most popular talk show hosts, Oprah Winfrey and Phil Donahue, would make wonderful classroom discussion leaders.

Undoubtedly there is a lot of junk on TV, but there is also a lot of junk in the bookstores today. Realistically, as educators our task is mammoth, particularly as Christian educators. We can promote non-television weeks and reiterate all the bad about TV, but I doubt that we are going to change society's habits. Or we can find the attraction of this media, use it to our advantage, and teach students the ability to evaluate in the process. We want them to be functional and

informed adults in the world in which they will have to live. They need more than literal learning, the facts; they need collateral learning, the formation of enduring attitudes that will keep them learning beyond the minimal requirements. We need to model critical television viewing and relate TV to other activities, even reading. Of course, we don't want to ever downplay the importance of reading, especially since, at this time, God's Word is predominantly read rather than heard or seen. Yet, the popularity of TV ministry may signal a change there also. We must face the possibilities.

The teacher is the key. I remember a former student telling me that he had decided he didn't want to read a certain book of an English class; he'd take the shortcut by reading Cliff notes, ultimately less work with the same results if only grades count anyway. However, he confessed that the teacher came to class with such energy, emotion, and enthusiasm about the book that he changed his mind and read the book in its entirety for enjoyment and entertainment. Television teases its viewers into staying tuned in, and so can we. Entertaining educators are boredom busters that lure couch potatoes into happy, active learners. But it's not an easy job.

Compounding the problem is the shift from a work ethic society to a pleasure-oriented society. Our students are caught up in an entertaining lifestyle outside the classroom, and restructuring the students' leisure time and the control of television viewing are parental obligations. Realizing, though, that prolonged uninterrupted or unintermediated viewing is unhealthy, we should feel the necessity to inform or warn that excess of anything is dangerous. Hooked on TV or books, kids miss out on reality. We must educate students to serve, not be served.

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.**

CEJ

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN WRITERS CONFERENCE

The Calvin College department of English announces a conference on "Contemporary Christian Writers in Community," April 19-21, 1990, on its campus.

The focus will be on creative writings of authors who, however nonsectarian their intentions and audiences, are identified as participating in or originating from a religious community.

Pre-registration: \$35; on-site registration: \$40; single session: \$7.50. Contact Henry Baron, c/o The Department of English, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI 49506

CHICAGO CONFERENCE

The "Chicago Conference," a grass-roots forum on Christian schooling, will again convene in June 1990 for the purpose of discussing and applying the *12 Affirmations* published by the Conference.

Place: Trinity Christian College,
Palos Heights, Illinois
Date: June 27, 28, 29
For more information, write to:

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

"I'm an Author!"

Picture books with simple story texts can provide an inspiration for writing that may help children to break from the TV model for story writing.

PROCEDURE

1. Each student chooses a book from the picture book section of the school library. Students after grade two perhaps do not often visit these shelves anymore and will enjoy recalling old favorites.

2. Each student reads his or her book silently.

3. The teacher directs attention toward the positive aspects of books for young children with questions such as, "Does your book tell about anyone who helped someone else? Who? How?"

4. The student analyzes the book to discover the story pattern used by the author. Is it a cumulative or repetitive

story? A circular journey? A linear journey? Are there episodes?

5. The student changes the characters, the plot, or the setting to write a new story using the same story pattern the author used. The rough copy can be done on newsprint folded into a booklet so the words and a rough sketch will be planned for each page.

6. Each student edits with a student partner and with the teacher.

7. The work is bound as a final copy. A report cover or clipfolder is neat and fast.

8. The writing is shared with classmates, primary pupils, or maybe even with the whole school by including the book in the school library.

WORKING TOGETHER

Students work together to discuss the structure of the book they are modeling, to collaborate on illustrations, to provide ideas for content, and to proofread. They love hearing each other's "published" work. They break away from TV retellings and violence for its own sake. With some guidance, their own creative ideas serve as a vehicle for expressing conflict in the context of justice, and they can express the hope and joy they experience in their walk with the Lord.

CEJ

With this issue we introduce our new Idea Bank editor, Eleanor Mills, who is a learning assistance teacher at Abbotsford Christian School in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Her personal interest lies mainly in the area of integration, with a strong emphasis on personalization in learning.

RESOURCES

Cochrane, Orin, et al. 1984. *Reading, Writing and Caring*. Winnipeg: Whole Language Consultants Ltd., 182-186.

McCracken, Marlene and Robert. 1987. *Stories, Songs & Poetry to Teach Reading & Writing*. Winnipeg: Pegius Publishers Ltd., 130-134.

Examples from Al Wisselink's grade four class in Abbotsford Christian School:

John Ross has created a new situation in which Curious George can get into trouble being helpful. The style and story pattern are inspired by H. A. Ray, but the setting is a contemporary hockey game in which John is able to show his considerable knowledge of the sport.



In the next thirty-eight seconds, George scored two more goals. Up in the broadcast booth, the play-by-play announcer tried to shout over the noise of the crowd: "It's a six-six tie, six seconds remain. The Oilers have a one-monkey advantage. George passes to Lamb, back to Lowe, Lowe to George. He shoots, he scores!" The horn sounded to end the game. The crowd went wild, and even the ticket seller cheered like crazy. George skated casually off the ice like a pro. Everybody wanted his autograph, even the ticket seller.

Chris Hill has used the original characters and plot from "The Three Little Pigs," but the story takes place in a modern setting with a subway, a train, a salesman, and a lawyer.

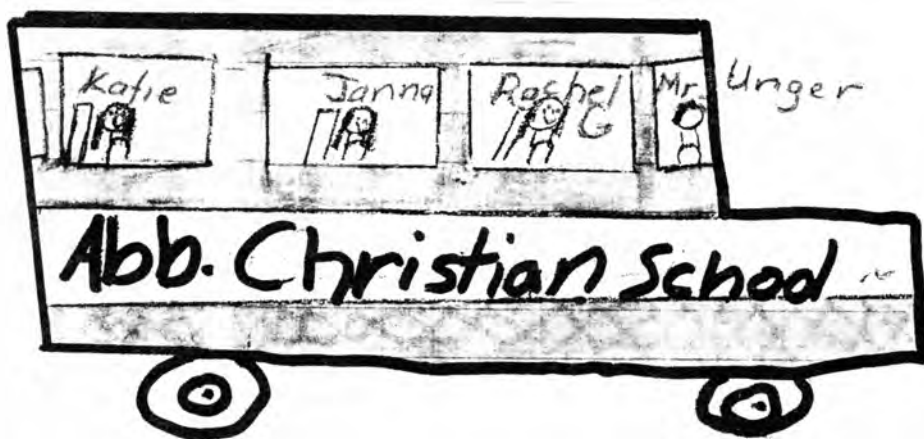


The pigs went into the subway station and took a train to their brother's house.

From Wynn Moodie's grade three class:

Using as a model *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst, Katie Dykshorn has written the other side of the story, with herself as the main character.

On the bus today I got to sit in the very back seat! Then I really knew it was going to be a special, terrific, wonderful, cool day.



—by JANET N. WEBSTER

Parables

Instead of working against kids' high activity level, work with it.

Do you ever come home from school frazzled as puppy-pawed yarn and feeling like the school bus driver who used to think he liked kids? Do you ever wonder how to make those junior high kids sit still and pay attention? The secret is you can't, at least not all of the time. The first year I taught junior high kids, I learned the definition of "perpetual motion": a seventh-grade boy trying to sit still.

Instead of working against kids' high activity level, work with it. Give them moving-and-talking activities. That's what they want to do anyway. Combine their creativity and their Scripture knowledge with their need for physical activity. Have them dramatize parables.

Your students will find more meaning in the parables by acting them out, and they'll understand better how parables relate to their daily lives. Follow these steps:

Employ the memories of those who know their Bible. Brainstorm a list of parables. In case their memories are napping, though, have a list of parables and Scripture passages handy.

Have them look up the passages. Make this as easy or as challenging as you wish. You could provide written-out passages on 3" x 5" cards, give the students the Scripture references, or let them use their Bible's concordance or parable list to locate Jesus' stories themselves.

Have the students study each parable to find the "moral of the story"—the main idea. (Be sure the main point of the parable and the common theme of the need for Christ both show in the final production.)

Now prepare to employ their imaginations in creating modern parables. Form groups of three to five students. Be sure each group includes at least one take-charge person,

someone who will keep the group thinking and doing.

Ask each group to choose a parable to adapt to a modern situation. Don't worry about duplication. Each group will handle it differently anyway. You might even want every group to take the same parable so the class can compare ideas after the presentations.

Be prepared with an idea for each parable in case you find members of a group staring at each other in an idea-less daze when you circulate. (See "Modern Parable Ideas" for help with this.)

Separate the groups as much as possible so their surprise won't be spoiled. Before they disperse, make sure they understand their job. You may want to give an example to help them grasp how to turn a Bible-time parable into a modern one.

Now employ the abilities of those who like to perform. Who says you can't have fun and still make a point? Ask each group to get all of its members involved. If Mary is so quiet that you're not certain she has a voice, she can be the one who stands around looking sad. If Joe is continually wanting to talk, he can be the Good Samaritan who will take care of a stranger and make arrangements with the hospital or motel.

This activity will cause your kids to think, to realize that parables are timely for twentieth century people, too. That's great, even if it stops there. However, you may find some of them eager to share with the whole school or with other classrooms.

If so, employ those who enjoy writing to commit the scene to paper. Polish it. Decide what costumes and props could enhance the presentation. Or perhaps your class is in charge of a

mixed-age event soon. Let them give the directions, divide the group, and help the small groups work by being part of them.

Using these steps to employ your kids' knowledge, their creativity, and their need to move will help your junior high students understand how the Bible relates to their lives. It may still send you home frazzled as puppy-pawed yarn, but it will be a happier frazzled.

MODERN PARABLE IDEAS

Only after allowing the kids several minutes to come up with their own ideas, offer your own or the following suggestions for adapting Bible parables to modern situations.



The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

On his way home from school, a new boy is beaten up by some bullies. The student council president sees him lying in the street, but hurries past, pretending not to see, rationalizing that he's already late to a meeting. A church youth group member sees the victim lying in the street but is disgusted and passes by because the boy looks as if he's been drinking. A poorly dressed, unpopular student comes along, sees the boy's need, and helps him.

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

A girl runs away from home. To pay for food and motel rooms, she sells her inheritance—her grandmother's diamond necklace. Before long, however, her money is gone and she ends up living on the streets and eating from garbage cans. She decides to go home. Her mother is excited to see her, but her sister—who has stayed in school and out of trouble—is jealous of the attention the prodigal is receiving.

The Two Sons (Matt. 21:28-32)

A mother tells her daughters to clean the house while she is at work. One easily agrees, while the other complains that she doesn't have time. By the time the mother returns, the complainer has changed her mind and done all of the work, while the "agreeable" one has done nothing but watch television.

The Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:23-35)

A boy has drawn ahead on his allowance but wants more money to buy a tape player that is on sale—something he's wanted for a long time. His parents take pity on him and give him the money. Then, in order to buy a tape, he bullies his younger sister into repaying a loan he'd made to her. The sister complains to the parents.

MORE PARABLES TO MODERNIZE

Candle Under a Bushel
(Matt. 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-22, Luke 8:16-18)
The Foolish Rich Man
(Luke 12:16-21)
Houses Built on Rock and Sand
(Matt. 7:24-27, Luke 6:46-49)
Laborers in the Vineyard
(Matt. 20:1-16)
The Lost Sheep
(Matt. 18:10-14, Luke 15:1-7)
The Pharisee and the Publican
(Luke 18:9-14)
The Shepherd and the Sheep
(John 10:7-18)
The Sower
(Matt. 13:3-23, Mark 4:3-20, Luke 8:5-15)
The Talents (Matt. 25:14-30)

Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25:31-46)

Some teenagers at a mall are talking about buying some ice cream and records. They see a very poorly dressed girl gazing longingly at a clothing sale ad. They walk past, but then come back, and one of them buys the girl a pretty blouse. Then they pass a very thin boy staring at the menu sign at a hamburger place. They insist that he eat with them, their treat. **CEJ**

Janet N. Webster is a free-lance writer who teaches middle school in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



—by LYNN M. ROSENDALE

LLOYD TINHOLT

Doing His Best to Keep Students on Track

Lloyd Tinholt has a saying, "Let's just do it better." "If the kids make a mistake, I just say, 'Next time we'll do it better.' It keeps them on a positive note."

Although Tinholt uses the saying to keep the players that he coaches on the right track, it is just as applicable to Tinholt himself, who uses it to keep his coaching and teaching of junior high school students going in the right direction as well.

Tinholt, who has taught physical education, science, and Bible at Jenison Christian Junior High School in Jenison, Michigan, for twenty-seven years, understands better than most the necessity of doing something new and exciting every year.

"Teaching junior high students is a special kind of challenge," Tinholt says. "You need a sense of humor, a lot of enthusiasm, but especially for junior high students, you need a lot of variety."

Variety is exactly what Tinholt brings to his classroom through the use of field trips, puppets, models, and live exhibits—including snakes and toads.

"He just encourages the kids to be active participants," says Jenison Christian School Principal Lester Knot. "For example, in a reading class he had the students write their own plays and then act them out with puppets."

"Digging in and finding hands-on materials that are relevant is the best way to motivate the kids," Tinholt explains. "That and a little craziness helps keep you going."

Although his main responsibility has been teaching, Tinholt, who earned a B.A. from Hope College and an M.A. in counseling from Ohio University, has also been involved in coaching almost every sport at the school.



"Through sports you can teach values that can't be taught in the classroom."

Tinholt claims he uses coaching as a stepping stone to develop good relationships with his students.

"Basically, at the junior high level, coaching and teaching are about the same. Coaching has helped me to develop the kind of relationship that I want with the kids."

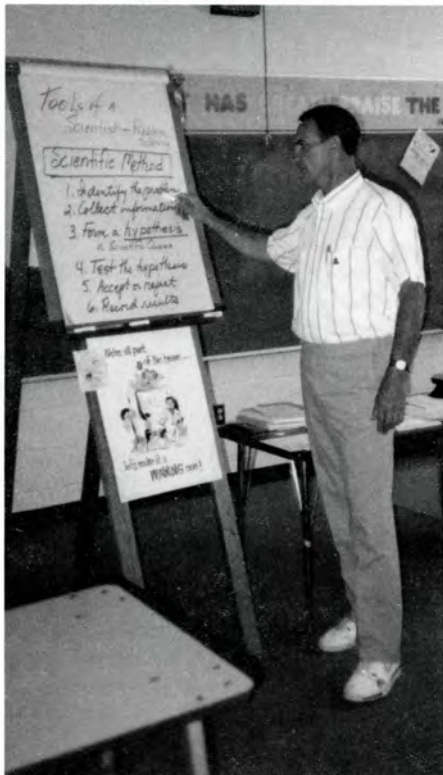
As a coach, Tinholt has had as much success as he has had as a teacher. In his last three seasons of coaching girls' junior high volleyball, he was undefeated.

But more than just winning, he emphasizes what can be learned by participating in team sports.

"I see sports as having tremendous teaching potential. Through sports you can teach values that can't be taught in the classroom, such as sportsmanship," he says.

Currently, he coaches the girls' varsity volleyball team at nearby Unity Christian High School as well as other sports at the junior high level.





"Digging in and finding hands-on materials that are relevant is the best way to motivate the kids."



**"Let's just
do it better."**

His interest in girls' volleyball came when his daughters Jane, now 22, and Sue, now 18, entered junior high. Experiences in coaching his own children—his daughters and son Rob, now 19—led Tinholt to a better understanding of what kids go through.

"I learned a whole new sensitivity about what it means for a kid to sit the bench. I also learned what a great teaching tool coaching can be," he says.

Although Tinholt says he learns a great deal from his students, they also benefit from having him.

"I would say one outstanding thing he does is spend extra time with students during noon hour or whenever," says Tinholt's principal. "In all special activities he's either leading or otherwise involved."

Students recognize his extra efforts as well.

"I can tell by his coaching that he really loves what he does," says 18-year-old Laurie Haan, one of Tinholt's

former volleyball players.

"He puts a lot of time into what he does and really cares about it," she says.

It is obvious that Tinholt really does care about what he does, but he claims the rewards offer some paybacks for all the time he devotes.

Letters from former students are one tangible way for Tinholt to see that perhaps he has made a difference.

One former student wrote: "I would just like you to know that I really appreciate the role that you played in shaping my life. When I think back to those junior high days, I see a very shy, immature kid. I think that you, more than any other person, instilled confidence in me to go after things that I would never have dreamed possible . . . So the next time . . . you wonder if it's really worth it, I hope you realize that there are a lot of kids out there you steered in the right direction."

A positive response from former students is the best kind of encouragement.

"You go to junior high day after day and sometimes you wonder, 'Am I making any progress?' But when you get something like this," Tinholt says, referring to the letter, "You figure it must have happened."

In addition to support from former students, he also is strongly supported by his wife Norma.

"She never stands for mediocrity. She pushes me to always do better," he says.

Coupled with support of his family, he attributes much of his development as a teacher to God.

"I owe so much to God calling me to be a teacher. I never really ever thought about doing anything else."

As for the students' lives Tinholt has touched, perhaps they've caught on to his operative saying, "Let's just do it better."

Of Tinholt one of his students said, "He's enthusiastic. He's great. He'd do anything to make it better." **CEJ**

Lynn Rosendale is a reporter for the Grand Rapids Business Journal in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

—Edited by STEVE VANDERWEELE

Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Learning and Teaching

Harro Van Brummelen
Trinity Western University, 7600
Glover Road, Langley, British
Columbia.

G.R. Welch Co., 960 Gateway,
Burlington, Ontario, L7L 5K7, 1988,
185 pp., \$19.95 pb.

Reviewed by Gloria Goris Stronks,
Professor of Education, Calvin College,
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I have on my desk a textbook written to introduce college students to the teaching profession. In this book, *Teach Them Well: An Introduction to Education*, by Madaus, Kellaghan, and Schwab (Harper and Row), the authors discuss the foundations of education, the way it is structured, the role of its key participants, and the sorts of activities that take place.

Is this kind of book, an introduction to the complexities of the school as an institution, the best way to introduce a novice to the profession? I seriously doubt it.

It is far more important that an introductory course in education in a Christian college should introduce students to ways of thinking about teaching and learning. An instructor in such a course should help the students develop a Reformed, Christian framework for thinking about education. The book *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Learning and Teaching* can be a valuable ally to an instructor who attempts to do so. Unlike the book I referred to earlier, it is a book about teaching, about classroom structures, and about curriculum designs that promote learning. And all of this is based on a biblical anthropology.

Van Brummelen's premise is that

the vision of the Kingdom of God directs Christian schools and, therefore, the central task of the school is to help children become Kingdom citizens. The educational implications of this task are that the school must explain the demands of God's call to repentance, conversion, and obedience; must train students for communal action of service to the Body of Christ; must apply Christ's teachings to various areas of life so that students may take up their calling while they are still students; and must provide constant opportunities for students, through educational programs, to put faith into practice.

This vision requires that students be taught to discern erroneous patterns of a secular culture, difficult as that may be.

In his chapter "Teaching Christianly," the author, after disposing of faulty assumptions behind several current approaches to teaching, introduces John Van Dyk's model of Christian teaching (see *CEJ* 26:1,2,3, and 4, 1986-1987). Expanding on Van Dyk's categories, he discusses the strategies of guiding, structuring, unfolding, and enabling, and applies this model to a unit on work.

A model for teaching, however, is helpful only if it relates closely to how people learn. Van Brummelen's own model, designed to help teachers as they plan their instruction, consists of these four phases: setting the stage, disclosure, reformulation, and transcendence. Though the model is carefully structured, it also allows for innovation as well as greater student involvement in the learning process than was true in traditional settings.

The chapter on "Structuring the Classroom for Learning" explains the various ways in which students and teachers can work together as members of a learning community—from organizing the class as a whole, to teaching the students individually, from group learning to personalized learning. His discussion is a thoughtful one, particularly his ideas about personal-

ized learning. With respect to group learning, too, his position is defensible.

The author, however, could have strengthened his case for group learning by doing the following: (1) explaining why a mixed group works best, (2) drawing out the implications of teaching in a mixed group setting for training in responsible discipleship, (3) providing appropriate plans for grouping, plans based on the extensive research available on cooperative and group learning.

The chapter on "Planning the Curriculum" presents some of the most helpful work I have seen on this subject. The chapter on "School as a Community for Learning" provides an interesting description of how to achieve a caring atmosphere in a school environment. The close of the book includes a section providing encouragement for Christians teaching in public schools, together with suggestions about how to do this effectively. The author uses fitting classroom situations throughout and provides questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.

I recommend this book as a textbook for an introductory course in education and also for background reading in preparation for an in-service unit in faculty development. Although the title of the book does not fully account for the focus of the discussion, discerning teachers will recognize that, wisely or not, it was likely chosen to attract a larger reading audience.

Some of us in the Christian school community have been concerned about the substantial gap between our philosophy and our educational practice. We have wondered whether Christian teachers and administrators, most of whom have graduated from Reformed, Christian colleges, are clear on the goals of Christian schooling and whether they are clear on the structures and methods necessary to attain those goals. Here we have an excellent resource to help present and future teachers and administrators achieve such clarity. ■