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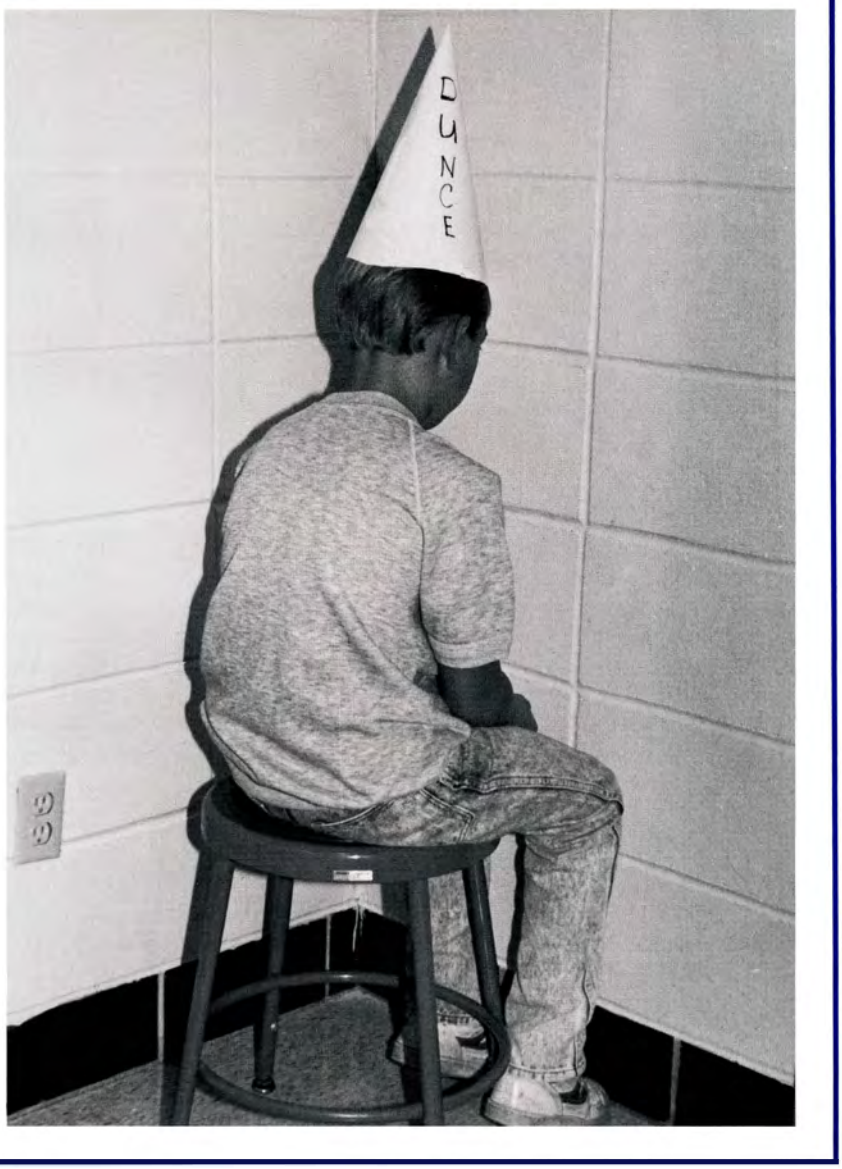


## Students at Risk

—Guest Editorial by JOHN VAN DYK

# Johnny at Risk in a Christian Classroom?

Johnny is a third grader. No one knows for sure just how intelligent the boy really is. At times, to the teacher's delight, he sparkles and shines; but then again he seems to tune out, refuse to work, and turn sullen, the picture of an unmotivated child.

More recently his behavior has become increasingly negative and disruptive, even obnoxious. His teacher, with growing exasperation, checked the cumulative file once more. "Johnny needs attention and discipline," his grade two teacher had written. Like his older brother Billy, Johnny is clearly at risk.

Our schools abound with students more or less "at risk." But what precisely does it mean to be "at risk"? How do we identify an at-risk student? What causes students to become at risk? And what should be done about them? These and similar questions are vigorously debated everywhere in the educational world. Expectedly, there is no consensus about the answers. If there is any agreement at all, perhaps it is that an at-risk student can be roughly described as "a student who is likely to fail in school, either because of learning disabilities or because of behavior problems, or both."

At-risk students, once identified and labeled as such, have a nasty habit of staying stuck in this category. Once at risk, always at risk, it seems. True, some at-risk students settle down and eventually merge with the mainstream, that is, with the students who meet the typical expectations of the teacher, of the curriculum, and of the graduation requirements. But, more often than not, at-risk students are expected to remain at risk. In fact, a youngster thought to be at risk not only stays at risk, but is often expected to fail altogether.

Take Johnny, our third grader, for example. Several years earlier his older brother Billy had been judged to be at risk: at risk to fail as a student. Billy was slow, apparently not all that bright, and pushy. People whispered gossipy stories about his family as well. As time went on Billy became such a recalcitrant, belligerent, intolerable character that he was eventually dismissed from school. The teachers and principal, at their wits' end, no longer knew what to do other than to get rid of him. After all, they said, there is the rotten apple, you know. We don't want to spoil the entire basket! But the dismissal of his brother Billy now confronts Johnny with tremendous odds: his teachers expect him to be like Billy! Though they might not say so, in reality they expect Johnny to fail. Unfortunately for Johnny, such expectations tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

At-risk students, especially the behavioral kind, receive plenty of attention and discipline. They are often separated from the main group in order to be tracked into remedial classes or even separate institutions. Some of them, like brother Billy, become intimately acquainted with the principal's office and eventually end up out in the street. Well-intentioned though such attention may be, studies show that these procedures often miss the real problem. While there may be many complicated, even mysterious, reasons for a student to be at risk, often the most fundamental factor is overlooked: a profound sense of alienation, inadequacy, and rejection.

This brings us to consider the Christian classroom once again. Sadly, alienation and rejection are not problems confined to inner-city public schools; they are common experiences in us. When our classrooms are essentially collections of individuals who compete with one another for grades and approval and are taught to be responsible only to themselves and to the teacher, then alienation, rejection, and inadequacy are inevitable consequences, and an at-risk atmosphere will prevail. Students are put at risk because the entire classroom is at risk! When, in addition, teachers engage in mostly whole-group instruction, and ignore or are blind to the individual needs and learning styles of students, the potential

for risk is likely to flourish.

Let's look at learning styles, for example. Kenneth and Rita Dunn have shown that something as simple as moving a youngster to a brighter location in the classroom, or replacing incandescent lamps with fluorescent light, has successfully delivered students from the "learning disabled" category. Over and over it has been shown that some students cannot process instructions or information instantaneously and need time to respond. Requiring such students to "pay attention right now!" or subjecting them to time tests puts them at risk. Still other students are simply not able to tune in to the analytic teaching styles so prevalent in junior high and secondary schools. Although such students have all sorts of gifts and abilities, they are not provided with opportunities to shine in their strong areas, and so they, too, are quickly put at risk.

Increasingly, studies show that a collaborative classroom with a warm, accepting, and positive atmosphere is one of the keys to reducing, perhaps even eliminating, the at-risk problem. Cooperative learning strategies, for example, when implemented in a classroom in which the development of trust, shared responsibility, and mutual concern and encouragement are high on the agenda, have been remarkably effective in aiding even those who would otherwise be shunted off as learning disabled or would end up as failures.

In some ways a Christian classroom and an at-risk student constitute a contradiction. True, some of our children are so physically, socially, or emotionally disabled, so severely distorted, that at-risk seems only their natural condition. And indeed, such children will surely be at risk. Yet, while I recognize the complexity and mystery surrounding the risk, I make bold to claim that even in very severe cases the Christian classroom should be able to accept these children and bring them to experience success according to their gifts. If we teachers could construct a genuinely collaborative classroom, such as I have earlier described in this journal (*CEJ*, December 1989), then the at-risk problem might well be sharply diminished.

Could it be that sometimes the teacher and not the student is really at risk? When Johnny's teacher expects him to fail because his brother Billy failed several years earlier, then is the teacher not putting Johnny at grave risk? If Billy failed, so goes the expectation, then more than likely Johnny will fail, too. Again, when a teacher, often unintentionally, inhibits or ignores the low achievers and favors the high achiever—as Good and Brophy's studies have shown teachers consistently to do (cf. T.L. Good and J.E. Brophy, *Looking in Classrooms*, 1987)—then surely it is primarily the teacher who is at risk, at risk of putting the students at risk.

What is needed is not first of all special remedial programs designed to get the at-risk students on track. After all, being "on track"—often translated to mean "quiet, compliant, and passive" —may conceal or reflect a much more profound at-risk problem than that indicated by the behavior of the "troublemakers." Needed above all, it seems to me, is staff development of the right kind.

Don't get me wrong. I am not out to criticize teachers. I see too many of them who do, in fact, effectively—and often quietly and unnoticed—reduce the at-risk problem in their classrooms. I do believe, however, that all of us teachers need to grow in awareness of what we are doing in the classroom, to grow as reflective practitioners. We teachers need to be increasingly trained to be alert to uniqueness, to the diversity of learning styles, to ways of creating classroom conditions attuned to such variety, and especially to ways of constructing collaborative, caring, accepting, and inviting classrooms.

Such staff development requires visionary principals who can forge their faculty into a team. It requires commitment to build a caring, authentically Christian community, classrooms in which we celebrate gifts rather than assess achievement. It requires a growing sense and practice of collegiality among us teachers. More and more we must open up our classrooms to each other; evaluate and encourage each other's work; freely discuss our strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures; suggest to one another various ways to improve our teaching effectiveness and our classroom atmosphere; and stay abreast with instructional innovation. Such staff development can surely help us build the kind of classrooms and the kind of schools where the at-risk student will either be a rare exception or only a vague memory. **JVD**

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—by ARDEN RUTH POST

# High-Risk Children

## Is the Classroom an Ego-Shattering Environment?

We hear over and over about the contribution of a good self-concept to success in school. However, a positive self-concept does not by itself cause high academic achievement. Rather, self-concept appears to be a necessary ingredient.

### THE SELF-CONCEPT

*Self-concept* refers to a set of perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that all people have about themselves. A related term, *self-esteem*, is the evaluative component of the self-concept. It is learned by comparing ourselves to others, by receiving feedback about ourselves, by observing the consequences of our behavior, and by perceiving cultural values (Hudgins). Our self-concept is how we see ourselves, and our self-esteem is how we feel about what we see. Also, there is a tendency to act consistently with our view of ourselves. For children in particular, feelings about self can determine what they think about themselves, what they do, and what they become—in other words, who they are!

### THE SCHOOL'S ROLE

Children enter school with positive or negative self-concepts already in formation. Family, home, and neighborhood environments have provided the beginning opportunities for children to develop a view of themselves. The entrance to school provides another source of feedback to influence such development. The logic is often explained in this manner: "Teachers have an influence on the way children think about themselves. Children's self-concepts, in turn, are related to achievement, which then further influences the way teachers act toward learners . . ." (Hudgins 89). The self-fulfilling prophecy has begun. The learner continues to accumulate experiences relating to success and failure outside of school, but for many children the self-concept is greatly affected by academic success (Hudgins).

### HIGH-RISK CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

Every school contains a number of children who are at high risk in developing and/or maintaining a positive self-concept. These children have some strikes against them as they perceive themselves to others, and observe the consequences of their academic or social behavior. Dobson (1974) cautions teachers that school is a dangerous place for children with fragile egos.

We teachers need to pay special attention to our approach to these children. We need to provide conditions for success, realistic expectations, sincere appreciation for these children as they are, and qualities to build upon in fostering a positive self-concept. Christian teachers especially are called to provide the necessary loving support because we know the value of each child in God's eyes and the privilege of being created in God's image. Let's look at some high-risk children.

#### ● The Slow Learner

George* is in fifth grade. He has been tested many times and found to have an I.Q. somewhere in the high seventies or low eighties. He is one of many children who "fall between the cracks." He will not qualify for special education for the mentally retarded (nor would his parents want him there). However, he also lacks the ability to keep up with his classmates in the regular class. When the teacher assigns a chapter to read and hands out a study guide to be filled in while reading, George can't do it. He can't read the assignment; he can't read the questions; and he can't write the answers. Oh, he can read and write many words, but his reading level is not up to the level of the text or questions, and his writing ability does not include producing a few complete, concise sentences. George knows he's different, and so does everyone else. Unless means are found for him to experience success, he will drown in his feelings of inadequacy.

A concerned, creative teacher is George's best source of survival. The teacher evaluates his reading level and his capabilities for written work and then assigns appropriate material and assignments (making sure they are not babyish). A teacher *never* need say, "I can't help George." The teacher can always call upon a special educator in a school or college for help. *Knowledge* is *not* the necessary ingredient for wanting to help George; *attitude* is. Knowledge can be gained when the teacher has a concerned, caring attitude.

#### ■ The Bilingual/Bicultural Child

Jimmy is a black child in first grade. Although he is not the only black child in the classroom, he is behind the rest of his classmates in learning to read. He is inattentive as the teacher writes words representing phonics elements on the chalk boards. When told to write the words in a sentence, he may complete one sentence by the time the rest of the class finishes. He doesn't know how to write many of the words he'd like to use. He is told to look them up, but he has not developed the sound-symbol relationships that permit him to guess at even a few letters in the word. Some words he uses in speaking and writing are in black English. He writes "She have a dog." The teacher marks it wrong.

*The names used in this article are fictitious. Any similarity to actual people or situations is purely coincidental.

Jimmy is in the lowest reading group, but he knows few words in his reader by sight. Since he isn't absorbing phonics, he lacks the ability to attack unknown words by sounding them out. He shows little interest in books and claims he has no books at home. At his young age Jimmy is beginning to "turn off" to school. School for him is a place to look dumb. He can't do much, and what he does is wrong.

Jimmy needs a concerned and caring teacher, just as George does. Jimmy's teacher needs to recognize and compensate for his lack of reading readiness, to appreciate his culture and dialect so that Jimmy feels valuable as he is. While Jimmy's speaking and writing in the standard dialect may be advisable for future school success, the correct aspects of Jimmy's work should be recognized now. Motivation to read, building on what he can do, and appreciation for any aspect of work done correctly are necessary for Jimmy's self-concept and his attitude toward learning.

### ▲ The Underachiever

Christy is in eighth grade. She is unmotivated to do school work. She does just enough to get by. Homework is done quickly, if at all. Preparation for tests consists of a quick look over the few notes she takes. Once in a while a project catches her interest, and she produces an excellent piece of work.

School work is boring to Christy. Recently her parents, upon the school's recommendation, had her tested. She was found to be of superior intelligence, and her achievement tests showed scores above grade level. Yet Christy is doing C and D work in most classes. Her teachers would rate her among their least favorite students. She puts forth virtually no effort, can be a distracting influence in class, and demonstrates a poor attitude.

Possibly unknown to her teachers is the fact that Christy's self-concept is also poor. She feels inadequate, resents her lack of motivation, dislikes poor grades, but can't seem to get in the groove of learning. She has heard that she is very bright, but that doesn't help her know how to get going.

Just like the others, Christy needs a caring and concerned teacher to find that spark that ignites the desire for learning. She needs a teacher to show personal interest in her, to explore her interests, and to find a way of making learning relevant and challenging. Christy's poor self-concept is likely to become even lower if she is permitted to continue on her present path.

### ◆ The Learning-Disabled Child

Larry has above-average intelligence. He comes from a home that provided a rich experiential background: visits to museums, the zoo, the beach; books to read and a family of readers; times of family togetherness and conversation; and lots of love and security. Larry seemed to have the preparation for a good self-concept and the prospects for school success. He came to school eager to learn.

But learning didn't come easy for Larry. He paid attention as the teacher taught sound-symbol relationships, but he couldn't remember the sounds of *p* and *at* when he saw them in the reading text. He said the sight words as the teacher put them on the board, but he didn't remember them the next day. Reading and reading-related activities seemed to be problem areas. In math, Larry did fine. In music and art he had talent, and in playing soccer he was the best in the class. But after recess came writing time, and again Larry had trouble. He couldn't spell the simplest words. His printing was jumbled, spacing was ignored, and letters of various shapes and sizes appeared.

A learning disability is possibly the hardest educational challenge for the classroom teacher. A child with average or above average ability has difficulty in one or more subject areas, a discrepancy between ability and achievement that is most often found in the areas of oral and written language performance and/or mathematics.

Yet, Larry needs the teacher's help as much as do George, Jimmy, and Christy. Larry's self-concept is already beginning to suffer. Art, music, and sports are pulling him through, but with so much reading and writing involved in school, he's likely to feel more and more inadequate as he progresses through the grades.

Larry's teacher needs to alert the principal, who may recommend an educational evaluation to the parents. The assistance of special education (learning disabilities) personnel for Larry in his school may be the answer. In any event, Larry's teacher needs to gain an understanding of effective teaching procedures to enable him to experience success in learning.

## CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

Why do we, as teachers, have special responsibility to these four children and others who are in danger of developing poor self-concepts due to lack of academic success? The obvious academic answer is that success breeds success and failure breeds failure. A poor self-concept thrives on failure, which produces more failure and an even poorer self-concept. These students need to be helped to experience success in order to build up the self-concept and to foster future success.

As Christian teachers we have a special God-given responsibility. We believe that children are created in God's image to fulfill his purpose for their lives. We need to help them appreciate themselves as God created them, and we begin by appreciating them ourselves. We need to help them develop their God-given abilities in order to serve him and those around them. Our challenge is to build up all children in the way they view themselves by enabling them to succeed in learning. Our attitude is the key; knowledge can be gained. Are we ready to meet the challenge? Perhaps the first question should be, Are we *willing* to meet the challenge? **CEJ**

*Arden Ruth Post is associate professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

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—by MARGARET HOUK

# BOOSTING TEEN SELF-ESTEEM

There is nothing teens need more then self-esteem. They want it. God wants it for them. But it is very hard to come by during those trying years of gawky legs and social awkwardness.

You can't give a person self-esteem. It is something people have to give themselves, a true do-it-yourself job. But there are ways by which those who live and work with teens can help them along the road.

**1. Listen to them.**

Nothing convinces a human being that he or she is important and valued as much as getting the undivided time and attention of another human being, even if it is only for a brief two-minute conversation.

Good listening requires that we listen non-judgmentally and that we appreciate the messages we hear, no matter how hard they might be to accept. Vivacious free-souled Sarah blurted out in eighth grade class one day, "How do we know God loves us? How do we know that isn't just a story our parents are telling us?"

Teen messages are sometimes plenty far-out. One of my imaginative young friends once said, "I think God is an alien. He is from outer space, isn't he?"

Sometimes the messages can be disheartening. Fourteen-year-old Steve said one night, "I don't believe in God anymore. I've decided to become an atheist." His parents had just separated.

The honesty and searching that teens get into is not so much a threat as it is an opportunity to build a strong foundation of their own with the Lord. Noted Christian author Catherine Marshall once said that we must all "throw off" the faith of our fathers in order to take on our very own. Startling teenage comments can be door openers, helping teens think through who and what God is and what they should do about that. In others, their remarks give eve evidence that they are on a colorful road to spiritual maturity.

**2. Affirm them.**

Everybody needs praise, but no one moreso than a teenager. With bodies that are growing fast, interests that suddenly shift gears, and emotions that run rampant, they are bound to goof up. But they also have moments of glorious sunlight.

Teens have varied gifts from God—personality traits that they can use in service to the Lord. One might have strong leadership skills, another the ability to follow. Some teens are aggressive, others quiet and retiring. Because society tends to reserve its rewards for leaders, we need to emphasize to teens that *all* traits are equally important to God.

To affirm your students, identify an outstanding characteristic in each one of them and mention it one-on-one as often as opportunity allows. Point out things that happen during class to "prove" the affirmation.

**3. Help them affirm themselves.**

Teens wanting to feel good about themselves are fighting a gigantic battle. They are extremely and often excessively self-critical. But they fight many external sources of put-me-down messages as well.

We live in a self-deprecating society. So many of us, when we receive a compliment, say, "Oh, it was nothing!" We are also bombarded with subtle messages that tell us we are either too young or too old, too skinny or too fat, or not quite "cool."

To help your teens rise above this, teach them to screen what they are seeing and hearing and to replace negative messages with positive ones. Here's what I would tell a teen distressed about being a bit shorter and heavier than average:

"The world is full of different kinds of people—tall, short, thin, hefty. That's what makes the world interesting. It would be a very dull world if we all looked alike.

"Try telling yourself this: 'This is the way I am, and what I am is nice. It's nice because I am created by God—a unique, important, special human being loved by him and by other people such as my friends, my family, my teachers, and my youth leaders. God has a purpose for my life, a job for me to do. Whatever I am is right for the job.'"

What do you say to the teen so obese that his or her health is endangered?

"God loves you just as you are. But he wants all of us to take good care of our bodies because we can serve him best that way. See what your doctor says, and work with her or him toward the best healthy state you can have."

Once is not enough. With self-image assault coming at them steadily from all directions, teens need to affirm themselves frequently and regularly.

**4. Give them responsibility.**

When my third daughter left home, barely eighteen, to move into her own apartment, she was terrified. A high school course had led her to believe it would take $4000 a year more than she was making to support herself. Her big fear was "I can't make it on my own!"

This is a very common reaction among teens going independent. In a complex social and economic structure such as ours, the fear has some validity. Independent teens need elaborate independent living skills—care of self, home, car, money, and time planning. Add to this the decisions they must make frequently about their responsibilities toward others and toward God. Anything teens can do to prepare themselves for the big day—care of

their possessions, household chores, leadership duties—not only sets a firm foundation, but also raises their confidence.

Teens often talk as if they don't want responsibility: "Aw, do I have to lead the meeting?" They sometimes act as if they don't want it. They may not get around to every item on the agenda. But they do feel good about themselves after doing a job well.

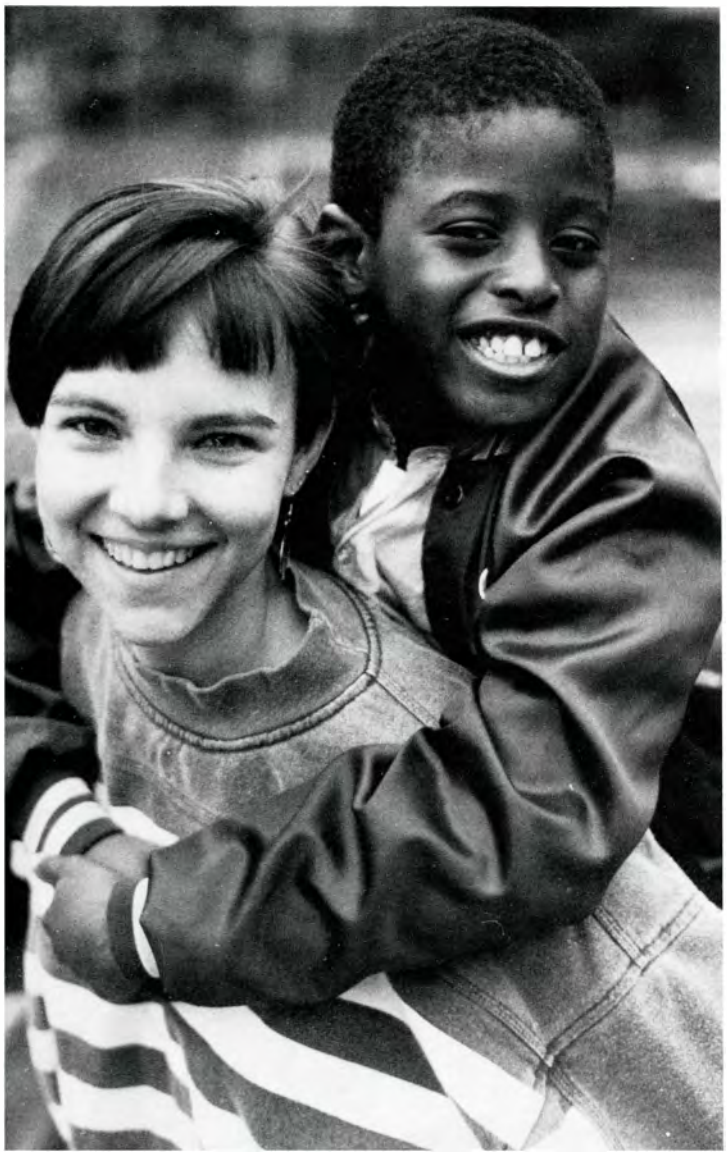
Doing what we don't really want to do is character-building. It requires self-discipline. People hesitate out of rebellion or laziness. But there is a certain amount of healthy pride and honor that comes with taking hold of a difficult task.

**5. Let them fail.**

Parents and adult leaders often take on responsibilities teens could handle because teens sometimes forget, goof up the job, or don't get things done fast enough. Letting teens do things themselves takes more adult time, involves aggravation, and subjects situations to failure. But teens need the experience of slipping and falling once in a while.

Soon no one will be there to pick up after them.The road to adulthood is easier if we allow them the painful consequences of irresponsibility. The more often they have to take hold lest they let somebody down, the faster they are able to face the world with grace.

When they fail, let *them* correct the situation, if at all possible. This is education for independent living. But don't let them get so down on themselves that they lose heart. Be firm, but keep it light: "I'm sorry you forgot to call your list about the hayride. That happens sometimes at your age. Why don't you call your friends and apologize? I think you'll feel better about it. And I'm sure they'll understand. They forget things, too, once in a while."



After a failure, encourage teens to forgive themselves and go on. Teens often hang on to their mistakes in bouts of rehashed guilt, self-pity, and self-condemnation. God wants us to sincerely regret our mistakes, to ask forgiveness of those we have offended, to make amends as best we can, and then to accept his forgiveness, and get on with our lives. We must do that so that we have more emotional energy for helping others.

To help your teens cross this bridge, point out that, after they put goofs behind them, they are more fun to be around, and their friends enjoy them more.

**6. Encourage them to treasure their relationships.**

Joy is sweeter and sorrow diminished when two share the burden of one. Our relationships with other people bring our greatest joys and deepest sorrows. Essential to self-esteem, then, is the building and maintaining of satisfying relationships.

Encourage teens to communicate in healthy ways. Twisted messages, those based on what the teen thinks others want to hear rather than on genuine ideas and feelings, foul up relationships. So do messages that pressure or manipulate others. Honest, straightforward communication not only clears the air, but also works better and feels better.

Communication is a skilled art, one that is never perfectly learned. No matter how hard people try, sooner or later they run into conflict. Urge your teens to resolve their conflicts quickly in a spirit of lovingkindness. Point out that the aim is to heal a treasured, damaged relationship, not to prove who is right or wrong.

There are many ways of settling differences, but teens in conflict usually see only two: my way and your way. Suggest that they try compromise, finding middle ground, or trading off. (Finding a middle ground is finding a solution that both parties like. Trading off is following one person's choice one time, the other person's the next.)

Psychologists say that we must love ourselves if we are to love other people God's way—unselfishly. To accomplish this we need self-esteem. By listening to teens, affirming them, helping them plant seeds of self-affirmation, expecting responsible behavior, letting them fail, and showing them how to get along with others, you can and will help them on their way. **CEJ**

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—by CAROL REGTS

# Portrait of an At-Risk Artist

Brad sighed. Monday morning and seventh grade history class—a combination to turn anyone's stomach. On a rather crumpled piece of notebook paper, Brad sketched a cartoon showing Hussein and Bush playing a game of hide-and-seek among tanks. Then he doodled various combinations of his newest magic number, 927—only 927 more days before he could drop out of school, legally anyway. It was this plan, and this plan only, that kept him from jumping out of his seat, screaming his anger and frustration, running far and fast away.

"Let us review the clash between white and Indian cultures as we see it in the late 1700s." As Ms. Smit plunged directly into her lecture by putting transparencies of notes onto the overhead and underlining the main points with a bright red pen, Brad sketched a little bee wearing a feathered headdress zooming in to attack the fat posterior of a white man urinating into a bush.

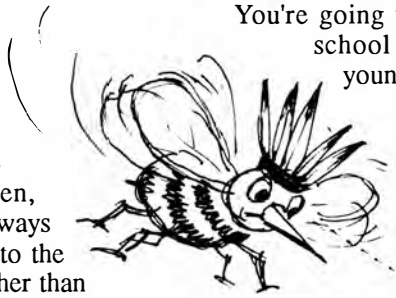
"Brad! Brad Doorn, just what is this? Where are your notes?"

Brad's back muscles tightened, his fingers fiddled with his pen, and his eyes shifted sideways a bit before focusing onto the paper in front of him rather than looking up into Ms. Smit's exasperated face. Brad knew from previous experience that her eyes would be glaring down into him, but they would also look bewildered and uncertain. Brad couldn't figure out what her problem was, why she was always at him, especially now when he hadn't done anything to call attention to himself. Sure, he had just flunked the last test—shoot, it had all been stuff he'd learned in fourth grade, and he didn't see why he had to put in all the effort to learn Ms. Smit's way of organizing history. Who did she think she was? She acted as if she knew it all.

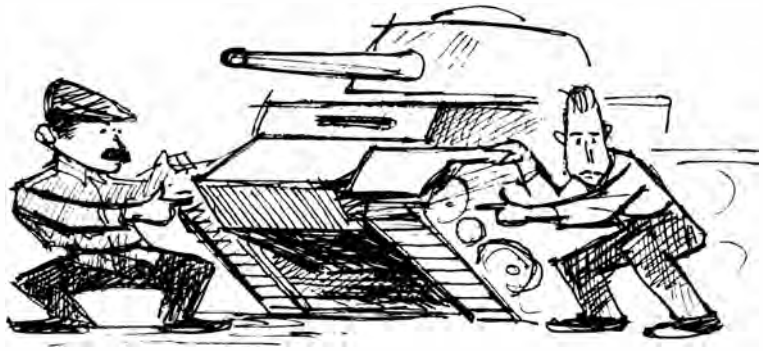
School was so boring. Who needed it?

"And where is your homework, Mr. Doorn?" Brad hated it when she used his name like that. And now all the kids were looking at him, as usual, laughing at him under their breaths.

"I told you in class yesterday that it had better be done. Now you leave me no choice. I'm going to have to send in another detention notice and make a call to your folks. You have turned in nothing this year—nothing! You're going to end up in summer school if you keep this up, young man."



Brad thought about



yesterday when Ms. Smit had stopped to check his progress on the homework sheet on chapter three. His paper had been stuffed into the back of his notebook while he finished a drawing of two Indians clad in robes like monks and fighting with Ninja stars. She had basically threatened him the same way then. Only yesterday she had flavored it with artificial sweetener, saying she was so worried about him because she knew he was smart and could do these assignments without even thinking and didn't he know he should be developing the talents God had given him?

Brad hated it when they told him he was bright, that God had made him responsible for being bright. It sounded as if that meant they owned him and could count on him to answer all their stupid questions and turn in his work on time. Why did he have to do the assignment at all if she knew he knew it? Teachers didn't make sense.

Ms. Smit hadn't stopped there. On and on she had talked about how she couldn't understand why he wouldn't at least try because she wanted to see him explore his creativity and didn't mind if he made mistakes. And she asked again for his overdue Indian project, saying that she knew he was almost done and that he should just hand in what he had so she could give him credit for what was completed.

Brad had actually started that project four times and four different ways, on each day Ms. Smit had given them time in class. He just couldn't get into it; it didn't seem to mean anything to him. Whenever they had worked on it, Ms. Smit had made a point of stopping at his desk first, as if she didn't trust him to get started on his own. Halfway through the class period, she would come back and say she liked what he was doing, what great ideas he had, and then she would point out what he'd still have to do to meet the requirements of the assignment.

Brad figured all she wanted was a grade in the grade book. He was sure she didn't care much about his trying to find something he wanted to do, though part of him wanted to impress the socks off her. But his ideas never worked out the way he wanted them to, never showed everything he wanted them to show, and when the bell rang each time, he tore up his paper because it wasn't going anywhere anyway.

To top it all off, yesterday after she had finally left his desk, both Darryn and Scott had taunted him about being so smart, saying it over and over under their breath and kicking his seat as if they were doing a rap until he couldn't help but turn around and shove back against their desks, knocking their papers to the floor. He had gotten a detention then, too. It wasn't fair.

Brad would have liked to ask Ms. Smit whether it was being like a Pharisee to point out how unfair the whites had been in past conflicts between Indians and whites and then to be glad and self-congratulatory that things were not like that today. Brad wanted to convince her that this objective history stuff—going over and over the same ground—was all a waste of time. He thought it was obvious that everyone would learn and accomplish more by sending letters to those Indians in Canada who didn't want their reservation turned into a golf course and asking them how they felt about the clash between Indians and whites. In fact, Brad thought it was a bunch of nostalgic crap to talk about history when no one was doing anything about the present, when white kids shoot black kids in school and black kids gang rape whites. What about that clash?

And how come God kept allowing whites to have all the power and so think they were superior, wiser, fairer? Personally, Brad thought God was pretty untrustworthy. Brad wasn't too sure that there was such a thing as providential care, certainly not for the Indians in a white world. He didn't get why anyone would put their faith in something that supported one race over another. It was just plain dumb, a cult like any other, only bigger and thus more powerful and more able to call itself "right." Brad wasn't ready to throw God out of consideration, but he did wonder why no one asked more questions, why no one acknowledged that Satanic groups seemed to be able to affect events more powerfully than Christians. The idea of having such power, any tangible power at all, tantalized Brad. He knew he didn't want Satan to have control of his life; but he did want to be empowered to change things, to make things fairer, to be involved in what is important and interesting in life—now.

Yet it wasn't only Ms. Smit or his other teachers giving him no space and only grief. Brad knew his parents were worried about him and his grades, about all the time he spent up in his room alone listening to heavy metal music, playing Nintendo, or tinkering with his remote-control cars, about his refusing to go to church most Sundays. He wished they would back off, give him a chance, not give him a hard time about his choice of T-shirts, which sported either the latest hard rock group or some Satanic symbol. He wanted to try out different roles, to make people think about him rather than take him for granted. He wasn't sure what he wanted to do or be—except that he definitely did not want to be seen as one of the nerds, always

going along with the teacher and having parents who gushed over their success.

People kept saying they wanted him to be his own person, but they wanted him to be a person in their image. It was as if everyone was pretending he was an individual and encouraging him to stretch his talents, but no one would let him break the least little rule or do anything different than what they expected from every other twelve-year-old. So much for the theory about being a unique person and accepted as unique.

No one had to convince him how different he really was. Brad knew he was a weirdo, a misfit, someone who would never be able to meet the expectations everyone had for him. Never be smart enough—or at least the right kind of smart. Never be successful enough for the talent everyone said he had—though which of the kids at school would follow his lead was beyond him. Never be much of anything—though he couldn't see himself ever wanting to take on all the extra work and grief that came from meeting everyone's demands.

Brad sighed. It was going to be a long 927 days.


Five percent of the general population is gifted, and our gifted students are at risk—at risk socially, academically, emotionally, and spiritually. They are not all like Brad, who has chosen the road of rebellion and underachievement. In fact, many of our gifted children who are model students, conforming and sometimes conscientious to a fault, do not seem at risk. However, in an environment where conformity is valued, these students' creativity and unique insights are often stifled and rarely challenged or encouraged to blossom, to stretch, to become the guidelines helping us to develop these students into the people God intends them to be. Not all gifted kids will accomplish these goals on their own. Gifted kids are learning disabled in that they process information at different rates and in different ways from the average student. They therefore need specialized help learning how to connect with and contribute to our school community.

If our Christian schools are dedicated to meeting the needs of each child as God has created him or her—the needs of disruptive students like Brad, who seems to misuse the talent God has entrusted to him, or the needs of quiet students on whom we can depend to complete each assignment to perfection—if we are so dedicated, then the gifted students must demand just as much time, effort, money, and love from us as those less talented or those seemingly more responsible. To focus a program on them is no less necessary and no more elitist than to offer special programs encouraging our best athletes and musicians to explore what God has given them.

Please, search out the many books, articles, workshops, and community resources available to help educators identify and teach gifted students. Demand that your school system develop supportive programs for the gifted rather than leave the responsibility to individual teachers to handle alone in their classrooms. Recognize that the middle school is a pivotal point especially for the gifted students who, with a dangerously naive sophistication, test society's rules, test the potential of their personhood, and test the Lord God, their Maker. Look for Brad in your classroom and seek the help you need, not only to challenge, but also to incorporate his uniqueness into God's Kingdom. **CEJ**

**"The equal treatment of unequals is the most unequal way of dealing with human beings ever devised. . . . What education is all about is being human, . . . developing those traits that are uniquely human for the benefit of the individual, the family, the community, the society, and the world."**

(Ashley Montagu, "My Idea of Education," *Today's Education*, February/March 1980, 39).

*A special thank you goes to my colleague Gloria Roorda, Eastern Christian's Gifted and Talented coordinator, for her suggestions and support as I wrote this article.*

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## *Our school has special education available for students who need additional academic help, but some of our students seem to have emotional problems that block their learning and cause classroom disruptions as well. The counselor is of some assistance in that area, but these kids still have a very difficult time in school. As teachers, we often feel helpless. What can be done for these students?*

Because I also have been in similar frustrating situations, I referred this question to someone who is trained to work with this special type of student. Joyce Veldman is a Christian teacher working in a public school setting. Her insights might prod us to think more about the needs in our Christian schools.

The term *special education* is nebulous. Our Christian schools and colleges tend to lump the many disabilities of our students into one label, *special education*. The schools often feel they are servicing the needs of the handicapped by setting up a resource room that usually caters to the LD (learning disabled) student rather than working with each disability.

As the question suggests and many Christian school teachers would conclude, the EBD (emotional behavioral disordered) child has been neglected too long. Eventually the frustration on the part of teachers, students, and families surfaces, and I trust efforts to get answers and proper training will occur. Learning disabled students can be identified through assessment, and remediation can take place in the areas of academic need; emotionally disordered students are not identified as such. If we place these students in the same resource room as LD students, we are only putting a bandage on a wound. We cannot remediate the EBD child in the same fashion as the LD.

Depression, unhappiness, low self-esteem, and interpersonal difficulties are some of the characteristics of the EBD students. If enough specific behaviors that interfere with the student's academic, social, and emotional growth are observed and measured, a student may be eligible for entrance into the EBD program. Goals and objectives must be set specifically for an EBD student rather than a special education student, or the student will continue to experience difficulties with his or her own behavioral management. These students, bright as some of them might be, are at high risk for continued problems in areas of self-esteem, peer development, family interaction, or scholastic achievement.

There are no cookbook solutions or quick fixes. Yet a trained EBD teacher has tools, strategies, and experience to work with these troubled and troubling students. EBD kids need to set goals for their lives, working through the emotional problems that interfere with learning and accepting the responsibility for their own behavior. Schools should recognize these students, assess them properly, and set up individual educational plans (IEP) to assure them the opportunity for success.

Designing programs for the emotionally disturbed, behaviorally disordered students should be one of the greatest challenges for the Christian schools so that these children have the opportunity to develop into self-sufficient Christian citizens of today's society. Unidentified and misunderstood, these hurting kids will continue to mask their inner needs with behavior and performance that are frustrating to the mainstream teacher and to themselves.

After years of teaching in other curricular areas and in both Christian and public school settings, I feel God called me to work in this very specific field. Not only do I find it rewarding, but I know God is using me to make a difference in the lives of these special students. I pray that more Christian schools will recognize the need, and I encourage other Christian educators to become involved as well. Space does not allow me to elaborate on the specific details of diagnostic testing, methods of instruction, or necessary training, but I welcome inquiries from interested teachers.

**CEJ**

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**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.**

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**CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.**

—by JOHN A. HOFLAND

# Drama as a Teaching Method

## for Math and Science

Drama provides us with a form whereby we can create images to make concepts meaningful.

William Zinsser discusses the importance of writing across the curriculum as a way of helping students think about the significance of the material they learn. He suggests that any subject can be made interesting—and significant—if we make connections between that subject and the "real" world, so that information is not abstracted and alienated from meaning.

Noting how important it is for science teachers to relate hardcore science to history and ethics, Zinsser tells about the chemistry professor who teaches a course on hazardous wastes and asks his students to write a paper summing up the legal and ethical issues of Love Canal (Zinsser 48).

A math teacher explaining that math, like any discipline, is one way to make sense of the world, says, "Unless you make those connections, children will always think of mathematics as somehow 'other than me—not part of my world,' and that continues right through high school, where there's a heavy emphasis on exercises and computation, with numbers as the sole language and the right answer as the sole objective" (152).

To counter the thinking that the teacher has all the information and the students must get the right answer, this particular math teacher has students write about the work they are doing to solve problems. In this way writing helps them clarify what they know and do not know, and it helps them explore the right answer.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics echoes this teacher's thinking. Its recent report notes that a shift from an industrial society to an information society has transformed "both the aspects of math that need to be transmitted to students and the concepts and procedures they must master" (*Curriculum and Evaluation Standards* 3). According to their report, that transformation involves connecting math with other content areas. The report also notes that "'knowing' mathematics is 'doing' mathematics. A person gathers, discovers, or creates knowledge in the course of some activity having a purpose. This active process is different from mastering concepts and procedures" (7). They do not thereby deny the value of informational knowledge, but they note that its value lies in the extent to which it is useful in some purposeful activity.

The kind of math curriculum they advocate seems to have many parallels with drama. The possibilities of using drama to explore mathematics deserves further attention.

Thus, while the writing advocated by Zinsser is one way to explore subject matter and the interrelationships between subjects, it is only one form that might be used. Another form of communication—an art form, such as drama—might also be used. Eisner points out that, if we limit ourselves to language to express our understanding, there are some things we do not have words for. We need to use language in a nonliteral way to express our understanding of some things. The advantage of an image-creating and image-reliant form such as drama is that drama does not rely entirely on words to give structure to our perception (Eisner 1989).

As a means of exploring and clarifying our understanding, drama has another advantage over writing in that it makes the rewriting process faster and less tedious. Once an idea is presented by the group, the performance can immediately be evaluated to see how well it reflects the group's understandings, and then it can be restructured and replayed. This process is more condensed and therefore probably less tedious than the process that is often followed when students do written work—having the teacher respond to individual papers, returning them to students, and waiting for them to be rewritten. ■

*John A. Hofland teaches creative dramatics and theatrical design at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. This is the conclusion of a series of lessons on drama as a teaching method.*

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*NOTE: The narration provided in the following lessons is not meant to be read or memorized. It is only a description of how to lead the lessons.*

## Using Drama to Teach Addition and Subtraction: A Math Lesson for Grade One

### Objectives

- To provide practice in working subtraction problems
- To help students visualize the concept of subtraction
- To help students understand the relationship between addition and subtraction

### Lesson Format

**1.** Begin by telling the students that you are going to ask them to imagine that they are sitting on the floor. Demonstrate what you mean. Sit on your haunches, with your feet on the floor. (Actually squat rather than sit down.)

Ask the students to sit at their desks and close their eyes. Say, "With your eyes closed, imagine you are sitting on the floor to the right side of your desk. See how short you would be if you were sitting there. Now imagine that if I clapped my hands, you would suddenly be standing up tall. (Clap) See how tall you are when you stand up. Think of how much taller you would be standing up than if you were sitting very small on the floor.

"Now the next time I clap, I will clap twice. On the first clap imagine yourself sitting half way down, and on the next clap, imagine you are again sitting all the way down on the floor. (Clap, clap) Now I will clap four times. So you will imagine yourself going up a little bit four times, until on the fourth clap you are standing tall again." (Clap, clap, clap, clap)

Then invite them to try the routine, going from sitting to standing in one clap, two claps, and four claps.

Increase the number of intervals to ten, and then draw a relationship between what they have been doing and what we can do with numbers. The number zero is a very small number, and it is like sitting very small on the ground. Ten is a big number, and it is more like standing tall. One would be the first step up from the sitting position. We can play a number game by standing at different heights. Try some addition. Say "three," and have them move up three intervals. Then add two and they will rise two more intervals. They should be half way up at this time.

Try the game with subtraction as well. The activity should help students understand that addition means creating a bigger amount than you had previously, and subtraction means creating a smaller amount.

**2.** For the next three sitting-at-the-desk activities, you will need a drum or other percussion instrument. It need not be a musical instrument, but merely something to keep a count with.

Begin by having students "walk" across their desks with two fingers. Then ask them to finger-walk across the desk to the beat of a drum. (Boom, boom, boom means three finger steps.)

Once this idea is clear, try a math problem. Start on the left side of the desk and move to the right for positive integers. Move to the left for negative integers. Addition of smaller numbers might be the math problems to start with. Then move to larger addition sums, and finally to subtraction.

For variety, try jumping with the fingers, or making sliding motions. Use a new percussive sound to accompany the change in the movement—a swishing sound, for instance, for the sliding movement.

Once you have communicated the idea of movement being related to a number value, do a few problems for demonstration. (Later the students will perform.) Ask students to give you an addition problem. Then announce your movement style, move, and ask them to give you the answer. Then ask for a subtraction problem, and choose a different style of movement. The slide movement may be most confusing for the class. Call one slide movement the sliding of one foot to the side and the consequent bringing of the other foot next to it again.

Now students should be able to play a guessing game, with one student being given a sum to jump, walk, or slide to in front of the room, and the other students guessing the answer. The set-up can be as follows: A student volunteers to perform. You then secretly give him or her a math problem—3+4, for example. This student tells the class what type of movement is being used, then moves across the front of the room, or across the side of the room, where there is a little more space, going from left to right for positive integers, and the opposite way for the negative integers. When the movement is completed, the class guesses the answer.

While it is true that students are moving up or down a number scale rather than memorizing math facts, the activity should be a valuable introductory lesson that helps them see subtraction as an opposite of addition. Also it provides an element of drill while giving some pleasant interaction. ■

## Using Drama to Teach Physical and Chemical Energy: A Science Lesson for Grade Three

### Objectives

- To learn a definition for energy
- To learn the law of conservation of energy
- To learn a definition for physical energy, chemical energy, potential energy, and kinetic energy
- To associate an image with each of the above concepts
- To learn through a questioning and discovery method

Supplies:

| | |
|---|---|
| vinegar | baking soda |
| flashlight | pool balls |

wizard costume (a hat, cape, and/or magic wand)

wizard book (The contents of the book are described in the lesson. The cover of the book should be large and fanciful.)

### Introduction

**1.** You may want to introduce the class to a control device, such as a tam-

bourine or some signal that you will use to get their attention by saying, "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. Therefore, 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, and when I hit the tambourine, freeze. . . . Now stand beside your desk. Try it with your whole body. Don't begin until I say *begin*. Begin. . . ." At the conclusion of all this wiggling, remind the class again of the purpose of the exercise.

**2.** Introduce the class to the topic of energy. Say, "Can anyone tell me what you think of when we say *energy*? What do you feel like when you don't have any energy? Show me while you sit in your desk." (Use the format shown above—a signal to begin, the tambourine to conclude the exercise, etc.) "How would I know when you have lots of energy? Can you show me while still seated in your desk?" (Again, use a signal to define the limits of the activity.) "Does anyone ever say you have too much energy?"

**Physical Energy**

1. Ask four students what they think energy is. Explore their ideas, and then explain that, in this lesson, we will use the scientific definition of energy and say that energy is the ability to do work. Let the class join you in showing various uses of energy by moving a pencil, moving one's own hand, and so forth.

2. *The Law of Conservation of Energy.* Continue by asking, "How do we get energy to move our hands or to move the pencil? Where does energy come from?" After discussing their ideas, say, "Let's try a demonstration to see where energy comes from. I need two volunteers, one who will be the Energy Wizard, and one who can act very tired. Supply the wizard with an appropriate costume and a large fanciful wizard's book. You may also have a very brief induction ceremony, saying something like, "I now pronounce you, Jane, to be Energy Wizard of grade three!" and placing the wizard on a platform or stool. Then explain to Jane that she will make various pronouncements when you request them, and that the Energy Wizard is never wrong. (The pronouncements should be in order in her book, and each pronouncement should be on a separate page titled "Pronouncement Number One," "Pronouncement Number Two," etc.) Ask the other student, whom we will call Jack, to lie on the floor and act very tired.

While Jack is lying there, ask the wizard to make her first pronouncement:

*Pronouncement Number One*
*Energy comes in two forms, physical energy and chemical energy.*

Have the class repeat the two forms, and then ask, "Do you understand what the wizard is saying? Ah! Then I must show you. The wizard says there are two kinds of energy, physical energy and chemical energy. For now, let's look at just one of those kinds of energy, physical energy. We are going to give Jack physical energy." Try to lift him up, reminding Jack that he has no energy of his own. When you have shown that Jack is too heavy, ask for a volunteer, and then, with a little cooperation from Jack, bring him to a standing position.

Ask, "Have we given Jack energy?" (He doesn't look as if he has energy, since he is just standing there, so the class will probably say no.) "Wizard, what would you say? Read your second pronouncement."

*Pronouncement Number Two*
*Energy is never lost. If you used energy to lift Jack up, it had to go somewhere. Your energy turned into another kind of energy.*

Begin thinking aloud. "Hmm. The wizard is never wrong. But she doesn't tell us much. Where could the energy have gone?" (You may need to explain this problem.) Discuss what may have happened to the energy that was used to lift Jack, and deal with answers as necessary.

Then turn to Jack. "Jack, I wonder if you could help us. Don't do anything until I say *begin*, however. If I asked you to crumple to the floor without hurting yourself, do you think you could do so? Do that for us, please. Begin. Did Jack do something? Did he do work? Where did he get the energy to do the work?" Discuss possible answers.

Then return to the wizard. "Wizard, what do you think? Did we give him energy? He didn't look as if he had energy. He was just standing there. Do you have another pronouncement?

*Pronouncement Number Three*
*You gave him potential physical energy.*

Explain this concept to the class —potential energy is stored energy. Let the class suggest other ways of storing energy in Jack. They may decide to raise his arm, for example, and after he has kept the energy stored for a moment, he could let the stored energy be used by dropping the arm.

Review the concept of potential energy, and then ask, "When Jack is falling to the ground or letting his arm drop, is the energy we gave him being stored or is it being used up? Could we call the energy he has, when he is dropping, potential energy?" After a discussion ask the wizard to help by giving another pronouncement.

*Pronouncement Number Four*
*His energy has been changed. The other kind of physical energy is kinetic energy.*

Help the class understand the concept. Formulate a definition of *kinetic* together. When the definition is complete, ask the wizard, "Is there anything else you would like to tell us, Wizard?" Information in her book should tell her that the answer is no. Thank Jack and Jane, and allow them to return to their seats.

Review the difference between potential and kinetic energy by having the class suggest ways to give potential and kinetic energy to other things in the room—pencils, books, two pool balls (when one hits the other, the first ball stops and other moves).

Review the terms—*energy, physical energy, potential energy, kinetic energy.* ■


## Chemical Energy

Begin this lesson by announcing, "I want to show you something. The wizard and Jack have shown us a lot of things about energy, but I have been playing with some things at my house, and I think I still have one question about energy. Let me show you what I did."

Put vinegar in a pop bottle, add some baking soda, and cap the bottle with a balloon. The balloon will inflate. Ask the class where the energy to inflate the balloon may have come from. Discuss any relationship between the balloon's inflation and concepts from the previous lesson—physical energy, potential energy, and kinetic energy.

Explain, "There is one other kind of energy. It is called chemical energy. It's harder to see because it involves tiny, tiny atoms—atoms so tiny that we cannot see them. The vinegar and the soda had chemical energy. It's hard to see how chemical energy works because the atoms that use this energy are so small, but we can explain how it works by acting it out. I need four volunteers to act out a little play that shows how chemical energy works. (Since the exercise involves a good deal of physical interaction, choose students who are somewhat friendly to each other.)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cast: | atom #1 | atom #4 |
| | atom #2 | energy |
| | atom #3 | energy |

Introduce the activity by saying, "Some atoms are together, but they don't like to be together. They would rather be with some other atom. Let's suppose these two atoms—#1 and #2—don't like to be together. They would rather be on their own, or with atoms #3 and #4. What would it take to keep atoms #1 and #2 together?" (Energy) "Let's see if our two energy persons can show us what it takes to keep these two atoms together. Does anyone have a suggestion of how to show this?"

Discuss alternatives. You may find a better answer, but my suggestion is to have the "energy" characters pressing the two "atoms" together. When atoms #1 and #2 are held together, ask, "What would happen if the energy let go? Where do you think the atoms would go?" (To their friends or off on their own) What would happen to the energy that was holding them together? Remember the wizard's words—energy is never lost." (You may need to take time to discuss this.) "It becomes free to do other work."

Relate this to what happened in the vinegar demonstration. Though this is a rather simplified explanation, it may be sufficient at this point to say that the atoms joined new friends, and the energy that was released helped do the work of inflating the balloon.

Review the various types of energy again, relating this knowledge with things in students' everyday world. Find more examples of potential chemical energy being changed to other forms of energy. A flashlight has batteries that store chemical energy. When the atoms in the battery find new partners, what happens to the energy that was holding them together? A candle also has stored chemical energy. When the candle burns, what is happening to the atoms? What is happening to the energy? You may find more examples, and the class may have suggestions as well. **CEJ**

—by H. K. ZOEKLICHT

# "Hi-Tech Teaching"

"She's done it again!" complained biology teacher Steve Vander Prikkel as he systematically nibbled at the edges of a raspberry jelly roll. In the matter of eating pastries, Steve was a nibbler, in sharp contrast to Bible teacher John Vroom, who was more a snapper, able to consume a whole pastry in two decisive snaps of his cavernous mouth.

"Done what?" queried Ren "Rabbit" Abbot as he peered across the rim of the brown-encrusted mug, which contained his morning draft of decaffeinated coffee. "Who's done what?"

"She has," responded Vander Prikkel, glancing darkly across the room at Principal Esther Carpenter, who was bent over the pastry table on the far side of the faculty room. "Carpenter's made another one of her inspired, unilateral decisions for the benefit of us all," he said. The biology teacher nibbled determinedly on his jelly roll. "Did you see the sign over the photocopier this morning?" he asked the coach.

"What, what?" repeated a smiling Coach Abbot, obviously enjoying his colleague's discomfiture. "What does it say?"

"It says that, effective today," intoned Vander Prikkel, "the use of our photocopier is limited to the hours between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. That's what it says. And no weekends either." Vander Prikkel studied Abbot's face to see his response.

Abbot now became serious. "You're kidding," he said deliberately. "You've got to be kidding. I do a lot of my copying when I get here in the morning at 7:30." His voice rose as he spoke. "That's a crazy idea," he added.

"That's what I think," said Vander Prikkel. And I do a lot of work here on Saturday mornings. I do a lot of duplicating then. What's eating her, anyway?" He shook his head in disbelief as he glanced across the room at the principal, who was chatting pleasantly with Susan Katje, school librarian.

"I knew things like that would happen with a woman principal," said Ren "Rabbit" Abbot, *sotto voce*. "She just doesn't know how to handle authority. Sort of a schoolmarm complex, if you know what I mean."

"Well, I don't know about that," demurred Vander Prikkel. "I think a man could make a dumb decision like that, too." Then he asked, "What do you suppose is behind a rule like that?"

At this moment science teacher Matt De Wit joined the clandestine duo. "Talking about that stupid new rule?" he asked. "I know why she did that. She's got her head up about a couple of things. In the first place, she says we use too much paper. I guess we've already used as much this year as we did all last year." He paused to blow his nose with a loud, reverberating snort. "And then I guess there was a big repair bill. Remember when the copier went out of whack for a few days? A few weeks ago on a Saturday somebody must have tried to fix a jam with a paper clip and left the clip in there. It must have scratched the drum or something." Matt blew his nose once more. "Anyway, that's probably why she did it." He shrugged his shoulders.

All three men were silent for a minute. Then Vander Prikkel offered an opinion. "That doesn't make any sense, if you ask me," he said. The question is not how much we use the machine, but how wisely. You shouldn't just count sheets of paper." Then he said, "I should think a good principal would first inquire about how the new policy will affect our work, wouldn't you? And how come she doesn't bring up such things at our faculty meetings?"

"I don't know," grumbled Abbot. "She's getting more and more arbitrary. It doesn't help the morale of the faculty if we can't discuss these things and then maybe come up with a solution." He shook his head and slowly repeated, "I don't know." Then he added, "I guess that tells you what our principal thinks about our working after school and on weekends."

It was, of course, morning break time at Omni Christian High School. The weather outdoors was cold, dark, and damp at 10:07 on this Friday morning late in February. But chapel had featured some enthusiastic group singing, and now it was a pleasure for teachers and staff to have a few minutes of fellowship, aided by a fresh pot of coffee, even if it was decaffeinated.

On the far side of the faculty lounge Principal Esther Carpenter beamed contentedly at the relaxed and dedicated faculty of this fine Christian high school. Somehow, they always seemed happier on Friday. She stepped slowly across the room to where her friend, the Reverend Ralph Broekhoest, teacher of religion and English, was chatting with several colleagues.

"Say, Ralph," inquired the principal. "I've got a question for you. How come I see all the darkened classrooms around here on Friday morning? I noticed that you had your shades drawn this morning. What's up?"

"Maybe that's because a lot of teachers are using VCR's lately," interrupted young Jack Ezel, government teacher. He grinned and added, "VCR's seem to work better on Fridays."

Now the Reverend Broekhoest responded to his principal's question. "Well, I dunno," he said hesitantly. He blushed slightly as he glanced at Esther Carpenter. "Now that you mention it," he continued, "I happen to be showing a very good video myself this morning—to my English class. Just something to sort of stimulate their thinking—for a paper, you know."

"What one are you showing?" inquired Joy de Vivre, history teacher. What kind of video can you show to a composition class?" She studiously clipped the fingernails on her left hand as she talked. "Well, uh, it's that Civil War thing, you know, the one that was on PBS a few months go. Very good, really. And, uh, I think the kids are really enjoying it and getting a lot of good ideas. I think I'll get some good papers." He studied his coffee cup.

"But, Ralph," said the history teacher impishly. "That series has six or seven parts, and each one lasts an hour. How many are you watching?"

The minister-turned-English-teacher flushed slightly as he answered softly, "All of them." Broekhoest took a somewhat noisy sip of his coffee. Then he said feebly, "It's important that they see the whole thing. Unity, you know."

"Where did you rent it?" came from the principal.

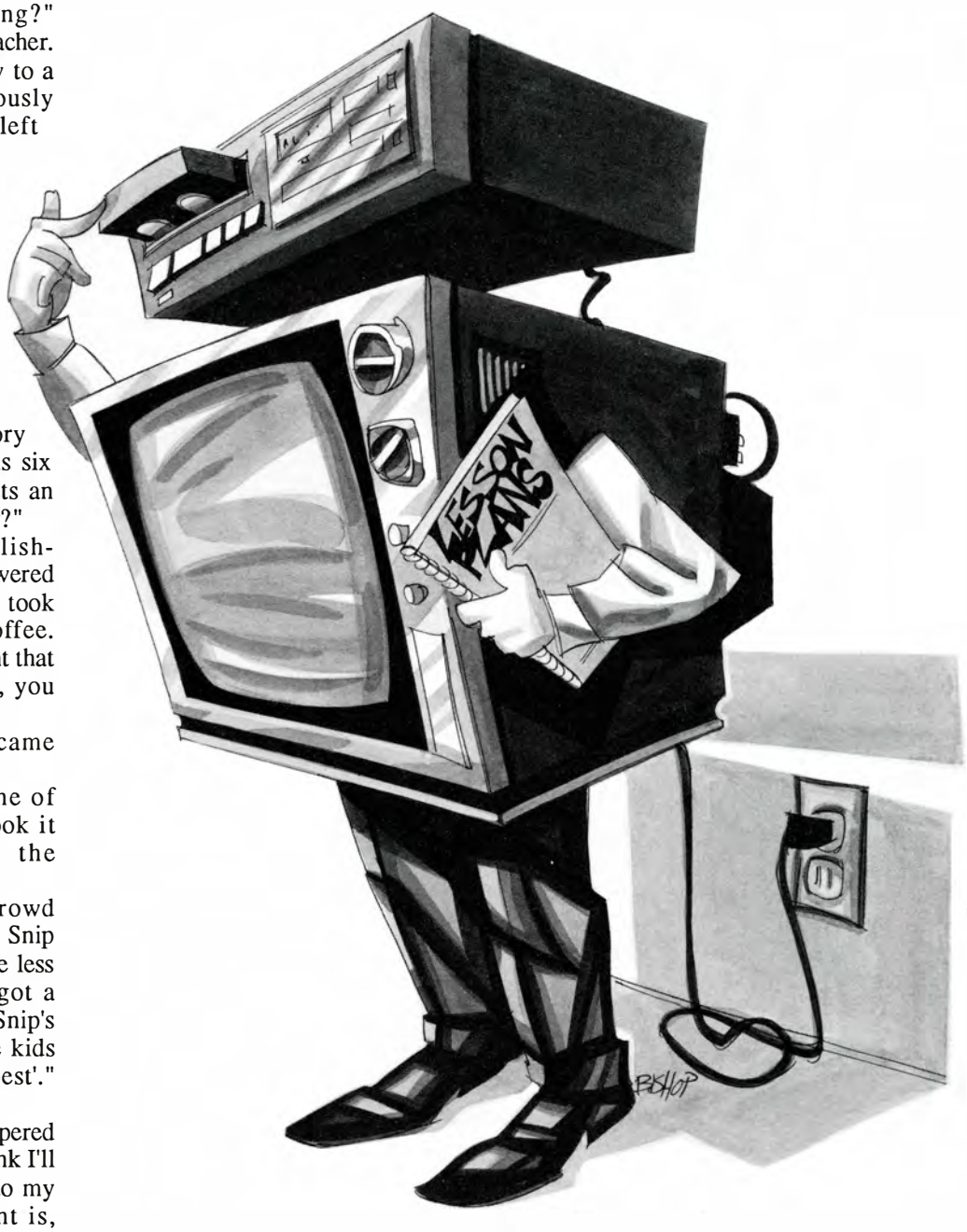
"Well, we, uh, we have one of those machines at home. We took it right from the television," the Reverend Broekhoest answered.

Over on the edge of the crowd Susan Katje leaned over to Jennie Snip and said softly, "Ralph's been here less than a year, and already he's got a nickname." Then, in response to Snip's inquisitive look she added, "The kids call him 'Plan-in-a-can Broekhoest'." She smiled guiltily at her humor.

"Hey, I've got an idea," whispered Jack Ezel to Katje and Snip. "I think I'll show some World Series videos to my government class. Government is, when you think about it, a lot like a baseball game. They throw a lot of curves," he grinned.

Snip glanced around warily and snapped, "I think I'd rather have Broekhoest show a Civil War film than to try to teach English. The kids tell me that he moralizes all the time. You know, tries to get a moral out of everything. He preaches to the kids. Even in writing class."

"I know, I know," said Susan Katje. "But I think we're stuck with him." She shook her head in dismay as she walked toward the door, giving Steve Vander Prikkel a jab as she walked past him. "No use coming in to work tomorrow morning, Steve. Remember, the copier is off limits on Saturday," she said for all to hear as she left the room.




The clock ticked to 10:25 a.m. Esther Carpenter looked approvingly at her faculty as they prepared to resume their work for the day. She reflected briefly on how rich God had blessed her with an appointment as principal of Omni Christian High School. Truly, her lines had fallen in pleasant places. She patted Ralph Broekhoest gently on the shoulder as she hurried toward her office to keep an appointment with a Mrs. Strawberry, the mother of the only black student at Omni. **CEJ**

—by STEFAN ULSTEIN

# Outrageous! I Shall Write the Times!

The op/ed and letters pages of your local newspaper are two of the treasures of a democratic society. They also provide a wonderful educational opportunity. Op/ed means opposite the editorial, a term that originated back in the early days of newspapers when the editors' views were on the left page and the readers' were opposite, on the right.

The power of a well-written letter to the editor, or op/ed piece, can be enormous in shaping public opinion, perhaps because of the personal nature of the genre. A news article is written by a professional, but a letter or op/ed piece is written by someone like us, a fellow citizen.

Democratic societies depend on vigorous, ongoing public debate for their vibrancy. Issues and ethics are scrutinized and refined by close examination. Traditionally this has occurred in newspapers. Newspapers, unlike television, are a medium of record. If a newspaper prints something untrue, the offending item stays there in black and white, demanding rebuttal. Shoddy thinking and weak logic are left hanging, like dirty laundry. A day, a week, a month later, a journalist's *faux pas* remains visible.

Television, from which most citizens get most or all of their news, jumps frenetically from image to image in its quest for ratings. Television allows the most outrageous untruths to pass unexamined. No wonder television is the medium of choice for political candidates. In television it is the image that matters. Viewers can call the station and log in their complaints, but little or no time is given for articulate rebuttal. Many scholars fear that the passive nature of television is responsible for the continuing slide in voter turnout.

If Christian students are to influence the media, they can best start with the medium that is most open to influence. Newspapers are still a surprisingly accessible two-way medium. Reading the op/ed page and letters section of the average metro newspaper takes close to the twenty-two minutes allotted for a half-hour television news show. Newspapers encourage feedback and debate.

Getting published on the letters or op/ed page, even for students, is surprisingly easy. Editors are always looking for an interesting, well-written letter or opinion piece.

"I like to get op/ed pieces from students," says Karl Thunemann, editorial page editor of the *Eastside Journal-American* in Bellevue, Washington. "The main thing they need to do, though, is to learn to write for an audience. We don't usually print themes or essays."

Karen Rathe, letters editor of the *Seattle Times*, agrees. "If you have no journalistic training, I suggest you cut out editorials you like and study the lead paragraphs. Learn to give your writing that extra punch so that your message gets read."

Both Thunemann and Rathe stress the need for letters and op/ed pieces with a local angle. "I get dozens of editorials over the wire from world-renowned experts," says Rathe, "so a locally written piece on the Middle East or the budget probably won't get printed unless the writer has some impressive credentials."

Thunemann says he always looks for a news peg. The best pieces, he says, are those that deal with issues in the public arena, or that are on the verge of being there. "The op/ed section is really an opportunity for readers to respond to what they read in the paper, not just an open forum for any old idea," he stresses. "But we really do feel that, since we print our opinions, the readers should be able to print their opposing views."

"There are lots of interesting, important local stories that don't generate much interest," laments Rathe. "Maybe people don't think they're sexy enough. But if someone has a good angle, we'll be glad to print their piece."

Both Rathe and Thunemann suggest that writers call the paper if they're not sure about their angle. He even has an eight-point guideline that he will fax or mail to aspiring writers. "If a writer has something important to say but is stuck on how to say it, I don't mind a phone call asking for help," Thunemann says.

Both editors stress the need to stay within length guidelines, usually about 600 words for an op/ed piece and a quarter of that for letters. "Use everyday language," says Thunemann. "Tell your story as if you were explaining your idea to your next-door neighbor. State the problem, bluntly if necessary, and propose a solution."

Op/ed and letter writers can be strong advocates, but they should not be combative. It's best to target issues and arguments, not personalities. Nothing is more offensive than a mean-spirited personal attack, even if the victim deserves it. Students should see themselves as participating in a civilized debate in which all viewpoints have a right to be heard—theirs and everyone else's. If writers wish to share a Christian perspective, they must remember that not all readers begin


Sean Sandberg and Phil Killham draft a letter to the editor.

with assumptions like the truth of the Bible and the sovereignty of God. These truths must be established through persuasion rather than intimidation.

Teaching students to write for their local newspapers will reinforce much of what they learn in English classes. Editors want clearly written manuscripts that are typed and double-spaced, with margins all the way around and page numbers on every page. But more than that, students will learn that they need not be passive, tuned-out observers of the news media.

My own experience with student writing has been instructive. If an editor suspects that students are writing for a grade in class, he or she may not want to print the piece. I sometimes have the entire class write a letter, but I make mailing it optional and gradeless. I also have students refrain from saying they are students. If a letter or op/ed piece has merit, let it be printed on the basis of that merit.

If letter and op/ed writing is to be a truly educational experience, it should not be done as propaganda or public relations for the school. The point is to teach students to respond honestly to the public debate. This is part of their educational and spiritual growth, and should be seen as a work in progress. Once, a student of mine won an American Civil Liberties Union essay contest. His well-crafted piece denouncing school censorship was published in *The Journal-American* along with his picture and a bio-note identifying him as a student at our school. Some of our school board members were furious with me, feeling that his essay reflected badly on the school's mission. While the ACLU essay did not reflect my own opinion on the subject, it did reflect my student's view at that time. I supported his right to write it, and I congratulated him on winning the contest.

What I like about teaching letter and op/ed writing is that students are not writing to get a grade or to please the teacher; they are writing to communicate and to join the public debate. But teachers would be well-advised to consider the administrative and parent climate of their schools before opening the Pandora's box of public writing. I stopped teaching it for a couple of years as a result of board pressure, and I resumed only when those brothers had been replaced by men and women more sympathetic to the goals of the program.

The most rewarding aspect of teaching students to write for the newspaper is that sometimes they get upset about something and write completely on their own accord. I'll never forget the time a young woman came storming into my room one lunch period, furious about the number of deer and raccoons killed by speeders near her home. She was a junior who struggled with English, but she booted up my computer and announced, "This is outrageous. I'm going to write the *Journal-American*!" Her impassioned, persuasive letter was printed two days later and generated a great deal of response. It tied in with news stories about the destruction of wildlife habitat, the encroachment of housing developments in virgin forests, and the county's lagging efforts to manage traffic in newly developed areas. "There!" she said.

That student, and our entire class, learned first hand the power of a well-written letter.

**Other Letter-Writing Motivators**

Sensing that many of my students knew little or nothing about the military buildup in the Persian Gulf, I decided to give the story a personal spin. I gave them a *New York Times* article about a Marine platoon on the front lines in Saudi Arabia. They wrote an abstract of the article, and then I asked them if they'd like to write to the Marines. Some of them did. The local Marine recruiter gave me the address, and I mailed the letters, at school expense. A few weeks later my students got replies. They now had friends in the Gulf, and the news took on a new importance. As they continued to write back and forth, they began to take a greater interest in the military and political situation.

When we read last year that some Soviet Christians were celebrating their first openly observed Christmas, we wrote Christmas cards. We have also written to imprisoned Christians in repressive countries.

Reading about people in the news can be just another exercise to teenagers whose lives are cluttered with homework, sports, and work. Writing letters to real people and getting letters of reply can make the news come alive.

**CEJ**

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—by ROBERT W. BRUINSMA

# fŏn' iks— Not the Reading Cure-all

This article, the second of a series, is excerpted from *Language Arts in Christian Schools*, recently published by Christian Schools International. Used with permission.

According to the Dutchess in *Alice in Wonderland*, "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves." Written English is an alphabetic code: the written symbols (letters) are meant to represent speech sounds. This statement seems to imply that teaching reading is largely teaching symbol-to-sound correspondences of the language, and that teaching spelling is teaching sound-to-symbol correspondences. Then, in reading, a person need only to sound out the symbols from left to right until a word is sounded out, match the sounded word to his or her mental store of known words to achieve meaning, and then move on to the next word. Doing this rapidly enough should result in fairly fluent reading.

Many skills-centered approaches to the teaching of reading take just such an approach. If modern written English were perfectly alphabetic or even predominantly alphabetic, such pedagogical practices might be reasonable. However, the phoneme-grapheme (sound-symbol) correspondence of modern English is far from being one-to-one. To begin with, there are only twenty-six letters to represent forty-four sounds; many of the letters have to represent more than one sound. The letter *c*, for example, can represent three sounds: */k/* as in *cake*, */s/* as in *city*, */ch/* as in *chicken* or no sound at all as in *science*. The */ch/* example points to the fact that many single phonemes of English are represented by letter combinations of two or more letters (sometimes referred to as spelling patterns or phonograms).

The *ough* phonogram, for example, stands for six distinct phonemes, depending on the rest of the word (*cough, bough, through, though, rough, thought*). There are at least seventy distinct spelling patterns that represent the 443 phonemes of English, but, in addition, there are many homographs in which the spelling patterns are pronounced differently depending on context (for example, *read, lead, wind, wound*). There are also homophones, words that have similar pronunciations but different spellings (for example, *so, sew, sow*). Other problems also exist. How, for example, does one distinguish whether *th* should be considered a single unit as in *father*, or two separate letters as in *fathead*? And what rules are there to distinguish the separate functions of *ph* in *elephant, haphazard*, or *shepherd*, or *sh* in *bishop* and *mishap*?

**Using phonics rules, pronunciation is correct only about twenty-five percent of the time.**

Smith (1985) cites research showing that a body of 20,000 common English words required over 300 different spelling-to-sound correspondences to account for their pronunciations. In fact, to account for the spelling-to-sound correspondences of 6,000 of the most common words in English requires about 166 rules and forty-five exceptions, the exceptions accounting for 600 of the most common words in English, words such as *the, was*, and *of*. At best, correspondence rules have about a 75 percent chance of being correct if there is but one sound in the word. But since the average word has about four sounds in it, the error rate is considerably higher; using phonics rules, pronunciation is correct only about 25 percent of the time.

Another problem in over-relying on phonics to identify words is that a reader often has to read a word from right to left in order to discover how the left-to-right sequencing should sound. Try this exercise: What is the sound represented by *h*? By *ho*? By *hon*? By *hone*? By *honest*? Notice how the sound value of *h* and *o* changes as letters are added until, in the case of *h*, its sound value disappears, and we speak of the *h* in *honest* as being "silent." Children are usually taught to sound out words from left to right, yet for many words in English it is not possible to know how to sound the beginning of the word until recognizing the end. Think, for example, of the "silent *e* rule" for changing the vowel sound from short

to long in words (for example, changing *hop* to *hope*). Not only must a reader see the *e* at the right end of the word to know how to "sound out" the vowel to its left, but this "rule" doesn't hold for words like *axe, love, have*, or *dove* (the noun—though it holds for the verb *dove*). And what about *does*? Isn't there a phonics rule that says, "When two vowels go walking, the first does the talking and says its own name"? Not only is the rule relevant in about only 50 percent of the English words that contain a vowel digraph, but the rule is violated in its very formulation. For "The first does the talking" suggests that *does*, with its *oe* vowel digraph, should be sounded with a long *o* sound as in *does*, referring to a number of female deer.

There is no denying that phonics is an incredibly complex system. Then what accounts for its tremendous popularity as a word recognition technique? Why do some experts (for example, Flesch 1955, 1981) claim, in fact, that illiteracy is primarily the fault of teachers who don't teach phonics? The reason is that people who can read (including teachers) believe that they do so by "sounding out" words, when in actual fact, phonics works only if one knows what the word is likely to be in the first place. A reader coming to the word *hotel* does not sound it out from left-to-right because that would demand deciding which of the ten possible pronunciations of *ho* to begin with (*ho* as in *hot, hope, hook, hoot, house, hoist, horse, horizon, honey, hour*, or *honest*). It does not, in fact, occur to readers to think of all of these possibilities because they already know how the word is pronounced in the first place. "Therefore," says Frank Smith, "phonics always looks obvious to people who can read" (1985 C. 54). The students who do best on phonics exercises are inevitably those who are the best readers; knowing how to read helps us know phonics rather than vice versa. Children whose concept of reading is primarily one of "sounding out" letters and words from left-to-right are often the painfully slow, word-by-word readers. When one has to "sound out" most of the words, the reading process becomes so slow and labored that fluency suffers; and when fluency suffers, meaning suffers. For the meaning of text lies not only, or even primarily, in individual words, but in cohesive, connected phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.

**Phonics works only if one knows what the word is likely to be in the first place.**

Does the foregoing suggest that there is absolutely no benefit to teaching children phonics to help them learn to read? The answer is, It depends. It depends on what we mean by both the content and process of teaching phonics. If teaching phonics means having children memorize phonics "rules" that they then consciously apply in reading when they come to unknown words, the answer is that there is virtually no benefit to such teaching. If teaching phonics means teaching children a large number of symbol-sound correspondences and then having children try to blend these sounds together as they read words from left-to-right, the answer is that there is also little benefit to such teaching. If teaching phonics means frequently drawing children's attention to the symbol-sound characteristics of letters and groups of letters in words while reading stories and poems to and with the children, the answer is that there is great benefit to such teaching. Symbol-sound correspondences are one aspect of reading; not a very systematic or infallible aspect, but one that shouldn't be ignored. If a child comes to the word *donkey* in a story, one way to know that it is not *horse* or *mule* is to know the most usual sound values of *d, h*, and *m*.

The point is that phonics is a limited tool that serves an *initial* purpose in helping children learn to read. The emphasis is on the word *initial* because phonics is a means to an end. It is an aid to reading that should be dispensed with as soon as possible. All good readers recognize words and phrases as wholes—fluent reading absolutely depends on this. So children should be encouraged to dispense with mediated word recognition strategies as soon as possible and go directly from print to meaning.

One of the most sensible approaches of the whole matter of teaching word recognition that I know of is Johnson and Pearson's *Teaching Reading Vocabulary*. In addition to dealing with both the content and method of phonics instruction, this book deals intelligently with other word identification processes such as structural analysis, use of context clues, and the development of sight and meaning vocabularies. Teachers will find in this volume sensible theory and lots of practical pedagogical help in teaching a broad range of word identification and, more importantly, word comprehension skills.

What remains to be said about word recognition skills is this: the best word recognition skills-teaching and learning is the practice of reading itself. We learn to read by reading just as we learn to talk by talking, learn to skate by skating, and learn to swim by swimming. It is not inherently more difficult to get children to recognize words and the differences among them than to recognize the differences among animals, people, stamps, sailing ships and sealing wax, cabbages and kings. What is required is lots of exposure to all of these different things in meaningful contexts. The challenge for primary teachers is to get the process started and for intermediate and junior high teachers to keep the process going. **CEJ**

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—by TRENT DE JONG

# Greek City-States:

## A Social Studies Unit for Upper Elementary Students

Peer teaching and cooperative group learning make for lively discussions and serious planning as students attempt to bring to life the Greek city-states.

The key concept is that city-states were different from one another. The two most important city-states, Athens and Sparta, provide an excellent opportunity for students to compare and contrast life in each place. Students can also contrast the pagan religious influence with that of a Christian worldview and can note city-states that were later affected by the missionary efforts of the early Christian church.

Rather than accumulating a great deal of detailed information, students come away from this study with impressions of each city-state as a societal unit.

### METHOD

1. Divide the class into two groups, Athens and Sparta. If you are teaching two classes, let one class be Athens and the other class be Sparta, rather than dividing each class.

2. List topics to be explored in the study of each city-state. Suggestions are literature, drama, art, architecture, philosophy, scholarship, religion, Olympic games, daily life, societal values, social structure, and government.

3. Explain the topics and form study groups. Group sizes may vary from two to seven. Guide the students in choosing a topic that is suited to their gifts, strengths, and interests.

4. Each group researches the topic chosen. Assist the students in their research by providing summaries of information that may be difficult for them to use because of high academic level. Students can also use textbooks, encyclopedias, fiction, and non-fiction.

5. Each group prepares a presentation for the class in order to teach the class what the group has learned. The presentation may be a speech, posters, diagrams, story-telling, pictures, skits, or murals. For example, the group researching government might role play a Spartan voting session in which factions are seeking to shout one another down. The literature group could present the well-rehearsed reading of a story. Spartan society could be represented with a diagram of the hierarchy. Architecture could be illustrated with a large mural. Students may wish to make use of visuals prepared by another group as part of a skit or to illustrate a speech.

### EXAMPLES

Topic: Daily Life in Athens
Presentation: Several skits
Group size: 5-7
Information summary:

Any presentation of daily life in Athens should include the Agora, or Market Square. Shops and stands of every description filled the square. Most of the people at the market were men who were talking, listening, and arguing. Between discussions they did some shopping.

Most men worked as farmers, and some as craftsmen. They did not have much interest in making money or buying things. The most important thing was to have time to discuss politics and ideas as well as to gossip with others. Slaves often had to do the work so masters had time for discussion. Women were under the total control of their husbands. Their job was to prepare meals and run the household. They were rarely allowed out, and when guests were over, the women ate separately and were expected to stay out of sight. Young girls were taught by their mothers or slaves, and at age fifteen they got married to the man of their father's choice.

Boys, on the other hand, went to school from age seven to eighteen. Students learned grammar, music, and rhetoric—the art of public speaking. They studied the works of Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Sports and music were also taught. A great deal of debate occurred over questions in art, politics, and philosophy.

At age eighteen boys began a two-year term as full-time soldiers. They learned how to defend the city they loved. They then became full citizens and members of the assembly. Men could be called upon to fight in the wars of Athens until the age of sixty.

Topic: Way of Life in Sparta
Presentation: Several skits
Group size: 5-7
Information summary:

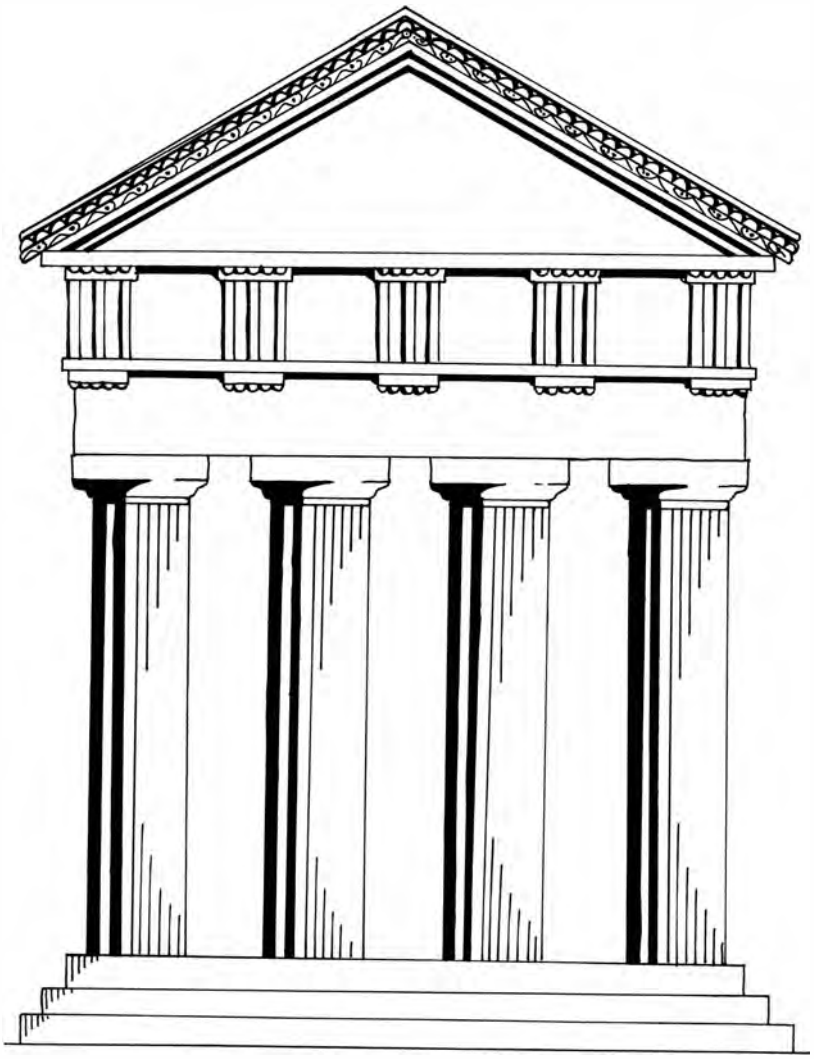
Sparta was a city that had no walls so that, when attacked, the people would fight harder. Its streets were not lit at night, and the soldiers, trained to adjust to darkness, had the advantage over enemies in night fighting. In order for the city to develop strong military strength, very little manufacturing or trade occurred, and even less music or art.

The military state governed the lives of its citizens from birth to death. Infants were brought to the *ephors* (rulers). If a child was judged to be sick or weak, the father abandoned it on the mountainside. At age seven boys were taken from their homes to live in barracks. They were provided with little food, no shoes, and few clothes, even in winter. This taught them to fend for themselves. They had to steal to survive and were honored if they got away with it, but were beaten severely if caught. In these years they were taught to fight, to accept discipline, and to endure hardship.

They were also taught reading and writing, but discussion was discouraged. Students were to answer the teacher's questions in as few words as possible. Today, a person who gives answers very briefly is called "laconic," from Laconia, the region around Sparta. At age twenty men married but had to live in the barracks until thirty, when they became citizens. At this age the state provided them with a small farm. The food in Sparta was terrible. Upon tasting it one visitor supposedly said, "Now I understand why Spartans do not fear death."

Women also learned strict discipline and methods of fighting. They had to show absolute obedience to their fathers and later to their husbands. They were very tough-minded. Once, as Spartan soldiers were leaving for battle, a group of women yelled out, "Come back with your shield, or on it!"

The Spartans were a great military force. They lived by the rule "Never retreat in battle, however great the odds, but always stand firm, and conquer or die."



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The group of students presenting skits about life in Athens use a backdrop prepared by the "architecture" group. Since the Spartans didn't develop notable architecture, the Spartan skit is performed with a background of abstract design, which depicts the severity and orderliness of Spartan life. **CEJ**

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—by GLORIA GORIS STRONKS

# A Different Way of Educating

**"When you are on the bus, or in the lunch room, or at a party with your classmates, what language do you usually speak?" The college students and I were interviewing three high school students in what is one of nine unique schools. The students looked at each other in bewilderment for a moment, obviously trying to remember which languages they tended to use most frequently. Finally one boy said, "Well, I think it depends on which person in the group starts to speak. We all usually tend to flow in the same language. Unless, of course, there are younger students in the group and they don't appear to understand so well. When that happens we switch to their language."**

Although from the outside the school looks like many other large, modern schools, it is one of a small group of schools that are different in purpose and in structure from any other schools in the world. These schools are called, "European Schools" and the European School we were visiting is in The Netherlands in the town of Bergen, along the North Sea coast.

Some years ago the Common Market countries recognized a need for education suitable for the children of parents who work outside of their own land. The companies for which these people worked asked them to relocate to other Common Market countries, and the parents did so willingly but were left wondering what kind of schooling would be available for their children. Would it be better for them to attend an International School, established by United States corporations and reflecting U.S. curriculum and values? Or would it be better to place them in a local school where they had to learn the language of yet another country before they could actively participate in the academic and social life of the school? There were times when the parents moved rather frequently, and they recognized the difficulties many such moves imposed on their children's education. The solution to the problem appeared to be the establishment of a network of schools supported by the governments of the Common Market countries and responding to the educational needs unique to such a school community.

The first European School was established in Luxembourg in 1953 for the children of employees at the European Iron and Steel Community. There are now nine schools located in the following places: Luxembourg; Brussels and Mol, Belgium; Karlsruhe and Munich, Germany; Varese, Italy; and Bergen, The Netherlands.

Each school begins at the nursery school level and goes through grade twelve. After completing grade twelve, students take the examination for the European Baccalaureate, which is similar to the International Baccalaureate in that if they earn that degree they will qualify for entrance to any European university. When we were told that 90% of the students qualify for this degree, we immediately asked whether this is a select group of students who attend such schools. The answer was that there is no entrance screening, but that the parents care greatly about the education of their children.

Throughout the primary school there are as many as seven classes at each level, depending on the language needs of the population. For example, one first grade class is for children whose mother tongue is German, one is for Dutch children, one for Italian, one for French, one for Danish, one for English, and one for Greek children. The content of the curriculum remains the same for each group of students, but the teachers have been educated in their own countries, and so the classroom climate and the instruction reflect

the educational beliefs of the country represented by that language group.

Although instruction is in the mother tongue, beginning with the first grade, each child must study one other language, choosing from English, French, or German. Since children of many different language backgrounds are learning English (for example) at the same time, all instruction in the English class is given in that language, even at the first grade level. Our visit took place in January, and we were very impressed with how skilled they already were with our language. In grade five, the child receives instruction in creative arts and physical education in this second language. In grade seven, instruction in history and geography are also done in this language. A third foreign language is compulsory in grades six through twelve, and a fourth language is an option after grade nine.

Children from all language backgrounds play together, ride the bus together, have lunch together, and participate in as many activities as possible. Because of the instruction and also because of the interaction with children speaking other languages, students who have received most of their education in one of these schools are often fluent in two languages besides their mother tongue. Fluency, to the high school boys we talked with, meant that they knew the language well enough so that they usually didn't really notice which language they were speaking. All three agreed that they could understand speakers of the other languages present in the school and could communicate rather well but weren't really fluent in more than three.

Although instruction in each of the classrooms reflects the educational philosophy of the teacher-training institutions the teachers represent, teachers freely exchange perspectives and ideas. Teachers' meetings and parent-teacher group meetings are usually conducted in the language of the host country, but the dialogue reflects the languages with which the participants are most comfortable.

Teachers for these schools are appointed by the education departments of each country, rather than by the school administrator. Each applicant must be fluent in at least two languages, and since these teachers have the highest salaries of teachers anywhere in the world, there is no dearth of applicants. The teachers readily agreed, however, that not one of them is as skilled in languages as their twelfth grade students. In fact, it is quite likely that very few adults are.

The relationship between the language or languages people speak and their view of the world is recognized by the writers of the schools' statement of purpose:

> Here, while all pupils will be taught their own countries' language, literature, and history by teachers from those countries, they will at the same time become accustomed from childhood to speak other languages also, and absorb the combined influences of the different cultures which together make up European civilization. Playing the same games, learning the same lessons, boys and girls of different speech and citizenship will come to know, to respect, and to live in harmony with one another. Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in the different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind Europeans, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their parents before them to bring into being a united and thriving Europe.

With the approach of the establishment of the European Community in 1992 and the expected increase in multinational commerce and communication, there is a strong possibility that these schools will increase in number. However, educational leaders in local Dutch, German, and French schools are saying that this type of education will probably become the wave of the future in their schools also.

I am very concerned that in the United States there is such a lack of concern for learning other languages and for coming to know other people of the world, both in the public schools and in the Christian schools. Albert Einstein once wrote that "modern education is competitive, nationalistic, and separative." We have lived with the assumption that if people want to do anything of importance in the world, they will do it in English. But our students are missing out on the opportunity to approach a wider world with more understanding and wisdom. The Canadian schools are protected to some extent by the fact that their students are required to study French.

We have always claimed that Christian education is good education. Could Einstein's accusation legitimately be made of your school? **CEJ**

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

—by BARBARA CARVILL

# Foreign Language Education

# A Christian Calling

Not long ago, the American Council on Education published a policy statement with the title "What We Can't Say Can Hurt Us" (1989). It contains an ardent plea addressed to the educational leaders in the nation to increase drastically the number of students with proficiency in a foreign language. The authors assert that the dismal state of foreign language education in most high schools and colleges threatens national security, the political leadership of the United States, and its place in the world market. We should all have the economic and political welfare of the nation at heart, they say, and, in the name of national self-interest, learn a foreign language well. It remains to be seen how successful the appeal to patriotism will be for improving foreign language instruction in the United States.

North American Christian educators as citizens of the U.S. or Canada and, at the same time, as members of a new humanity in Christ, have to ask the same question with regard to foreign language study: What or whom do we ultimately serve when we teach our students competency in foreign languages? What or whom do we hurt by falling short in that enterprise? What will we say to our students when they ask us why they should go through the long and arduous discipline of mastering a foreign language?

We train and prepare our students for being a blessing in Christ's name in the world of today and of tomorrow. Our world is made up of many nations and cultures and thousands of different languages.

The biblical story of God's self-disclosure in human history reveals that God wants, affirms, and blesses cultural diversity and, along with it, linguistic diversity. The outpouring of Christ's Spirit at Pentecost is, among other things, God's blessing on the diversity of tongues and the cancelling of the punishment of Babel. The Son of God came to save all nations, but he did not come to abolish cultural differences. God gave us the freedom to live out the good news in our particular culture, and he urges us to challenge and critique that culture in the light of the gospel.

Because of the multi-cultural, multi-lingual makeup of God's creation and because of the interdependence of all cultures and nations on our globe, every one of us, at some point in life, will host a representative of a foreign culture, or will be in a foreign country as a visitor. God wants us to take these two roles of host and stranger very seriously. He wants us to be gracious hosts to strangers in our land, and he wants us to be a blessing as a foreigner or stranger when we are abroad. I suggest that the aim and purpose of foreign language study in Christian schools is to prepare the students for these two life-callings.

As foreign language educators we have to give our students the sense that learning a foreign language is a great privilege. Through hard work they acquire the gift of a new tongue and, with it, a door to a foreign culture opens. We need to stress that to study a language is not a classroom game, but "real life," since students actually prepare themselves for meeting people who think and act and value things differently from the way we do. Not only will they become richer for it, but they will be changed in the learning process. For the first time they become conscious of their cultural identity, of what is typically American or Canadian, and of the nature of the English language. Only in the encounter with what is foreign do we find out what and who we are.

Many of us have given hospitality to foreigners. It is important to share with our students what makes such a visit so meaningful for us and why cross-cultural communication on a personal level is such a significant part of the Christian life.

What kind of talk goes on at such a visit? We like to find out how our guests react to our country and the North American way of life. Not all the things they say will be flattering. Sometimes we will feel that they do not understand our mentality, and we will need to explain a specific issue from our insider's perspective. They will make us think and talk about aspects of our country that we have not thought much about before. In the give-and-take of the conversation we will do a lot of cross-cultural comparisons and learn much about the life in the other country.

When our guests leave, we will feel animated and enriched. By giving them hospitality we will have been blessed. Our interest and concern for

the home country of the guests will have increased; so will our need to be better informed about our own culture.

We need contact with the stranger not only because we learn much about the multi-cultural makeup of God's world, but also because the stranger draws us out and forces us to look at ourselves with foreign eyes and challenges us to see things for which we have blind spots. That is one of the major reasons why God wants us to show hospitality to the stranger and alien.

Foreign language instruction prepares students for one day being visitors and guests in a country where that particular language is spoken. Our students go there both as foreigners and as Christians. The question is, How can they as Christians be a blessing in their contact with the natives of that culture? How can our students show that they care, that they love and respect these people out of the love of Christ within them?

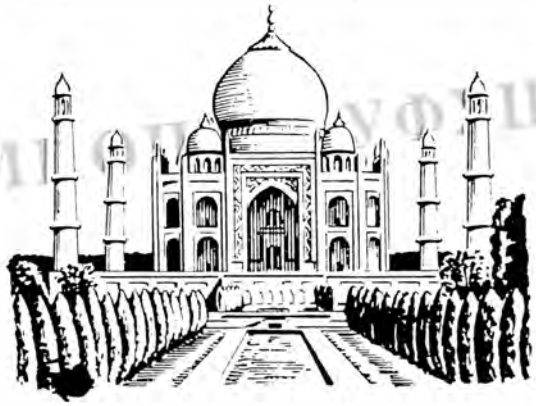
We foreign language teachers try to provide our students with an answer: Do your very best to learn the foreign language; learn how to be polite, to express your gratitude. Take pride in developing good pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. Enjoy acquiring a rich idiomatic vocabulary and fluency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learn as much as you can about the geography, the history, the arts, the everyday culture, the current problems, and conflicts of that nation. You will want to be well informed. In addition, you will want to be able to speak intelligently in the foreign language about your own country. We teachers will do our best in providing you with the necessary curriculum, activities, and practice for equipping you for this calling. The more you learn in class, the better will be your encounters with the natives of that culture. You will be able to ask good, informed questions. People will sense that you take loving interest in their lives and problems. They will appreciate your thoughtfulness and the fact that you do not fit the stereotype of the shallow tourist. Often people will open up and tell you their stories and share with you the joys and wounds of their lives. Encounters of this sort are deeply moving and meaningful; you learn much and give much to the other by being a patient, loving listener.

It is crucial in this context that we teachers provide a good model and share with our students our most meaningful encounters and experiences as strangers in the host country.

Finally, for us as well as for our students, the contact with Christian brothers and sisters in the foreign country is of special importance. To realize that the Christian faith is lived out quite differently from what we have grown up with and are used to can be unsettling.

Our task is to let go of our self-righteousness and the view that our way is the only right way to be a Christian. On the other hand, our students need to experience that the claims and promises of the gospel transcend any particular cultural expression. They will feel part of the great network of God's people around the globe, the Church universal. They will develop a Christian world consciousness and have at heart the joys, concerns, and sufferings of the people whose language they have studied.

God has called the new humanity in Christ to be a blessing for all nations. We foreign language teachers do our small share in preparing our students for that call. **CEJ**



*Barbara Carvill teaches in the foreign language department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

—by MINS REINSMA

# Hope for the Few

In the summer of 1989 my wife and I received an invitation from friends we had previously met in Nepal and Switzerland, to visit them at a Catholic convent in Tanzania, in east Africa. Although they are Lutherans, Reto and Anna Pfister had signed a contract with St. Mary's Convent—Anna as an English teacher and Teto as a farm manager.

The convent is located high in the mountains of northwest Tanzania at a place named Kifungilo, which means "windy hollow." A perilous hour's drive away is the nearest town, Lushoto, which, in turn, is a six-hour drive from the Kilimanjaro airport. In Tanzania distances are not measured in miles or kilometers but in driving hours. All roads in this country are bad, but some are unbelievably bad.

Upon entering the convent I was immediately struck by its European layout. The orderly and logical arrangement of the buildings and the neatness and cleanliness of the grounds reminded me of a small German village. The surrounding area of the campus, however, is all African.

About two-hundred native families in a dozen small villages have settled around the convent. They cultivate a plot of ground on which they raise crops for their own use and for the convent—generally to barter for clothing, soap, and kerosene. The natives are drawn to such convents for a variety of reasons: possible work, the availability of health care, and the school—a government school partly supported and cared for by the St. Mary's sisters.

The convent itself comprises eighteen excellently-constructed and well-maintained buildings. Cement blocks, made by hand on the premises from fine-sifted grit and imported cement, are the main building materials.

Because the primary purpose of this convent is education, many of the buildings are designed with that intent. There are four-story classroom buildings with dormitories on the top floor. Several other structures are used for a library, home economics labs, and study halls. Kitchens and dining rooms are close. Although the bathrooms and shower stalls are of simple but sound design, I noticed that, for bathing, the nearby river is preferred over the showers.

Since there are 360 dormitory beds on campus, this is the precise number of girls in the student body. The "forms," or class divisions, conform loosely to our high schools. All students are involved in some activity to help support the school.

Students start their day at six-thirty in the morning, when they perform an hour of work. Then it is time for breakfast, showers, and the change from the work uniform, a blue cotton dress, to a maroon sweater and blue skirt for schoolwear.

At eight-thirty an assembly generally is held outside. The students line up in class formation and stand at attention. The assembly is opened with prayer by the head mistress, Sister Cecelia, after which various announcements are made. This is also when extra work is assigned to those who have committed infractions for the rules. After assembly all the students jog in formation for about fifteen minutes, accompanied by enthusiastic singing—the only time they are allowed to use the Kiswahili language.

Classes start at nine and are conducted in English. Even outside the classrooms the students speak English (at least when they are within hearing distance of a teacher). Morning classes are dismissed at noon, and afternoon classes are held from one to four. At that time another hour of work is performed, always on a monthly rotating basis. Some of the labor is truly backbreaking, such as carrying firewood for the kitchens or rocks for a building project. The girls are able to carry some fifty pounds of wood or rocks the African way, on their heads. After this work period the rest of the day is spent on homework, laundry, and play. Lights go out at ten in the study halls and dormitories.

Physical labor is an important aspect of the educational program, and each student is required to work. Not only are the campus grounds, staff housing, the extensive flower beds, and kitchen gardens maintained by the students, but students perform all the janitorial work in the school and dormitory as well. Some students work in the kitchens, others on the farms and stables where a large number of animals furnish the convent with meat, eggs, and all kinds of dairy products. Such active participation in all aspects of the convent is considered not only an educational, but also a financial necessity.

Most convents I have visited in Tanzania are self-supporting. This is achieved in a variety of ways. Some grow coffee or tea for the open market; others raise cinchona trees, whose bark is sold for the production of quinine. One convent located where the temperature is suitable cultivates many acres of grapes. Here wine is bottled in a small but rather modern plant and exported under the convent label. The nature of these supporting ventures depends on the climate and soil and the interest and knowledge of the people who, many years ago, started these convents.

The curriculum at the school is similar to that of our high schools, with a heavy emphasis on English, math, and social studies. Rigid discipline is maintained in and out of the classroom, but I did not notice any rebellion. Every student realized that the only way to be accepted to the next level of education—to college, that is—is to pass the yearly examinations and to strictly observe the rules of conduct in and out of the classrooms. The students know that good jobs are available to high school graduates, while absolute poverty awaits those without an education.

The demanding entrance examina-

tions are conducted in English, the language in which all subjects are taught. Most applicants are bright and have a fair command of English. The students are highly motivated by family, privilege, and necessity to take their studies very seriously. Tuition, as well as room and board, is the equivalent of $100 per year—a large amount for a Tanzanian family. The request for placement is amazing; for the 1990 school year 1200 applications were received for ninety openings.

The staff at St. Mary's consists of the head mistress, sister Fidesta, who received her degree in Toronto, Canada; another sister who teaches science; five Tanzanian teachers, two of whom are Lutheran; and, at the time of our visit, a Catholic girl from Germany, practice teaching for one year. Some members of the staff are married and live in simple housing on campus.

I was asked to address several classes in the question-and-answer session. Although I wanted to stay away from questions about Hollywood, New York, and the latest crop of heavy rock musicians, this was not easy. The queries ranged from "What is an opera like?" or "What can you buy in a supermarket?" or "How many children do you have?" to "What is Jim Bakker like?"

When we discussed their plans for the future, the conversation always centered on the desire for higher education in Europe, or preferably in North America. To them, America has an aura of wonder, fascination, and bewilderment incomparable to European countries. When we discussed the problem of all African countries that send their students overseas—the reluctance of students to return to their native land—they made it clear that they would return to be of service to their own people. (I don't know if they will carry out the promise.)

About 60 percent of the students are from Catholic homes; the others come from various Protestant backgrounds. Moslem students and children from Indian families are noticeably absent.

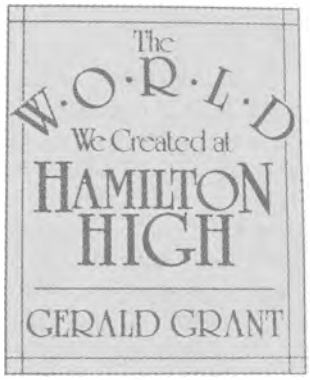
A mass is conducted four times each week for the Catholic schoolgirls and the natives in the surrounding villages who wish to attend. Religious classes for the Catholic students are conducted by Father Peter, a Dutch priest who has served in Africa for over sixty years. The Protestant students have formed study and prayer groups on their own. Two teachers serve as informal counselors, and one leads an after-school Bible class. The cooperation between the Protestant teachers and the sisters seemed to be good, although a three-week visit is much too short to judge the congeniality of any faculty.

Leaving Kifungilo after three weeks of close contact with both faculty and students was emotional, I have to admit. On the last day of our visit I addressed the assembly, and, looking at the upturned faces of the young girls, I felt a kinship that is difficult to explain. By now I had some idea of the social, economic, and cultural difficulties these students will face in the pursuit of further education in a land struggling with its newly gained independence.

During my first visit to our local Christian high school I was struck by the conveniences and the comparative luxury of our campus, but most of all by the open and unconstrained relationship of our students with each other and their teachers. In North America God has given us institutions of learning where we have the opportunity of teaching our young people that this world belongs to God and that he is the very center of our work and play. These blessings, framed within the freedoms we enjoy in this continent, make our schools unique in all the world. **CEJ**

*Mins Reinsma, a strong supporter of Christian education, lives in Seattle, Washington.*

—Edited by STEVE J. VAN DER WEELE




## The World We Created at Hamilton High

Gerald Grant

Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1988. 254 pp., $9.95.

Reviewed by Thea Lawrence, free-lance writer, and coordinator of a volunteer program at the Nature Center in Lincoln, Nebraska.

This book grew out of a study initiated by the National Institute of Education in the spring of 1979. With five research assistants, Gerald Grant, who is a professor at Syracuse University, examined thirty-three public and private schools from which five were chosen for further scrutiny. They then selected for more penetrating analysis one representative school, which in this book is called Hamilton High.

Part One is a biography of this school, which covers the years between 1953 and 1986. It reports the effects of federal legislation, court decisions, and ACLU activism on administrators, teachers, students, and parents. By the use of statistics, interviews, and first-hand observation, Grant creates a fascinating portrait of a typical secondary school of our time. He details racial violence in the 1960s and documents the alteration of Hamilton High from an elite academic school to one with low standards, powerful students, and powerless teachers. He shows how grievance procedures, new child-abuse laws, and court decisions relating to dress codes all conspired to erode traditional authority. By the 1970s, alcohol and drug abuse had become commonplace at Hamilton High, and by the early 1980s a survey showed that 38 percent of the students used drugs.

By 1979, the school had begun to settle down: "Police cars no longer cluttered the front drive on a regular basis." Between 1981 and 1984 the school board raised the number of credits required for graduation and adopted new academic requirements for extracurricular activities, including sports. Greater attention to academic achievement produced dramatic results, but a survey taken in the mid-1980s showed that cheating was widespread. Worse still, it showed that the best students cheated most because grades mattered more to them, and few adults seemed to care.

In Part Two Grant theorizes about the causes of the collapse of the educative process at Hamilton High and arrives at principles that he believes apply to other schools as well. In examining the contemporary teacher's predicament, he notes that the more able teachers have left teaching in disproportionate numbers as a result of worsening conditions. He believes that the basic cause of this exodus is disregard for the accumulated experience and practical wisdom of the classroom teacher in favor of rules imposed from above.

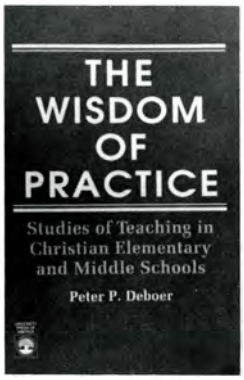
As a sociologist, Grant wonders what choice is left to those of us who fear the drift toward an impersonal, values-neutral bureaucratic model. He contends that we cannot dispense with the teaching of the most basic ethical principles in the classroom if we are to provide the kind of environment in which education can actually take place.

He claims that current values clarification programs not only breed absolute relativism among students, but also operate in the classroom to coerce youngsters into the most popular value choice, whatever it is. He insists that we must teach honesty and truthfulness, "for educational discourse cannot proceed if one party is dissembling, and science has no meaning if one has no compunction about misrepresenting the evidence."

He speaks briefly but disparagingly of current teacher training, observing that schools of education no longer turn out graduates who are well-prepared for the classroom. He considers two educational reforms essential: authentic local control, and teachers in charge of their own practice. Regarding the latter reform, the method he considers best is that of a "career ladder," an idea which merits serious consideration by all schools, public and private. Under this system novices would serve an apprenticeship of one or two years, teach under the guidance of senior or master teachers, and then be hired or fired by those same mentors. Grant believes that such a method would attract new talent to teaching and help to retain the ablest of those already in the schools.

To the experienced teacher the stories Grant presents are depressingly familiar. Values clarification curriculums have also been introduced into many Christian schools by well-meaning but brainwashed administrators. Those notions once spoken of as "the eternal verities" have passed from notice. In their place we have "I'm okay, you're okay."

In writing this book, Gerald Grant has done a service to all those who love learning and would see our children taught the things they ought to know. He deserves our praise, and one hopes that he will contemplate a sequel that will further explore the career ladder concept and investigate the misuse of power by non-teachers in our public school systems. We are in desperate need of such a work. ■




## The Wisdom of Practice: Studies of Teaching in Christian Elementary and Middle Schools

Peter DeBoer (Name style on book cover is incorrect.)

University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1989. 157 pp., (pb), $29.75 (library binding).

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Professor Emeritus of English, Calvin College.

All teachers will appreciate especially two quotations conveniently included in the preface of this book. The first, by Philip W. Jackson, reads, "In teaching, as in every craft, there are masters from whom apprentices can and should learn." The second is by Lee S. Shulman, who says, in a passage regretting how infrequently good teaching gets recorded and thus remains unavailable for analysis: "Great teaching . . . disappears into thin air as soon as it's completed."

The apprentices for whom this book is designed are college students preparing to teach. And the purpose of the book is to make less true the complaint that good teaching dissipates immediately. It does that by describing in great detail what happened in sixteen classrooms the author visited. Thus, it bridges the gap between theory in the college classroom and the practice of the theory in the lower grades.

This book takes its place among recent attempts at qualitative research in classroom strategies. (Why has this all taken so long?) These studies make available the dynamics of a classroom —the relationship between students and teachers and among students as they address themselves to the curricular topics. This book should pleasantly enhance the process of training future teachers in the art of teaching.

And teaching, whatever else it may be, is an art. Personality, liveliness, sensitivity, resourcefulness, skillful give-and-take—to analyze these is like trying to capture the rays of the sun. These and other qualities are what come through in these descriptive vignettes of how sixteen teachers lead students step by step to appropriate not only understanding, but also attitudes and values. These teachers have built on their native gifts through study, observation, experience, and reflections about their art.

It was in the spring of 1987 that Professor DeBoer was awarded a sabbatical semester to engage in these close-up descriptions of activities in sixteen classrooms, in visits ranging from twenty minutes to several days. He did not go into the classrooms *tabula rasa*. He was looking for particularly effective examples of teachers employing the responsibility theory of education—education where the curriculum is designed to foster the divine summons to obedience through discipleship. A valuable epilogue supplies the chronology of efforts among Calvinist educators to develop, refine, and structure educational theory and directions for preparing the students for contemporary life.

The reader is a privileged guest as he or she observes the teachers and students engaged in the learning process. The reader can marvel at what ingenuity comes into play as teachers help students appropriate the complexities of the self-contained biological systems; the narrative power of *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*; poetry (a fine unit on similes); map reading and the measurement of distances. What fine instruction goes on in the teaching of biblical narrative—including assignments to children to act out various parts! Some lessons use mathematical strategies devised by faculty members of Michigan State University. And the series of activities patterned after the international Olympics appeared to be very effective.

Reflecting on these various strategies, though, I question especially the pedagogical economy. And readers may wish for some evaluative judgments about some of the procedures. But it is obvious why that is not feasible: it would detract from the usefulness of the book for the college classroom in education. The book provides case studies that the student preparing to teach is challenged to evaluate. That challenge would be compromised if reflections were offered in advance by faculty or anyone else.

The author concedes that other teachers could have been selected for these classroom visits, but observes that for convenience he limited himself to Grand Rapids Christian School Association schools and to teachers experienced and well reputed in the Christian educational community. The author also observes, wisely, that the responsibility theory does not require rigidity and prescription, but is flexible enough to permit a wide range of pedagogical strategies. Imagination, resourcefulness, openness—these will continue to be important qualities as teachers seek alternative ways to teach what must be learned. ■

## CRC PUBLICATIONS: AN EDUCATIONAL CORNUCOPIA

Although the *CEJ* focuses—rightfully—on Christian day schools, no school staff or administration should be uninformed about the growing quality and quantity of programs and materials available from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) denominational publishing house. These materials derive from

the great energy and other resources invested in Christian education. One needs only to study the 1990–1991 catalog of these publications to appreciate their variety and quality. Whatever the relationship that exists between day schools and church educational programs, it is clear that they mutually reinforce each other.

This brief note is an invitation for teachers and others to inform themselves about the impressive educational arm of the Christian Reformed Church via the new catalog or direct examination of these materials. They address the needs of people of all ages and at every season in life, from preschoolers to adults who never wish to cease learning, from biblical narrative to the great doctrines of the church. They are attractively prepared, challenging, balanced, competently done, and amenable to various forms of pedagogy.

Here are some titles that appear particularly worthy:

5 on 1 Series: *Luke 1-6* (intensive day-by-day Bible studies) Rev. John Van Regenmorter

*The Kingdom Equation: A Fresh Look at the Parables of Jesus*

*Human Rights: A Biblical Study*, Gordon Spykman (issues in Christian living)

*Worship: Not for Adults Only*, Edith Bajema (issues in Christian living)

*Business: Making Christian Choices*, Gregory Mellema (issues in Christian living)

An interesting development also needs to be noted. An organization called TRAVARCA represents a cooperative venture between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church of America to operate a film and video library. Computer games are also available to motivate students in their studies, as are materials for persons with mental impairment.

Write to the CRC Publishing House, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49560 (1-800-333-8300); or CRC Publications, 3475 Mainway, P.O. Box 5070, Burlington, Ontario, L7R 3Y8 (1-800-263-4252).

**CEJ**

Dear Editor,

I am relatively new to the world of Christian education. I am a development director for a Christian school in Illinois. I was quite pleased with your magazine except for the "Media Eye" pages of the October 1990 issue.

It seems that Mr. Ulstein has an axe to grind against Frank Peretti. I think that Mr. Peretti would agree that his writing is not great literature, but let us not cast it aside, because I believe it can teach some very valuable lessons. Mr. Peretti's books illustrate a long-neglected truth about the nature of spiritual warfare. It seems that many Christians have forgotten that a battle is even in progress.

While college profs and high school teachers may disdain the writing of Peretti, it should be of some note that people are at least reading a book. And can't the reading of these books lead to other things? Couldn't Peretti be an introduction to C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* or to Dante? (I wonder what profs and teachers think of those authors.) Doesn't Peretti open up a whole new vista into the essence of evil and good, which is a natural part of great literature? Is it because Peretti has been a success that such an outcry is heard?

Perhaps I have missed the point, but shouldn't we take students where they are and point them to a desired destination? Personally, I was bored stiff with *The Great Gatsby*. Other books are only a dim memory. But I remember a book, *Lord of the Flies*, which caught my attention and was also quite controversial for its day. There were others that helped shape me as well.

Let's call off the bashing of a popular Christian author. The mass media may be where our students are. Let's build some bridges from it to where we want our students to be. It seems that Mr. Ulstein does not like the proposition of spiritual warfare. As we seek to educate students, let us make sure they are aware not only of a worldview but also of a spiritual worldview. The latter should be the goal of our instruction.

In Christ,
Larry Dodge
Fulton, Illinois

Dear Editor,

I have always thought something was odd about the faculty room featured in the "Asylum" column, but I always thought it was odd because it was so much like the one in the school in which I teach. In fact, for a while, I thought one of my colleagues, who shall remain nameless, wrote the column, but then he went on to become *Banner* editor. I knew then that he was too serious a person to write such a column.

I found out that it is more than the faculty room of Omni High that is strange. The football team is named the Marauders, the basketball team the Eagles, to say nothing of the tennis, track, soccer, baseball, volleyball, softball teams. Who knows what they are called? One can imagine a gymnasium wall covered with mascots of all shapes and sizes to cover all the teams. (Except for "Squires." It is hard to imagine any school naming its teams the Squires.)

It causes one to wonder just what asylum H. K. Zoeklicht, a name as unpronounceable and unspellable as a disease, writes from. Could it be the author lives in some kind of psychiatric facility (formerly called asylum)? Could it be that Zoeklicht is a former teacher who succumbed to the occupational hazard that threatens us all? And could it be that someone who goes on and on about so trivial a matter as what sports teams are called in a fictitious high school is himself in need of help?

Sincerely,
Robert L. Otte
Grand Rapids, Michigan