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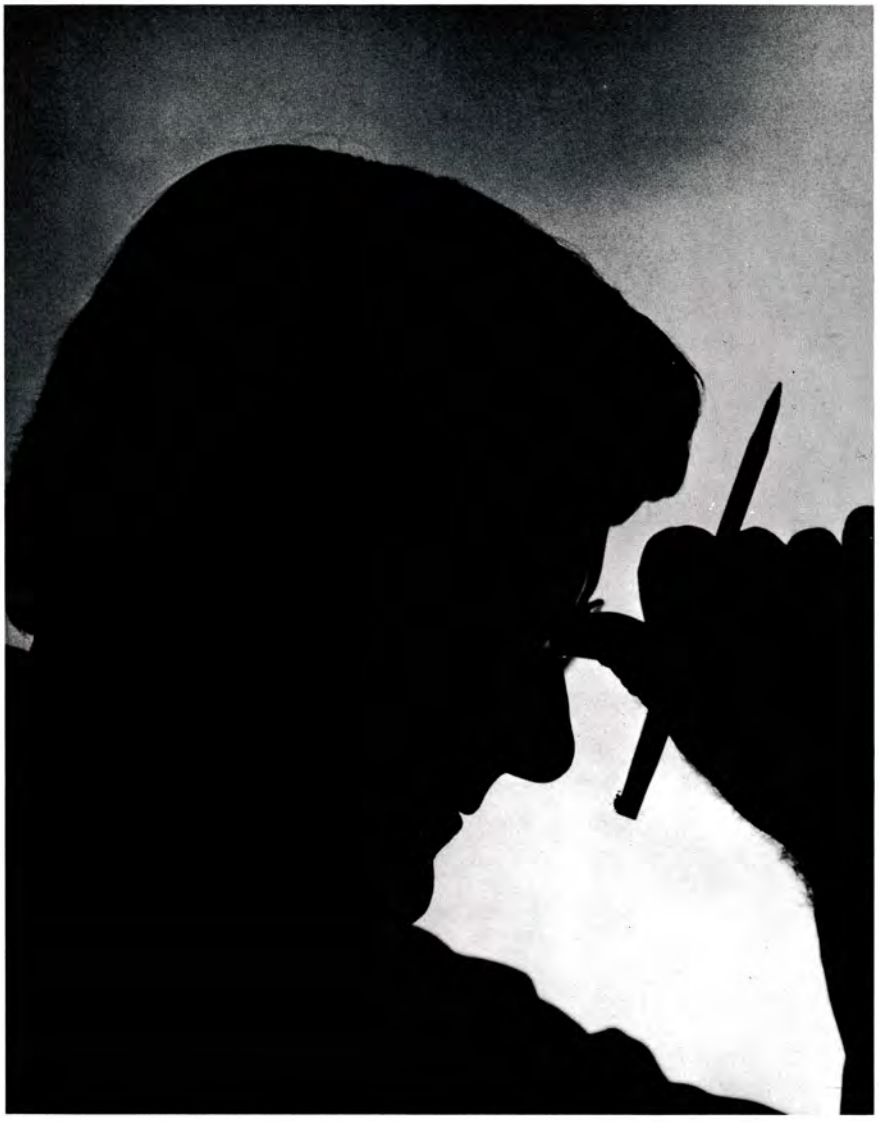

What Makes a Master Teacher

—by LORNA VAN GILST

Out of the Spotlight, into the Crowd

Chaim Potok was coming to our campus, and we who love literature were excited. We made sure our students read at least one book of this acclaimed Jewish author. The bookstore stocked up on Potok novels. The college president ordered a kosher dinner.

As the dinner hour arrived, we were edgy as freshmen on a first banquet date. Our host and hostess introduced us to the special guest. One by one we seated ourselves across from the real, live Potok. Finally someone took the chair next to the cordial, bearded man.

All wanting to be more than fledgling writers, we sat in the presence of a master writer—and we knew it. That knowledge frightened us and distanced us.

And then the master writer, perhaps sensing our distance, quietly demonstrated his greatness. He asked us about our lives, our land, our literature. He found ways to connect with us. He talked with us as equals. He found genuine beauty in our corn-filled landscape. "You have so much sky here!" he told us. We had come to sit at his literary feet, but he turned the focus back to us.

From that point, "Potok the master" became for us "Potok the man," one with us. He showed us that his mastery comes not from some sort of literary magic, but from faithful application of his particular gifts.

Such is the character of master teachers. They recognize their strengths as gifts to offer, not to hoard. Real masters continue to refine their gifts—for personal joy in their art, not for worldly accolades. True masters do what they have to do, even if the world fails to recognize their gifts. They work for the prize of the high calling, not the Teacher of the Year Award.

Society encourages us to sell ourselves, to assure others that we measure up. Schools are no exception. Sometimes our systems rate teachers by the same artificial standards used to rate students: scores, popularity, and extracurricular achievements.

This game has subtle rules. I used to respect the commitment of certain presenters at national teachers' conventions. Then I heard one panelist say to a colleague, "Well, that presentation ought to get me into the next bracket." The idea of sharing methods sounds commendable, but doing so merely for rank or pay destroys the merit.

Certainly, teachers must be held accountable. We must assess our teaching strengths and acknowledge them, our own as well as our colleagues'. But grateful recognition of gifts is something quite different from the competitive game of selling ourselves on the basis of honors, degrees, evaluation points, membership in various organizations, popularity with students, flaunting of educational jargon, or long hours invested in the job. When these become the criteria for good teaching, surely the soul has gone out of teaching. Then teaching becomes merely a game of beating one another to the glory. But that is not master teaching. Real masters don't have to proclaim their own glory.

Surely, the best criteria for judging master teaching are those things that happen quietly, within the hearts and minds of teachers who receive their confidence from God, who entrusts them with unique ways to reach out to students.

Master teachers are probably surprised to be considered masters in their profession. They do what they do because they love their students and they love their work. They so put themselves into their teaching that their very personality shines through their work.

Master teaching can occur at any grade level. It depends less on academic degree than on commitment. Master teachers are never content with short-term success. They continually project toward long-term effects, constantly learning, constantly refining the content and the methods of their teaching.

A master teacher is something like Potok's version of a good book: different for every reader, different at every reading. A mediocre teacher is the same for every student every year, like the buried talent of the unfaithful servant.

A master teacher can't stay the same. A master teacher grows richer in grace as he or she faithfully offers the gift of teaching in service to the Master of all teaching. **LVG**

Teachers

I did not want Mr. Smith.
He was built like a football player
whose hair seemed to brush the ceiling.

"Please, Lord, not him! Give me Mrs. Sheppard.
She has a nice name and a sore neck and won't
beat on me as last year's teacher did."

We lined up.
Mr. Smith called my name.
My heart sank.

"How could you let me down, God,
when I prayed all summer?"

In class our resident bully and
troublemaker goofed off.
Mr. Smith nailed him to the wall with gentle
words about people who spoil field trips for
others will be left behind.

I felt safe at last!

Mr. Smith wrote so neatly I wanted to copy him.
He didn't have to yell at me.
I hated spelling, but Mr. Smith taught us jokes
to remember words like "tobacco" having a
bad chew chew for one "b" and two "c's."

Mrs. Sheppard can't play broomball.
Her neck is too sore.

We played broomball on the ice rink for P.E.
He always picked me for his team.
No one else wanted me.
He even passed the ball to me.

I felt so proud!

Thank you, God.

—Andy Leech

—by DANIEL R. VANDER ARK

Who Cares? Master Teachers!

She told stories all hour, witty, funny, wild stories; nobody was bored; she was crazy, zany, supercharged every day. He gave them the facts, tons of them, straight and true to an outline published to the fourth subpoint; you couldn't miss getting it all down and up again for the test. She led the faculty in popularity, with parties of food in class and chaperoning any after-school affair with a teenager's nose for being where the "cool kids" are. He "loved 'em to death," a cloying caring that sucked some toward him to their exclusion of same-age friends. None were master teachers.

Who are the master teachers? Colleges may train them with techniques of pedagogy, but these top teachers have followed the only Master, Jesus; they walk his walk. They see children as God's children. They are excellent story tellers. They discipline and are disciplined. They fit the heart with glasses. And they have a fine sense of awe. Even with these qualities in common, they vary. Some seem reserved in the faculty room but light up in the classroom. Some almost badger students into solving problems while others gently counsel students toward the truth. But anyone who has been in these master teachers' classrooms just *knows* she or he has been near someone worthwhile.

The Master Teacher

Jesus taught by precept (the Sermon on the Mount), by action (miracles), and by parables (stories: "a certain man . . . "). He made the kingdom of God clear. He taught with authority (Matt. 7:29), and "When the crowds heard this they were amazed at his teaching" (Matt. 22:33). He was available to the crowds, but he retreated for prayer. He was gentle, tender, and loving (his response to Mary after the resurrection), but he warned his students often: "Watch out for the teachers of the law" (Mark 12:38). He knew his students well: "He knew what was in their hearts" (John 2:25). Before he told the parable of the mustard seed, he tried to think of the best way to explain: "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable shall we use to explain it?" (Mark 4:30). He was angry with hardened evil and sharp in detecting the motives of Pharisees who tried to trap him. He persistently sought the truth and told it: "I tell you the truth . . . " (John 3:5). Christian teachers follow the Master every day.

Walking the path of Jesus is humbling; no Christian teacher can easily escape the traps of Vanity Fair or the Slough of Despond. Many excellent Christian teachers obey the advice of Golda Meir: "Don't be so humble; you're not that great." The temptation for teachers is to wear the mask, to show off, to cover up, to hide the insecurities of self. The best ones follow Jesus in "emptying himself" of self and are like Jesus who "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:6–7). These good teachers admit weakness, are self-deprecating and God-praising; they depend on him. They are transparent; through the jokes, the arm on the shoulder, the organized talk, the stories, the furrowed or funny face, the shape in the bleachers at the middle school field day, or the outlines in class, students see Jesus in master Christian teachers.

Student Caretakers

Christian master teachers take care of their students, and that's what students desire and need. The aphorism expresses students' needs well: "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care." The teacher who sees students not as clients in a business, not as storage buckets of information, not as objects of learning objectives, but as *persons* sees children as God does.

These persons are God's children, stamped with his mark, each created with unique gifts to be honed for service to this great God. Master teachers see students as sinners redeemed or on the road to it, "saints in progress," as a colleague calls them. Master teachers talk *with*, not *at* these children. Because they see children in this light, they care for them in gentle and firm ways.

Henri Nouwen claims the master Christian teacher has "first of all to reveal, to take away the veil covering many students' intellectual life, and help them see that their own life experiences, their own insights, their own intuitions and formulations are worthy of serious attention." And all the time, these master Christ-followers say, "Follow me as I follow Jesus."

Storytellers

Master Christian teachers make analogies, connections between the unfamiliar and students' experience. When Peter is rescued from prison by the angel of the Lord at midnight, the angel gives Peter his marching orders: "Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life" (Acts 5:20). Not, tell them the words of the Torah. Not, tell them the Master's words. It was the whole Jesus-permeated life Peter was to communicate. It still is. Christian master teachers communicate "the full message of this new life" all the time. They make direct connections between God's acts in history, in his creation, and students' lives because they are walking with God and with students.

Good pastors, someone has said, walk with "one foot in the Word and

one foot in the world." That's true for master teachers. They know God's Word and his work in all of history. They are astutely aware of students, their development stages, their interests, their personal histories, their families and family circumstances, their faith progress, their personality nuances. And these master teachers conceive ways of connecting this world *out there* (as perceived by students) to that world *in there* (students' own histories).

These teachers look for ligaments, tough tissue that will connect, mainly drawing up analogies. These master teachers, as Joseph Epstein has said, "lead others to the truth and impress them with it." They make the truth concrete, touchable, graspable, with apt pictures that hold a mirror up to God's creation at just the right angle so almost all can see. The impression students get from these master teachers is that the teacher enjoys looking too, that he or she is still making discoveries with the students. And the best Christian teachers always fit the small stories into the only story: God rescues his people.

Disciplined Guides

Two decades ago Dr. Marion Snapper, former teacher at Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, recalling the best teachers he had had, concluded that the greatest teachers practice a "way of thinking" that students can and want to follow. Master Christian teachers both encourage and confront students.These teachers practice solving problems, raise the right questions, take no glib answers without probing them further, draw out students carefully, risk seeing things from an oblique angle to create understanding, and *do* what they say students should do: science, researching the past, writing, reading, drawing, or figuring.

These teachers organize what there is to know with care for the students. They see a logic in their discipline and communicate it; their plans are clear but flexible. They measure their own and their students' progress both humanely and persistently. They have pedagogical poise, and they constructively correct. Out of love for students, they discipline them to keep them on the Christian path of learning Christian discipleship. These teachers convey to students "that the acquisition of knowledge is a delight, but that there are dues to pay, for the delight is never available without effort" (Epstein). But all of this correction and discipline fits within the teacher's love for God and his children. Abraham Lincoln catches the point: "He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help."

Teaching Ophthalmologists

Students need a way to see the Truth and the truth; they need glasses, not only for their eyes, but also for their hearts. Paul prays for the Ephesians that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" (Eph. 1:18). He prays for the Philippians that "your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best" (Phil. 1:9–10). Christian master teachers fit children with the glasses of Scripture so that these students can see from the heart, can discern what is good or bad, tasteful or tasteless, pure or dirty, right or wrong.

Most Christian schools have in their philosophy statements some form of Calvin's phrase "the spectacles of Scripture." The best teachers in these schools help children fit these heart glasses; it's often called Christian perspective. It is a way of leaning into life. It presumes that Christian teachers know where they stand on fundamental issues, that they know which issues are fundamental, and that, in teaching, they communicate this stance to students clearly and with conviction.

Amazing Teachers

Seitze Buning describes the shepherds' response to the birth of Jesus by contrasting it with most of us moderns' "ingenious speculations about it" ("The Shepherds"). What the shepherds gave Jesus was "the only appropriate gift for this baby": *awe*. Christian master teachers give their Lord and his children the same gift, awe. Christian schools ought to be the real amazement parks. The Gospels repeatedly speak this refrain: "and they were amazed at his teaching."

The best teachers model wonder and thereby lead their students to imitate it. Wolterstorff says in *Educating for Responsible Action* that our children will end up "preaching what we preach and practicing what we practice." The best teachers at least occasionally inspire wonder not by begging for it, but by being awed themselves, genuinely humbled and moved by God's work in his world.

So, Christian master teachers have a sense of humor and exercise it. They demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm for their Lord, for their subject, and for their students. They take no umbrage in being laughed with or at. They bring "all the words of this life" in Christ to children with an unmistakable enthusiasm that is reflected in the joy these teachers express when students themselves are surprised by wonder.

Teaching is tough work. Christian master teachers hardly know it. Samuel Johnson says in a macabre line, "Teaching, like hanging, concentrates the mind wonderfully." And most very good teachers would agree with Epstein: "I have never entered a classroom without feeling nervous nor emerged from one without feeling relieved." Stuart Walesh, dean at Valparaiso University for the College of Engineering, sums up caring: "Caring isn't coddling. Caring is pushing, pulling, admonishing, stretching, demanding, encouraging, urging, challenging, cajoling. Caring is high expectations coupled with high support." Master teachers who follow the Lord of life are worth imitating; those students who do become Christian disciples for the good of the kingdom. **CEJ**

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—by JOHN VRIEND

Sietze Buning on Classroom Discipline

While preparing for another lecture on effective classroom discipline this fall, I laid aside the familiar and necessary topics of behavior strategies, group goals, and utilization of technique to re-read the poem "Election" by the late Stanley Wiersma, whose pen name was Sietze Buning. The poem is about profound and ordinary things like understanding, graffiti, respect, tiddlywinks, and sacrifice. It is also helpful for teachers thinking about classroom discipline because, in this poem, Wiersma provides an illustration of discipline exemplifying a distinctive worldview that is at the heart of Christian nurture.

What attracted me to this fine poem as a model for classroom discipline was not the specific techniques illustrated, but the depth of insight that needs to undergird and shape specific teacher actions. Appropriate techniques—although important and necessary for parents and teachers—are empty when detached from confession, an integrated vision of Christian service, and meaningful standards for morality. Implicit in the wise counsel and actions of the parent in this poem are some principles that are fundamental to a Christian understanding of classroom discipline.

One is the understanding of office. Teachers, parents, and students have distinctive tasks and responsibilities for which they are mutually accountable to God and to each other. This perception of office means that classroom order and rules are not for our convenience, but for facilitating the learning of each student and of the total group.

Also implicit in the idea of office is the imperative of cooperation among teachers and parents. This cooperation is illustrated in Sietze Buning's poem by the help that the novice teacher received from the wiser father, who could have found justification to undermine her authority but did not. The father helped, it seems, because he understood that parent and teacher should cooperate in their various tasks. Father's sense of responsibility started with Sietze but carried over to the teacher and also over to Ted, Sietze's friend.

The teacher, too, accepts parental cooperation and may well have apologized for her earlier mistake, for at the poem's end we find she has Ted, the author of the naughty word, busy at a more appropriate task than the 500 lines assigned to Sietze. The acceptance of the teacher's authority rested not on her own beginning expertise, but on her office. She needed the cooperation of all, not because she was so able, but because she was the teacher.

The poem reminds us that in everything, including classroom discipline, justice and love go hand in hand. This basic theme of Christianity shapes a healthy view of classroom discipline. Although this perspective on discipline is not overtly illustrated in the poem, one senses it in the speech and actions of the father. The father's firmness and understanding for his son suggest this view as he softens the hardest lesson with the return of the tiddlywinks. When teachers use admonition and punishment, students need to see that these are an expression of concern for their learning and behavior rather than an action of impersonal justice or something to support the ego or convenience of the teacher.

This poem illustrates that classroom discipline should have a pedagogical purpose and focus. If admonition and correction are to be helpful, they should not only correct an immediate situation, but also teach the students and the class a better way. Rather than the unproductive disruption that climaxed in Sietze's 500 lines, we have Ted washing the toilet wall, cleaning up the mess he made. This correction underlines the principle that classroom discipline should never be designed to "put someone in his place," but to facilitate learning. Rules are to provide an appropriate atmosphere for reading, thinking, lively activity, and the interchange of ideas.

Already a decade ago, Nicholas Wolterstorff emphasized the importance of modeling and induction for teaching students to accept and incorporate into their own actions the lessons taught by the school. Again in this poem the central figure of the father illustrates these principles. He gives Sietze profound reasons (induction) why he should not rebel against the mistakes of the teacher and provides an example of responsibility (modeling) when he goes to help the teacher—"Poor teacher, . . . No wonder she makes mistakes."

Teachers can be reminded that their classroom standards need the support of their own example to their students. Their actions need to illustrate the kindness, respect, forgiveness, and diligence that are required of the students. They should also remember to give students reasons why work needs to be done, procedures adhered to, and standards upheld.

I hear the footsteps of God's covenant in the lines of this work. Children of believers belong to the Lord and must be treated as God's children even when, in their youthful and sinful rebellion, they act in disobedience. The main concern in this story is never the four-letter word, but the nurture of Sietze and Ted. The scrubbing of the wall is for their sanctification much more than for the cleanliness of the bathroom.

The verses we read remind us that

the practice of classroom discipline needs to be tempered by what I will call "Christian common sense." This includes an understanding of children and young people, sensitivity, and patience that go beyond specific procedures and technique. "To this day / I do not know how he knew." It is the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" spoken of in Ephesians 6:4 that does not "provoke children to anger." It is the wisdom of Sietze's father who used the incident of the "naughty word / inside the door of the boys' toilet," the unjust punishment, and the tiddlywinks in the church collection to point Sietze and us all to God's sovereign sacrifice and care for his children.

In this poem, Sietze—in this case both through mistakes and through wise discipline—learned more about being a disciple of Christ. Classroom discipline must also be like that: discipline that leads students toward an ideal. It needs to provide room for choices, for inquiry, and for the exercise of self-discipline.

In the context of these principles, Christian teachers need to learn diligently specific techniques that include good planning, helpful routines, "overlapping," unobtrusive intervention, clear expectations, and consistency. Tempered by Christian common sense, our techniques will not reflect ideas of behavior modification, primary needs gratification, or the development of autonomous morality. Rather, the techniques will be shaped by ideas of nurture that confess and illustrate that learning and classroom discipline are for service. **CEJ**

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Election

Nobody would tell who had written the naughty word
inside the door of the boys' toilet.

The six girls in our one-room country school
were dismissed, and the five boys—
two older and two younger than I,
and I in fifth grade—were left behind.

"Write on a piece of paper," the teacher said,
"the name of the person you think did it,
put the paper on your inkwell,
and put your head down on your desk."

Teacher's footsteps from desk to desk,
the unfolding of paper,
and afterwards:
"Sietze,
you will stay to write five hundred times
'I will be pure in thought, word, and deed.'"

Elected but not guilty,
I ran home, the copying done,
and cried in outrage.

"But who," said Dad, "put the tiddlywinks
in the collection plate on Sunday?
The deacons found them
and they're missing from your set."

So much for outraged innocence.

"Poor teacher," said Dad,
"what can she do with lying
foulmouthed boys?
No wonder she makes mistakes."

So much for mistrial.

"And now you know," Dad said,
"a very little bit about how Jesus felt
being punished for sins he didn't do."

So much for self-pity.

Dad gave me the tiddlywinks from his overall pocket:
"I'll see the teacher, though.
Whoever did it shouldn't get away with it."

Next day my friend Ted was washing the toilet wall.

"Hey, how did your dad know I did it?"

To this day
I do not know how he knew. —Sietze Buning

—by NANCY WADE ZAPPULLA

To My Tireless Administrator

Dear Joy,

As I peer across the vast expanse of work that stretches between this day and the end of school, I can almost catch a glimpse of you struggling with your own work. In reality, the divider between us has been that uncomfortably thin wall, but I can still hear the rustling papers, the indistinguishable conferences with students and teachers, and the far too infrequent times of silence. What a year this has been for us!

Well, before we know it, exams will be holding all of us captive, teachers and students alike, and no longer will we have either time or energy for farewells. So, here's yours just a little early.

But I hate goodbyes. I cry whenever I encounter one in a book or on television, and I utter them with the fiercest reluctance. Besides, our God's sense of humor is far too creative to miss another chance to lump us together and watch the resulting excitement. So, instead of choking out some soggy sentiments, I'm sending you the official "See you later, alligator!" report.

You have driven me cross-eyed-and-speechless crazy all year long. I showed up, new to this school but not to the task, and you had the nerve to refrain from swooning with delight. You weren't astonished at my wit, and many times yours was far sharper. No gossip nor giggler were you, nor did I ever see you sliding out of some exciting meeting. You worked with intense concentration and wasted nary a moment on frivolities. I spent huge amounts of time and energy feeling alternately hurt, lonely, angry, and determined. "*Who* does this girl think she is?" I'd fume. "Why, I've taught *kids* older than she is!" I'd stomp about and pray self-righteously regarding the kind of spiritual work needed in your life. Daily I contemplated resigning. You rubbed me the wrong way, just like sandpaper. Just like sandpaper. . .

Throughout this entire year, all of the pressure and shaping and altering that has come from you has molded me into the kind of teacher I never dreamed of becoming. Certainly not perfect yet, but a teacher more efficient, more organized, and more polished. So, thanks to you, long-suffering supervisor, for all of the vision and plain old elbow grease expended on my behalf.

Because of that vision, I can enjoy weekends without the specter of lesson plans haunting me. At first, I detested turning them in to you each Friday, but now I feel a delicious freedom when the weekend arrives and my plan book goes home with you, brimming with completed work. My plans are better conceived and developed, too, because of your eagle-eyed scrutiny. Though I sometimes felt excessively inspected (it isn't easy being in the same department as your supervisor), my work has never been more focused or creative.

Do you realize that, until you waltzed through my door that first time, my teaching had never been officially observed? Of course you do, because I repeated that during my regular litany of sorrows, but you ignored the histrionics and kept on showing up during my classes. It became a matter of pride with me to act as though your visits were of no consequence; but they were, and I worked hard to gain your approval. Your little note of encouragement still hangs on my kitchen bulletin board to remind me that I could not only survive your visits, I could succeed. I'll never quake under surveillance again.

Your inherent aura of competence and control at first threatened me and then angered me, but, in the long run, it taught me. I have learned to settle down, to be more attentive to the seriousness of teaching, to cultivate what might one day be distantly recognizable as dignity. From you I have learned these things; by you I have had rough edges smoothed.

This very full year is almost over, but I must admit that I still long for missed opportunities. I'm sorry that I never got to study drama with you. I regret that we never had that brunch or even a real moment to get to know one another, apart from interruptions and expectations. Despite the showers of chocolate doughnuts and M & M's, I'll wonder if I could have been more supportive. I'm looking forward to seeing you in eternity, hoping to finish a sentence, read some English poetry, and become your friend.

So, we're off to complete the year. In the days to come, perhaps you'll think of me when you run into someone else who dotes on chocolate or "pre-people" as I do. I know that I'll always think of you when things run smoothly in my classroom, because yours was the hand with the sandpaper.

Nancy

Nancy Wade Zappulla is an English teacher now doing graduate work at Radford University in Radford, Virginia.

I've been teaching for many years and am becoming concerned that students seem to lack the moral values that allow the conscience to operate under circumstances of cheating, sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, etc. Is there less guilt, more pressure, or just more talk? How involved should teachers be?

There is more talk today. Such matters are more openly discussed, hopefully not just in hallways, locker rooms, and parked cars, but in the home and classroom as well. The overt exploitation by the media, the materialistic "get-rich-quick" society, the increase in dysfunctional families, and the ever-present peer pressure result in complex and varied ethics that creep into our schools and the lives of our students.

Dr. Ron Nydam, a local Christian counselor who works with many of our students, suggests that kids today do not have the same sense of guilt that we did. If so, they are not operating on the same premises. Joe Frost, a professor of early childhood education at the University of Texas, says children no longer have the positive role models that were traditionally the community helpers. Instead, their superheroes from television often enhance negative aspects of behavior. Christian school teachers compete with the insensitive, but glamorous, world of technology. This fast-paced society tends to rob our children of the human contact, the listening ear. Genuine care and concern are still in demand, but mixed messages and opposing viewpoints by role models seem to compound the uncertainty in the young students' minds.

Maybe none, maybe some, maybe all of the above mentioned reasons account for the apparent lack of moral conduct today. Admittedly, there can be more serious, underlying causes; an appropriate support staff should be available for referral. However, we do our students a disservice if we fail to teach coping strategies and decision making skills that will enable them to articulate their beliefs of right and wrong. But even more important, we should encourage them to focus on the real purpose Christ intended in John 10:10, to experience life in all its fullness. They must see the value we place on a God-centered life and our fulfillment in Christ. ■

How can a teacher help a pompous student who doesn't fit in socially and doesn't have even one good friend?

I do not believe the teacher can force acceptance or friendship, but I do think the teacher is able to set the stage for better understanding. Preaching and plotting usually are less effective than well-planned discussion. For teens particularly, I recommend developing a unit on self-esteem and relationships using thematic literature, teen songs, and current videos. Role playing about "put-downs" and "in" groups will incite personal responses to specific actions or comments.

When adolescents start sharing their feelings, trust and empathy and some understanding of each other occur; and then the likelihood of offensive behavior from either party is lessened. Respect begins to surface when the student with no friends hears that even the most popular kid has fears and doubts and when the "in" group starts to figure out why some "nerds" act and talk the way they do. The process and results are not immediate, but they are worth the effort. Patience is required.

Often the pompous personality is irritating even to the teacher. I recall a similar seventh grader who, finally in a trusting environment, openly revealed experiences of rejection at school and verbal abuse at home. The explanation of poor self concept silenced the room and eventually the mouths of most offenders. As the teacher, I could never look at that kid the same way again. The exposure of his pain melted the pretentious facade.

In the lunchroom and on the playground, the students have considerable control, but in the classroom we as educators have the power to provide a safe and comfortable environment for everyone. We can legitimately intervene to disintegrate an exclusive, tightly-knit social structure. One way is to disallow the "pick-a-friend" method of selecting partners. Setting up specific groups or pairs creates appreciation of varied skills and personalities and opportunities for tolerance and acceptance.

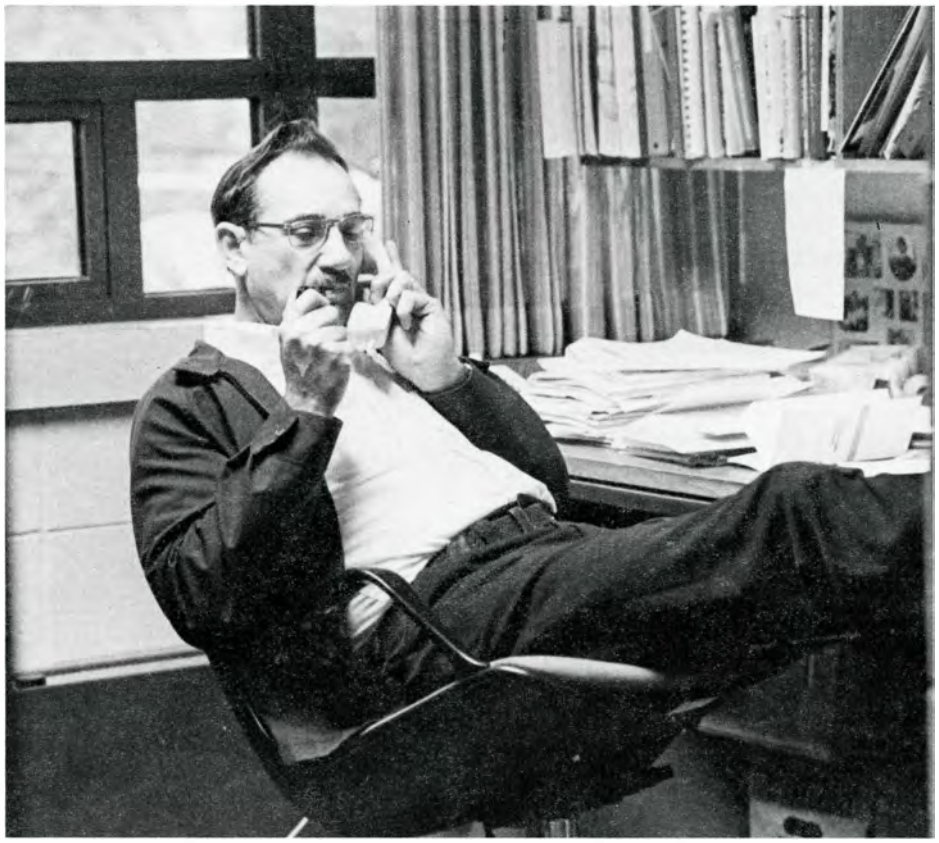
Christian school teachers must first see *all* students as image bearers of Christ and then help them discover that truth about themselves and each other. **CEJ**

You are encouraged to send questions to the Query editor. See address on page 35.

—by HENRY J. BARON

DONALD OPPEWAL— NOT FINISHED TEACHING YET

One of *CEJ*'s early editors, Dr. Donald Oppewal, completes his teaching career as professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the end of this school year. I sniffed him out recently (not hard to do if one simply follows one's nose to his smoking pipe's pungent aroma) and found him in his comfortably cluttered office. We talked of things past, present, and future.



HB: You've been a teacher at Calvin College for thirty years. How did that career get started?

DO: When I got out of the army after World War II, I decided to take advantage of the GI Bill and go to college. I graduated in 1950 with a major in English in secondary education.

HB: And where did that take you?

DO: Well, first to the University of Michigan to get my master's degree in English. Then I went to Illiana Christian High School in Lansing, Illinois, and taught there for five years.

HB: Were those good years?

DO: Yes, I enjoyed seeing many of my students go on to college and later enter academic careers, a number of them here at Calvin.

HB: And you decided to move on yourself.

DO: Yes. I learned a lot in those five years, including the fact that I knew far more about English than I needed to know to be a good *English* teacher and that I knew far less than I needed to know how to be a good *teacher*. I also wanted to know more about the purpose of school and about the Christian school movement.

HB: And that's why you decided to pursue your doctoral work at the University of Illinois in education rather than in English.

DO: Right. I didn't want more specialization but more philosophy and psychology of education.

HB: After five years of graduate school, you and your family of six children moved from Urbana to Grand Rapids in 1960, and you joined such established figures as Flokstra and Jaarsma in the education department. Looking back now, what will Don Oppewal especially be remembered for in his teaching?

DO: I don't know whether I've ever tried to verbalize that. I think it is for pushing students into decision-making. My role is to induce in them cognitive dissonance.

HB: What do you mean by that?

DO: There are obviously different views of education. I induct them into the options. I don't tell them which option to choose; I don't lead them to my own conclusions. I want to keep my bias out of the process of teaching as much as possible. They need to do their own thinking about the options and come to their own decisions about education. Those conclusions may be

diametrically opposed to mine, but if they do a good job of defending theirs, then they are exceptional students.

HB: Do students appreciate that kind of teaching?

DO: Yes, I think they come to see my approach not only as unusual, but as unusually helpful. They find that too many of their professors give them answers. I don't, and they appreciate that.

HB: How did you come to adopt that approach to learning?

DO: It didn't come in a flash. My doctoral program helped me to see that students learn best when they come to their own conclusions. John Dewey also helped me see that education is a process rather than a product. Therefore, the teacher's job is to promote thinking skills and not do the thinking for the students. So, over a period of about ten years I switched from being a teacher who tells students what to think to one who tells them that *they have to think.* My job is to help them by giving materials and presentations that will force them to do so.

HB: Would you like to see that method applied across the disciplines?

DO: Yes. The induction of cognitive dissonance should be at the heart of college teaching.

HB: Do you have a sense that your views are out there in the Christian schools and being practiced?

DO: That's always hard to say, but assuming that the number of students whose final papers represent my ideology are out there practicing what they say they believe, then I am gratified. And I have some evidence that that's the case. Also, if the writing in *CEJ* is an indication, then I see persistent reinforcement of what I hope they would be writing and doing.

HB: We've seen a number of shifts and trends recently, like the process paradigm in composition, collaborative learning, the Whole Language approach, mainstreaming of students, a more integrated curriculum. Do you find those exciting?

DO: Very much so! They all hang together, and as a Christian experimentalist, I applaud them all. That's what ought to be happening in Christian education.

HB: Any concerns about the future of Christian education?

DO: My real concern is that Christian education will be a privilege only for the children of the rich. But even there I am optimistic that there will be politically feasible ways of securing parental rights to private education by a share of the tax dollar.

HB: You've done a lot of research and writing on that topic. What else has occupied your scholarly interest?

DO: I tried to make my contribution to epistemology, the theory of knowing, and to curriculum especially through *Biblical Knowing and Teaching*. Of course I've written many other things. But I only recently realized that I've spent much more of my time getting other people to publish than getting myself published. The books I have produced have been other people.

HB: And that must be gratifying. I suppose that started especially during your twelve-year stint as *CEJ* editor.

DO: Yes, and then another six years as *CEJ*'s Book Review editor; and now as editor of a monograph series.

HB: What vision did you have for *CEJ* when you became editor?

DO: To make it a journal for and by teachers—a channel of communication in which Christian educators could talk to each other, carry on an internal dialogue. I didn't see it as a repository of great scholarly thought, but more of an expression of what's bugging and exciting people in the classrooms.

HB: Was it difficult to make that happen?

DO: Yes, because teachers aren't used to writing journal articles. But that's been coming more in recent years, and that's for the better.

HB: Were there times when the future of *CEJ* hung by a thread?

DO: Financially, yes. And manuscripts were not always plentiful either. We could not always afford the luxury of being very selective in what we would print. I understand that has changed for the better, too.

HB: You put so much of yourself into those early, shaky years of *CEJ*. What did you get out of it besides a lot of work?

DO: The satisfaction of capturing into print what I thought were significant essays, and the increasing endorsement of teachers themselves when they began to join as professional teacher organizations. It took us ten years to get a number of them on board, but every one of them was a vote of confidence.

HB: As a former editor and life-long educator, what challenge would you like *CEJ* to address in the future?

DO: To continue to engender enthusiasm about Christian teaching, and then to become more professional by connecting Christian theory and practice; "professional" means connecting the two.

HB: If you had a choice of living your life over again, would you choose a different profession?

DO: Certain persons who have observed my style of interaction say I should have been a lawyer. And that's been a side interest of mine all along, such as my intense interest in the legal question of school funding. I guess my style of discourse is to peel away the incidentals and get to the essence of a matter, to make the substantial distinctions that need to be made—and that is a lawyer trait. But that's not to say I've really wanted to be a lawyer.

HB: You've hung your hat—and your pipe—in this office for many years; are you going to miss it?

DO: Very much.

HB: What of the future?

DO: I predict that I'll continue to write. And I'll be waiting for the leading of the Spirit.

HB: To take you where?

DO: Maybe to take me to other Christian college settings, whether it be Canada or Nigeria, doing what I've done here. I don't think I'm through teaching yet. **CEJ**

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—by H. K. ZOEKLICHT

"All Wet"

May is supposed to be the month of cleanly fresh, pale-blue skies and wispy clouds, of fragrant scents from flowering tree and bush, of summertime promises for leisure and adventure that make those last weeks of school routines more bearable. May is supposed to be sunshine and sweetness.

But May was drizzly this year. Farmers grumbled, gardeners sighed, and students became ornery. Eventually the drizzle seeped inside the teachers too, and inside Omni's "Asylum." It had drenched Rick Cole as he glumly looked at his colleagues and exclaimed, "This is the first time since I started teaching that I'm really wondering whether there's any reason for me to stay in it."

"What is this—something more than a mid-May crisis, Rick?" queried Matt as he took off his glasses to rub his eyes.

"You really want to know?" responded Rick, but it was clear to all that he really needed to unburden himself.

"Go ahead, give us an earful, Rick," said Steve Vander Prikkel. "Maybe I'll match you."

"Well, I have students write in journals several times a week in English class, an idea I got from Lucy, by the way, and I've been happy with it. I mean, I can tell that it has improved their regular writing, and our discussions have been freer and better, too. But I don't read their journals, unless they *want* to share them with me. The journals are private; students can write anything they wish.

Unfortunately, one of my students was careless. His journal was found and turned in to the office. Jenny looked in it long enough to decide that Carpenter should see it, and. . . ."

"What was I supposed to do, burn it instead?" snapped Jenny Snip, pursing her lips as if she'd been sucking vinegar.

Ignoring that, Rick continued, "Anyway, Carpenter read it and called in the student. Wanted to know details. And the student got terribly upset, of course."

"Details about what?" Rev. Broekhoest wanted to know.

"The *what* is none of our business, that's private," retorted Rick emphatically. "We're talking about an issue here!"

"Details about a drinking party," offered Snip, trying to gain the group's approval for self and judgment on Rick.

But now Rick reddened with anger as he faced the school secretary and raised his voice: "You're completely unprofessional! Whatever access you have to student information is to be kept in strict confidence. And if you can't handle that, then you're in the wrong job!"

At that outburst, drizzle was about to cover Jenny's face, too. She got up hastily and stormed back to the front office.

"Okay, Rick, I still don't know what all this is about, but it's obviously been painful. Why don't you tell us the whole thing," invited Lucy Den Denker gently.

Rick's hand shook as he took a swig from his diet coke. "You're right, Lucy, I'm upset. But this is what happened next. Carpenter called me in and wanted me to read what she had read. I told her I didn't want to read it—I had promised my students I wouldn't. She got angry and said that I was responsible for what I had my students write and had a duty to read what they wrote in and for my class. Then she called the parents in and let them read it, too. She told the parents that the school would have to discipline their son. Well, in the meantime my student had come to me. Carpenter had refused to return the journal to him, but he wanted me to know what he had written about, and of course he wanted advice."

"And what did you tell him?" Broekhoest wanted to know.

"That I stood by him," replied Rick with conviction. "I told him that his right to privacy had been violated, and I was grieved about that."

"It seems to me, Rick, that the secular humanist law of privacy is superseded by God's own law, which governs this school after all, and that is that we are all in subjection to God and responsible before him and each other for all our actions." Rev. Broekhoest clutched his empty coffee mug in both hands as he looked sternly at his younger colleague.

"Yes, Ralph," interjected Lucy, "but in journal writing we encourage students to write honestly about anything that's important to them, so that they learn to verbalize their own thoughts and feelings and develop as human beings and as writers. They need freedom to do that, without any fear of a grade or of censure."

But Ralph Broekhoest was not persuaded. "I don't use a journal to teach them how to write. I teach them that their writing should exhibit God's principles of order and purity and truth. That, I think, is Christian education."

"And if that kind of Christian education can ride roughshod over agreements and privileged information and student privacy, then I'd say that unethical system is neither Christian nor educational, and I want none of it." Rick Cole got up, tossed his empty coke can in the refund box, and headed out.

Matt DeWit shook his head. "I think Rick is right. If this kid, whoever he is—and I don't want to know, had sat in class and thought about whatever good or bad things he had done the night before, that would be no different than writing about it in a private journal. So, are we going to start thought control now?"

Susan Katje, the librarian, stroked her pouffy hairdo as if it were a cat when she offered, "But we have rules, and Jenny told me that Alex Pils is on the baseball team, and that means he'll have to be kicked off if he went to a booze party."

The others stared in disbelief at another breach of confidence. Matt groaned, "I hope the kid gets himself a lawyer. He needs protection around here."

"We need a faculty meeting to talk about this," decided Lucy.

"We need a prayer meeting more," countered the reverend.

But then the door opened, and in lumbered a jolly John Vroom, a notebook clutched in his pudgy hands. A gleam of accomplishment shone on his face as he explained: "This I confiscated from two girls I caught in Lucy's room. They were reading this and laughing hilariously, so I got suspicious and asked them to show me. When they refused, I got more suspicious and took it away from them. It's a journal they're writing for Lucy's class, and you ought to see some of the things they write about some of the people right here in this room."

Outside the drizzle had turned into a shower. **CEJ**

—by CAROL M. REGTS

Teaching Clear Vision

Our middle school students do not know why they are in a Christian school. Or, if they do know, they cannot put the reasons easily into words, nor are they convicted by those reasons. Our students lack a vision for Christian education.

This, at least, is what I have discovered at Eastern Christian Middle School. I would hope E.C.M.S. is an oddity, but I think not. I have taught elsewhere, and I believe E.C.M.S. middle schoolers are more like those of other Christian schools than they are different. Consequently, if students do not understand how and why Christian education is fundamentally different from other systems, I am concerned that it may well be a problem in many other schools as well. And if this lack of understanding pervades our Christian schools, we teachers and administrators must confess we have failed our primary task.

Before claiming status as master teachers in a Christian school, we must first determine how effectively we inspire and guide our students toward a Christian life in which our individual subject areas represent parts of a greater whole.

The Problem

Wanting the advice of those who know us best, I asked seventh and eighth graders, via a survey, what traits described an effective middle school teacher. For the most part their answers were ones most of us could have predicted. The top three were having a sense of humor, respecting and caring for them as individuals, and using mostly group work and projects as basic tools of instruction and evaluation.

Yet, as I skimmed through the answers on each of the 130 surveys, I found the comfortable predictability disturbed by another pattern of response (or lack of response). Their reasons for whether or not their teachers needed to be Christians disturbed me. Most said their teachers needed to be Christians to set an example or to help teachers be loving and patient and forgiving rather than swear at and be a bad influence on their students. Fifteen or so saw Christianity merely as a job requirement to teach in a Christian school. About twenty-five said it was important but had no idea why, and another ten said it was not important for their teachers to be Christians. Only five of the 130 students wrote that it was important because the teachers helped them "see how God relates to the subject" or "how the subject is shown in a Christian's point of view."

I conclude from these responses that most E.C.M.S. students and very likely many other Christian school middle schoolers do not understand or do not have the language necessary to connect with the basic premises of a Reformed Christian education where God reveals himself in all subjects, where his children hold a responsibility to live in his light in every area of life, and where each teacher is necessarily a Christian teacher walking in the paths of Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher.

Why Teach the Vision

Some of you may protest the statement that we must teach our students the reasons they are in a Christian school. Perhaps this is an issue with roots in the tension inherent in the academic/evangelistic purposes of Christian education. I dare say that few of us believe education is a matter of either academics or evangelism. Our philosophy is founded on the merging of church and home and school where evangelism is the church's primary responsibility and teaching specific skills and content is the school's task. We must also recognize, however, that church, home, and school form interlocking circles. Convincing our students of the absolute, fundamental need for them to have a Christian education lies directly at the heart of that area where the three overlap and where our trifocal vision merges into a clear, united statement of purpose. *Each source* must address teaching a clear vision of Christian education.

This is especially a concern for the middle school where our students have begun the critical process of forming and consciously internalizing the standards by which they will live as adults. In a whirlwind of emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual change, they are judging everything in varying combinations of absolutes. The absolutes they choose now will form the continuum for their future decisions, including sending their own children to a Christian versus a public school. So it is now that we must help our students understand the philosophy, accept the need for Christian education, and commit to continuing the nurturing offered within Christian education.

How We Can Clarify and Share the Vision

Helping our students "see" and even celebrate or enjoy Christian education involves pointing out why they are there, telling them what they can and should be looking for, and then helping them see it clearly. Think of it this way. You are part of a group who has hiked partway up a mountain. Although today you began the journey reluctantly, you have found a certain satisfaction in conquering the tough

climb. Now you are gazing up the craggy mountainside, all gray and barren rock. Someone beside you gasps in excitement. You stare hard and see nothing, only murky shadows. A friend picks out landmarks you can identify and gradually guides your sight toward the area where a mountain goat stands. There it is, in plain view, and you wonder why you hadn't been able to see it before. Such is the process of clarifying our students' vision of education.

● The first step into this process must be an examination of how we approach our subject matter, both as individual teachers and as schools in general, in order to develop a unified approach. Middle school students tend to compartmentalize their subjects rather than see them as parts of a whole. For them science lasts for forty minutes and is unconnected to math or history or language arts. We must help them see connections—and the most important connection is how each subject bears directly on their lives as members of God's kingdom and becomes part of that greater whole.

In order to construct those connections, we must spend more time on a regular basis in faculty meetings as well as in private preparation time brainstorming and evaluating how well our teaching of skills and content arises out of our desire to help students fully realize God's image. Again it is a matter of weighing philosophical responsibility in the educational balance with practical application. We need to face the *why* and the *how*, finding answers that mesh the two.

Although we all realize that it *should* be part of our lessons, most of us would confess that we rarely make the effort to experiment with effective, varied teaching strategies that coordinate with the skills and content. This preparation and assessment must be our first task and the fulcrum for everything else we do in our classrooms.

● Second, we must look at how we schedule our daily routines. The adage says that we make time for what we think is important. At E.C.M.S. we teachers have decided that we do not have enough time at the beginning nor at the end of the school day for devotions. Presently, with only five minutes, we find ourselves rushing through the tasks of taking attendance, passing out or collecting forms, reading announcements, and having devotions. Our time spent "with God," exercising our freedom of worship in school and showing our students the source of our education, seems almost a token experience where devotions are part of the mundane busywork of the school day. We do not have enough time to truly quiet ourselves and become attuned to the loving guidance and continuing presence of our heavenly father. We have consequently decided that the schedule at E.C.M.S. must change because it is not God-glorifying; it does not show our students that our school necessarily rests on and is "informed by" our communal belief in and reliance on the Lord.

● Finally, with our students we must regularly and directly question, examine, and discuss the reasons they are in a Christian school, discussions that do not necessarily relate to our subject area. Middle schoolers yearn for clear vision to lead them to commitment. First determine how your students view Christian education and then work in direct, specific steps toward clarifying the vision. Challenge them to search for differences and to suggest ways to make Christian education noticeably different. Use their ideas to supplement teaching strategies so that they see the philosophy in practice—see as well as contribute to the process of applying God's Word to the work of living in God's kingdom.

Here is one way I approached the topic in my classroom. It contains ideas of what to do *and what not to do*. It is a confession and a warning.

I had begun drafting this article and wanted to pursue my concerns with my eighth graders, yet I put off a discussion. But one period I found I had about ten minutes of time to "spare." So I asked the group how Christian schools were different from public schools. They responded quite negatively: Christian schools had more rules and responsibilities, Bible as an additional requirement, worse facilities, and stricter teachers.

Mentally I took notes on their comments to support my argument about their lack of commitment to Christian education. I asked them why their parents send them, and someone finally supplied me the answer of Christian environment to work with. I pursued a definition and was given the grudging admission that teachers talked about God all day. I asked how they would answer someone who wondered how I taught language arts differently from a public school teacher. One quipped that he would change the subject, others sat blankly silent, and a few remembered talks about responsible Christian reading and writing. The bell rang, and I let them move on to the next class as I pondered what advice to give *CEJ* readers.

After school that day, I was shocked to hear the teacher who had these students right after me say she did not think it was right to allow students to leave a class in such a state. Evidently I had been so caught up in using my students' responses to clarify my article that I had failed to clarify their vision in *support* of Christian education. They had left focusing on all that was "wrong" with Christian schools. I had wrongly assumed that my closing the conversation with how I tried to make my class different was enough to point their eyes in the right direction. But I had not given enough landmarks. I had not checked to see what they were seeing.

I am thankful, however, that the teacher to whom they went listened to them and recognized that their vision needed correcting. Instead of plunging into her lesson for the day, she took time to guide them in seeing clearly that all the negatives they had listed for Christian schools focused on the material level, not on the spiritual level.

Such is the vision we all need.

CEJ

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—by MARK A. LAMPORT

Distinctively *Christian*

If there are no distinguishing characteristics between a Christian theory of education and a public theory of education, then one is not needed. If a person in Christian education teaches algebra, biology, and English literature with the same presuppositions about education as the public school teacher, then I am not convinced the former education is Christian. Yes, the fact that the teacher is Christian is significant, but not enough. What makes Christian education Christian is its thoroughly distinctive theory of education.

Why should Christians borrow a system of education from the secular world?

I ask with Wyckoff, "What has [secular] education to do at all with man's need for redemption and release from bondage through [God's] reconciliation?" (53). In other words, why should Christians borrow a system of education from the secular world?

Some would say Christian education is defiling its bed, as it were, by implementing secular educational research and humanistic social theories. But obviously, *education* is the noun in the term "Christian education." Clearly, there are points of contact with general education. The crux of the matter is to strike a proper relationship between our modern empirical knowledge from the social sciences and a biblical understanding of educating in faith.

A Holy Obligation

When searching for truth, some people have built a false dichotomy between sacred and secular. Holmes reminds us that all truth is God's truth. Christian education has a holy obligation to stand for and honor truth wherever it may be found.

Truth permeates all venues of human inquiry. The task of the Christian educator, then, is to integrate truth from various sources including, for example, insights from sociology and philosophy. One does not take, willy-nilly, all the presuppositions of the various views—just that truth which sees humans and teaching/learning from God's view.

I have observed two main weaknesses of some Christian educators who try to discern a Christian theory of education. Parochialism sees only the distinctive views of a provincial way of thinking. ("If it's not in the Bible, it doesn't apply!") This narrow view has created a type of "scholastic schizophrenia," which embraces the Bible but rejects "non-religious" subjects, such as psychology. Eclecticism uncritically lumps some Christian principles of education with some secular views. The resulting position has absorbed so much from so many disciplines that it is hard-pressed to delineate its ultimate authority or foundation (see Lamport 1988).

Where ought we begin in forming a Christian theory of education? We start by recognizing that Christian education should be informed from a multiplicity of disciplines. In order to proceed in developing a Christian theory of education, we need to establish certainty of our foundation.

Identifying Foundations

Sherrill, in his landmark work, discusses education and revelation. He contends that a Christian philosophy of education must come from within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Assuredly, we are informed from outside sources, but the unique nature of Christian education is derived from the unique nature of the Christian faith, revealed in history, nature, Scripture, and Jesus Christ.

A worldview based on God's revelation of himself is central to the formation of conceptions about Christian education. The Christian worldview is one that must be built on the biblical teaching that reality is supernatural as well as natural, divine and human, containing revealed and natural knowledge.

A chief distinction between Christian education and other kinds of education is that Christian education begins and ends with God (theology), and other education begins and ends with humans (anthropology). If humans are the foundation, then social and natural sciences are the starting points from which educational assumptions are made. If God is the foundation, then his statements about educating in faith must be pre-emptive. For example, Christian education teaches whole persons, not just a mind. In addition, Christian education views behavior and value formation as supreme over the public education's primary task of cognitive acquisition.

If God is the creator of all things, then the case for a naturalistic view of persons, a main tenet for many educational theorists, becomes moot (e.g., B.F. Skinner's behaviorism). Because humans are in a fallen state,

the clue to human nature is theology, not anthropology. Christian education must find its purpose, content, and method in theology.

However, we must remind ourselves that Christian education uninformed by ongoing input and dialogue from the social and natural sciences is a waste of God-given resources. Although the foundation is theology, we must not declare other truth to be anathema, but supplementary.

Revelation and Response

The continental divide that separates true Christian education from all other education is the authority of the Bible and the primacy of revelation. Zuck aptly summarizes:

> Christian education is unique because of its subject matter—the Bible, God's written revelation; because of its goals—spiritual transformation of lives; and because of its spiritual dynamics— the work of the Holy Spirit.

Distinctive Christian education, then, is an education that bears witness of this revelation. It is the kind of instruction and training that leads one to a deeper understanding of self and the world. Second, Christian education is distinct because of the nature of the community (*koinonia*) in which it exists. Third, it is distinct because of its concern about the encounter between the self-disclosing God and a responding human. Finally, it is distinct because of the result, which is not merely a cognitive knowledge about God (*gnosis*), but a personal and intimate knowledge of God (*epignosis*).

Defining Terms

Because Christianity is a revealed religion, Christian education is a reinterpretation of God's revelation. Jaarsma expresses it this way: "Education is the process of making known and learning what God's truth is" (46). It is the attempt to participate in and guide the changes that take place in persons in their relationship with God, church, society, and self.

Inasmuch as revelation is the discovery of reality, reality that needs to be experienced, one may convincingly posit that it should be experienced in the context of the community of believers. The gathered Church is given by God for being socialized in the faith by relational modeling. Then after growth of Christian knowledge and faith, it should be the witnessing agent in society. Hauerwas says: "The most important social task of Christians is to be nothing less than a community capable with virtues sufficient to witness God's truth in the world" (3).

"Where the truth is, in so far as it is truth, there God is."

The ultimate aim of Christian education is redemption and service—to restore the image of God in persons, which leads to Christlike character for all-kingdom service. The goal is that every person be presented mature in Christ (II Timothy 3:17; Colossians 1:27–28). In theological terms, the concept is sanctification.

A Clarion Call to Integration

I hope we have constructed a way of defining truth and can say along with Miguel de Cervantes, "Where the truth is, in so far as it is truth, there God is." As God is the ultimate source of reality, we build a Christian worldview.

The desperate need, however, is for this worldview to be integrated into all areas of study and life. I believe the most effective way to correlate every subject of study with Christianity is through the transparent lives of teachers with a thoroughly integrated Christian worldview.

In sum, from a Christian worldview will evolve a theory of education that is distinct because of the revelatory nature of God and humans' predicament in sin. As a result of these insights, a proper definition of education and its goals may be discovered. Our metaphysics is rooted in God; our epistemology is deduced from revelation; our anthropology is based on restoring all persons to the image of God; our axiology is eternity-centered; our objective is Christlikeness; our curriculum is all of life; our methodology is community interaction; and our teacher is a Spirit-filled guide. **CEJ**

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—by GORDON DeBLAEY AND ED DOUMA

THE BALANCING ACT OF INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS

Sports as part of the educational institution has a long history in the United States and Canada. The benefits and drawbacks of sports have always been debated. And in these times of increased drug use among athletes, excessive financial rewards for athletic success, and regular institutional cheating for the purpose of recruiting talented athletes, the debate becomes even more intense.

What should be the place of interscholastic sports in the high school? What should be the values taught by the interscholastic sports program? To what extent should the sports program be integrated into the entire school structure?

These questions are also important for Christian schools to consider. A Christian Schools International (CSI) publication titled "Interscholastic Athletics: Education for Expressive Play and Responsible Action" (1982) provides some guidelines for a specifically Christian response to these and other questions concerning sports in the high school. The argument made in this publication is that interscholastic sports in Christian schools must fit into the Christian world-and-life view, that sports activities should involve the whole person—body, mind, and soul. More specifically, sports in the Christian school should be celebrative and expressive.

The key to developing celebrative and expressive play in the context of competitive sports, according to this publication, is balance—balance of "discipline, regimentation and drive for victory with spontaneous and exuberant play [and balance between] spontaneous and non-serious play with some acceptance of rules, meaningful competition and some desire to improve . . ." (6). In addition the Christian view of sports should be "celebration . . . of the joyous nature of a Christian existence in God . . ." (6).

Interscholastic sports can—perhaps even should—exist in the Christian high school and should be distinctively Christian by being an integral part of the school structure, and by fostering a delicate balance between the Christian values of expressive play and responsible structured activity.

One must wonder how closely the sports programs of Christian high schools compare to the model described in the CSI publication. In the fall of 1989 we sent a questionnaire to most Christian high schools in the United States listed in the CSI Directory. We received responses from 81 percent of the sixty-two schools on our list. The questionnaire was responded to by the athletic director of the high school or someone in a similar position. Some of the items in the questionnaire speak to the issues delineated above: the integration of the interscholastic sports program into the entire school structure, and the balance of what might be identified as intrinsic and extrinsic values in the sports program.

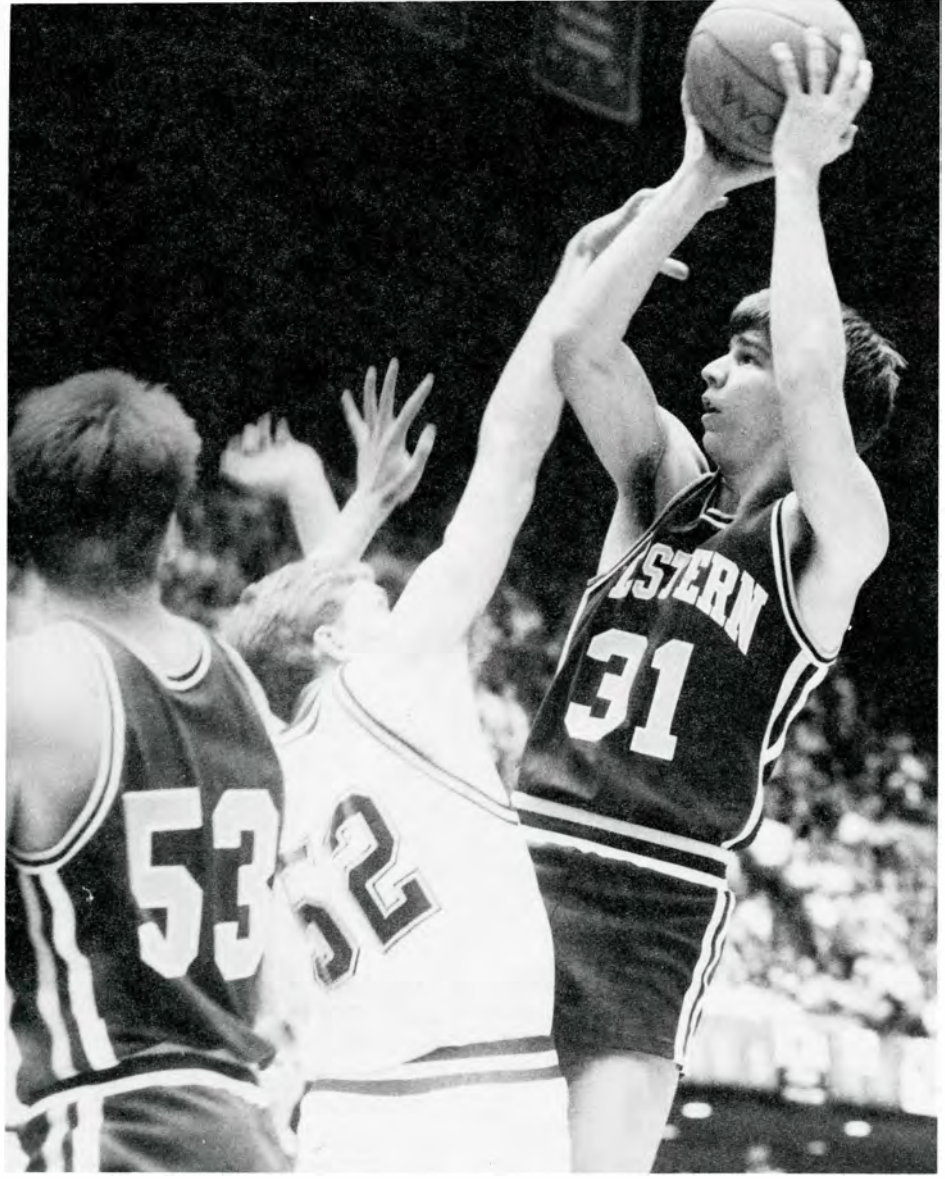
With such a large response rate, we are not surprised that the schools in our sample cover a wide range. The schools range in size from less than 100 students to over 1000, and they range in number of student-athletes from less than 60 per school to 375. The total athletic budget, excluding salaries, ranges from less then $10,000 to $90,000, with the mean being $19,840. Sixty-six percent of the schools have an athletic booster club that contributes from less than $2,000 to $45,000 per year to the sports program, with the mean contribution being $10,606. More than half of the schools have participants in boys' cross country (66%), track (73%), baseball (78%), soccer (86%), and basketball (98%), and more than half of the schools have participants in girls' cross country (60%), track (70%), softball (70%), and basketball (98%).

The issue of how well the sports program is integrated into the school structure is addressed by the respondents' perceptions of how "important" the sports program is to various groups. Table 1 shows the six groups identified and the percentage of respondents who felt each group saw the sports program as "somewhat important" or "very important":

TABLE 1
Importance Placed on School's Sports Program by Various Groups as Perceived by Respondents

(in percent)	very important	somewhat important
Athlete/participant	94%	6%
Parent/constituents	50	44
Administration	40	58
Student body	42	50
School board	30	56
Faculty	4	82

In response to a series of statements concerning the sports program at their high school, 36 percent of the respondents (athletic directors or similar persons) agreed or strongly agreed that "our school places too much emphasis on sports" and 42 percent agreed or strongly agreed that "if we don't win often enough the



constituents express their concern."

Finally, athletic directors were asked to indicate the amount of difficulty experienced in eight different areas of their job. The two areas of greatest difficulty cited were "obtaining quality coaches" and "living with budget constraints."

There is room for improvement in integrating the sports program into the total structure of the typical Christian high school. Lack of adequate finances and inability to attract or find quality personnel are classic signs of low priority. Our respondents' perception of less than enthusiastic support for a program from front-line personnel (faculty) and powerful overseers (board) speaks to a step-child program in the structure. Such feeble support may not be surprising when more than a third of those persons responsible for the program (athletic directors) perceive an over-emphasis on their program. A school program so visible and influential in and out of school, not enjoying complete backing of the larger school structure, is not a healthy program. Nor is the total system that encompasses this program as healthy as it should be.

Values are difficult to define, identify, and measure, but it is possible to gain some insight into *perceptions* of ideal values by asking respondents to make choices between statements and to rank the relative importance of specific values. We have such measures from athletic directors in our survey. First we asked them to rank (from one to four) four distinct things that sports should be teaching its participants. Table 2 shows the relative ranking of the four values and how the rankings were achieved.

It is true, no doubt that most respondents would include all four values as important, but we forced a ranking. So, while it would be inappropriate to conclude that "teaching a sense of satisfaction" is unimportant in the minds of our respondents, it is clear that such a value is generally seen as subordinate to "teaching the importance of cooperation with others." It is difficult not to read in these responses an emphasis on regulation, conformity, and consensus first and then a more individualistic happiness.

Analysis of sports participation has often been conducted on an intrinsic/extrinsic continuum. Intrinsic participation refers to a more self-oriented behavior where the participant enjoys the activity for its own sake, whereas an extrinsic participation refers to participation for extra-activity goals. The argument typically is that children and school participants should be more intrinsically involved than extrinsically involved in sports, while the trend and pressure seems to be exactly the opposite.

The Christian perspective on interscholastic sports referred to earlier in this article calls for a combination of, or a balance between, intrinsic and extrinsic orientations. Zuidema argues that a "key ingredient" of the Christian competitive play ethic is a balance of "discipline, regimentation and drive for victory (extrinsic) with spontaneous and exuberant play (intrinsic)" (6).

The four values identified in Table 2 can be seen as falling along the intrinsic/extrinsic continuum too,

TABLE 2
Ranking of Four Values School Sports Should Teach the Sports Participant

		RANKING (in percent)			
		1	2	3	4
I.	Sports should teach the importance of cooperation with others.	68	26	4	2
II.	Sports should teach control over own behavior.	12	32	36	20
III.	Sports should teach the importance of rules and structure.	4	32	42	22
IV.	Sports should teach a sense of satisfaction.	16	10	18	56

TABLE 3
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Choices by Four Major Values

VALUE		INTRINSIC/EXTRINSIC EXPRESSION
Cooperation with others:	The opponents . . .	are the ones who make the game possible. . . . (98%) I are the ones who must be outscored.
	The opponent . . .	makes sports the fun it is. . . . . (90%) I often gets in the way of fun in sports.
Control own behavior:	Athletic behavior . . .	should follow the directions of the coach. . . . . (84%) E should be controlled by the athlete.
	Athletic success . . .	is a group accomplishment.. . . . . (82%) E is a personal accomplishment.
Rules and structure:	Sports rules . . .	are necessary for competition to exist. . . . . (98%) I should be used as part of winning strategy.
	Athletic behavior . . .	should be mostly guided by rules. . . . . (68%) E should be highly creative.
Sense of satisfaction:	Rewards in sports . . .	come from merely playing the game. . . . . (100%) I come from winning.
	Sports records . . .	are really unimportant. . . . . (66%) I are good indicators of success.

the first three being more extrinsic in character and the fourth being more intrinsic. But we feel it is more appropriate and enlightening to see each of these four values as being expressed in either an intrinsic or extrinsic fashion.

We asked our respondents to choose between two options for completing a sentence concerning eight different issues. The two options were coded in each case as either intrinsic or extrinsic in their orientation. The results show almost an even split between intrinsic and extrinsic options, five of the eight selections being intrinsic. Table 3 shows the intrinsic/extrinsic choices grouped by the major value each represents. The option chosen most often in each case is followed by the percentage of respondents who chose it and is coded as intrinsic (I) or extrinsic (E).

We think these data indicate a positive balance between intrinsic and extrinsic expressions of important values that sports programs should ideally teach their participants, and we think this is an affirmation of what Christian Schools International calls for as a Christian perspective in interscholastic sports in our Christian high schools. It seems that the values held as appropriate by CSI and expressed in its literature relative to high school sports programs are accepted by most of the athletic directors in Christian high schools.

We conclude on the basis of these data that the success of the espoused Christian perspective on interscholastic sports is a mixed bag. Sports programs do not seem to enjoy the backing of the groups in the school structure that would make sports programs a fully integrated part of the school, and this is cause for concern. Why do teachers and board members, for example, place relatively little importance on the sports program? Or, at least, why is it perceived as such by those responsible for running the sports program? On the positive side, as we have just seen, however, those who run the sports program seem to hold the kind of values toward school sports that have been deemed appropriately Christian.

Several important questions must still be asked. Could it be that other groups in the school system (faculty and board members, for example) do not share the values relative to sports that we see being held by athletic directors? Could that be why the sports programs don't enjoy complete integration into the school system? Are the Christian values held by those responsible for running the sports programs in our Christian schools being successfully transmitted to the student-athletes? Exactly how do such Christian values get expressed in behavior by student-athletes and fans? We think these are necessary issues that are worthy of more research, and we intend to continue our efforts in this regard. **CEJ**

REFERENCE

Zuidema, Marvin A. 1982. "Interscholastic Athletics: Education for Expressive Play and Responsible Action." Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Schools International.

Both authors teach at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Gordon DeBlaey is a member of the department of sociology and social work, and Ed Douma is in the physical education department.

—by KENNETH OLFERT

A German Examines Her Nation's Past

The manner in which the people of a nation see themselves and their history is integral to the study of a modern language, but materials and teaching aids contributing to that end—authentic texts and films—are difficult to find. Authentic texts are those materials written by and for the people of a particular culture. By using authentic texts, we see a culture as it sees itself.

Especially in a Christian school, we should be willing and careful to understand the people whose language we are attempting to teach and learn. We should be willing and eager to learn from the people themselves, respecting their place in God's world. *The Nasty Girl,* a newly released film produced in German with English subtitles, is an excellent resource. *The Nasty Girl* won both the best film and best director prizes at the 1990 Berlin Film Festival.

North Americans who have seen such films as *The Tin Drum, Das Boot (The Boat),* and *The White Rose* often wonder why German films deal with such difficult philosophical issues. These films are long and difficult by North American standards. But through such authentic texts, one can see the Germans through German eyes and begin to capture a bit of what German culture is all about.

Whereas other nations captured and explored territories, and expanded to capture other nations, all such attempts by Germany have been thwarted. Perhaps this is why the inner explorations into the realms of philosophy, science, and the arts have been, and continue to be, the issues that captivate German thinking.

In *The Nasty Girl* the viewer is confronted with the way many Germans viewed Germany in the past and how they wrestle with their national identity today. The film begins with Rose growing up in a small Bavarian town, her life in the small Catholic community, and the relationships that develop through her school experience. We follow her life and see her growth from childhood innocence to adult questioning.

What begins as an attempt to write an essay about how her home town resisted the Nazi regime turns into an expose of individuals who were collaborators during the past and, more important in the context of the film, who are attempting in the present to cover up the associations of the past.

The roles of social standing, education, and position in the community, so important in German culture, are carefully portrayed as reasons for denial and for more probing. Just as position and authority gave way to corruption and abuse in the Nazi past, they offer the same temptations in the present. The conflicts that grow out of the strained relationships in these roles pose the issue for the last half of the movie.

In spite of the serious nature of these issues, the film's humor allows the viewer to see more fully the central issue of the search for truth. The movie takes a decidedly Brechtian form in scenes where Rose attempts to gain access to the files at the newspaper, in her first-person appearance at various times to narrate what has been happening, and in the use of theatrical backdrops rather than location shots. In one sequence, the family sits around the kitchen table, as if they are riding in a carousel while the city is going peacefully by. The film is so Brechtian that a teacher could develop a whole unit just to discuss the dramatic philosophy of Berthold Brecht and the purpose of such alienation techniques.

As an authentic text, *The Nasty Girl* could do much to expand a student's understanding of history, a German's present view of history, a German's view of life and society, and the role of the arts in the German community. But the viewer isn't allowed to leave the film thinking about only "them." Ultimately, *The Nasty Girl* forces us to wrestle with the price each person must pay in searching for the truth and the impact that such a venture can have on a community. **CEJ**

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—by ROBERT W. BRUINSMA

Grammar and Meaning

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

Learning to produce conventionally acceptable written language presents the greatest combination of difficulties of any language task. This is so because, in learning to write, a person must master purely mechanical and arbitrary skills to represent the essentially "natural" psycholinguistic activity of lingual communication. Writing mechanics involve refined muscular control of the hand and arm (handwriting) as well as learning a fairly arbitrary system of representing words in print (spelling) and a way of representing the stress, pitch, and juncture of speech in writing (punctuation). In addition, a writer must learn grammatical conventions and must deal with the slow and deliberate process of writing.

These demanding features of writing tempt us to teach writing as a set of isolated skills—handwriting, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage. But the assumption that skills or rules learned as isolated activities transfer to real uses of written language is unwarranted. Isolating skills from the communicative and expressive use of language makes them abstract (disembodied) exercises unrelated to the process of encoding meaning. So the first principle is this: any skill is best developed in the context of meaningful activity. Another principle is that writing is meant to be read first for the content of the message. Mechanics are only important to the extent that they facilitate meaningful communication between writer and reader. In teaching and evaluating writing we must focus on meaning. Of course, since form greatly affects function, mechanics cannot be ignored.

Finally, learning to produce conventionally acceptable written language is a developmental process, and developmental processes always have an emergent character. That is, the learning of skills always moves from the vague to the precise, from gross to fine, from highly concrete and contextualized to more abstract, and from familiar contexts to unfamiliar ones. In learning written conventions risk taking is essential; developing writers must think about what they want to say, explore genre, invent spellings, and experiment with punctuation. Students and teachers need to appreciate that imperfections are part of learning.

The etymology of the word *grammar* is the Latin *gramma*, meaning either a small grain or a drawn or written character or letter. Thus, grammar has to do with the study of the bits and pieces that go into making up a language. More technically, grammar is the study of the usages of a language, including the form and syntax of its words.

Prior to 1700 no books existed on the subject of the structure of English. Grammar meant Latin grammar, and grammar schools were schools in which the teaching of Latin predominated. The educated elite of European society considered Latin and Greek to be superior classical languages and the vernacular languages, including English, to be inferior. The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of the middle class, who wanted the advantages of an education, but had no particular fondness for the traditional classical languages. During the eighteenth century, over 250 books on English grammar were published, but they were books attempting to describe the structure of English in terms of the structure of Latin, mostly in an effort to enhance the status of English through an association with Latin.

Latin is, however, an inflected language, relying predominantly on word endings and changes within a word to signal its grammatical relationship to other words in a sentence. In contrast, it is the position of words in English sentences that largely determines their grammatical function. Most early grammars of English and current traditional English grammar artificially impose Latinate grammatical categories on a language that operates by quite different linguistic principles.

Various twentieth century grammars of English have been developed. Structural grammar developed from structural linguistics, which was an attempt to approach each language without preconceptions as to its structure. Structuralists wanted to write grammars describing the language accurately without appealing to meaning. They felt that "meaning" is an imprecise term and that a linguistic science must be meaning neutral.

The great American linguist Noam Chomsky took issue with the structuralists' flight from meaning and insisted that grammatical function is often impossible to describe—or even to determine—without referring to meaning. For example, the sentences "Snoopy is eager to see" and "Snoopy is easy to see" are structurally identical; only through an appeal to meaning can we differentiate these two sentences grammatically. Chomsky developed the theory of transformational grammar, which is concerned primarily with the processes by which deep grammatical structure (unconscious grammatical knowledge) is transformed into the surface structure grammar that we speak and write.

All of this is preamble to the question, should grammar (of any kind) be a formal part of the English language arts curriculum? Constance Weaver comments on this question in her book *Grammar for Teachers*:

> One valid reason for teaching grammar may simply be that language is such a marvelous human achievement it deserves to be studied. Another reason may be that, properly approached, the study of grammar can help students discover how to collect data, formulate and test hypotheses, draw generalizations—in short, it can help students learn to approach something as a scientist does. However, the most common reason for teaching grammar has been the assumption that it will have a positive effect upon students' ability to use the language. Unfortunately, this assumption seems unwarranted. (1979, 88)

Of all the pedagogical issues in English education, the relationship between students' grammatical knowledge and their speaking and writing ability has been the most thoroughly researched for the past seventy-five years. The findings are unequivocal:

> The impressive fact . . . that in all these studies, carried out in places and at times far removed from each other, often by highly experienced and disinterested investigators, the results have been consistently negative so far as the value of grammar in the improvement of language expression is concerned. Surely there is no justification in the available evidence for the great expenditure of time and effort still being devoted to formal grammar in American schools. (DeBoer 1959, quoted in Weaver 1979, 89)

There are two main reasons why formal study of grammar has such a dismal record in the improvement of language expression. First, typical grammar pedagogy does not match the kind of teaching required to improve in language expression. Much grammar instruction consists of training students in formal grammatical analysis that breaks language apart. Diagramming sentences is a typical example. However, speaking and writing require synthesizing language into meaningful wholes. So while instruction in grammar typically concentrates on *analysis* of language, instruction in writing should concentrate on *synthesis*. Second, teachers too often assume that knowing parts of language automatically transfers to knowing how to apply this fragmented understanding to constructing whole language. The way to avoid these two problems is to match instructional and performance tasks and to consciously teach for transfer.

Speaking and writing abilities are not enhanced by learning about language through memorizing rules or analyzing sentences, but through practice in using the language.

A wide variety of useful activities can help students at all levels discover and explore the nature of English syntax (the effect that word order and sentence structure have on meaning). These activities fit in naturally with the writing process, particularly the prewriting and editing phases. They involve students in actively constructing and manipulating their own sentences rather than deconstructing and analyzing someone else's sentences in a workbook or manual.

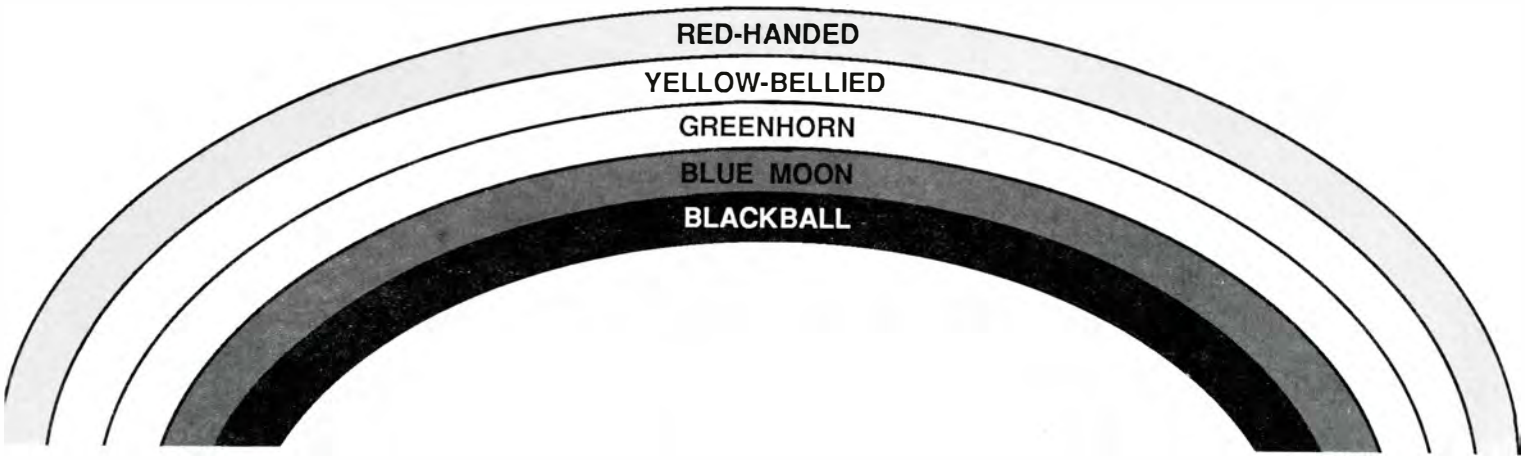
The study of English grammar is, of course, an area of worthwhile study in its own right. But studying grammar is best postponed until students are in high school and have the cognitive maturity, research ability, and historical perspective to deal with this fascinating but complex subject. All language arts teachers, however, ought to understand the main types of English grammars and the historical and pedagogical issues surrounding this controversial area of English language teaching. Constance Weaver's *Grammar for Teachers* is a good resource.

CEJ

Robert W. Bruinsma is professor of education at The King's College in Edmonton, Alberta. He is also a CEJ regional editor.

—by ELEANOR MILLS

The Language of Color



Our language is full of color words. Color identification is typically taught in kindergarten or grade one, with the reading of color words and the association of colors and objects. Older pupils enjoy exploring the way color is associated with feelings and events. Mary O'Neill's popular book of color poetry, *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*, which was first published in 1961, has been reissued with wonderful, new illustrations by John Wallner (1989). Read one or more of her poems to your students every day as you explore the idiomatic use of color words together.

OBJECTIVES

- To help students be aware of how they draw on their previous experience to interpret words in a figurative way
- To explore the use of some color idioms so students will understand the meaning of these phrases when they read them
- To enable students to use color words in their writing in a symbolic way
- To enhance students' awareness of God's gift of color

PROCEDURE

Begin the unit by reading several short prose and poetry selections to the students. After each selection, ask the question, "Is this a poem?" Students will conclude that the definition of a poem is rather nebulous. It doesn't necessarily have to rhyme. Invite them to close their eyes and try to see a picture while a poem is being read. Explore the possibility that they may be able to feel a strong emotion while a poem is being read. Provide opportunities for students to share favorite poems and to express their own thoughts and feelings in a poetic way.

Read *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* in several sittings, in order to be able to savor the word pictures. Discuss difficult words as needed, and explore the meaning of the illustrations. Vary the approach to each page. Sometimes begin by asking students to close their eyes, and ask them, "What does red remind you of?" Response to this question could be oral or a brief written list or a quick sketch colored with crayons. During the sharing of responses focus especially on those that indicate a figurative meaning of color; for example, anger, embarrassment, debt, political position. Write these on chart paper, a different chart for each color.

At the same time, begin a collection of words and phrases that use colors to express an idea other than the literal meaning of the word. Model for the children how to use word association to activate their background knowledge about the way color words are used. Explore the possible origins of the idioms. Discover examples of color idioms in novels, non-fiction books, newspapers, or the Bible. Here are some examples:

RED: saw red, red-handed, red-letter
YELLOW: yellow-bellied, yellow journalism, yellow dog
GREEN: green with envy, greenhorn, sickly green
BLUE: felt blue, blue moon, bluesy music, blue murder
BLACK: blackball, blackguard, black magic, black list

Provide small cards on which students can write their discoveries. Place these cards in a "color word box." Before the next reading from *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*, give students an opportunity to explain their contributions and to answer questions about them. If the idiom is explained adequately, record it on the chart for that color; if not, assign someone to find out more about the meaning of the word or phrase. As an "expert" on the item, a student may be called on in the future to remind the class of the use of the idiom.

ACTIVITIES

1. Spend at least one Bible lesson exploring the ways color words are used symbolically in the Bible. For example, sin is referred to as scarlet, forgiveness is white as snow.

2. Explore ways in which color words are used with their literal meaning to create common similes; for example, black as midnight, green as grass.

3. Listen for color words to be used in a literal way in poetry to create beautiful pictures;

Think of what starlight
And lamplight would lack,
Diamonds and fireflies
If they couldn't lean against
Black. . . .

(Hailstones)

4. Integrate poetry and art. Suggest the following: "Think of a time when you felt one of the strong emotions associated with color words. Write about the experience and the feeling in a poetic way. Create several watercolor washes in which the color from your poem is dominant. Choose the one you like best, and print your poem on that paper with a permanent marker, placing the words in a pleasing arrangement."

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SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Dunning S., E. Lueders, H. Smith, ed. 1966. *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle. . . .* Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman.

Larrick, Nancy, ed. 1982. *Piping Down the Valleys Wild.* New York: Dell.

O'Neill, Mary. 1989. *Hailstones and Halibut Bones.* New York: Doubleday.

Prelutsky, L.C. ed. 1983. *Random House Book of Poetry for Children.* New York: Random House, Inc.

(You may add other poetry books that students contribute from home, the public library, or school library.)

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

GREEN

What is green?
Green is the color of summer fun,
The forest and the leaves.
Green is for go.
Green is the chalkboard in the school.
It is the color of the kitchen bowl.
The color of Christmas,
The color of grass,
The emerald lake.
Green is your face when you're jealous or sick.
Green is a cool color, not too hot, not too cold.
It's the smell of the Christmas tree,
That's what green is.

Green is the garden in your yard.
It's the parrot at the zoo.
Olive green is a sad feeling, but grass green is not.
Peppermint candies smell like green.
Green is the crayon on your desk.
It is the day when you feel best.
It's the color of spring.
Mint green is an Easter color.
Green is the frog you caught at the lake.
Saint Patrick's Day is green.
The clover that the bunny eats is green.
Green is the color most relaxing . . .

—Aimee Klassen, grade five,
Abbotsford Christian School, Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Christian Teaching Affirmations Take Shape in Classrooms

We reviewed the book *12 Affirmations: Reformed Christian Schooling for the 21st Century* in our April 1990 issue. The book grew out of the first three Chicago Conferences held in the summers of 1986, 1987, and 1988.

At the fourth Chicago Conference in June of 1990, *Affirmations* authors Steven Vryhof, Joel Brouwer, Stefan Ulstein, and Daniel Vander Ark, along with conferee Steven Holtrop, agreed to produce a practical companion volume that will include short reports of actual experiences of teachers implementing the affirmations. (See ad in October 1990 and February 1991 *CEJ* issues.) Here are several examples.

I use the following grading strategy most of the time to take grades on students' daily assignments. Not only does it promote trust and honesty, but it also gives students practice in self-assessment, reinforcing the idea that they are responsible for evaluating their own work as well as doing it.

I simply ask students to decide what their grade should be for such assignments as reading a chapter or doing a worksheet, then report it to me at the beginning of class. I ask them to give me a percentage—zero percent for an assignment not done, 100 percent for an assignment done completely and conscientiously, and an appropriate number in between for assignments done incompletely, hurriedly, or with less than their best effort. I ask them to report these grades to me publicly as I call off their names. As a follow-up, I ask students to write about their reaction to the system every time I introduce it to a new class. This gives us more opportunity to discuss matters like honesty, integrity, and responsibility.

Here are some guidelines and ground rules that I always explain before introducing the system. First, I don't use this system all the time. I only use it to check how thoroughly or completely homework has been done, not whether it has been understood. Next, I talk with students about honesty and trustworthiness. I also tell them that if they have any suspicions that someone has not told the truth, they should confront that person privately, not publicly, as we're instructed to do in Matthew 18. In fact, one important rule is that while students are reporting their percentages, no one (including me) may make any comments, positive or negative.

Students often report that this method is more accurate than teacher-checking of assignments, or surprise-quizzing, because they are the ones who know best how thoroughly they've done their assignments. They're sometimes worried that others might cheat, but they report that they themselves are honest. I find that I must warn students against false modesty, encouraging them to report a full 100 percent when that's what they truly deserve. The most gratifying response comes from the many students who report that it feels good to be genuinely trusted by a teacher. They say it encourages them to live out their convictions as Christians. Because they're given the opportunity to cheat, but they choose not to, their ability to act with integrity is strengthened.

—Joel R. Brouwer
Joel Brouwer teaches at Unity Christian High School in Hudsonville, Michigan.

I have been an English teacher for many years, but I have never had much success in making writing assignments seem worthwhile to students. In most classes, English or otherwise, papers are written for the teacher—no one else. This artificiality robs the experience of most of its true learning value and takes away most of the student's fun in the process.

Last year that all changed in my classroom. I had read Elliot Wigginton's book *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* the summer before. I was convicted with the need to make our writing experiences real. I assigned a target audience as one criterium for every paper. Once, after viewing the documentary "America, You're Too Young to Die," we wrote to fellow teens to persuade them to become involved in concrete ways to slow the moral decay of our country. Another assignment involved readings on the subject of "Short Circuit." After many exciting class discussions, we wrote what I termed a position paper on artificial intelligence

that they were to imagine being published in a scientific journal. The most successful "real audience" project was done by a tenth grade speech class who wrote the script for a video against drunken teen drivers. This script ultimately won a contest and was produced and aired by a nearby metropolitan television station.

Of course, there were times when no "real" audience could be conjured up. In those instances I made no apologies for the fact that they were writing for me. The difference, though, was that I became to them an audience for which they were creating a specific piece of writing. For the most part, they all caught the vision of writing to someone, not just writing as an end in itself.

Numerous secondary benefits can be gleaned from this situation. One big one is that grammar suddenly had true purpose for them. Grammar exercises had always been ranked as equal to Latin verb conjugations in importance. Now there was a reason to write correctly: real people will read this stuff, and the better it is written, the better I make my point. Another thing that has seldom happened since the advent of compulsory education is that students *liked* English class. I realize that you don't have to like a thing to learn it, but who knows how much more will be remembered because it was an enjoyable, self-motivated experience. In addition, they learned vocabulary the only meaningful way—by using it in real situations with real purposes. I might also add that the parents appreciated the down-to-earth approach and on several occasions reported dinner conversations that stemmed from our class discussions and the need to formulate and write educated opinions. Too often we leave our students thinking that nothing they do in English class will ever have the remotest connection with life outside school.

Undoubtedly, this type of approach could be adapted to other disciplines as well, but it is desperately needed in English classes. As a Christian teacher, I am especially eager that my students embrace good communication as a meaningful, "real-world" skill. If it becomes second nature to them, think how much better they will be able to "give a reason for the hope that is within them;" think how much more brightly their light will shine.

—Clair Verway

Clair Verway from Muskegon, Michigan, is a graduate student at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

At the beginning of the year, I inform students that there can be no closure to learning or achieving. An assignment not completed must be completed before moving on to the next. A test on which the score is unacceptable will be repeated until it is acceptable. The lowest grade achievable is a C. The system works as follows:

For unfinished assignments, due dates are extended the first time only. Time after school is required to complete the assignment if it remains incomplete. Work that is not acceptable is "corrected" so that students know what is expected and then returned to be resubmitted. In this way, all students achieve success, and closure is not permitted until the student achieves that success.

For assessments, an unacceptable grade results in a conference to determine what is unacceptable and a retest to allow a second assessment, or third if necessary. The focus is on reteaching and redirecting.

Over all, the student is encouraged to work to his or her best ability and is given the opportunity to complete the body of learning. The emphasis is not on the grade as a reward, but on the learning required for closure in that unit of learning.

Trinity Christian School is dedicated to the concept of integration of learning across the curriculum. That means that, once a month, the school provides a half day for teachers to work on integration of unit materials. The staff plans a series of units over the course of the year in which language arts, literature/reading, science or social studies, as well as field trips, are integrated. Vocabulary and spelling are linked to the topics being studied.

The planning ensures that approximately half of each school day is given to the teaching of the units.

The curriculum and report cards are organized around these topics: knowing God, knowing creation, knowing others, and knowing self. On the report cards we report not only achievement but effort and growth since the last report.

—Bruce Nelson

Bruce Nelson teaches at Trinity Christian School in Cincinnati, Ohio.

As an English teacher, I've always considered the actual placing of the letter grade at the bottom of the paper the most distasteful thing I do. Rarely do I give just the right grade in such a way that the writer feels justly rewarded and eager to attack the next piece.

So, I've done something about it with my advanced composition class of seniors. For the first six weeks of the course, I grade nothing. They hand in plenty of writing—that hasn't changed. But each week when I get a stack of papers a couple of things have changed.

First, students have already "gone public" with their work by reading the first drafts to a group of responders (much as Ken Macrorie recommends in *Telling Writing*). So, each piece I receive has already passed a test of sorts: the critical ear of peers. Also, this second draft I am handed doesn't require a grade from me. Instead, I read it thoroughly for form and content, writing copious marginal notes and a long final comment at the end, in which I try to supply encouragement. But no grade.

Knowing that I won't be forced to pass judgment by assigning a letter grade frees me up as a reader; no longer do I write comments simply to justify the grade I expect I will give the student. Instead, I look for strengths and try to carry on a conversation with the writer. My comments at the end, too, are more honest. I'm not explaining a low grade or groping for suggestions for an "A" paper. Instead of checking only for the grade when I hand the paper back, the students read the comments, noting my suggestions for improvement on the final draft.

I do grade the papers at the end of the six-week quarter. Students spend the last week or so of the quarter revising their best work. Then they submit an eight- to ten-page packet of their best writing for a grade. I grade it as a whole, responding once again to each individual piece in a final comment at the end of the packet. I find this more general grade far easier to give. I've given the students much encouragement, so they know I'm not "out to get them," and they've heard each other's writing enough in the group readings to have a sense of where they stand in relation to the others. (James C. Schaap has given a similar reason for using reading groups.) All in all, I've found, students are rarely surprised at the grade they receive on their report cards.

This system is by no means new, and it is not without fault. The way it looks on paper is, of course, better than it is in reality. But it works for me because it takes me out of the role of judge and makes me more of a co-worker, concerned with helping the writer write honestly and well.

—Mark Hiskes
Mark Hiskes teaches English at Holland Christian High School in Holland, Michigan.

In order to enhance community, to build the concept that our life story is a part of God's large Story, as well as to reinforce several language arts concepts, I have developed the following activities over time with the input of others.

"God Gave Me My Story" is the overall theme I am using in my grade three class this year. To make this a reality for the students, I made a bulletin board to start the year that displayed the theme and each student's name. For the first week I set up centers that would help the students focus on their own life story. At the end of the week, each student compiled a booklet that told a bit about his or her own story (special people, special places, beginning, middle, and present events in their story). One lesson during this time focused on how each student's story was a part of the class's story and a part of their family story, all of which are a part of God's overall Story. These concepts are developed throughout the year in order to make them concrete.

One way in which I do this is through the ongoing presentation of each student's story on the "God Gave Me My Story" bulletin board. Each week a new child is chosen to bring special pictures, toys, or other objects that bring back memories of his or her life story. The student arranges the memorabilia on the bulletin board and tells the class about the significance of each piece. Tags reading BEGINNING, MIDDLE, NOW, PLACES, and CHARACTERS are then given to the child to help sort the memorabilia into the different categories. The rest of the class participates by asking questions and agreeing or disagreeing with the placement of the tags.

This idea is further carried out during our weekly "Story Circle" time when we sit together with half the class and share stories about our lives on a certain topic (e.g. a time I was happy/sad/angry/hurt, a special time/place/person in my life). Ground rules are simple: a) everyone gets a turn to speak; b) you may pass if you want to; c) look at and listen to the speaker; d) whatever is said is to be accepted completely—no negative feedback.

My third graders are just developing a sense of beginning, middle, and end of a story plot, so I've included a "story rope" to help them in telling their story. The rope has three knots in it and is passed from speaker to speaker. The children move their hands along the knots to remind them to tell a complete story (basically three thoughts/ideas/sentences on the topic). If a child gets stuck, nothing is done to make him or her feel uncomfortable. He or she is given the option of thinking for a few moments or passing the rope on. After everyone has a turn, we review what has been said, find similarities and differences in responses, and discuss the topic in general, very briefly. About fifteen minutes are allotted for each "Story Circle" time. The experience allows everyone to share part of their lives in a safe environment and brings into focus events in their "life story." (You may recognize the format is a variation on the Magic Circle, Human Development Program.)

—Dorothy Vaandering
Dorothy Vaandering teaches at London Parental Christian School in London, Ontario.

As a catalyst for our discussion of the image of God, we viewed portions of *The Elephant Man*, a 1980 film about a grossly deformed man who lived in Victorian England. Joseph Merrick, the title character, had a brief career as an itinerant freak. He was promoted as "Half-a-Man and Half-an-Elephant" even though he was rather petite and resembled an elephant only in the sense that his skin was thick and rough.

After seeing photographs of this poor creature, eighteen of my twenty-one third graders decided that Merrick was too ugly to have been created in the image of God. The junior high students were shocked and intrigued. How could a freak be an image-bearer of God? How can we reconcile Merrick's deplorable condition with the limitless majesty and mercy of God?

Questions:

1. Was Merrick's condition a divine mistake? Was it a judgment or punishment? Or was it the best thing that could have happened?
2. What is the source of Merrick's handicap: God, Satan, fate, or the people he met and their treatment of him?
3. What comfort is there in knowing that we are created in the image of God? What are the challenges?

For further information:

- Montagu, Ashley. 1971. *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity*. London: Allison & Busby. This book contains excellent photographs and primary documents, including Merrick's two-page autobiography.
- Howell, Michael J. and Peter Ford. 1980. *The True History of the Elephant Man*. London: Allison & Busby (dist. by Penguin Books). Although shorter and less readily available than the Montagu book, this book is more scholarly and up to date. It contains a few photographs and the more important primary documents.
- *The Genuine Original Elephant Man*, a play written by Pamela Bardolph Eiten and presented by the eighth grade of Pella Christian Grade School in December of 1990.

Contact the author at 229 East Third, Pella, Iowa , 50219.

—Pamela B. Eiten

Pamela B. Eiten, a homemaker in Pella, Iowa, formerly taught at Roseland Christian School in Chicago, and Holland Christian Middle School in Holland, Michigan.

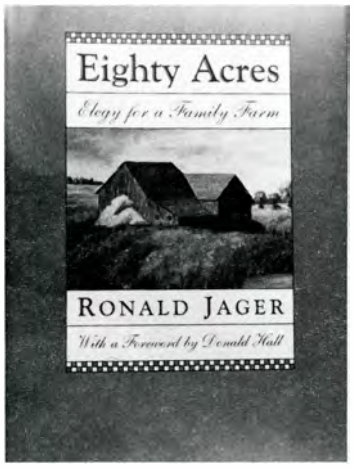
Don't Farm

"Don't farm!" my dad said,
his face beet red
from sun
and my rotary hoeing out
a quarter-mile of corn;
"Don't farm!" my dad said,
the hailstones gathered
as thick as cockleburs;
"Don't farm!" my dad said,
the Hereford lay bloated
beside the broken barbed wire;
"Don't farm!" my dad said,
his knuckles bleeding
from a rusty nut.

And so
today I teach,
and guess what, Dad?
My heart bleeds
from a few rusty nuts
whose barbed stares
and English papers bloated with errors
make me wish
right now
I could turn back the acres of time
and replant
myself on the farm.

—by Bryce Fopma

—by STEVE J. VAN DER WEELE



Eighty Acres: Elegy for a Family Farm

Ronald Jager

Beacon Press, Boston, 1990. 257 pp., $15.00.

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

This book, written by Ronald Jager, a Calvin alumnus, can be useful to teachers in various ways. Sociology teachers will find it valuable as a detailed account of rural life in the period from 1930–1950, as lived by a family in a strong ethnic town (McBain, Michigan) under the aegis of a pervasive religious commitment. The family—and its neighbors—lived out that life in a context imbued with deep religious meaning—which meant, among other things, obedience, order, and purpose. Sociology and history teachers will profit from this vivid account of how a microcosm of a family living on eighty acres interacted with the larger world of events such as depressions and the invasion on D-Day.

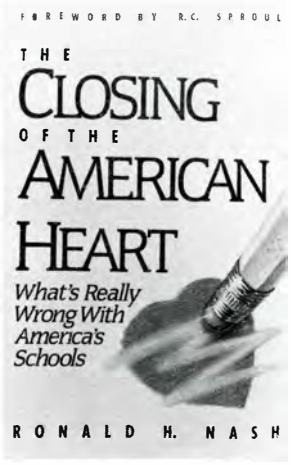
Teachers in other disciplines will discover other areas of interest. Economists, for example, will come to understand a bit more vividly the transition from the mythical family farm to agri-business. Jager describes well the external manifestations of this upheaval in passages such as this:

> Spilling out of every town, suburbia trickles along the edges of the two-lane road—houses parked in a row where the potato patch used to be. . . . Almost certainly I shall spot an old two-handle horse-drawn walking plow, parked on a flat rock or on a little concrete pedestal in the center of someone's lawn. The plow's moldboard, once steel gray and glistening from the soil, might now be painted silo blue, its handles barn red, white petunias flowering at its feet. (2)

Such passages are useful also for teachers of writing. The book serves as a model of how a keen memory and a sense for language can be transmuted into expression that recreates both the physical landscape and the human drama for the reader in images that linger in the mind. Almost every page contains passages that combine narrative with interpretation, and perceptive characterization with appreciation for the wide array of human types and personalities that inhabit our world.

The book is more than a merely descriptive chronicle. These memoirs narrate something very precious: the family as an embryonic community, knit together through the unswerving faith and practice of the parents, and all devoted—in education, social life, spiritual moorings—to a cause higher than any one family member or the family itself, the kingdom of God. Thus, the chapter "The Long Arm of John Calvin" can be said to brace and structure the work from beginning to end.

These memoirs belong to the category of work done by Stanley Wiersma, Hugh Cook, Frederick Manfred, and James Schaap in their sympathetic portrayal of rich legacy. Glenn Meeter's *Letters to Barbara* and Peter De Vries's *The Blood of the Lamb* do much the same, though portraying life in the city. Along with these others, *Eighty Acres* will perpetuate an inheritance that could easily be lost through time if not now and then recorded so effectively. ■



The Closing of the American Heart: What's Really Wrong with America's Schools

Ronald H. Nash

Probe Books, Dallas, 1990. 225 pp., $14.99.

Reviewed by Dr. Gregory J. Maffet, Elementary Principal, Orangewood Christian School, Matiland, Florida.

Ronald Nash fears that "American education is beyond repair." Accordingly he takes off from the popular works of Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch with the purpose of providing "some hope . . . from the perspective of American evangelicalism."

The *heart* in Nash's title is "the religious and moral center of our being that plays a role in determining our ultimate commitments." Nash dwells at

length on the inseparability of knowledge and the moral order of the human heart, together with the corollary of "the inescapable religious component" of man. Contending that "all humans are incurably religious" or, in other words, that "education that pretends to be religiously neutral is a fraud," he calls for a Christian philosophy of education that is "unapologetically" based on "a Christian view of life and the world." Since everyone's view of education is inseparable from his or her worldview, it follows that for the sake of both Christians and non-Christians we must continue to hold before our society the necessity of a Christian education.

Nash's position is very much like the one developed by Gordon Clark in 1946, when he wrote *A Christian Philosophy of Education*. He has updated Clark's work and applied its principles to the issues concerning Christian parents and education as we pass through the 1990s.

These are the key issues addressed and which make this book well worth reading:

1. Functional illiteracy, cultural illiteracy, and moral illiteracy. Nash presents, compares, and contrasts these manifestations of America's educational crisis.

2. The nihilistic condition in American education, where "all ultimate values lose their value." He analyzes this phenomenon in the light of the "three enemies of 'The Permanent Things'": relativism, positivism, and "secularism-naturalism-humanism."

3. The vivid attack on the educational establishment. He exposes, with strong support of Samuel Blumenfeld and with embarrassing evidence, the problem of "woefully under-educated teachers" and the spectacle of departments and colleges of education as requiring courses "with little or no content, that require little or no significant work, and that result in highly inflated grades."

4. The concession of higher education, including Christian colleges, to Marxist utopian thinking in contrast to capitalism. In addition, some evangelical colleges tend to be "long on spirituality but short on academics."

The hope Nash offers is formidable and deserves our attention. Readers are directed to save American education by increasing parental educational choice, by destroying the public school monopoly with competition, by supporting arguments for vouchers, and by expanding the vision for Christian schools.

Allan Bloom calls for educators to return to the great classics as reservoirs of knowledge and virtue. Nash goes beyond that. He directs Christian educators to "recover" the truth with its theological doctrine and to disclose its absolute nature.

The author concludes the book by advocating some of William Bennett's ideas: his "three C's"—Content, Character, and Choice; his insistence of the importance of family, church, and school; his emphasis on the ethical instruction to be derived from classical literature and history, with the added observation that "no quality education will ignore the Bible."

The plea to reopen the American heart and mind may fall short of the expectations of some Christian educators. And Reformed Christian school and college educators will look in vain for a discussion of the well-established covenantal foundation for the Christian philosophy of education and the subsequent necessity for Christian schools. An entire chapter is devoted to the "Christian School Movement" without a reference to Christian Schools International. Instead, Nash contrasts Susan Rose's secular critique of a fundamentalist Baptist school using the A.C.E. curriculum, together with a charismatic school, with Dallas Theological Seminary's Kenneth Gargel and his view of Christian schools. He offers no suggestions for the Christian school classroom practitioners, neither does he refer to the writings of Nicholas Wolterstorff, Harro Van Brummelen, or Geraldine Steensma, or to the work of C.S.I. or A.C.S.I. He cites no curriculum development projects, nor does he allude to the *12 Affirmations*.

Nash attempts to keep the heart of America's schools beating by prescribing a strong dose of morals. To achieve this hope he calls for a return to liberal arts education and the classic morals that are contained in the great books, particularly the Bible. He supports Christian schools as the "preferable option" and challenges Christian educators to stand with Joshua "to take dominion." Yet, I recommend the book. Nash writes lucidly; his ideas are accessible to lay educators and stimulating for everyone.

CEJ

ARTICLES, COLUMNS, AND EDITORIALS

BOOKS REVIEWED

AUTHORS, BOOK REVIEWERS, AND POETS

POETRY