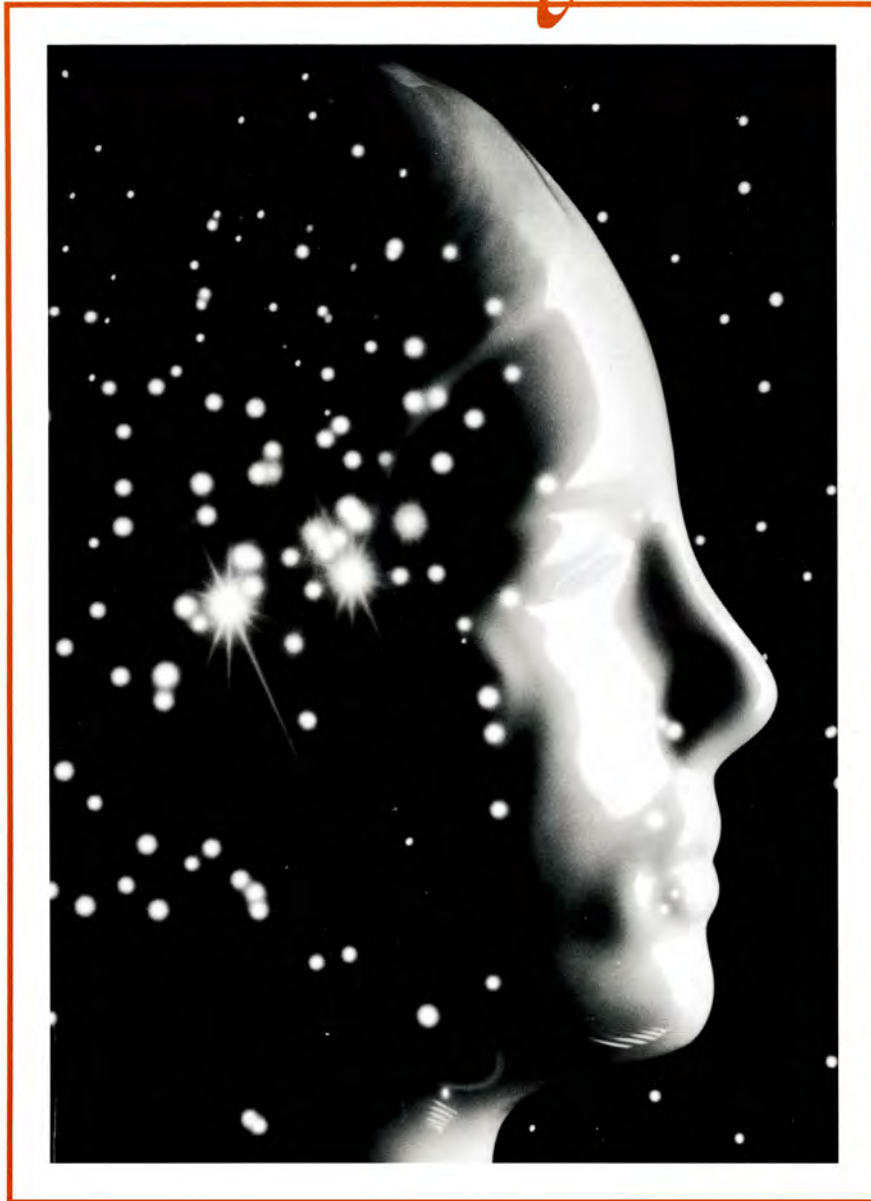


# CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS *Journal*

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Education for the '90s

# You Can Beat the Competition



With one eye on the road and one on the odometer, I watched the nines roll over and the zeros line up to 40,000. Where might the next

10,000 miles take me?

Decades affect educators like odometers do drivers. As the 1990s start to roll out beyond our reach, we realize that soon those zeros will line up again, and we'll be teaching kids of the twenty-first century. Even if we prepare now, we may not be ready.

Principals and teachers I visited recently in Canada and the United States predict that this is the decade of grass roots education. Education leaders state in national journals that the most effective schools will be those with strong local control. I see that trend as a hopeful one, especially for small schools with supportive parents.

Strong local control can backfire, of course, when control means pushing for winning ball teams, classy-looking kids, and top test scores in the district. Yet these are the rewards many well-meaning supporters work to achieve, in Christian schools as well as in public schools. The system is wrought with competition: play to win, be the best, beat the opponent.

We justify our competitive practices by saying that God requires excellence, and surely that is true—God asks us to give our best. We gamble with God, though, when we say we compete "for God's glory" while we ignore or ostracize students who lack social skills or academic strengths. We may think of our classrooms as communities, but many of them lack the qualities of Christian community.

Competition in the classroom is a

delicate matter. We talk about "healthy competition," but rarely do we compete with other human beings "to the glory of God." Competition against each other quickly becomes a matter of self-glorification.

Our competitive habits are deep—even buried—in tradition. So we go on printing lists of "smart" students. We go on stuffing our trophy cases with athletic icons. We compete for letters to display on school sweaters and jackets. We photograph our heroes. We have a "healthy good time" competing. And we hurt a few along the way, those who don't know enough to realize they ought to quit. But that's life. They may as well learn early.

Teachers are vulnerable in schools steeped with competitive tradition. Oh, those who buy it survive quite happily. Those who resist risk board and parent support.

We must take that kind of risk though. We must gently and firmly establish a priority of community over competition, so that every goal in every race becomes a godly one. Firmly and gently we must resist movements to promote academic and social activities that jeopardize the personal, God-given worth of any student, whether in athletics, grading, dress, or curriculum.

This challenge is not for the faint-hearted. Promoting Christian community means sometimes submitting efficiency to efficacy. It means that students together with teachers explore issues that have no pat answers. It means helping students be responsible for each other. It means submitting some teacher-directed activities to students. It means realizing that Madeleine L'Engle, collaborative learning, and holistic grading raise more parental eyebrows than *Moby Dick*, straight rows, and strict

percentage grades.

Some educators feel called to develop alternatives to multi-disciplined curriculum in order to model Christian community within their schools. Covenant Christian in Seattle, Washington, is such a school. In this school the curriculum is flexible enough for students to investigate their questions and controlled enough to provide structure for those who need it, all within the context of Christian community. Students in K-3 work together in one area with their teacher, and individual levels are played down, although students can quickly identify their progress by grade level. High school students have work communities of their own, although the whole school cooperates to produce dramatic productions of excellent quality.

Christian community does not automatically occur when students are grouped together for a common purpose. Teachers soon learn that developing work communities that truly operate to serve one another takes more than the usual planning and flexibility.

I recently heard a professor give this advice: Do what you have to do to satisfy the system, and then quietly do what you have to do to best serve students. When alternative schools are not an option, the professor's advice may be the only way to replace a competitive tradition with one of shared responsibility.

Teachers can develop Christian community by seeing differences as opportunities to demonstrate the way Christian community works, even when competition seems more likely to win the game.

It won't, you know.

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# Enabling Learners

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## A Curriculum Framework for the 1990s

**N**orth America experienced two different waves of educational reform during the 1980s. The first one expanded centralized controls while emphasizing basics, standards, testing, and accountability. The more recent one involved attempts to empower principals and teachers at the local school level. Higher level thinking skills received more attention (Murphy 1990). Now, the British Columbia government has proposed a bold, far-reaching wave of renewal that has captured the attention of North American educators. The proposals, referred to as *Enabling Learners: Year 2000*, also involve and affect Christian Schools International (CSI) schools.

### A New Wave of Reform

*Year 2000* will revolutionize schooling if implemented as intended. It accommodates pupils' learning rates and styles through personalized, continuous learning. It proposes a totally integrated, non-graded curriculum during the first four primary years, and one integrated by means of four "strands" in the next seven. It no longer allows norm-based assessment for most learning; it uses learning profiles and descriptors and files of student products rather than grades and standardized test results. It does not allow ability grouping until the last two years of high school, and then courses will consist of four flexible nine- or ten-week "units."

The B.C. government has poured millions of dollars into the development and implementation of *Year 2000*. Extensive and frequent two-day seminars have explained program details. Christian and other independent schools received a \$100,000 grant to plan workshops for their teachers. Several Christian school teachers have taken leadership roles in disseminating information province-wide.

### Positive and Negative Features

Certain aspects of *Year 2000* dovetail recent thrusts in Christian schooling. The document views learners as individuals whose unique talents need to be developed for self-improvement as well as for contribution to society. It incorporates flexible grouping, the use of learning centers, and collaborative learning approaches. Learning is rooted in children's first-

hand experiences. Rights of learners are balanced with responsibilities.

Moreover, literacy is developed in purposeful, meaningful contexts. An integrated curriculum allows children to experience learning as a meaningful whole and to understand connections. The program goes beyond conceptual and skill knowledge, fostering attitudes and creative thinking. Assessment methods intend to help children improve, not to provide summative evaluations. Such approaches can help children be and become responsible disciples of Christ, and may suit a Christian philosophy of education.

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### ***Year 2000 promotes an underlying faith in the basic goodness and autonomy of individuals.***

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At the same time, Christian school supporters need to ask penetrating questions. *Year 2000* promotes an underlying faith in the basic goodness and autonomy of individuals and in the power of rationality. In line with common Enlightenment thinking, it *assumes* that education will always contribute to a progressive form of social change, that the individual is the source of all truth and freedom, and that personal rational thought is the real basis of authority for regulating the affairs of daily life (Bowers 1987).

Yet, precisely these assumptions have led Western culture to be self-centered, hedonistic, riddled with social and ecological problems, insensitive even to the *need* for ethical and spiritual commitment.



# **Year 2000, regrettably, fails to address our moral and spiritual numbness, our social injustice and alienation, our lack of true community.**

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## **The Mission and Aims of Schooling**

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British Columbia's new program has some specific shortcomings. Such failings do not mean, however, that Christian schools should passively let this reform wave roll over them. They should, rather, discerningly identify and embrace aspects that advance their own goals.

*Year 2000* is driven by a new mission statement for B.C.'s schools: *To enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.*

One problem here is that knowledge in the biblical sense involves not only concepts, skills, and attitudes, but also—and most importantly—*dispositions and commitment*. Knowledge must lead students to become committed to a principled way of life, acting on their adopted values. But if, in the words of *Year 2000*, "knowledge about this world is constructed by the child," little room remains for our Christian or cultural heritage, or for faith in abiding principles and norms.

What is a *healthy* society? *Year 2000* mentions only one feature: a prosperous and sustainable economy. Pupils must be prepared to become "good" consumers and workers; the health of our economic system is paramount. The emptiness of a society bound together only by economic prosperity speaks volumes about the worldview that drives our culture.

## **The Nature of Learners and Teachers**

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*Year 2000* lists impressive characteristics of an educated person: thoughtful, creative, self-motivated, and flexible; productive, cooperative, principled, and respectful; able to think

critically, communicate, and make independent decisions. But what is the content of some of these terms? "Principled" has no principles attached. A sound basis for making independent decisions is lacking. Key biblical traits are notable for their absence: love, compassion, forgiveness, humility, moral uprightness, truthfulness, self-sacrifice.

The program is unboundedly optimistic about human potential and autonomy. Social responsibility takes the place of moral and spiritual development. Ultimately, in the sense of helping children mold society into a better one, the proposal is empty. Christian educators want to help children become loving and supportive members of the body of Christ and society, rather than just self-directing, autonomous individuals.

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## **The program neglects the practical problems resulting from circumstance or imperfection, from the power of sin to mar individual and group-learning settings.**

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*Year 2000* contains many sound suggestions for structuring classroom learning. In the past, Christian schools have often treated learners too much like manipulable objects or passive information banks. Yet the program neglects the practical problems resulting from circumstance or imperfection, from the power of sin to mar individual and group-learning settings.

It is true, for instance, that children benefit from feeling comfortable with learning, and we need to pay attention to diverse learning styles. Yet, because of the complexity of the issue, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to

determine which learning style and environment would be best for each child in each learning situation. Research also shows that multi-age non-graded primary classrooms are arduous for teachers. Indeed, how teachers structure learning inside their classrooms is more important than any one organizational schema. Further, *Year 2000* ignores the need for discipline, for taking into account classroom dynamics when planning different structures, and for systematic reinforcement of conceptual learning.

The teacher, according to the program, facilitates children's learning. Teachers plan and organize opportunities and learning environments that stimulate active learning. Teachers, in other words, are gardeners nurturing the plants, and not just depositors of information.

Teachers, however, are even more than facilitators. They are religious craftspersons who guide pupils into commitment and responsibility on the basis of considered values (Van Brummelen 1989). They are called to unfold what is culturally significant, what is intrinsically worthwhile. As John Van Dyk has said, they are guides and disclosers as well as enablers.

## **Curriculum Content**

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The new primary curriculum is divided into five "development" areas: aesthetic and artistic, emotional and social, intellectual, physical, and social responsibility (note the absence of moral and religious development). If, as I believe, schools must foster deepened understanding of the issues facing students, enabling them to meet the challenges of life in a responsible way, then the curriculum must certainly go beyond narrow intellectual development.

Is it true, however, as the primary program holds, that these five dimensions are of equal importance in the school setting? Is not the school an institution that provides focused learning in an academic setting? The primary document, indeed, belies the premise that intellectual development ranks equally with the other four dimensions; it uses more space to describe intellectual development than the other four dimensions combined.

The description of intellectual development itself is also problematic. *Year 2000* holds that intellectual development (which includes language development) takes place in order to develop thinking. The curriculum sets out to develop a framework for thinking that fosters inquiry, reflection, and metacognition. While rationality is important, here it is absolutized. *Year 2000* rejects the cultural embeddedness of most knowledge and the need for a shared sense of meaning and commitment. The *search* for truth will set the learner free.

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**Do we really want to  
create process-oriented,  
skilled thinkers who are  
culturally impoverished  
and lack the most  
essential ingredients of  
human life: faith, hope,  
and love?**

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As a result, the study of literature is important only to provide examples of the *processes* of human creative endeavor. It is not seen as a way of learning to understand and react to the human condition through concrete vicarious experience, and thus help develop one's ideals and values. Piaget's narrow conception of cognitive development is adopted even though children can learn a great deal about abstract moral and religious concepts such as good and evil when presented in a concrete context. According to *Year 2000* there is no *inherent* meaning in knowledge, and thus it disregards that certain content is important for children to know for functioning

responsibly in society. Do we really want to create process-oriented, skilled thinkers who are culturally impoverished and lack the most essential ingredients of human life: faith, hope, and love?

### **Implications for Christian Educators**

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What do the *Year 2000* initiatives mean for Christian schools? First, the schools need to understand and maintain their own aims and curriculum framework. School staffs must review their framework every few years. Second, schools must use such reflection to make their own decisions about adopting elements of the new program. Otherwise, we jump on band-wagons that may take us to wrong destinations. Nevertheless, a careful evaluation and implementation of certain pedagogical structures and assessment procedures of *Year 2000* may help us to attain our goals more effectively. Putting on our blinders does not do justice to transforming our minds for Christ!

"The modern Western world," wrote Al Greene recently, "is dying amidst a glut of material possessions, a mad orgy of consumerism, and pre-occupation with techniques that have blinded it to the loss of its soul and the relations through which alone the soul can be nourished." The B.C. government initiatives remain firmly entrenched on this path. If followed as intended, *Year 2000* will result in graduates with "a devastating lack of commitment to anything except one's self fulfillment" (Greene 1989).

With careful discernment, Christian schools must and can do better than that. **CEJ**

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British Columbia.*

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# New Emphases in the Curriculum:

## The Christian School's Reaction

**A**ll kinds of names have been given to our present decade, but one thing is sure—it is a decade of change. National and international reports have prompted the public to cry out for more instruction in the basic skills. This, in turn, has caused a scamper at all levels of education to implement some sort of core curriculum. The core curriculum in itself is not new, but the stress upon it is new.

### Core Curriculum

There is no one definition for core curriculum, but most educators tend to think of the core curriculum as a serious attempt to get back to training students in the basic skills and to improve their knowledge in the area of what we usually term general education.

The core curriculum at the elementary school level usually emphasizes reading, writing, and computational skills. At the secondary level the core puts more emphasis on the development of writing skills, foreign languages, the classics, the life sciences, mathematical skills, and sometimes the arts. Many educators today feel that the secondary student should be given a good foundation in the liberal arts, or general education, and that vocational-type subjects should be studied in a post-secondary school of some nature, whether it be a specialized vocational school or a two- or four-year college.

A well-known educator and researcher, John Goodlad, believes that a substantial portion of a secondary

student's curriculum should be required, and thus the number of electives cut back.

Christian educators assume that part of the core for the Christian school should be a study of the Bible. The Christian school, therefore, must consider the scope of core curriculum in light of the purpose of Christian education. A burden rests upon Christian school personnel to achieve and maintain proper balance within the core.

### National Curriculum

Another tendency within the United States is movement toward a national curriculum rather than state-mandated requirements. Committees have been formed and studies are being done with regard to the content of a national curriculum. What little information is available has dealt more with concepts to be taught than individual subjects or courses.

However, Christian schools cannot wait until later to start thinking about what their reaction will be to such a curriculum and to begin to put together strategies for meeting the requirements that a national curriculum might impose. As they do their professional reading, people in Christian school positions should be on the alert.

Christian educators should not panic and start expressing themselves strongly or get all worked up over the matter until more information is made available. However, Christian educa-

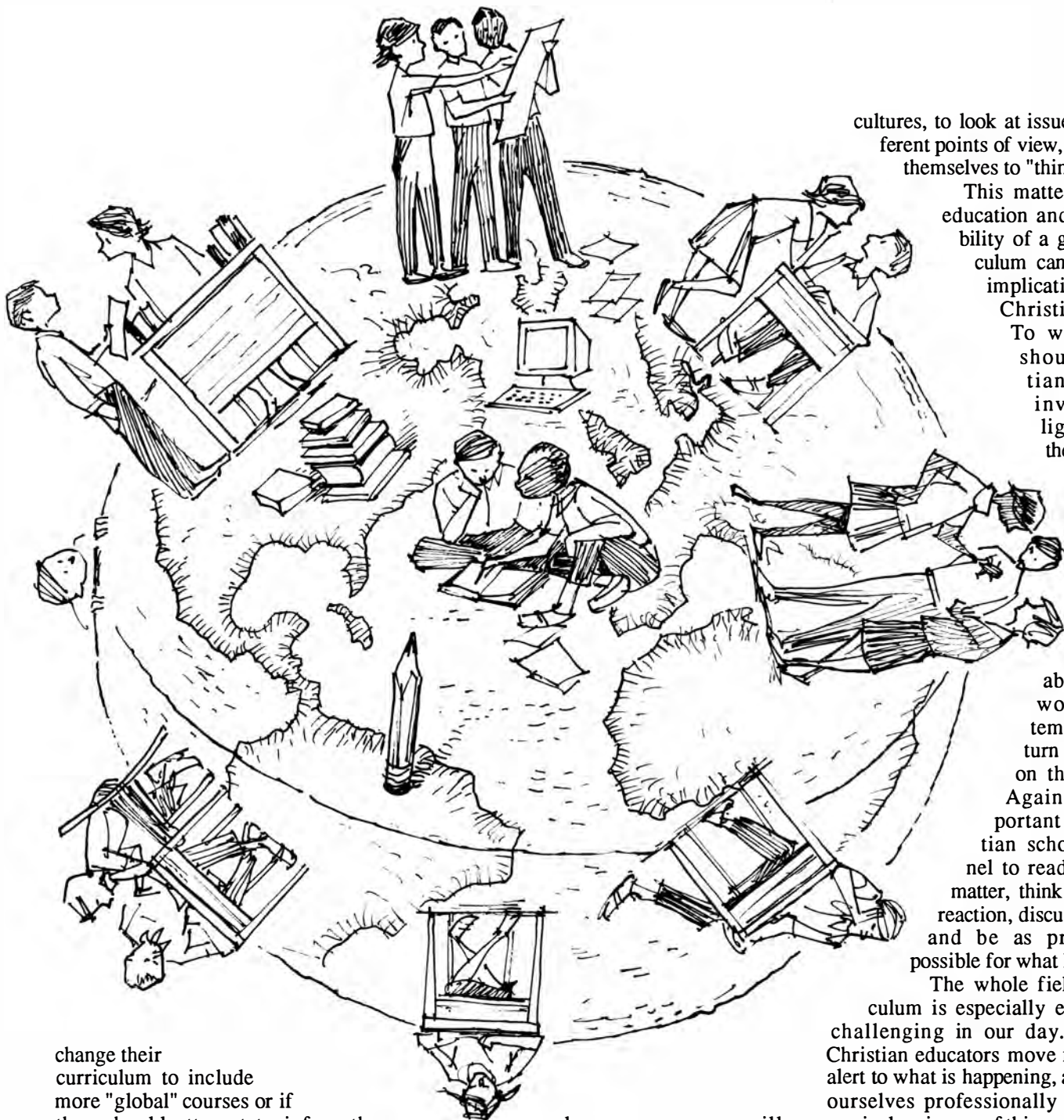
tors must show the world that they are professional and that they know what is going on.

### Global Curriculum

Of even more interest to the Christian school is the serious consideration of a global curriculum. Advanced technology has brought people to realize that "our world is getting small," as many put it. Because of the number of nationalities now present in the United States, because of the increased business with foreign nations, and because of more recent developments in European and Third World countries, a growing support for global education encourages the possibility of a global curriculum.

The belief that citizens of the future will be global citizens encourages a stronger commitment to this matter of global education and a global curriculum than most people suspect. John O'Neil states that while global education is not appreciated by some, a number of recent reports have supported more international study, and that districts and states have added requirements in such courses as global studies and contemporary *world* problems. He further states that a national coalition of global educators has been formed, which promises to provide new leadership in tackling some of the issues facing the field (1989).

One problem faced by global educators is whether schools should



cultures, to look at issues from different points of view, and to train themselves to "think global."

This matter of global education and the possibility of a global curriculum can have great implications for the Christian school.

To what extent should Christians become involved in light of what the Bible says

about a one-world system? Can they turn their backs on the concept? Again, it is important for Christian school personnel to read about this matter, think about their reaction, discuss the issue, and be as prepared as possible for what lies ahead.

The whole field of curriculum is especially exciting and challenging in our day. Let us as Christian educators move forward, be alert to what is happening, and conduct ourselves professionally toward the curriculum issues of this new decade.

**CEJ**

change their curriculum to include more "global" courses or if they should attempt to infuse the present curriculum with a global perspective. Courses in the new global curriculum would deal with such matters as cross-cultural communication, ecology, nuclear power, international politics, international finance, human rights, technology and global communication, international travel, and international business, as well as world religions and cultures (Costa 1989).

This whole issue of global education will affect our curriculum practices. Science courses will need to be changed; history courses will be global and multicultural; foreign

language courses will experience new emphasis; English courses will include intercultural communication. In the implementation of the global-centered curriculum and in the instructional practices, students will need to learn to solve problems cooperatively, to learn to accept the points of view of other

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—by STEFAN ULSTEIN

# Techno-Thrillers and Bodice-Rippers

## Popular Fiction is a Key Component of the Mass Media.

**A**t a recent Christian writers conference, I attended a session on popular fiction which could have been called "Here's a Fire Axe: Have a Whack at Frank Peretti." Just about everybody hated *This Present Darkness* and its sequel, *Piercing the Darkness*. The college professors among us sang the refrain, "If there's one book that my students have read on their own this school year, it's that awful thing by Peretti." The high school teachers complained that some parents were demanding they teach Frank Peretti instead of Steinbeck and Fitzgerald.

It's safe to say that *This Present Darkness* is not literature, at least not in the sense that *The Grapes of Wrath* or *The Great Gatsby* are. But the novels of Frank Peretti are an important part of the mass media, and like other best-selling novels, they're having a big effect on the worldviews of those who avidly read them. The problem is not that students are reading Peretti; it's that nobody is teaching them to read him critically. By roundly denouncing popular fiction, teachers simply join the chorus of prescriptive censors.

Teachers often forget that most popular fiction is a major component of the mass media. Most of the books taught in schools were written by white men who are now dead. Now the books are "classics," but once they were popular fiction. Writers of popular fiction distill what the other media process as information and then give us stories, allegories, parables, and propaganda. Books that go from being timely to timeless enter the canon.

For the past decade the news media have reported on the resurgence

of the occult. Newspapers continue to report on animal mutilations and serial killers, such as the L.A. Night Stalker who cried, "Hail Satan!" and flashed a pentagram tattoo during his trial. Shirley McLane's numerous books encourage followers to call up familiar spirits. Nancy Reagan's consultations with her astrologer (revealed in a best-selling memoir) confirmed that occult practices are part of the most respectable circles. Sung Myung Moon, who claims to be the latest incarnation of Jesus, publishes *Insight on the News* magazine and *The Washington Times* newspaper, both very popular with conservative Christians.

Given this climate, it's no wonder that sales of *This Present Darkness* are nearing the 1.5 million mark. Frank Peretti has simply extended discussion of the occult and the New Age into the world of popular fiction.

To understand the role of popular fiction in the mass media we should examine the channels through which information is reported and discussed. Radio gives us instant news flashes—news as it happens. Television news adds pictures and a bit more background for its short reports. Newspapers, which have a whole day to sort through events, give even more background.

Weekly news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* sort through the stories and rank the issues, leaving out

what their editors deem peripheral. Monthlies like *Harper's* and *Atlantic* move from reportorial journalism to essay and analysis.

Bi-monthly and quarterly journals like *Columbia Journalism Review* and *Foreign Policy* focus on refined aspects of the news, as do special audience magazines like *Christianity Today*. Professional journals like the *New England Journal of Medicine* and neo-professional magazines like *Psychology Today* further refine issues and are in turn excerpted and quoted for the newspapers and other "hot" media. The various media take their cues from one another, rehashing the news until a sort of conventional wisdom emerges.

When an issue has gone through all of the above media and has entered the popular mind, it becomes material for writers of books. Usually the non-fiction writers take the initial plunge. A look at the shelves of any bookstore will reveal a plethora of non-fiction titles on the occult and New Age that predate *This Present Darkness*. Peretti's fictionalizations are merely the next logical step. It's important to remember that books about the New Age—both fiction and non-fiction—sell well because the other media have raised questions and placed the issue in the public mind. The same thing happened with Vietnam. The war was covered on TV and in the press. For the next few years dozens of books like David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*, Don Oberdorfer's *Tet*, and William Shawcross's *Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger and the Destruction of Cambodia* populated the bestseller racks.

They were followed in short order by Vietnam novels like Phillip Caputo's





Rochelle Kimble and Julie McIntire enjoy a review in the *New York Times Book Review*.

*A Rumor of War* and Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July*, both of which became movies. Interestingly enough, Peretti's *This Present Darkness* has been optioned by a Hollywood production company. If the movie is as successful as the book, we can expect to see many spinoffs.

Teaching students to see popular fiction as a part of the whole is one of the most sadly neglected areas of media teaching. Waiting until an author is dead and his book safely enshrined in the canon allows only one part of an education. We teach classic novels to transmit cultural ideals and to give students a sense of historical period. But it is equally important to help them sort through the burning issues of the times in which they live.

This can be difficult because current novels generally contain language, subject matter, and philosophical viewpoints that people fear. However, the same could be said of the classics that we teach in literature classes. Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* was condemned as communistic in its day. Much of Shakespeare's language and subject matter would offend modern fundamentalists if they took the time to really read it.

Anyone who has taught classic literature has heard the question, "Why can't we read something interesting instead of this boring stuff?" Teachers

demur for many reasons. Nobody wants to spend class time reading bodice-rippers and macho adventures written to formula by pseudonymous hacks. But not all popular fiction is escape fiction. It may not be great literature, but popular fiction can be an excellent window into the *zeitgeist*.

Ideally, students will be studying history and current events in school. If they watch the TV news and read a newspaper, they'll have some idea of what the big issues are. They probably don't read book reviews, though, so that's a good place to start. I use the *New York Times Book Review* to give my students a sense of what's out there and what's hot. *The Book Review* can be bought for sixty cents in most bookstores. Tower Books in my city gives it away free, so I pick up a few copies a week and keep a big stack in my classroom.

After they have read a number of reviews, I ask my students to choose a current or recent bestseller. They work in groups of three so that they'll have someone to discuss the book with. I ask them to get their parents' informed consent before purchasing a book, but most importantly, I tell them to choose a book they *want* to read.

Sometimes I leave it very open-ended and students choose military techno-thrillers like *Flight of the Intruder* or period romances like

*Almost Heaven*. When I asked them to choose an African-American writer they read *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*.

After they have read and discussed their books, I have them use *The Book Review* as a stylistic model for writing a review of their own. They touch on prose style and plot, but they also attempt to place the book in the current socio-political milieu. This accomplishes a couple of goals. It gets them thinking and talking about current ideas, and it teaches them to write in a creative academic style that will serve them well in college.

Interestingly enough, students become aware of the shortcomings of their books without my harping on them. They are able to tell a serious attempt to address an issue from simple escape fiction. They also learn that it is possible to critically discuss authors they like, not just the dead white men of the canon.

A primary goal of English and mass communication teachers should be to empower students to be readers. Students need the ability and confidence to select, to read, and to discuss current books if they are to enter the adult world as participants. Christian students need curricula that will help them to unify their knowledge and insights into a vital, critically-sound worldview.

**CEJ**

*We are pleased to introduce our new editor of this column, Stefan Ulstein, who is English chairperson at Bellevue Christian School in Bellevue, Washington. He has previously contributed to this column.*

—by JANET DOWHOWER WEBSTER

# Classroom Word Processing



## with Only Four Computers

**M**any middle school students are curious and eager to learn about computers because they have played video games on them or because the monitors can seem so colorful and magic. Teachers can draw upon this enthusiasm to help students improve their writing. Word processing—which allows words, sentences, and whole paragraphs to be moved around or even to disappear at the touch of a key—can make revision quite an adventure.

You just may have the pleasure of seeing some reluctant students suddenly show enthusiasm for their class work as you involve them in something that already fascinates them. At the same time, you will be encouraging their computer literacy, something that will be important to them when they go on to college or out into the job market. Even if your school has only four computers available part time for a class of twenty-four students, you can help equip your students for a future in which many jobs will require computer

literacy. Many of these are jobs in which Christians can make a difference.

You don't have to be a computer expert to teach word processing. (Of course, if you are unsure of yourself, it does help to have an expert just down the hall from your room in case of an emergency.) In six short months I changed from being ignorant of how to use a computer and scared by the complexity to being an "addict" teaching word processing to junior high students. I'd be the first to admit that I still don't know as much as I would

like, but I do know enough to teach kids what word processing can do for them.

The first time I taught this unit, I went home each day wrung out but happy, feeling that the learning achieved in my classroom was well worth the effort. Well, to be honest, that's the way I went home every day but the first one. By the middle of the first day, I thought perhaps I should have my sanity investigated. However, I've come up with solutions to many management and planning problems I first encountered. They could make your life easier if you choose to use word processing with your junior high writers.

**Be familiar with the particular computer and word processing program you will use.**

If you are used to a different computer, word processor, or printer than the kind your school has, don't panic. If you know how to use one kind, with some practice you can get used to another. The principles are the same.



Do everything you'll expect the students to do so you can anticipate their problems. If your students are new to word processing, use your system's tutorial. Learn how to get into the program's "help" sequence. And practice.

### **Plan your seating carefully in advance.**

If you have only four computers available, plan to have your students work in pairs. This is a natural for helping you to meet one of the goals of Christian education—helping students learn to share their talents and knowledge.

Arrange pairs so the student who is computer literate and the student who writes creatively can blend their skills, so the student who has good ideas and the student who is a good speller can help each other. Also, remember that students will keep working better if you try to avoid pairing students who are buddies or enemies. At first they may feel gyped that they have to share the computer, but they will soon discover that working with a partner can be very helpful. And, because there are only two of them, they each still have plenty of time at the keyboard. If you have eight computers, give each student his or her own computer, but still arrange their seating so that students can benefit each other.

### **Plan the daily schedule carefully in advance.**

When I first started using word processing, only four computers were available for use in my classroom, and only for a few days at a time. Even with two students at each computer, only a third of each of my classes could work on computers at a time. So, I set up a schedule for four groups to work on the computers while the rest of the class worked on alternate activities.

See "Group Schedules" for an example chart showing who would do what on which day. "C1" stands for the first period of computer use by that group, "A2" is the second period of alternate activities for that group, etc.

### **Plan what to do during alternate periods.**

As you can see by the chart, each pair of students spends four class periods (about three hours) on the computer and eight class periods in alternate activities. Each day before class, list on the chalkboard which groups will be on the computers and what alternate activities the other groups will be doing.

Unless your students have worked with word processing, they will need much assistance, especially in the

beginning. Thus it is important to plan activities for those groups which will not require so much teacher attention. Here are a few ideas:

□ The days you start new groups on word processing are excellent for scheduling an outside-the-classroom activity for other groups. You might enlist a media specialist to teach them how to use some reference books that are new to them and that they will soon need for some of their writing.

□ Have students read and give written comments on a story or article written by an anonymous adult who would like their help. Be brave! Use a story you have written. After all, you give *them* plenty of comment on *their* writing.

□ As a source of ideas for future writing or speeches, have students fill out an inventory listing one hundred or more interests that a student might have.

### **Plan the computer activities.**

Decide just how much you can reasonably expect from these junior high students, especially those who are receiving their first exposure to word processing. They don't need to know all the marvelous processes that are possible. Start with the simple ones.

Put two copies of rules, procedures, and commands near each computer so each student can see a copy.

**GROUP SCHEDULES**

		HOUR OF UNIT											
G R O U P		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	1-4	C1	C2	A1	A2	A3	A4	C3	C4	A5	A6	A7	A8
	5-8	A1	A2	C1	C2	A3	A4	A5	A6	C3	C4	A7	A8
	9-12	A1	A2	A3	A4	C1	C2	A5	A6	A7	A8	C3	C4

On an information sheet, explain in exact detail any procedures not included in the tutorial, such as loading a file. Also remind students of some technical aspects of keyboarding that they are prone to forget:

- ☐ Space after a word.
- ☐ Space after a comma.
- ☐ Indent five spaces for a new paragraph.
- ☐ Don't hit *return* at the end of a line as you would with a typewriter; the computer will automatically go to a new line when it is needed.
- ☐ Save your text before you walk away from your computer.

Also save it before you print, just in case there is any problem in the printing process.

- ☐ Each time you save a new item, be sure to give it a different file name (your name and an abbreviation for the assignment, for example), or you will lose a document you saved earlier.

Also include exact printing procedures, remembering to mention the simple things that students easily forget, such as having the paper properly positioned. If possible, have a separate data disk for each student's work.

## Keep track of practice.

One checksheet will do the job for all your classes if you use a different color for each class and make a continuous line through the practice numbers—a simple method of keeping track of how far each group in each class has progressed. This will help you be sure that each group has completed the entire assignment and will also help students remember where they left off. See "Practice Checkoff" for a sample chart for classes of twenty-four doing eight practice assignments. It shows that in one class, two groups finished Practice Assignment 3, while one group finished Practice Assignment 4, and another finished Practice Assignment 5.

		PRACTICES							
G R O U P		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	1	.....→							
	2	-----→							
	3	.....→							
	4	-----→							
	5								
	6								
	7								
	8								
	9								
	10								
	11								
	12								

PRACTICE CHECK-OFF

## Progress to student writing.

This is the main reason to teach word processing. Have each student type in a paper or paragraph that's been through a couple of drafts. If many of your students are hunt-and-peck typists, make this first effort a paragraph rather than a full story or essay. (Otherwise what they may remember most is frustration!) Student-authors then will revise and edit the composition with help from their computer partners, then save, and print.

For me, a gratifying surprise of this unit occurred with a boy who had never really been fired up over anything else we had done in class. He caught on fast to the word processing, including the printing process. He voluntarily helped so many students through the printing that I simply put him in charge of it, which freed me to concentrate on helping the rest of the class. This was great for his self-esteem and also for my sanity. Another welcome surprise was having a girl who was often uninterested and sometimes even belligerent in class come in after school to work on an unassigned poem, trying to get it perfect before printing it. One other little plus is a boon to a teacher's eyes—computer print is much easier to read than some students' handwriting.

## Hold "debriefing" sessions.

Once or twice during the unit and at the end when the computers have gone to another teacher, hold your debriefings. Review what students learned about word processing, and discuss the various alternate assignments. Also ask the students to rate the computer-training unit and to offer written suggestions for improvement.

Since students as well as adults lose what they don't use, plan to provide access to the computers as often as possible. Each time, have students review what they've learned, do a few review practice exercises, or learn a new word-processing technique or two. Then have them enter some of their own writing, revise and edit, save, and print.

Working with computers is a natural motivator for many kids. I'm not saying this will be easy, but I can practically guarantee that teaching word processing will be rewarding for you and your students. **CEJ**

*Janet Dowhower Webster is a freelance writer and a middle school language arts teacher at Wilson Middle School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.*



—by ELEANOR MILLS

# Welcome to Our Classroom

"School was never like that when we were kids." Parents, grandparents and other visitors to our schools may be puzzled by some of the activities they see in today's classrooms. One way to explain the way children are learning in your classroom is to have your students prepare a welcoming book that each visitor can read in the first few minutes of a visit. Include photographs of the children engaged in various learning activities. Students themselves can write a simple explanation for each picture. A weekly schedule will help visitors to identify the activity they are observing.

For example, students in a grade three class taught by Wynn Moodie assembled a sturdy booklet on tagboard, held together by rings. Photographs show the children working at tables, reading in the reading corner, writing stories, keeping records, and working cooperatively. Special events, class projects, and the function of the pocket charts are also highlighted.

Janelle Mitchell, grade three teacher at Tipaskan Elementary School, Edmonton, Alberta, (*Whole Language Newsletter*, April 1989) wrote a letter to provide visitors with an observation guide when they visit her classroom. An observation guide could include such items as a list of the general goals and objectives of your program, suggested ways for the visitors to interact with the children while they work, and explanations of block scheduling, sustained reading, partner reading, writing and reading conferences, sharing time, cooperative learning, themes, and integration.

When children explore God's world together cooperatively and creatively, visitors can sense the excitement in the classrooms and understand the significance of the learning activities they see. They may echo the sentiment of a visitor to a grade one classroom: "It's obvious I was born too soon. What a wonderful way to learn!"

CEJ

Photographs and student writing are from Wynn Moodie's grade three class, 1988-89.

*Eleanor Mills is a learning assistance teacher in Abbotsford, British Columbia.*

*This is Brendan. He is working in a reading record. A reading record is a book. First we write the title, then we write the author, then we write the date and then we read the book. Then we write comments.*

▼ —by Dorothy and Belinda

►  
*This is Jacqueline, Dorothy and Shannon. It is S.Q.U.I.R.T. S.Q.U.I.R.T. is a time when we read in the reading corner. We are allowed to read any kind of book.*

—by Angela Rempel

\*S.Q.U.I.R.T. is Sustained, Quiet, Uninterrupted, Individual Reading Time.



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## On the Reading of *Old Books*

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**M**y grandmother did very little reading. Her contacts outside the home were very limited. No radio was heard in her home; no newspaper was thrown onto her porch. The dinner hour conversations with her family and the infrequent visits with a neighbor were virtually the only sources of news of the world around her. She considered her pastor a trusted counselor. When he preached, she listened; and from time to time—I can still see her—she would nod her head as though to say, "Yes, that's the way it is."

She lived with her own thoughts, her own traditions, her own family. She knew what was good, and she knew what was right. Life was not easy, but she found her strength in quietness and confidence—the confidence of one who knows that

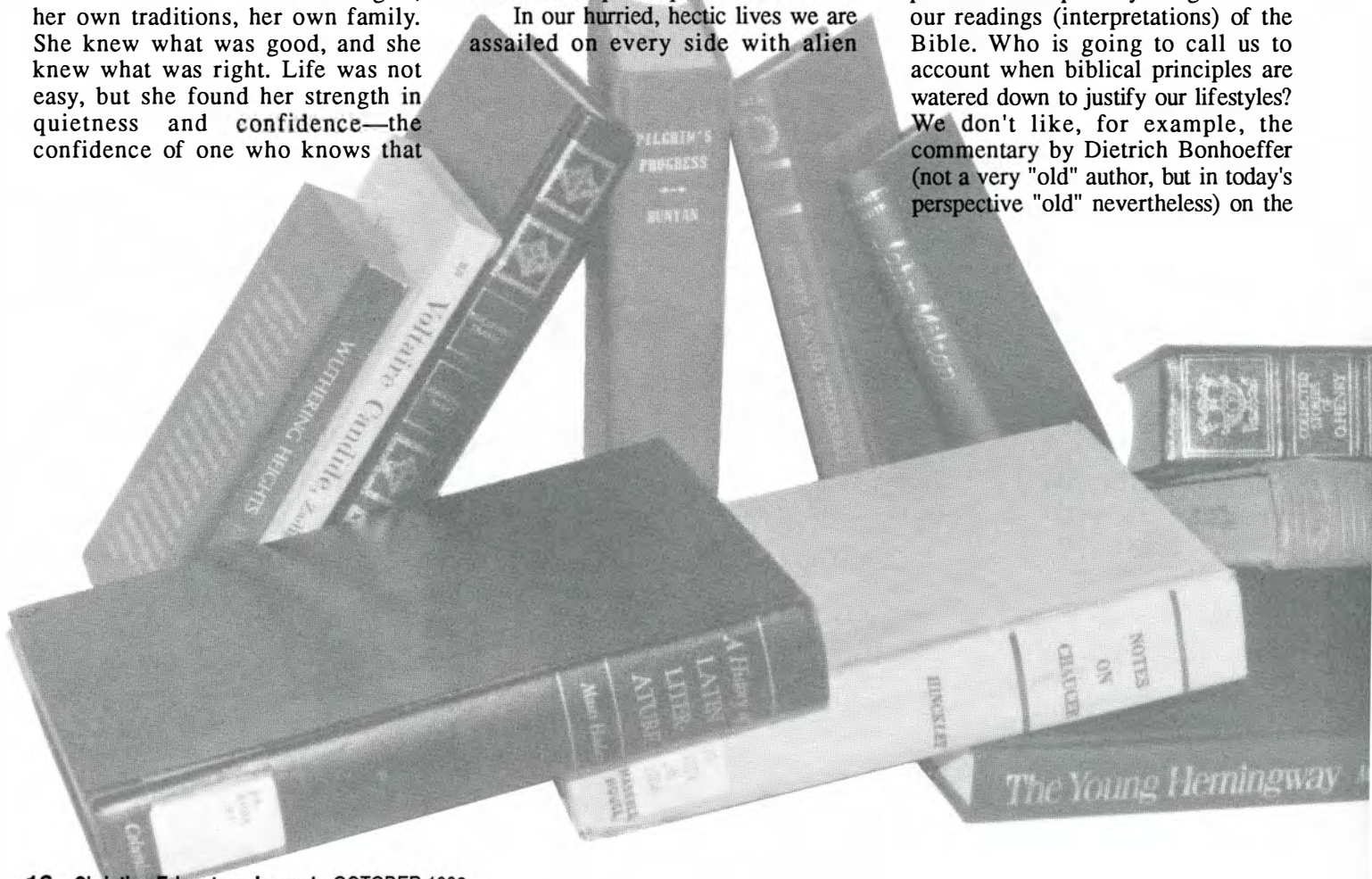
"here there is no abiding city, but we look forward to the one that is to come."

Those days, alas, are gone forever. But who would want them back? They sound almost medieval. Yes, and I dare say my grandmother's mindset, what she valued, what she lived for, was closer to the spirit of the Age of Faith than to the spirit of our day. Our break with the past is almost radical; only the present touches us. "All dead authors, I see," a friend recently remarked as she scanned a shelf of books in my classroom. I read the scorn in her voice: what's past is past.

In our hurried, hectic lives we are assailed on every side with alien

ideologies, prejudices, and values. My grandmother's life was difficult, but her anchor in the Christian tradition was not buffeted by as many contrary winds as we and our students experience today. At the very time when we should lean heavily on the past, we shut ourselves off from the best of our heritages. As James Thurber would say, "There must be a bright side to this menacing state of civilization, and if somebody will snap on his flashlight, we'll take a look around."

Cutting ourselves off from the past can be especially dangerous for our readings (interpretations) of the Bible. Who is going to call us to account when biblical principles are watered down to justify our lifestyles? We don't like, for example, the commentary by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (not a very "old" author, but in today's perspective "old" nevertheless) on the





Sermon on the Mount. "Too somber," we say, by which we mean, "too demanding, too costly." We prefer the current commentators who stress the more joyful, the more upbeat, interpretations. But knowing Bonhoeffer's reading challenges current readings and makes us take another look at what Jesus teaches in the gospels.

What reading of the Bible do our students hear in our Bible classes? What reading of the Bible do they pick up from us in the course of the school day? My grandmother's pastor carried with him on his rounds a small leather-bound edition of Augustine's *Confessions*. He compared Augustine's reading of the Bible with his own. Augustine helped him understand more fully the disaster of man's fall from grace and the wonder of God's power, the splendor of his redeeming love. Augustine helped him better to understand Scripture's perspective of the kind of being man is and the kind of God we have. How often do we compare our readings of the Bible with those of the old church fathers, and then go back to the Bible to see whose interpretation is closer to the truth?

My father took his children, once a year, to the Art Institute of Chicago. On the granite steps leading up to the entrance of the museum, he would stop us and—under the watchful gaze of those two huge stone lions—he would say, "Remember, now, *you* are on trial, not the art you are about to see." I don't think we understood what he meant, and that may be just as well; an

approach like that could preclude any joyful, spontaneous responses to what we were about to see. And yet, there is an element of truth in what he admonished. He wanted us to be open at least to the possibility that there was something in those works of art that could enlarge our experiences of what human life is, and perhaps even of what it can become.

This is true of the master writers also. They can help us to make our students aware of human goals that go beyond conventional piety and ourselves and the world in which we live. They can give, says Alan Bloom, "a real basis for discontent with the present and awareness that there are alternatives to it."

But we don't read the great novelists or dramatists of the past anymore. Oh, a few people still do, but they are called "buffs" or "hobbyists": John reads Jane Austin; Michelle collects baseball cards. So what's the big deal? "I wouldn't cross the street to see a Shakespeare play," a friend announced one evening recently. (She had crossed town to sit in my living room and drink my coffee. I was flattered.) She, of course, was disclaiming cultural hypocrisy.

But why do we deliberately shut ourselves off from at least the possibility of developing a taste for an old master? I'm often surprised at the way teenagers—at least the ones I know—can take or leave TV. They will come in on a program in progress, and ten minutes later get up and leave. But what, to me, is more surprising is that they can come in on a Shakespeare play in progress, not knowing it is by Shakespeare, and watch it to the end. "That was interesting," they'll say. Yes, Shakespeare *is* entertaining. And so are the old master writers of novels.

That entertainment level is the level on which to get our students hooked, get them to acquire an "affection" for an author. That can best be accomplished by simply making the best old authors easily accessible, with an occasional nudge of recommendation.

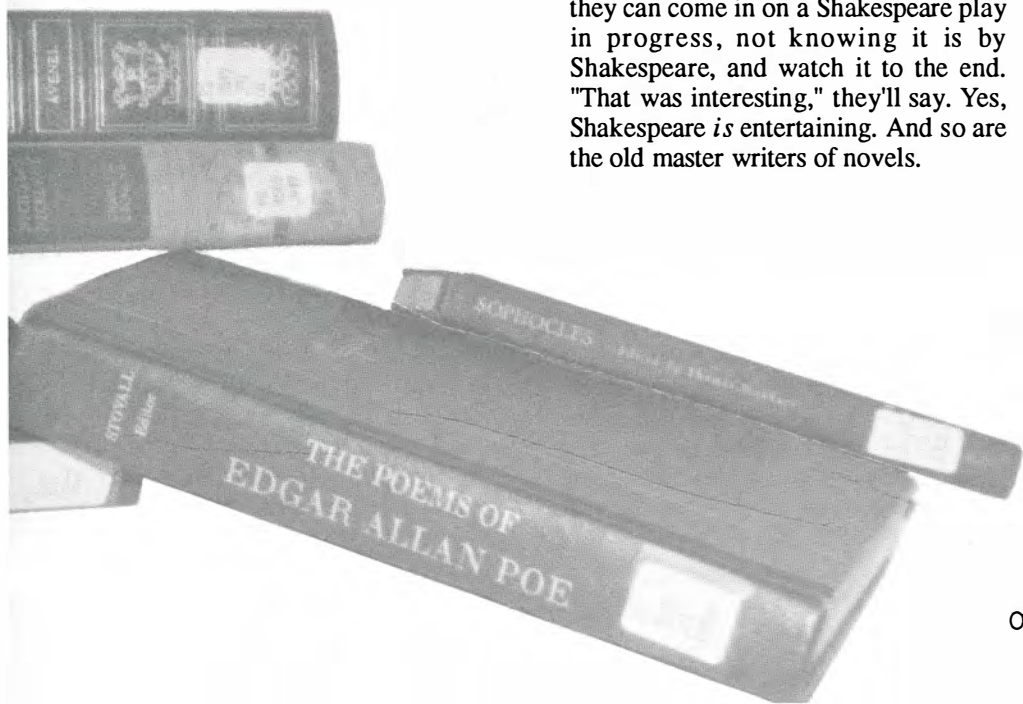
"Taste," says Walter Kerr, "is the product of tested affection. It comes from playing with the dog, not from studying his pedigree." Allow the student first of all to read "in a spirit of self-indulgence, confident that pleasure holds within itself its own powers of growth, and that quality will sooner or later smite him in the eye."

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. We say we agree, but we don't understand Socrates' aphorism. Our examinations are skewed; there are no wrong answers. What is the purpose of human existence? We *act* as though the answer is self-fulfillment or self-esteem or success or wealth or longevity. Take your pick. I don't think my grandmother ever heard of Socrates, but she would have understood what he meant. She would not have understood our passionate pursuit of ephemeral goals.

We will have to start talking with each other again. Reading a book, especially an old book that has survived the tests of time, is a *communal* affair rather than just a personal, private affair. "The literary experience," says Lionel Trilling, "is communal—it asks to be shared in discourse." Yes, we like to recommend a book we enjoyed, sharing with each other our feelings about it, our responses, our reactions—helping each other the better to understand who in the world we are and why we are here. And are not such conversations overheard? "Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard."

CEJ

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# Drama—

**R**ecently, one of my colleagues suggested that any subject could be taught, indeed might best be taught, by having students dramatize it. Being for the most part untrained in improvisation and creative dramatics, however, he was unsure of how to put the idea into practice.

But he was rather insistent on his idea: drama could be used to teach any subject in the curriculum.

Is the idea credible? If a biology teacher asked his students to slink around the room acting like amoebas, those students might understand the movement patterns of amoebas more concretely, but would one call such activity drama? Would this not cheapen drama as an art form? One is reminded of Judith Kase-Polisini's advice that "it is necessary to understand an apparent paradox: creative drama is most educational when it is used as an artistic process, rather than as another kind of learning device" (*Three Approaches* 11). Was my colleague only showing that he was ignorant of what real drama is? Can drama be used to teach? Should it be used? What is the place of drama in the curriculum?

Authorities generally agree that creative dramatics is built on the child's natural tendency to play, and people who have been schooled in the psychoanalytic theories of play have argued that the main function of play is not to teach anything academic, but to help children work out their inner conflicts. For example, if a child has been spanked by an adult, the child might in turn spank a doll or pretend to punish a playmate. If the function of play is to aid a child's emotional growth, adults should neither join in the play nor interfere with it because such adult intervention would reduce the

therapeutic effects of such play (James E. Johnson et al. 21).

A number of drama leaders have supported this view of play. For example, Peter Slade's 1954 book, *Child Drama*, describes creative dramatics as "a method of planned

## Frivolous Play. . .

emotional training" (1). Along with Brian Way, he says that the function of drama is to develop the individual from within and to encourage self-realization. For him, drama is a safety valve, allowing children to act out evil in a legal framework. Can drama then be used to teach academic disciplines like social studies or science? Way and Slade would frown on such use of drama. The primary purpose of drama, according to them, is to promote personal development, not to help students learn about material outside themselves. In their view, the drama teacher's role is not to teach subject matter, but to create an environment that will help children in their natural growth (Johnson and O'Neill 42).

Earlier in the century, however, Caldwell Cook argued that a child's natural way to study is to play, and that drama, therefore, is a sure way to learn. If students were really to understand history, for example, they should act out the history being studied. More recent authors have followed a similar line of thought. Winifred Ward, for example, suggests using drama as motivation for studying such areas as history, speech, and language learning. Dorothy Heathcote, while respecting the importance of developing the individual, says that drama is a "tool

for the teacher, to be used flexibly at times when 'personal identity' role-playing is the most efficient way of crystallizing what the teacher wishes to make clear" (Johnson and O'Neill 45).

What we have observed, then, is a kind of seesaw effect, with Cook pushing us to use drama to teach subject matter, Slade and Way pushing us to develop individuals, and Heathcote pulling us back to the side of pursuing knowledge.

Included in the polemics is a voice arguing that creative drama must first of all be drama, an art, and that other goals must follow in a secondary fashion. Polisini, while urging drama leaders to use a combination of three approaches—playmaking, theater games, and educational drama—qualifies this advice by maintaining that there "will always be at least two objectives of a creative drama lesson.

## or Worthwhile

First, there is a drama objective. What drama skills will be achieved in the lesson? Second, there will be personal growth and development objectives" (*Three Approaches* 115). Some might read this to mean that the dramatic or artistic element must remain in the forefront. It would be okay to use dramatic activities in other areas of the curriculum as long as the teaching of a drama skill is listed as a primary goal. If that is the idea, the next question is to ask what makes drama "really" drama.

Polisini says that "the group objective of creative drama always focuses on the creation of a play" (*Three Approaches* 114). Among American creative dramatics leaders, this is a rather generally held emphasis. However, it is not the only view. For example, Peggy Endres, of the St. Paul-based CLIMB Theatre Company, which uses drama to teach both handicapped and non-handicapped students, holds a different view. She says a creative experience is any

*This is the first in a series of articles and lessons on drama as a teaching method.*



experience in which you experience something differently than you have before. Another leader in the field of drama, Robert Alexander of the Living Stage, says that an artist is one who has an irrepressible need to express himself. If this is true, the foremost element of creative dramatics is self-expression, not the creation of a play (Endres).

Therefore, the argument that drama can be used to relate to the rest of the curriculum, as long as drama is first of all drama, might not be as helpful as it would first seem. The definition of drama seems elusive. There must be another way to approach the problem.

Rather than asking whether a given person is doing "real" drama, we would do better to avoid the dilemma by considering that an art form, including drama, can have many functions. As usually thought of, the primary function of drama is aesthetic, and drama therefore operates according to certain aesthetic codes. In this way, creative drama, as distinguished from other subjects in the curriculum, is first of all an art form.

# Education?

But art—and drama—may have other functions. For example, if a family or group of friends gathers around a piano or guitar to sing and laugh, they are probably not concerned first of all with the artfulness of their singing. Their primary interest is a social interest. Music is being used as a vehicle for social interaction.

A similar observation might be made about dance. There are many forms of dance, among which are ballet, jazz, and aerobic dancing. If a person were dancing a ballet, he or she

might be interested first of all in the aesthetic quality of dancing; but if the dancer were doing aerobic dancing, he or she might be more interested in exercise. The person would be dancing, but the artistic quality of the dancing would have assumed secondary importance.

Likewise, although the banners created for church sanctuaries might be pleasing to look at, and although they are artistic expressions, few of them would be called great works of art. They have been created primarily for liturgical purposes, and their aesthetic function is secondary.

In a similar way, dramatic activities may function first of all as educational activities. Drama may serve first of all to foster better student-teacher relationships, to motivate students as they begin a study of *Tom Sawyer*, or to study the amoeba. True, if a student did a movement activity to study amoebas, the activity would probably lack an interesting conflict or well-developed characters. But it might help students understand the movement patterns of amoebas better. Drama will have assumed a secondary role. Does this constitute a profanation of drama as an art form? I think not. Not if at another time we also study drama in as full an aesthetic dimension as the form allows.

What I suggest is that we avoid restricting ourselves by suggesting that we use drama in a legitimate fashion only when certain dramatic rules apply. More important than whether we are "really" doing drama may be the question of whether we are giving students opportunity to playfully and dramatically explore the curriculum that they are studying.

Recent publications indicate a growing awareness of the usefulness of

drama both as an element in the curriculum and as an activity to be used in relation to other areas of the curriculum. Barbara Salisbury, for example, in her books *Theatre Arts in the Elementary Classroom, Kindergarten through Grade Three*, and *Theatre Arts in the Elementary Classroom, Grade Four through Grade Six*, has a section titled "Correlating Drama with Other Subject Areas." Similarly, Ruth Beall Heinig notes that even if a classroom teacher emphasizes drama goals in a lesson that uses drama, that teacher "is usually expected to combine drama with other areas of the curriculum. For this reason lessons often have a curricular-related theme or topic—such as Pilgrim life, westward movement, seasons, or current events—which ties the activities together. The specific learning objectives you want children to cover in these curricular topics will also be considered" (275-276). Jed Davis celebrates the trend toward using drama for pursuing knowledge by saying that drama leaders are finally acknowledging that "if we are going to find creative drama a living place in a vitalized elementary curriculum we must come off that high horse and make ourselves useful. I doubt that such usefulness will constitute profanation of our great art!" (196).

Drama needs to be taught as an art form, but we should not limit its use to such a function. Creative dramatics can function in more ways than to teach drama appreciation and drama skills, or to encourage individual growth. It can also help us teach history, language, math, and science. If we consider drama as a dimension of life, rather than only a distinguishable component of life, we will have enhanced the art form, not diminished it. **CEJ**

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# Using Drama to Teach

## A Lesson Plan for Grade Three: Learning to Distinguish Four Types of Sentences

### **O**BJECTIVES:

1. To provide practice in making a distinction between sentences that give commands, make statements, ask questions, or make exclamations
2. To learn pantomime skills
3. To learn confidence in presenting ideas to a group

*NOTE: This lesson is intended to provide practice in recognizing the four types of sentences, not to introduce the concept.*

### **1. Setting the Control Mechanism**

◆ Introduce students to a control device, such as a tambourine or some signal that you will use to get their attention. The following is provided as an example of how you might lead the class:

In this lesson you may want to move about, but you will have to know when to stop so that I can get your attention when I need to. So I'm going to use this tambourine. When I hit it, I want you to freeze until I tell you what to do. Let's practice this. When I say *begin*, wiggle your hand. When I hit the tambourine, freeze. . . . Now let's try it with our body. You will have to stand beside your desk. Don't begin until I say *begin*. Begin. . . . Freeze.

◆ Follow the activity with a wrap-up discussion.

### **2. An Activity to Help the Class Build Pantomime Skills**

◆ Remind the class of the types of sentences you have been discussing. Then proceed as follows:

Today we would like to practice making those kinds of sentences. One of the things we will have to do as we practice the sentences is to do some pantomimes. (Make sure students understand what a pantomime is.) First we are going to do a very ordinary activity, and then we will try to pantomime the same activity and see how similar we can make our pantomime to the real thing!

Begin by clearing your desk. . . . Do not do anything

more until I say *begin*. We are going to take out a pencil and a piece of paper, write on the paper, and then put everything away. While you are doing this, I will be reminding you of things to watch as you do the activity, to help you remember things clearly for your pantomime. Are there any questions?

Then let's begin by taking out a pencil. Notice where the pencil is, and how you pick up the pencil. How thick is it between your fingers? See where your notebook is. Which fingers do you use to pick it up? (Students may want to respond verbally to you. If this happens, remind them that your purpose is to sidcoach them, and that they are to simply respond by concentrating on their activity.) Which hand do you use to close your desk? Notice how you open your notebook and where you place it on your desk.

◆ Continue like this, helping them to take the time to observe what they are doing. After they have finished writing a few sentences, ask them to put all their materials away, using the same care and attention they used as they did when they began the activity.

◆ Once the activity concludes, you might ask students if they noticed anything that surprised them about how they did the activity, or if they noticed anything that they had never noticed before. Then ask them to repeat the activity, doing it in pantomime. Support them with the same kind of sidcoaching as before. "See the color of your pencil. Notice how far the pencil extends from the tips of your fingers. How thick is the pencil? How much does it push your fingers apart? What words are you writing? See each letter as you write it."

◆ At the end of the activity, ask the students what parts of the activity were easy for them to remember and about what parts of the activity they were less certain.

### **3. A Demonstration**

◆ Ask the class to suggest a small object that you could pretend to use in a pantomime. A shoe, a box, a book—any small item will do.

Assuming that you have five rows of desks in the room (if your desks are in rows), tell the class that you are going to do a pantomime pretending to use that object, and that when you call for a response, you want



- a) the people in the first row to think of a question they might ask if a person were using the object you are pretending to use
- b) the people in the second row to think of a statement they might make
- c) the people in the third row to think of a command they might give you
- d) the people in the fourth row to think of an exclamation they might make, and
- e) the people in the fifth row to be ready to make any of the above sentences.

◆ Do the pantomime and call for responses, helping students compose ideas for their sentences if necessary.

#### **4. Using the Pantomime Activity to Practice Composing the Four Types of Sentences**

◆ Call up the students in row one and show them a piece of paper with the name of an object that you would like them to pantomime using. Answer any questions they may have regarding the object or the pantomime. Then tell the students who are still seated that they are to watch, and after a few minutes they may guess what is being pantomimed.

◆ Once the performance and the guessing have been completed, you might ask students what they saw that helped them know what was being pantomimed. Also ask what kind of things they can think of to make the pantomime clearer. Give the performers a chance to play the pantomime a second time, but, before the playing, assign the individuals in the second row to think of a question regarding the pantomime, those in the third row to think of a command, the fourth row to think of a statement, and the fifth row to think of an exclamation. At the end of the playing, you might note the improvements you saw, invite the performers to go back to their seats, and ask for the four kinds of sentences.

◆ Once this sequence is completed, repeat, using the second row for performers and assigning new types of sentences to the remaining rows.

Continue until every row has had a turn performing.

◆ End the lesson with a review. Ask students what they have learned about the four kinds of sentences.

## **SOME SPECIAL NOTES**

1. *Your role in the performances.* You have performed the demonstration of the activity. You might also ask students who are performing in step four if they would like you to perform with them. This may help to take some of the burden off them as performers, and your modeling may serve as a sort of sidecoaching to support their efforts.

2. *Providing feedback.* It is important that students receive feedback on their performance. Some of the best feedback is the kind that says, "I saw one of the performers (avoid pointing out specific persons, and thereby promoting self-consciousness) tying a shoe, and this person picked up one string at a time." In other words, you are telling them what you saw and what was communicated. You are not giving an evaluation, such as, "When you tied your shoe, that was very good." Such a comment lacks specifics and locks students into seeking rewards for their efforts.

You may want to ask the audience members to join you in providing feedback, but if you do so, you will have to help the class to understand the kind of feedback you are seeking. Furthermore, you may need to provide practice giving feedback before responding to the pantomimes.

If you feel it important to search for ways to improve the performances, avoid making the search a threat to the performers. If your class seems shy about performing in front of peers, you might let performers make their own suggestions for improving their performances in step four. Thus, instead of asking for suggestions from the audience or giving suggestions yourself, it might be better to ask the performers to think of one thing they could improve in their own performance (they will probably get ideas from observations made about other performers' work). If they can think of an improvement they would like to make, let them

whisper their idea into your ear before the second attempt.

3. *Objects for pantomiming.* Words you might provide as names of objects for pantomiming might include the following: camera, typewriter, boots, kitten, shovel (warn them not to hit each other as they swing their shovel), and faucet. **CEJ**



Children follow instructions to throw and catch an imaginary soccer ball.

—by H. K. ZOEKLICHT

## "So What's New?"

**A**fter a delightful summer respite, the Omni Christian High School faculty had resumed the work of its calling and now, on the first Friday after the first week of school, was gathering for its morning coffee break at 10:07. The windows on the west side of the large faculty room were wide open, and the wet smell of newly cut grass blended with the moist aroma of coffee, automatic drip and "naturally decaffeinated." Spirits were high.

And why not? Enrollment at Omni was up by twenty-three students, including a new black one. The paychecks, promptly placed in the boxes by Jenny Snip, school secretary, were from thirty to forty dollars larger than were first checks last year. The classrooms had been thoroughly cleaned; there was still the lingering smell of soap in the freshly cleaned rooms. Most of last year's football team was back, offering some hope for a conference championship, a never-before-attained honor for the Omni Marauders. And the sun was shining, too.

The chatter on this Friday was a melange of summer stories and fall hopes. Jack Ezel had caught Moby Dick himself in Lake Okoboji. John Vroom had attended his denomination's synod, lending all of his considerable weight in an effort to slow down the inexorable march toward the ordination of women. He was thinking, he said, of writing an article. The house-painting crew, Omni Decorators (Interior and Exterior Work at Lower Prices) had prospered, benefiting from good painting weather most of the summer. Ren (Rabbit) Abbott had assisted in running a summer basketball clinic at Servant College and had picked up some new jargon and a number of new offensive and defensive strategies that,

he was sure, would help his Omni Eagles later in the fall. The new teacher of religion and English, the Reverend Ralph Broekhoest, close friend of Principal Esther Carpenter, had read a book on English teaching and was filled with optimism as he ventured for the first time into the uncharted waters of school teaching. And the new thirty-cup coffee maker gleamed and sparkled, eager to sputter and gurgle on behalf of this sturdy band of Christian educators who periodically required a few shots of caffeine to catalyze their teaching. Most of them didn't yet know that Jenny Snip had decided to use only decaffeinated coffee this year, "for health reasons," she said.

"Well," chirped Principal Carpenter, "has anyone read the April issue of the *CEJ*?" Carpenter waved an attractive, glossy-covered magazine in her right hand and a cup of coffee in her left, as though she were about to offer a toast. "There's a fine piece here by Dr. Smeenge, from Servant. It's about the Christian teacher as a professional. Anybody read it?" she inquired expectantly.

"Yeah, I read it," said Steve Vander Prikkel, biology teacher and charter member of the Omni Decorators. "He's way off base, if you ask me."

"Oh?" responded Carpenter with arched eyebrows and a rising inflection, "How so, Steve?"

"Well, I dunno exactly," said Vander Prikkel. "Maybe it's because Smeenge says that we should use the summer for reading, writing, taking courses, and all that. Well, that's fine and dandy, but how does he expect me to raise the four thousand bucks for my kids' tuition? I'll betcha Smeenge doesn't have any kids." He added, "Those college professors live in ivory towers—and earn big salaries."

"I think so too, Steve," put in English teacher Rick Cole. "Those guys are good at theory, but not very good at arithmetic. I read that article in *CEJ* too," and he pointed at the journal held by the principal. "Smeenge thinks I should be working on a master's degree, and then a specialist degree? Listen, the money I made painting this summer, after taxes and stuff, will pay only about half the tuition for our kids this year. And my '83 Escort is about to collapse. Smeenge should wake up and smell the coffee."

"I'm with you on that," chimed in Jack Ezel, third-year government teacher. "Do you know," he asked incredulously, "that my brother-in-law, the one who just graduated from Servant in May, took a job in that new Christian school in Montana, and he's getting just \$15,000? He's up to his ears in college debts. And he has an old car. So he should go to grad school next summer?"

Jack sipped his coffee and almost choked on it before adding, "And they gave him a split assignment—two different courses in the high school and four different preps in the junior high. Six preps! Fifteen thousand bucks! And he's gotta put on the spring play in the junior high and be in charge of the high school newspaper too!" Ezel shook his head as if he couldn't believe his own words. Then he thought of something else. "They want him to coach tennis, too. That will give him an extra three hundred dollars. Can you believe it?"

"Of course I can believe it," intoned Bible teacher John Vroom, giving his large head an affirmative nod. "Your brother-in-law ought to be grateful for a job in these difficult days, and in kingdom work besides. It is the Lord's work, after all. Besides, when I began teaching I earned only \$3,500 a





year." And with one snap of his capacious mouth John Vroom tore off exactly half of a large cream-filled pastry from Jaarsma's Bakery. Through the food he said to Ezel, "You tell your brother-in-law that."

Esther Carpenter prevented Ezel from replying by waving the *CEJ* at him and protesting, "But have you really read what Smeenge actually says?" She opened the journal to page eight and said, "Now be quiet just a minute. Let me read this to you." She looked around to get everybody's attention and began reading:

School boards bear a heavy responsibility to insure that Christian school teachers are not required to disproportionately subsidize Christian education.

They should receive compensation that compares favorably with that of public educators and that enables them throughout their careers to continue their professional development on behalf of our children and our schools.

"Did he really say that?" came from Steve Vander Prikkel. "I'd better take a look at that rag."

But Ren Abbott waved his hand dismissively. "They can say things like that all they want," he protested. "But it's nothing new. It doesn't change anything. It just doesn't make any difference. The Omni Christian School Society represents a whole lot of wealth—look at all the trips to Europe, and even China now. And the expensive homes and cottages and cars and

stuff—these kids drive better cars than we do—so what else is new?"

He paused for breath and effect and then said, "The fact is they'd rather have us paint houses in the summer and sell insurance and stuff on the side during the school year. That way they can keep our wages down, keep the tuition down, and get their houses painted cheap too." He looked directly at Esther Carpenter.

"I can tell already that this is going to be a great year," grinned the administrator, hiding the *CEJ* behind her back and glancing at her watch.

"I desperately need to hear some good news today to start the weekend right." She looked around expectantly.

"I've got some good news," said Ginny Traansma, home economics teacher. "It's from the social committee. Next week Saturday afternoon—keep it open—is the day for our fall picnic. Keep it open," she repeated.

"Where is it?" inquired the Reverend Ralph Broekhoest. "Where do you have these things?"

"We're driving out to the Abbotts' cottage for this one," was the answer. "Ren has promised us all a sunset ride in his new Bayliner."

"What will we eat?" This from John Vroom.

"Steak and lobster, that's what," smiled the home economics teacher, licking her lips. "All you can eat."

"And what about transportation?" inquired Principal Carpenter. "It's quite a long ride to Abbotts' cottage."

"Matt, Rick, and Silver have volunteered their vans," was the happy response. "And they're all air-conditioned. The vans, I mean. Matt's got a new one."

"Well," said the principal, "I guess that's good news enough, for now."

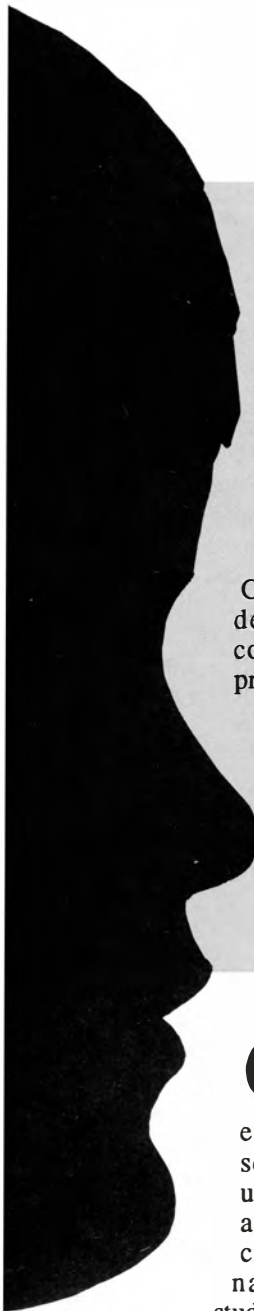
"Hey," came a protesting voice from the other side of the room. "How come this is de-caf we're using?" Matt De Witt was holding in his hand the telltale coffee can. "I can't get through a whole morning unless I have real coffee."

Vacation was over. No doubt about it.

**CEJ**



# A Challenge to Keep Covenant



After John spent several frustrating years at Calvin Christian School, the education committee advised John's parents to enroll him elsewhere next year. John, a junior high student, was always in trouble. "The maturity needed to make the move into adolescence just isn't there," John's teacher advised. This student's short attention span, disruptive behavior, and poor grades caused the committee to echo the teacher's message: "We just can't teach John any more!"

John's parents, lifelong supporters of Christian education, were faced with a painful decision that violated their understanding of covenantal responsibility. They realized their son presented difficulty in the classroom, but they never had imagined that he would have to leave school. They desperately wanted a Christian education for their son. "Are you sure you have tried everything?" they asked. ■

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Note: The case scenarios described in this article are based on true situations. Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Jim and Sally's two daughters were born within a year of each other. Both avid learners, the girls eagerly devoured information about the world around them. Judy, the older, demonstrated excellent social and academic skills already in kindergarten. Ashley proved herself equally bright and socially adept, with a tremendous desire to learn. In fact, Jim and Sally were worried that when Ashley entered school, she might pass her sister academically.

When Jim and Sally went to enroll Ashley at the Christian school, they were told that Ashley's blindness made her ineligible. Jim and Sally had realized this would be an issue, but, quite frankly, they had never thought it would exclude Ashley from Christian education. Although blindness had presented some obstacles, it had never seemed to handicap their daughter.

In spite of an appeal by the parents, the school board decided that Ashley could not be served at the Christian school. The parents reluctantly enrolled her in a public school thirty-five miles away. ■

**C**hristian education is a covenantal right for every person who seeks to know and understand the nature and scope of God's creation. That covenantal right includes students with disabilities.

While many Christian schools have recognized this right and have attempted to help children succeed in the regular classroom, most disabled students are placed in public special educational programs that are segregated from the regular school system. A recent trend in public education, however, brings students with disabilities back into the regular school setting. This trend is called "mainstreaming." Mainstreaming

students with disabilities into the regular classroom is vigorously debated within educational circles. Journal articles and books on special education discuss the pros and cons of mainstreaming, and the debate continues in informal teacher lounge discussions.

In these discussions there seems to be no clear victor, especially in the context of Christian education. While many teachers and other special education professionals argue the validity of mainstreaming, Christian school supporters all but dismiss the possibilities because of the cost and the work involved.

No one can deny that educating disabled children in the regular classroom is expensive and time consuming. However, by dismissing the possibility of mainstreaming, we

close the door to one of the greatest challenges of Christian education today. Mainstreaming can have several benefits, and several viable strategies are cost beneficial. While not every child with a disability can be educated in every Christian school, we need to answer the question, "Whom can we serve in a Christian school and how can we do so?"

Most teachers in Christian schools are generalists who guide the educational process. As generalists, teachers have come to believe that students who exhibit learning and behavioral problems cannot be effectively taught in the regular classroom, since such students tend to disrupt the learning process of the entire classroom. Until recently, special educators have helped foster this belief.

Teachers face the challenge of



learning about the student, understanding who the student is, and developing the ability to manage that student in the classroom. Many teachers do not have the training to effectively manage or the curriculum resources to respond to students with special needs. Thus, the parents of students with disabilities are told, "Sorry, but we can no longer serve your child."

Often the teachers try for many weeks, months, or years to alleviate the problem before they give up in frustration. Research shows that while their efforts are well intentioned, teachers rarely use methods that are shown to be effective. Teachers and other members of the school staff are not prepared to systematically analyze the problems or identify the appropriate interventions needed to educate such students in the regular classroom.

Yet, several strategies exist that can help teachers in both small and large Christian schools. Students with disabilities can succeed in the regular classroom.

### Strategy #1:

*Build alliances with organizations and individuals that specialize in providing special education and rehabilitation services. Potential organizations and individuals include the following:*

■ Public or private rehabilitation and residential programs for people with disabilities. These programs include organizations such as Elim Christian School in Chicago, Illinois; Hope Haven in Rock Valley, Iowa; Christian Opportunity Center in Pella, Iowa; Bethesda Christian Association in Clearbrook, British Columbia; Rehoboth Christian Association in Stony Plain, Alberta; and Christian Horizons in Elmira, Ontario. These organizations have people skilled in behavior management, program planning, problem solving, and knowledge about how disabling conditions affect the ability to learn. Similar organizations may be found near most Christian schools and are generally available for consultation with teachers.

■ Special education staffs in public schools, as well as college and university departments of education,

special education, or social work are available to share their expertise with Christian schools. While formal alliances may not be possible with the organizations that employ these "experts," the staff may be members of the Christian school society and willing to offer their expertise. These persons can include physical and occupational therapists, special education teachers, and social workers.

These alliances can provide resource people who can consult with school personnel in the following ways:

■ Help the school to define whom it can serve and what resources are needed.

■ Provide in-service training to teachers and volunteers about the disabilities of their student(s).

■ Help develop effective problem-solving approaches that assume the student will stay in the regular classroom.

■ Provide evaluation and assessment and help develop strategies that respond to the educational needs of a specific student.

Ashley's situation could have been avoided if the Christian school had had access to a resource person who was familiar with blindness and how it affects classroom teaching. The resource person could have identified the resources and support that Ashley would need to learn and to succeed in the regular classroom. Mere lack of information can make the situation seem impossible.

### Strategy #2:

*Develop alliances with other Christian schools to jointly hire consultant staff. By hiring a consultant who is able to help the teacher address immediate problems and enhance the students' ability to solve their own problems in the context of the regular classroom, the school will be taking major strides in offering Christian education to students with learning and behavior problems.*

If the Calvin Christian School had used resources that such an alliance could provide, John might have been able to succeed and to experience covenantal Christian education.

### Strategy #3:

*Assume that students with disabilities can be educated in the regular classroom. With this assumption in mind, ask what type of support and consultative services are needed for the teacher and the student.*

By beginning with this assumption, the educational system will counteract assumptions that all children with disabilities, no matter how minor, belong in separate classrooms or schools. In Ashley's situation, the school personnel automatically assumed that a student with blindness could not be in the "normal" classroom. The situation may have turned out differently if they assumed that it was "normal" for all children to receive an education in a regular classroom.

### Strategy #4:

*Develop a communal sense of responsibility for teaching children with disabilities. Create the opportunity to share insights among the teaching staff.*

The teaching staff, along with any administrative personnel, should meet on a regular basis to provide consultation, peer support, and shared insight into how teachers can respond in the classroom. The staff review process could have provided John's teacher with support and encouragement, as well as classroom strategies. The process also contributes to improved staff morale and cohesiveness: "We're all in this together."

Incorporating any of these strategies does not guarantee that Christian schools will be able to help all students with disabilities to succeed in the regular classroom. It does guarantee, however, that the Christian school takes seriously its calling to provide education to all God's covenantal children.

CEJ

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# Programs

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## for Gifted Children

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**I**f we view our students as image bearers of the living God who created them, we must be willing to consider special programming for those students who are gifted. To ask them to be content with a curriculum that has been designed for students with needs that are often very different from theirs may result in boredom, the reinforcement of bad (or no) study habits, and mental laziness. Helping them learn in a way that better suits them is simply part of treating students as important members of God's kingdom. When a school starts to consider programs for these students, however, some basic questions arise. The questions deal with the impact of special programs on the students themselves, their classmates, the teachers, and the community at large. Some of these questions are considered here.

### **Q: Aren't all students gifted?**

A: Yes. The issue at stake, though, is not whether some people are gifted and some aren't. It is an issue of meeting the needs of students. Some students are served well by the standard pace and curriculum and some are not. Consider what schools do to help students with very low I.Q. scores. If a student received a score of 70 (30 points below average) on an I.Q. test, special programming would most certainly be considered. With a score of 60 (40 points below average), special placement would be a major consideration. These decisions are not made in order to remove the student from the regular classroom. On the contrary, they are made to best help the student progress at a rate that is most beneficial.

Take those same I.Q. scores and extend them upward from 100. A student with a score of 130 or even 140

would often not receive any special consideration. The very things that make a mainstream curriculum out of step for a student with an I.Q. of 60 are just as inappropriate for a student with an I.Q. of 140.

### **Q: Is there a danger of elitism—the feeling within students that they are better than others?**

A: Yes, there is that danger. Let's put it in perspective, though. For years, schools have had special programs for students who excel in certain areas such as music, drama, or sports. Special programs for those who excel in academics should be viewed in the same manner. There is still a danger, though, that these students might feel superior. Part of the task, then, of the teachers in the program is to help the students understand their abilities and limitations. Students should see that they do some things well while other students do other things well; they are all necessary to the kingdom. As the apostle Paul wrote, "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (I Cor. 12:18 NIV). These students need to see that they, *and their classmates*, have a special place in the kingdom of God.

### **Q: What differentiates a gifted student from an average student?**

A: Giftedness is not like a virus that one either has or doesn't have. Some students will have special abilities in some areas and average or below average ability in other areas. For legal purposes the U.S. Office of Education developed the following definition in 1972:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who, by

virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by "regular school programs" in order to realize their contributions to self and society.

Children with "demonstrated" and/or "potential" high performance in the following areas:

- a) general intellectual ability
- b) specific academic aptitude
- c) creative or productive thinking
- d) leadership ability

In classes, though, gifted children are those who often "go beyond" what one would expect. Gifted students are not the ones who always know the answers. They are often the ones who ask the tough questions. Instead of being able to show all the steps in the solution to a problem, the gifted student might not see that there were any steps. They are often the students whose store of background information allows them to be "good guessers."

### **Q: How should these students be identified?**

A: There is no simple answer to that question, but a few general principles should apply. The U.S. Department of Education commissioned research in identification and assessment (Richert 1985). The panel recommended six principles.

1) Advocacy. The identification plan should be in the best interest of *all* students—not just those eventually identified as gifted.

2) Defensibility. The plan should be based on pertinent research.

3) Equity. The plan should guarantee that no one is overlooked. This is especially important in schools where



the population includes minority students who traditionally do not score as high on certain types of identification instruments.

4) Pluralism. The broadest defensible definition of giftedness should be used.

5) Comprehensiveness. As many gifted learners as possible should be identified and served. The testing procedures should not "keep the un-gifted out," but make sure that all of the students who would benefit from the program should be allowed to participate.

6) Pragmatism. If possible, the procedure should make use of the tools and resources that are already available. If a certain test is already used in the school system, that tool should be examined as a possible identification instrument.

Beyond these general principles, some more specific comments are in order. One of the best tools that schools should avail themselves of is parent recommendation. The myth that all parents think their child is gifted is, simply, a myth. Research has shown that parents are very good indicators of giftedness in their own children and, conversely, that untrained teachers are not very good at recognizing gifted students. (Martinson [1974] contains a good summary of this research.)

Also, some standardized tests can be used to compare an individual child to a national mean. Teachers should consider scores of such tests as important in choosing students for special programs. One danger in the use of multiple criteria is that the criteria become multiple hurdles that the student must overcome instead of multiple doors through which the student can enter.

**Q: What kind of program is better, an in-class enrichment program or a part-time pull-out model?**

A: There is no clear-cut answer to this question either, but a recent national survey (Cox, Daniel, and Boston 1985) can give us an indication of factors that are important. This survey, known as the Richardson Study, a landmark report in education of the gifted, was very critical of the part-time pull-out model, citing that it was inefficient in its use of funds, a "part-

time solution to a full-time problem," and disruptive, often pitting teacher against teacher. The authors of the study called for the phasing out of this model.

Since the survey discovered that this model was the most used model in U.S. schools (72% of all programs used this model in some capacity), the criticism was not given lightly. Their criticisms were also, perhaps, a bit extreme. This model has served a number of children very well. Even a cursory glance at the most popular and critically recognized programs show that many of them are based on this model. Nonetheless, the problems noted need to be addressed.

The enrichment model, if used properly, can be a more effective means of meeting individual needs while keeping the students in a standard classroom.

The enrichment model also has some flaws, though, one of them of great concern. In the Richardson study, 63% of all schools surveyed described enrichment as the type of program used. Further questioning found that only 16% of the schools in the survey had *substantial* enrichment programs. This means that for nearly half the schools in the survey, the enrichment program for the gifted was merely a smokescreen for the fact that there was really almost no program at all. The lesson here is that an enrichment program must be carefully monitored to make sure it indeed is a program, not just some fancy verbiage to appease parents.

To be used properly, an enrichment program must be differentiated for the students, keeping their unique needs and abilities in mind; and it must be accompanied by opportunities in the regular curriculum for the use of higher level thinking, the encouragement of divergent responses, and even, possibly, appropriate acceleration when indi-

cated. These are the types of teaching strategies that are good for all children but necessary for gifted children.

The cluster group model, as suggested by Beverly Parke (1989), may be a good place to start. The cluster model allows students' special needs to be met while keeping them in mainstream classes. As noted earlier, the students who are given these opportunities must also be taught that unique learning situations in no way make these students "better" than others in their group or class. Such means better address the needs of these students.

Gifted education is not just the latest of a long series of bandwagons onto which the educational establishment has jumped. One indicator that the pressure on schools to implement gifted programming will not wane is that the initial call for gifted education came from parents and not from the government, college professors, or authors. It is a need that requires programming, not just a fancy idea that people get excited about.

More than that, though, basic to our covenant responsibility is the desire to see all students given the opportunity to learn as much and grow as much as they can while in school. This concept applies not only to the average or struggling students, but also to the gifted students in our classes. In order for them to serve the Lord in the best way they can, they need to be given the skills and tools to let them use their potential.

CEJ

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—by LARRY EGGINK

# Bringing the Outdoors In

"**M**any of my lesson plans are fleshed out at my desk; but they were likely conceived in a duck blind at dawn or in a bass boat at dusk," claims Dennis Pluimer. "It is in places such as these that I am most inspired." Students who enter Mr. Pluimer's classroom can attest to the fact that their science teacher is indeed an avid outdoorsman.

Den Pluimer teaches almost all of the high school science courses at Central Minnesota Christian School in Prinsburg, Minnesota. He graduated from Calvin College in 1968 and has taught for twenty-two years. He earned his master of science degree in biology from South Dakota State University in 1977. Yet, one does not have to spend much time with Den to realize that his education and experience go beyond the classroom. Love and respect for God's creation have developed in him a mindset that without question affects the way he teaches.

"One of my goals," Den states, "is to instill appreciation and respect for all other created beings, thereby fostering an attitude of stewardship for all natural resources." For Den Pluimer, this is more than just an ideal. As an extension



Dennis Pluimer's duck-endowed classroom demonstrates his love of nature and his desire to share it with students.

of his classroom teaching, Project Fish is one example of how the ideal becomes a reality.

Project Fish is an opportunity for Den's high school students to go up to his cabin in the woods for two or three days during the summer, to camp out and fish, and to observe wildlife with Den as their guide. This outing provides an opportunity for students to see, hear, smell, and touch nature in a way the classroom cannot provide. In addition, Den gains a greater rapport

with his students, which consequently makes his teaching more effective.

To make learning enjoyable and significant, Den claims, "the teacher must find creative means of making the subject matter palatable." To that end, he believes that a good science teacher must meet three criteria: a healthy sense of humor, a desire and willingness to stay abreast of new ideas and innovative technology through reading, and a genuine passion for making better people out of his students.





**Urging teens to take an active role in making God's world a better place is a challenge Dennis eagerly confronts.**

These thoughts are evidenced not only in his teaching, but also in his professional writing and his family life. Den has published articles in several periodicals, including *The Iowa Conservationist*, *Minnesota Volunteer*, *Fins & Feathers*, *Minnesota Sportsman*, and *CEJ*. He has written his own comprehensive units on AIDS, ecology, wildlife, conservation, birds, and fish. Den is always willing to share his knowledge and experiences; he presents two dozen public addresses each year on topics varying from Lyme disease to fishing seminars to nature and conservation.

But his family comes first. The most precious times in his life, says Den, are sharing a sunrise in an October duck blind with his sons Mike and Mark, or drifting a weedline for largemouth bass with his wife Sheri, his daughter Joy, and her husband Chad. "Sometimes I find it ironic that I enjoy teaching so much, for I feel most comfortable when away from people, in a boat or in the woods. Yet, I enjoy addressing a group, hoping to communicate my love for the outdoors."

That love for the outdoors and his ability to bring it indoors has made Den Pluimer the first-rate teacher that he is. **CEJ**



**"Many of my lesson plans are fleshed out at my desk; but they were likely conceived in a duck blind at dawn or in a bass boat at dusk."**

Having taught with Den for four years, I can affirm that Den Pluimer meets these criteria. His jovial nature (there's usually a grin behind that beard), his love for the students he teaches, and his zeal for science and nature blend together to produce a highly effective teaching style.

Pluimer wants kids to wonder, contemplate, question, challenge—and then become active. Student apathy is one of Den's major turn-offs. Urging teens to take an active role in making God's world a better place is a challenge he eagerly confronts. Den wants his classroom to be a place where students develop an appreciation for the creation. Concern and care for what God has provided is a primary responsibility for all Christians.

"I feel that God reveals his salvation plan only in the Bible, but he reveals many other traits through creation. By observing the abundance and diversity in living things around us, we can gain a fuller, more thorough knowledge of God," Den says.

*Larry Eggink teaches Bible at Pella Christian High School in Pella, Iowa.*

## ***Should boards of Christian schools broaden their denominational requirements for faculty members to allow more freedom of choice for teachers and their families?***

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Confronting the status quo periodically can strengthen or redefine current practices. Recently challenged by this question, Rod Oosterhouse, the principal of Denver Christian High School, comments and raises searching questions regarding Reformed perspective and denominational requirements.

**F**or many years schools in the Christian Schools International (CSI) tradition have had a close relationship with the Christian Reformed Church. Often this relationship creates questions about whether the schools are parochial by nature rather than covenantal. Each of these schools claims a Reformed perspective in education, independent of any denominational control.

To insure a Reformed perspective in the classroom, many of these CSI member schools require that all teachers be members of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) or the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The standards of these denominations are certainly consistent with the educational perspective of a CSI member school.

Some CSI schools already have begun the struggle of the teacher-church membership issue. Is the assumption valid that all teachers who are RCA or CRC members are able to

articulate a Reformed perspective? Is the assumption valid that only teachers who are RCA or CRC members hold a Reformed perspective?

I believe that a particular denominational membership has advantages as part of an overall screening and evaluation of teachers. But I also believe that other churches in the Calvinist tradition may provide the theological basis CSI seeks. Perhaps more important than their membership in a particular denomination, teacher candidates for CSI schools should be evaluated on their articulation of what a Reformed perspective means for their service. This individual, perspective-based emphasis could serve non-CSI schools, too. Then each school can decide whether a candidate's philosophy is in agreement with the school's stated purpose, basis, and objective.

I commend participants in the 1986, 1987, 1988, and 1990 Chicago conferences publicized in this journal, the authors of *12 Affirmations—Reformed Christian Schooling for the 21st Century* (Baker 1989), and CSI (especially in the focus of the 1992 International Conference) for their efforts in helping us all in this area. This question will be a discussion issue for years to come. ■

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## ***My colleagues regularly check student papers during faculty meetings. How should I deal with this practice?***

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**I**nitially one might condemn such rude and unprofessional behavior. After all, we don't tolerate students doing other class work while we're discussing or lecturing. Manners and respect require full attention by all. Even if certain objective papers can be corrected almost mindlessly, checking them during meetings is likely to distract the chairperson or other faculty members. Worse yet, a precedent is set.

To determine how to handle the situation, we need to understand why it happens. It could be a not-so-subtle message that the meetings are too long or taken up with idle talk. Ideally, the year begins with a schedule of tentative

meeting dates and a list of expectations for the chairperson(s) and members regarding times, agendas, and guidelines. After-school faculty meetings with no cut-off time create obvious frustration for teachers.

The building principal should kindly confront the teachers who check papers in faculty meetings. Are these teachers experiencing overload? an inordinate amount of busy work? rebellion? Regardless of the reason, the problem will not be resolved by ignoring it or by making sarcastic remarks. A skilled, diplomatic approach allows change and maintains respect both of teachers and administrators. ■



## ***How do we develop loving, open-minded thinkers in a Christian school that is populated by students who come from very similar backgrounds?***

**L**oving, open-minded thinking should begin at home already before school age. Parents, however, sometimes lack opportunities to start children in this practice, or they fail to see them. Perhaps some don't even see the necessity. Thus, students often enter school with an ethnocentric frame of mind.

Although the school should not take the sole responsibility, it should create an atmosphere that promotes diverse opinions and encourages a variety of responses. Students can learn tolerance by exposure to non-judgmental models.

Even when kids seem so alike, they find many differences as excuses to isolate or "pick on" one another. Christian teachers must see these instances as opportunities to correct

the premise that "different" means wrong or bad.

A few years ago, with the assistance of my church's Denver diaconal coordinator, I developed a unit on exposure to community. The purpose was to alleviate fears and promote understanding. Many rather self-centered middle school students forgot their own "needs" and popularity status as they played with homeless children in a shelter, fed street people and low income city dwellers, and listened to the heartache and hope of the families of mentally and physically handicapped individuals. Representatives of various minority races challenged them to think differently.

Exposure, awareness, and teacher tolerance create a real beginning to a life-long process of learning and practicing the unconditional love Christ demonstrates. **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.**

### ***ANNOUNCEMENT***

Steve Isham of Calvin Christian School in Kingston, Tasmania, is seeking an opportunity for a one-year exchange with an art teacher in the U.S. or Canada. Calvin Christian is the oldest Christian school of Reformed faith in Australia.

If interested contact

Steve Isham  
P.O. Box 375  
Margate, Tasmania 7054  
Australia

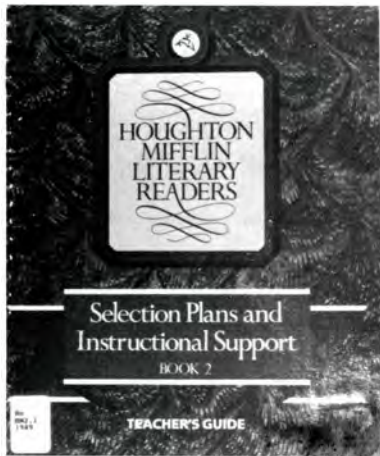
### ***READER RESPONSE***

Dear Editor,

I was disappointed to read the letter to the editor by Frank de Vries of Victoria, B.C., that you printed in your April 1990 edition. The articles of Dr. Van Dyk and of Dr. Guldemon, printed in your December/January issue, serve to further the discussion of the philosophy and practice of Christian education. Trite comments seem to me to serve no useful purpose.

A. Ben Harsevoort  
Ancaster, Ontario

—Edited by STEVE J. VAN DER WEELE



## Houghton Mifflin Literary Readers

Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.  
For information write to:  
1900 S. Batavia Ave.  
Geneva, Illinois, 60134.

Reviewed by Joan Stob,  
free-lance curriculum  
consultant, Grand Rapids,  
Michigan.

For a number of years classroom teachers have recognized that although a basal reading series may be effective in teaching children to read, it is often equally effective in killing the joy of reading. Instead of learning to enjoy reading as a pleasurable and meaningful activity, children learn to dread "reading" as a boring time when they must answer picky questions and fill in mind-numbing blanks.

As a result, some teachers have developed their own reading programs using high-quality children's literature and language experience activities. Many more would like to, but they realize that they do not have the time or expertise that it takes to do a good job. They also realize that an effective reading and literature program needs to be coordinated across all grade levels, something that is difficult to achieve without a textbook series.

In response to teachers' dissatisfaction with typical basal series, textbook publishers are finally pro-

ducing reading curricula that include a substantial amount of high-quality, high-interest children's literature. These new curricula, however, range from those that still use the typical basal approach of teaching subskills using drills and worksheets (Heath) to one that draws heavily on the whole language approach (Houghton Mifflin). Others lie between extremes (Silver Burdett/Ginn).

The Houghton Mifflin Reading/Language Arts Program is unique among the new reading/literature curricula. The publisher refuses to call it a basal because it is so different from a typical basal series. Instead of being organized by a scope and sequence chart of skills and subskills to be mastered, the program is organized by two models of activities that integrate literature, language, writing, and thinking.

The model for teaching fiction includes activities for building background, reading the story, responding to literature, exploring language, connecting reading to writing, and extending reading experiences. The model for teaching nonfiction includes activities for building background, reading for information, extending thinking, and exploring related topics.

Lesson plans offer basic activities and options for all of these categories, allowing teachers to choose the options (or use other ideas) most appropriate for their students. The majority of the activities are directly related to understanding and responding to the literature selections, but there is also a strong emphasis on writing. Most of the writing is related to the literature selections and is form-oriented (e.g., writing a letter, writing a story). In this the program departs from a true language-experience orientation, which would call for more student-selected topics and forms.

The language component of the program does not receive as much emphasis as the writing component. Usually the plans suggest that the teacher use the selection to illustrate some aspect of language (e.g., homo-

nymy, similies). Phonics is taught in the readiness and beginning readers as one strategy for decoding, but it is not over emphasized. Grammar study is barely touched on—a wise decision, since grammar study is generally a waste of valuable class time at the elementary level.

The two main components of the Houghton Mifflin program are the Literary Readers and the Bookshelf. The Literary Readers are anthologies of high-quality children's literature. The lower levels contain complete trade books with original illustrations; the upper levels contain selected chapters from classic and high-quality contemporary children's literature. Four to six selections are grouped together under a common theme.

The teacher's guide for the readers includes selection plans and "instructional support" (optional activities for more direct teaching of reading and language skills). Optional materials include a selection response booklet for students that requires considerably more creativity and thought than the typical workbook. A student resource booklet is also available to provide practice on the instructional support activities and more language and mechanics instruction.

The second main component of the program is the Bookshelf, a collection of six to ten paperback books designed to fit with the themes in the literary readers. These books are available as a package from Houghton Mifflin, but some schools put together their own collections by adding some of the recommended selections to the books they already own. Options for this component are audio cassettes of the books, big books for grades K and 1, student literature journals to guide students as they read, and the *Houghton Mifflin Literature Teacher's Manual*. This last resource provides ideas for how to use the Bookshelf—little mention is made of the bookshelf paperbacks in the teacher guides for the literary readers.

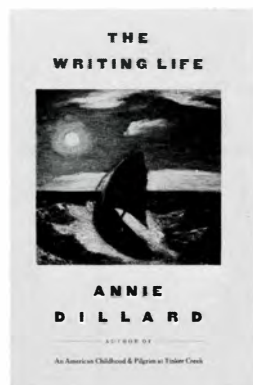
Other "bells and whistles" include blacklines, charts, transparencies, a



booklet of challenge projects, and special evaluation materials designed to fit the approach of the program.

Teachers who have already begun to use this series report that their students really enjoy the selections in the readers. The teachers themselves are pleased with the program, although some believe that a strong phonics-based spelling program such as Spaulding is a necessary supplement.

Schools looking for a reading series that emphasizes enjoying high-quality literature and integrating a whole language approach into the reading curriculum would do well to consider this series. ■



## The Writing Life

Annie Dillard

Harper and Row, New York, 1989,  
111 pp., \$15.95

Reviewed by Chris Vander Ark,  
senior education student,  
Calvin College,  
Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In *The Writing Life* Annie Dillard, an acknowledged master of English lyrical prose, writes about the burden and the glory of a writer's life. In carefully crafted sentences—vivid, shining prose—she speaks humbly but

knowledgeably of the shrouded, ineffable operations that take place in the writer's mind. Yet, while acknowledging the mysterious nature of the act of composing, she keeps her discussion earth-bound. She speaks not of words flowing brilliantly when it feels right, but of long, wearisome hours and days spent frustrated in cold writing sheds.

Though the book in large part consists of Annie Dillard's reflections on the writing experience, a hidden agenda vigorously exhorts the struggling writer: "Go. Write. Now." She agrees with still others who say, "Writers write"; that is, zealous novice writers should face their task squarely, not simply write from afar while preparing a wardrobe to go along with their dreams. She notes:

Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case. What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon? What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality? (68)

Dillard considers writing a non-mechanical process, a very human activity. One fumbles one's way through. Persistence is of the essence. She says, "If you skip a visit or two, a work in progress will turn on you. A work in progress quickly becomes feral. It reverts to a wild state overnight. It is barely domesticated, a Mustang on which you one day fastened a halter, but which you now cannot catch" (52).

This acknowledgment that writing is a messy process carried on only by faulty human beings has important pedagogical implications. To prove that writing is not a straightforward activity, Dillard unabashedly recounts the odd practices of many writers. I find these accounts exciting. As students discover that even great writers undergo demanding, often frustrating, processes, they can come to see themselves as part of the larger community of writers and

begin to make choices about how they will write.

Permit me a digression. Christian teachers may well wish to begin teaching writing with an acknowledgment of human limitations. The Fall has had a deleterious effect on all human activity; frustration in composition represents one such effect. Teachers should concede while teaching their models—and these models have their place—that writing is difficult for everyone, and that the intractability of the models flows from the humanity of the students. Creative improvisation on the models should be permitted and encouraged.

Choosing subject matter also concerns the author of *The Writing Life*. When asked to address high school students on *style* in writing, Kurt Vonnegut advised, "Write on something you care about." Dillard, too, emphasized individual perception of things:

There is something you find interesting, for a reason hard to explain. It is hard to explain because you have never read it on any page; there you begin. You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment. (67-68)

This existential directive can do much to orient students toward self-expression in the writing class, and may be particularly helpful with journals and the development of voice.

*The Writing Life* is a delightful book, especially for serious students of writing. It makes the reader want to write. It records the deep gratification that ensues from the painful effort writing entails: "The page . . . which you cover slowly with the crabbed thread of your gut . . . that page will teach you to write" (59). **CEJ**

Have you read *12 Affirmations: Reformed Christian Schooling for the 21st Century*?

Or

Have you attended any of the "Chicago Conferences"?\*

## LET'S SHARE OUR SUCCESSES!

If you've had success implementing something (anything) in response to any of the affirmations in *12 Affirmations*--in the classroom, faculty lounge, hallways, boardroom, or community--then commit yourself to write a one-page explanation of your idea, its tie-in with *12 Affirmations* or any other ideas gleaned from the Chicago Conferences, and the effect.

Longer manuscripts are welcome; unpolished manuscripts somewhat to be expected; and cassette tapes or phone calls to be tolerated.

### Some hints on what to write about:

Success with a new mission statement	Student-generated goals	Increasing "community"
"Restorative" grading strategies	Protection vs. mission	Is being boring really a sin?
Non-competitive classrooms & ballfields	A better schedule	More incentive to be inventive
A school-wide retreat	Workshops for parents	Room to fail
Work portfolios	Working up to one's best	Written and video evaluations
Service projects	Knowing as doing	Redefining intelligence
Questioning as a primary teaching method	Sexism, militarism, racism, and classism	Compassion in the teachers' lounge
Protecting against becoming "flat-souled"	Support groups	Fighting the factory model of schooling
Journal writing	Drama as "therapy"	Learning to learn
Media awareness	Special exchanges	Real purpose & real audience
Transporting the students to the sufferers	Redefining the knowledge core	Recycling projects
Hunger awareness	Team teaching	Bucking the status quo
TV abstinence challenges	The Reformed Christian teacher	<i>12 Affirmations</i> -based board policies

Send your manuscripts (or tapes or queries) to:

Steve Holtrop  
623 Hawkeye Court  
Iowa City, IA 52246

(319) 353-4734 (home)  
(319) 335-5436 (office)

### Deadlines:

October 15, 1990, for possible inclusion in February 1991 issue of *Christian Educators Journal*

December 15, 1990, for use in practical companion volume to *12 Affirmations*

## DON'T HIDE IT UNDER A BUSHEL!

\**12 Affirmations: Reformed Christian Schooling for the 21st Century* by Steven Vryhof, Joel Brouwer, Stefan Ulstein, and Daniel Vander Ark; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.

The Chicago Conferences were held in 1986 at Illiana Christian High School in Lansing, IL, and in 1987, 1988, and 1990 at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL.