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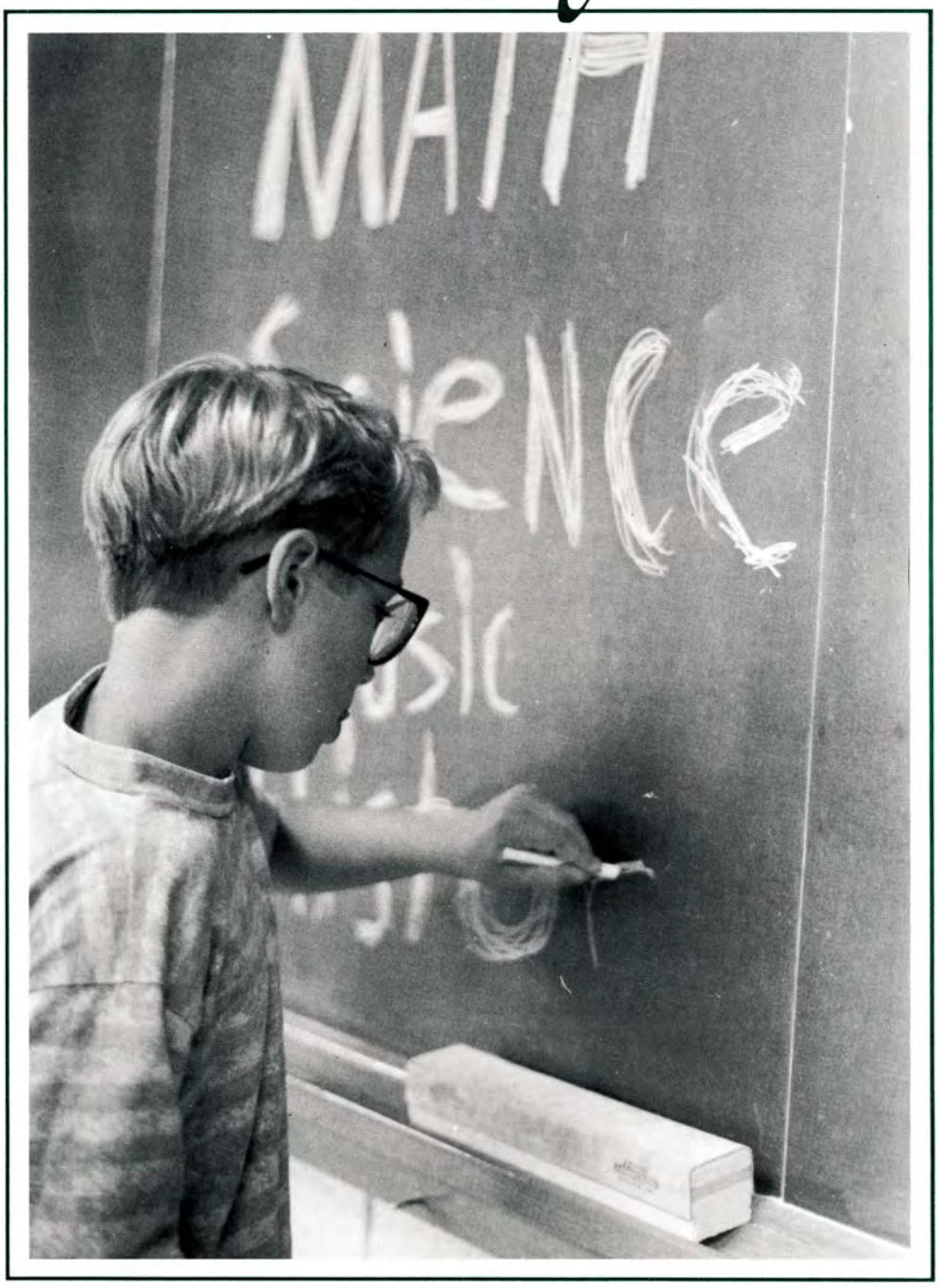


Writing to Learn in All Disciplines

—by LORNA VAN GILST

For the Love of Learning

Our new history teacher thought we were lazy, so he ordered us to return to class at the 3:30 dismissal bell. What he didn't know was that most of us were farm kids, some of us living thirty or forty miles from school.

At 3:30 he asked us why we weren't keeping up writing chapter outlines. Not sure how long our bus driver would wait—and not sure how to get home if he didn't—I turned suddenly bold and said, "It takes a long time to copy so much." He wanted those outlines thorough and accurate, and we had found the way to impress him: copy the book's wording and work down to minor subpoints.

Writing to learn meant, in that class, copying to learn. Perhaps we gained something through the mere act of running textbook words through the mind and through the hand that held the pen. Some thought must have gone into our choice of ideas and their arrangement on the page.

But we gained precious little knowledge or even appreciation for history. In the years that followed I had many dedicated teachers who outlined the textbooks for me; my job was to copy their outlines.

I like to think no one teaches that way anymore. But I know better. And I know the reasons. Teachers feel compelled to cover the book. They want to appear accountable to their students, to their administrators, to the community.

Writing to learn, a concept we hear about so much today in education, encourages students to choose the ideas and to respond to ideas in ways that make sense to them. Writing to learn is not really a new concept. We have probably noticed that we become aware of new ideas even when we write memos or letters. But never before have we been so conscious of the way writing can enable us to discover the connections between what we know and what new ideas we encounter.

Writing to learn implies a different way of thinking about the way we are created. It enlarges the scope of the image of God in us. It views each student not as a product that schools produce, but as an image bearer of God, able to praise God with creative gifts. Christian teachers are called not to pour a canon of Christlike thoughts about science, history, literature, and math into our students, not to hand them the formulas to keep them safe from sin, but to nudge them to live in praise and service to God by caring for his creation, to appreciate the connections between themselves and the rest of creation.

Some people articulate those links through spoken language. Clear speech requires clear thinking. But there are other ways to think, and writing is a way of thinking. As we study how we speak and write, we become more and more aware that writing is not simply transferring pre-formulated thoughts from the mind to the page, although that may be a part of the process. But writing leads us to thoughts that extend beyond what we consciously know—reaching, reaching, reaching a little farther to connect what we know with what we encounter.

The beauty of this concept of writing is appreciating the marvelous potential God has given people to learn through writing. It may be the tedious process of Joni Eriksen Tada's punching out her quadraplegic story by stylus in her mouth, the deliberate press of a nephew's penciled thank you note, or the speedy click of a colleague's computer keys. In numerous cases the act of writing itself leads to new realization.

In school, this kind of realization seems to occur most often when writers take responsibility for their own discoveries, knowing that teachers view their writing as part of a process, not, first of all, as a product to be graded.

In my own experience, I have been most likely to continue that process when I am encouraged by mentors and peers who allow me to work through my muddle of thoughts. Sometimes they praise me. Sometimes they question me. There are times when I am unwilling or unable to go on because I cannot yet complete the bridge between my experience and the new concept. Sometimes I quit. Sometimes a deadline hangs over me, and I am obliged to go on.

This process is by no means limited to writers of magazine articles or student essays. It can become a valuable process in almost every field.

I met Agnes Robinson from El Paso Community College in 1988 in Cambridge, England. She was there to discuss the writing-to-learn philosophy with British educators. Robinson had helped advise The West Texas Project in Writing across the Curriculum, and she emphasized the benefits of the writing-as-learning philosophy. She shared examples of such an approach in courses for business education, interior design, nursing, agricultural administration, and accounting.

Agnes Robinson discovered in her courses at a small liberal arts college

that when students understood what they were writing, they not only wrote more clearly, but also they wrote with fewer grammatical problems—even though grammar was not specifically addressed. She believes the solution to student writing problems is not to give students more grammar courses or more formal reports and research papers, but to integrate writing with learning in every course. Such writing, says Robinson, builds self-confidence and critical thinking. It enables students and teachers to participate together in the joy of learning.

I, too, have experienced that joy of learning, as teacher and as student. But I struggle, especially when my self-confidence is low, when I think I have to produce writing—my own or my students'—that proves my worth.

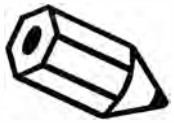
When I accept the worth that God gives me, I am free to flourish as his image bearer and to encourage my students to do so as well, in praise to God. And that is why I must show them and nudge them—but not manipulate them—to write. For when they of themselves offer their unique expression in service to God, then God is truly praised. **LVG**

I to I

"I don't like English,"
he journaled
while I stood
poised above his desk,
my afternoon turned ink red
by this young man;
my heart raced,
my tongue lifted to lash out
to punish capitally
for his punishing me.
Then
mysteriously
the Spirit spoke
before I did;

knees bent,
body lowered
and I
met him
I to I.

—by BRYCE FOPMA



—by LARRY J. CAMERON

Writing to Learn in the Secondary Program

All of us have been conditioned to believe that writing is a means of proving that a person has learned. In high school we prepare carefully-written essays to accompany our college applications and gain admission (we hope!) to the school of our choice. In college we complete page after page of blue books to convince our professors that we have gained knowledge. In our professions we often find ourselves composing memos and board reports to satisfy the demands of our superiors. Over and over, our writing validates our experiences. We tend to lose sight of the fact, however, that writing can be just as effective a tool *to learn* as it is a tool to prove that learning has occurred.

Many writers and authors in the field of education have been telling us this for a number of years. In the last decade Ernest Boyer noted that "language is the most essential tool of learning" (85). Ruth Tschumy, also writing in the 1980s, commented, "Writing in every class promotes learning . . . writing is a way of arriving at learning" (66). In his recently published book on language arts, Robert Bruinsma states, "Writing is a process of learning rather than its end product" (89). These authors and others obviously believe that the emphasis in a successful school's writing program is the use of writing as a tool to promote learning rather than a tool to measure whether or not learning has occurred.

Experts in the field make a distinction between expressive writing and transactional writing. Nancy Martin notes that the former is language written for oneself, offering a mixture of fact, opinion, feeling, and personal anecdote. The latter is language that is most used in schools. It is instructive, scientific, technical, and reportive. Bruinsma includes expository, or essay, writing in the transactional category.

Most teachers use transactional writing exclusively and ignore the use of expressive language. Transaction writing is used to prove that learning has taken place. But writing can and should be used to promote learning, and expressive writing may serve this purpose. Again quoting Tschumy: "Increased amounts of brief, subject-related, non-tested writing significantly improves student learning and increases concept clarity" (67).

Some teachers have tried to incorporate the use of expressive writing in their classes through the use of journals. In every subject pupils can be encouraged to keep journals. Students can, for example, write for five minutes at the end of each class session, capsulizing what they have just been studying. To generate thinking, the teacher may reverse this order and have students write journal entries on a topic before the lesson is taught.

Advantages to journal writing include 1) increased discussion and participation, 2) getting pupils to think and to be more precise, and 3) allowing teachers an opportunity to examine and review with each pupil his or her thinking on a particular subject. One math teacher found that students who had completed a unit on probability and had successfully passed a post-test could not express in words what they had just studied. He commented, "We are . . . concerned with the inability to express a complete mathematical idea, much less a correct one" (Geelin 113).

Teachers of any subject can incorporate journal writing in their classrooms. To do so they need to perform two basic tasks: prepare a list of topics and provide the students with time to write. After students have written, they should be given time to share their efforts and time to rewrite or revise, working in small groups. The purpose of these assignments is to give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge and understanding. Journal writing can serve as a diagnostic tool for the teacher and as a learning tool for the pupil. Some recommended guidelines are as follows:

- ✏ Get students to write frequently (daily, if possible).
- ✏ Encourage students to write expressively at first; do not make a lot of corrections of their style.
- ✏ Use the students' own writing to teach them correct grammar and usage.
- ✏ Involve students more in the *process* of writing rather than in the product.
- ✏ Give students time to work together both individually and in groups.
- ✏ Do not stress grades; in fact, consider making only positive comments rather than assigning mere letter grades to students' work.

Effective writing programs, of course, incorporate both expressive and transactional forms of writing. Teachers need to be encouraged to try more expressive writing opportunities. Possibilities for appropriate use of this type of writing are limited only by one's imagination. One social studies teacher reported giving students a few historical facts and asking them to write a passage of text themselves. Science students in another class chose topics of interest and wrote information books for the class on that topic. A teacher of math suggested that initially teachers should focus only on the content of the pupils' writing and later attend to correcting errors in the writing itself.

We who are educators are rightly

concerned these days with critical thinking skills. Writing is naturally related to thinking. The more we encourage writing—of all kinds—the more we encourage thinking. As Ernest Boyer has commented, "Clear writing leads to clear thinking" (302). Incorporating the use of expressive writing in our curricula, teachers encourage better thinking and better learning. **CEJ**

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—by BARBARA HERSHBERGER

Process Writing:
Comprehension for Disabled Readers

Brad was a fourth grade student whose reading level was early second grade. He could not respond to language activities quickly enough to keep pace with the other students in his class. So, Brad was referred to me for eight weeks of tutoring in reading skills.

I wanted to use an instructional approach with Brad that would show him how to use his language gifts as tools for enjoyable interaction with books. After all, God gave humans the unique gift of language for the purpose of communication with God and with others.

Brad had shown no interest in reading books on his own. But his teacher had been reading *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* to the class, and Brad enjoyed the adventures of Ralph S. Mouse. I decided to build upon this interest. Because Beverly Cleary has written two other books about Ralph, I knew we had enough reading material to keep us busy.

During our sessions, Brad and I read from paperback copies of the books. We took turns reading aloud and talking about story events. I frequently asked Brad what he thought would happen next. One afternoon as we began our session, I asked Brad to predict who might discover Ralph hiding in the school building. "I already know," he said. Brad had taken the book home and had read several pages because he wanted to know what would happen. That was our first giant step of progress toward enjoying language through books.

As we read together, we began to write down some of Brad's predictions, questions, and suggestions for changes in the story. My interest in his opinions clearly boosted his confidence in extending his thoughts both orally and in writing. As we finished the books, I asked Brad if he had any ideas for another adventure for Ralph. "I think he might have an adventure with a computer," he replied. Brad began to write his own adventure for Ralph, who now used the school computers at night to do homework assignments for his special friends. This was another giant step of progress for Brad.

Brad's story was several pages in length. He wanted to write because he was interacting with the literature and connecting it to his own background of interests and experiences. Language was becoming enjoyable and meaningful. Language was becoming communication.

The past decade has seen a surge of interest in and research into the connection between reading ability and writing ability. Walter Loban's research has been a foundation for the current emphasis. Loban tracked the reading development of 211 students from kindergarten through high school, and he found a strong correlation between reading performance and writing performance. The relationship became more pronounced as students reached the upper grades (Klein 20).

Becoming a Nation of Readers, the report of the U.S. Commission on Reading, strongly supports the use of writing to improve reading skills. The commission recommends replacing workbooks and skillsheets with

composing activities designed to link textbook lessons with the students' understanding of the concepts presented in literature (Anderson 79-81).

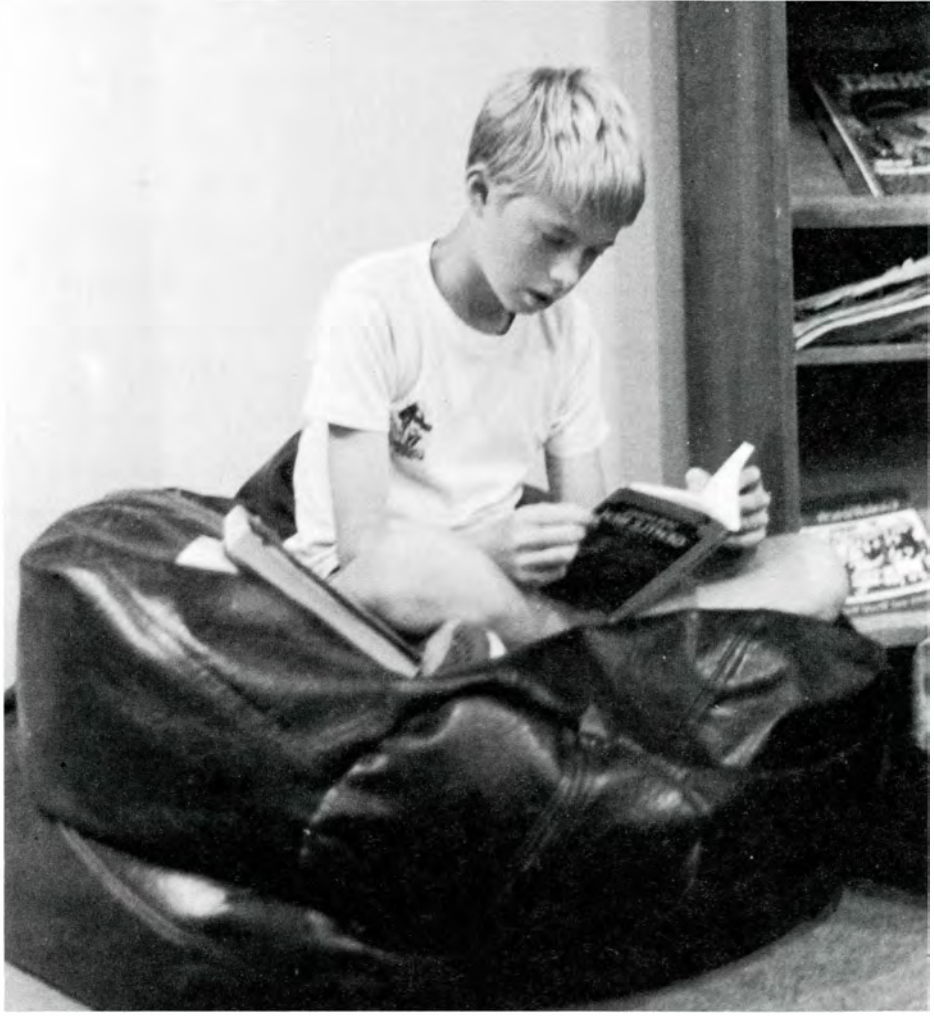
In earlier studies by Doctorow, Wittrock, and Marks (1978) and by Wittrock (1983), low-ability students were asked to compose summaries during reading. The researchers found that students who wrote summaries scored higher on comprehension tests than students who did not write.

One case study presents the situation of a boy named Michael. Not previously asked to write as part of the classroom reading program, Michael had difficulty getting started when instructed to do so in a remedial reading setting. He wanted a clean sheet of paper every time he made an error; but he relaxed and enjoyed writing when he understood the drafting step. With merged skills, he progressed swiftly. At the end of one semester, testing indicated that Michael was reading at grade level.

These studies are representative of the mounting evidence that process writing, when connected to literature experiences, can improve the reading ability of remedial students. Enough evidence is available to urge teachers to include process writing in their remedial programs as well as in the regular classroom curriculum.

Writing is most likely to encourage learning when the writer has a purpose for writing. The same is true of reading. Brad became a reader when he wanted to know what would happen to the mouse hero in Beverly Cleary's books. He became a writer when he wanted to share his own idea for a new adventure for the mouse.

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills should work together to reinforce one another. They cannot and should not be isolated.



Too many reading disabled students have spent countless hours reading literature samples from textbooks followed by endless worksheets of meaningless pencil tasks. Student strengths and weaknesses have often been ignored. The best program of instruction is one that views the student as a uniquely created individual with special needs, and the language skills as integrated tools for the purpose of communication.

The sequence of integrating is not complex. Spoken language is an excellent starting point for pre-reading and pre-writing activities. Conversation about the students' own interests and experiences will help with the task of literature selection. When students and teachers take turns reading aloud, the teacher serves as a model of good reading skills. You may want to brainstorm predictions of events and possible outcomes and let the students record these on paper. Be attuned to the students' responses for clues that they are motivated to write original compositions. Probe, question, and occasionally make suggestions. Remember that drafting precedes editing: be concerned with the expression of ideas more than with correct mechanics.

Keep a log of each teaching session. Be sure to record those special student responses that indicate steps of progress toward your goals. **CEJ**

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—by LAURA APOL OBBINK

A Lesson in Finding Our Own Way

Before we can understand ourselves as writers or as teachers of writing, we need to understand ourselves as students of writing —remembering not only what, but how we learned what we know about shaping thoughts and ideas into words. My own memories of learning to write are not so much connected to a method as to a person—a person who continues to surprise me with what he knows by instinct rather than by instruction, and within whose shadow I continue to teach and to learn: Carl Vandermeulen.

The day I met Vandermeulen he was wearing his sky-blue safari suit. Vandermeulen predicted on that first day that taking his English class would change our lives; then he distributed our new grammar books. We could use the texts if we wanted, he told us, but it's something like using a map to explore a park—the beauty and excitement are more often found in the wandering exploration than in the actual destination.

On the second day, Vandermeulen began to teach. We read. We found symbols. We became familiar with terms such as "attacking a straw man" and "begging the question." We discussed authenticity, and he led us to conclude that "all that glitters is not gold." And we learned to write. There were no five-paragraph essays, no funnels or thesis statements. Vandermeulen emphasized instead an internal coherence of content, a unity of ideas themselves. It was not structure or format he taught, but a way of perceiving the world and a method of relating our perceptions to others.

In the progression of our writing classes, Vandermeulen distributed an article called "Salt Crystals, Spider Webs, and Words" in which Paul Engle begins, "Writing is a lot like making love. It is astonishing how far pure instinct (if it is really pure) will take you. It is also true of both of these lyrical forms of expression that a few things consciously learned will push toward perfection what might otherwise be an ordinary act."

I suspect Vandermeulen rather enjoyed our shocked surprise at the mention of "making love" in a high school English handout, but that was his way. He challenged us, shocked us, trusted us to be more adult even than we considered ourselves, then helped us become the adults he envisioned us to be. When we were visiting New York City for a journalism workshop one spring, he warned us—three high school seniors, caught up in the glitter, not the gold—that the lights would be bright but the streets would be dark. Then he trusted us to find our own way.

Engle's perception of writing as cultivated instinct was an appropriate description of how Vandermeulen taught us to write. He allowed us the freedom of intuition, yet he guided us by assigning us to imitate essays, poems, and stories that we studied together; and he brought along samples of his own writing as illustration. He taught general guidelines of voice, tense, and point of view but never gave prescriptions or formulas for successful writing. We would discuss the variety of writers and works he brought in, then practice and imitate the models until the imitation felt comfortable, until we ourselves could hear the rightness of the phrases, until the voices had become our own. Vandermeulen taught us to find ourselves through the work of others, when finding ourselves was our chief interest anyway, and he made us believe that we—and our words—were fitting and beautiful.

His instruction was open, but it was not without structure. There was a five-part evaluation of our work—content, interest, organization, mechanics, and style. Our grades were never based on our performance in relation to the rest of the class, but in relation to what he determined we were capable of. Subjective? Extremely—but then, he would say that most things in life are subjective.

How Vandermeulen's methods must have frustrated the other teachers! Most of Vandermeulen's English students never learned to identify a participial phrase or to correct a dangling modifier. But he didn't concern himself with the approval or disapproval of others. Imperturbable, he was both infuriatingly reasonable and entirely unreasonable in making his points. Walking in New York that spring, searching unsuccessfully for Chinatown and impatient to arrive, we urged him to ask for directions. He insisted that together we find our own way. Ralph Ellison in *The Invisible Man* suggests that perhaps to lose a sense of *where* you are implies the danger of losing a sense of *who* you are, and I think Vandermeulen would agree. He wanted us to know the satisfaction of making our own way, unassisted, through New York City (as through the writing of an essay, and through high school itself).

At a time when conformity characterized most of our lives, Vandermeulen encouraged us to believe in what we were and in what we were becoming; and his satisfaction came from finding a new voice in each of us. Consciously or unconsciously, we still echo much of what he taught. He would be pleased to hear me say that, for it was he who told me that by the way the hands have shaped the clay, you know the potter.

And he would be pleased because he was right that first day in his blue safari suit: he did change my life.

CEJ

Laura Apol Obbink is completing a Ph.D. in English education at the University of Iowa. She lives in Davenport, Iowa.

—by CAROL M. REGTS

USING WRITING SUCCESSFULLY IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS:

I DARE YOU

I dare you to read this article. I dare you to begin by giving yourself credit. Too often writing as activity, as requirement, involves guilt and shame and the stomach-wrenching assignment of the "research paper." But you don't need to accept that burden. No matter what subject you teach, you already use writing to help your students learn. Your students use writing to take notes, to solve equations the "long" way, to make flash cards, to paraphrase, to answer essay questions.

Although I know that writing often can be a frightening, failure-ridden activity for teacher and student, I dare you to discover how you can use writing more successfully in your classroom. I dare you to realize that writing can put your students' roller coaster emotions and energy to use in a learning process that you and they can enjoy, observe, and evaluate. Just as important, writing sends that learning in a concrete fashion back inside each student.

Pat yourself on the back for what you are already doing and then dare to step onward.

Playing with Writing

Teachers and students must recognize that writing is an emotion-laden act, and teachers must be willing to take some of the pressure off in order to help students play with writing. If students are afraid to write from past experiences because they have always failed or don't feel they have something important to say, or if students are angry because they tried to be honest in what they said but were not accepted, writing will not help them learn. Indeed, it can stop learning in its tracks. To offset this reaction and to help your students feel safe when writing, you as the teacher must first relax and decide to have fun with the process of learning that writing represents.

Your students will see themselves learning through the writing, often in surprising and sophisticated ways.

Sure, you're serious about learning. Sure, writing is a serious business because it is inherently connected with learning. That, however, is all the more reason to step back a bit and see where writing can lead you and your students, to wait patiently for yourself and your students to trust the process.

Once that trust is established, you will witness a revival of excitement in learning because not only you but also your students will see themselves learning through the writing, often in surprising and sophisticated ways. You will also discover that one of the mysteries of education for which no one can take credit is the way writing grabs hold of a pen and connects to some line in the brain never touched before. That interaction can be scary to watch and to engage in, but mostly it's exciting—if you can prepare yourself and your students to delight in and seek out the possibility.

Perhaps your first step toward relaxing is to realize why and how writing makes you tense. Probably you need to stop picturing that forbidding language arts teacher on your staff or from your own junior high school days glaring in disbelief that you, of all people, should attempt to engage students in writing. You know that anyone with excitement for learning has the right, the need, and the ability to tap into writing's energy in any course of study.

The second part in relaxing is allowing your language arts teacher to help you create ideas you are comfortable using. If you are not familiar with some of the writing terms I use, please ask your colleagues to explain and suggest ways to apply them in your classroom. You don't need to figure this stuff out by yourself. Also ask your librarian to help connect your subject with the variety of ways others have used writing to make sense of particular subject material. Writing is a community business as much as it is the individual facing a blank sheet of paper and daring to risk defining oneself in a relationship with an idea.

Having fun with that definition and that relationship, as well as relieving the emotional pressure, is brought about by a variety of writing experiences. Students need to engage with language in diverse ways that nourish their self-image and creatively

challenge their understanding of the subject. They need to experiment with frequent, short pieces of writing that take only five to ten minutes to write and that everyone can do in class together (perhaps you might even try a few yourself). To help students see that writing represents successful learning in your classroom, you must lay a groundwork of weekly or even daily engagements in which students learn that writing helps them cross over from knowledge "out there" to understanding "in me."

Once students trust themselves to their writing, they and you will benefit with responses that have depth, texture, and interest. I think the main reason for boring and poorly written essays and research papers is that students have not gained experience in trusting the learning process involved in writing and their part in it. They may be as afraid of writing and of your part in the process as you very likely are yourself. They need practice investing themselves, their thoughts and feelings, in writing that is appreciated for the risk taken and for its content. That investment then pays off for both you and the students alike because students must invest in or connect to the material you are teaching.

No matter what your subject area, consider using some of the playful yet serious learning activities listed in the accompanying box. All of the activities require students to translate their learning concretely in different forms of writing, and they force students to choose what is important and necessary to explore, define, summarize, order logically, or evaluate. You can use these activities at the beginning or end of the period or a unit; you can develop them into full-scale projects or keep them at a sketchy "let's try and see" level. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but I hope it sparks some ideas for you and makes you excited about playing with writing.

Activities like these allow students with low ability to succeed and encourage high-ability students to stretch. They require students a) to explore the making-meaning process actively, b) to reflect on how their language use shows what they know and what they do not know, and c) to evaluate how their commitment to or feelings about the material affect their understanding. The variety and experimentation itself will excite students to want to write—and thereby to learn.

"Guided imagery" is one learning-rich activity that is a favorite for me. This procedure requires the teacher (initially, students later) to create a general "story" line in which students place themselves as the main character and envision concretely whatever situation or process you want them to make a connection with. For example, if the class is studying the first English colony at Jamestown, ask students to close their eyes as you tell the story and to imagine how they feel as this person:

> I've been on this ship for four weeks. Water is running low, and I haven't had a bath in all this time. What do I look like to other people? I know we all smell. There are bugs in the food. Everyone is fighting. I just had a run-in with John Smith, who nearly beat me to death. Thank goodness he's down below in chains.

When you finish setting the stage for the story, students should continue, writing as that character in the first

Brainstorming or freewriting everything students know *and* don't know about the subject or topic you are covering gives a quick check on their knowledge, gives closure to a lesson, and allows everyone to participate with a "right" answer.

Cartoons, riddles, posters, flash cards, or symbols to represent vocabulary words, themes, conflicts, or processes encourage applying hierarchies, abstracting into symbolic language, and finding the essential message.

Journals help students respond to reading or lecture material, discuss how they are learning what they are learning, develop opinions, and ask questions.

One- to one-hundred-word paraphrases of a reading selection provide practice in necessary research skill, choosing important information, and translating. (Make sure they write with the book closed or even wait a day after they read it.)

Biographies, historical fiction, or narratives of scientists, mathematicians, and explorers apply research techniques creatively and employ point of view or bias.

Creeds or statements of belief that historical figures or the students' ministers or students themselves would hold about the subject material encourage students to identify self with a particular perspective and personal applications.

Letters about what students are learning can be written to teachers, to the principal, to parents, to classmates, or to key people you're studying. One could be from a soldier to his mother, from the student to the past, to the future, to God—or vice versa. Don't diminish the importance of such a note jotted in ten minutes. It still involves an explanation and an evaluation of what is going on and helps students experiment with different persona.

person *I*, giving themselves a name and describing in detail their experience, their specific thoughts and feelings, making the facts their own.

You can use guided imagery with a number going through an equation, with the ozone layer wondering about its fate, with Stephen facing a stoning, with a basketball making its way through zone defense, or with a note in the chromatic scale.

It is important to insert questions, thoughts, feelings, and sensory details into the initial story line and to encourage your students to follow suit in their narrative. It is also necessary to do any of these activities more than once and to share some of these writings as a class. This not only increases the fun, but also lets students see the variety in perspective and description, to see ways of being more specific and sequential, to see other possibilities for seeing. Familiarity with the process will also boost students' confidence and imagination.

Evaluating Writing

Now that you have your students writing and writing, you very likely cringe thinking about the piles of papers you must read. A primary rule to evaluating writing successfully is "Don't kill yourself or your students." You do not need a red pen leaking blood over a paper to show yourself, your fellow teachers, and your students that you are using writing in your classroom. You certainly do not need to grade nor even to read everything your students write. Indeed, having your students write more frequently releases you from the obligation to read everything. It gives the much more helpful, truer message that writing can be used to explore, to experiment, and to enjoy.

I am not saying that response is not necessary to using writing successfully in the classroom. In fact, response is extremely important because no one likes to send a bit of themselves, whether it's in writing or some other form, into a void. Perhaps, though, you might consider the differences between *judgment*, with its right-versus-wrong absolutes, and *reaction*, with its emphasis on the reader's likes and dislikes. The former begs for the red pen, whereas the latter encourages dialogue, meeting the students halfway as they try to make sense of the material and to write what makes sense. However, you cannot be the sole receiver, the sole reader. Let your students, their parents, and even the principal take a turn.

Response is extremely important because no one likes to send a bit of themselves, whether it's in writing or some other form, into a void.

In addition, you must decide what you absolutely need to see in your students' writing to show you that they are learning or are at least open to learning. Tell them these decisions *ahead* of time. Be honest with yourself about your writing activity and your requirements. If you are not honest, students will not trust you or their writing, and they will not learn. For a ten-minute writing activity in class, you cannot expect your students to worry about punctuation, spelling, and grammar. What you and they need to be more concerned about is exploring the ideas, getting words on paper. The students need to direct their energy into discovering and translating what's in their heads. Their keeping up with the flow of thoughts is enough of a struggle and accomplishment for these short activities.

Reordering, refashioning, and revising may come later only if what they are writing about represents closure to an idea or topic integral to your unit. Requiring revision for every writing activity is not necessary and, in fact, is detrimental. Revising is extremely difficult and time-consuming. It is made easier only when students have learned and want to be invested in their writing. If you exact final-draft writing from them too frequently, you will kill your students' enthusiasm for writing as a way to make meaning.

I would suggest you set up a code in your classroom for writing: on a "zero draft" or Draft 1 you are looking only for specific ideas, for students' opinions, for reasons, or for educated guesses to questions they have. This guideline will foster students' desire to explore all aspects of an idea—to dare to be "free" thinkers. Final drafts additionally demand the thoughtful choice and clear communication of key ideas presented in a formal way.

When you and your students communicate the differences between these expectations of writing activities, you will release the emotional pressure and develop trust in your classroom.

For response and evaluation of the quick-write activities, have students share their favorite line or the entire writing with a partner or a small group. If you want to make sure everyone has written, just check off in your grade book who handed in a paper. For journals, a quick and easy way to evaluate is to collect them periodically and assign each entry a point or more depending on what you're looking for—length, reasons explained, at least one question asked, or whatever. Skim over the entry rapidly and jot the appropriate point value at the top of the page. Assign a grade based on a scale of something like 4 = A, 3 1/2 = B+, 3 = B, and so on. Develop the habit of giving many A's and B's for attempting assignments.

Focus your effort of evaluation by making quick responses using question marks for what you don't understand and exclamation marks for what you like. I often do things like "?word choice" if I don't understand the word or think another could be used better; or I use the *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how* words to show what type of information I need for a clear picture. In the margin I make positive shorthand comments such as these: !verb, !simile, !topic sentence, !vocab word, !sound, !feeling, !reason. Without having to write complete sentences, I still can give a specific message about what I see as good writing. And I have found that students are more likely to read and learn from these remarks because they are right next to the place I am praising.

When you do expect final-draft writing, you must provide ample time within the scope of your writing assignment for students to do an adequate job. You should also realize that the average middle school student cannot edit everything. Once again, you must decide what factors will show they cared enough about their product and their audience. If spelling and correct comma punctuation are a big deal to you, then make sure that your students know it and that you are consistent in marking it. If neat margins, ink, and cursive writing are what "make" a final draft for you, then say so. Such concerns do characterize writers caring about their writing and communication; therefore, it is legitimate to expect such quality on final drafts—if you have worked to make students care about and trust themselves in their writing.

When you evaluate major writing projects, use objective evaluation sheets, which you should give when you assign a writing project: so many points for topic sentences in paragraphs or for covering a certain area or for spelling or for an interesting introductory paragraph. This helps you stay focused on what you have chosen as important and not stray into marking every single error (an exhausting and betraying act as a reader). It helps your students trust you as an evaluator. Again, ask your language arts teacher for direction and assistance with various time-saving, confidence-building tools for evaluation. Trust yourself to react in ways that you feel good about—allow yourself (and your students) to enjoy and appreciate the process. If that is not happening, you must step back and begin once again.

I dare you to relax and to enjoy using writing more frequently and in more varied ways. You may need to set aside some of your long-held biases about writing and about what is legitimate or constructive. You may need help discovering what you can do with writing and what writing can do for you.

Although all writing is hard work, it does not have to be drudgery where every word is counted at attention, lined up neatly in rows, heel to toe, ready to do battle with ignorance. Successful writing in the middle school also must teeter along boundaries and skulk in shadows; defining no-man's land is where learning truly happens. Just like our students, middle school writing may also skip and hold hands, may tantalize and tempt one day but the next snarl and groan and moan. When you and your students discover that writing is alive, that it thrums with potency and self, that it thrills and challenges and agonizes, then you know you and your students have touched the potential for learning that writing represents.

Watching as your students and you follow the writing where it may lead and pulling back to teach the writing where you want it to go—that is learning. Together you will have used writing to make concrete meaning of God's world and to see more clearly each person's place in that world. Indeed, writing will have helped you shape a unique individual and communal meaning that poses you and your students at the center of God's kingdom, with the Lord directing your seeing as he stands by your side and within you. Your students, in writing, can become responsible and joyful, creative and deliberate in their learning, in their exploration of the life God gives his people. That is success.

I dare you to give writing, with its unique connection to learning, a try in your classroom. **CEJ**

Carol M. Regts teaches seventh and eighth grade language arts at Eastern Christian Middle School in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

—by RON B. DE BOER

Allowing the Students to Write for Themselves

I'll always remember the day my English teacher handed back my short story. For weeks, I had been anticipating the glowing comments about my story line and the singing praises for my character and plot development. I had worked hard writing and revising that story and couldn't wait to reap the harvest of my labors.

I noticed there were not many red marks or teacher symbols in the margins indicating grammatical or structural errors, and I remember the pride I felt for my flawless work. After riffling through the pages, I reached the final page. My heart sank, for at the bottom of the page was my grade, a "C-", and one sentence: "Can't you write about anything but sports!!?"

Those words stung at the time, and they still do, not only because of the words themselves, but also because of the impatient, annoyed tone that spoke from the page.

Those words, blazing from the page, told me that something very close to me—sports—was not important, and that hurt. Sports made sense to me when I was a high school student. Basketball, football, hockey—you name it, and I watched or played it. Baseball and tennis came easy to me, not just because I knew all the rules, but because I knew about the range of emotions and attitudes that are carried onto the field or court, and I had experienced locker room tension before a big game. Although it wasn't completely clear to me at the time, I knew vaguely about the parallel that exists between sports and life, the disappointments, the victories, the sense of community and camaraderie teams experience.

Sports were a constant in my life as a teenager, and it made sense to me that I would write about the action I found in an arena or a gym. Like me at that time, most teenagers have limited experience in life (or at least limited understanding of their experiences). Nonetheless, their daily encounters with the world around them need to be regarded with importance.

Students need to be able to write from their own experiences in order to enable them on their quests toward self-discovery.

I now teach writing in my high school English classes, and it seems to me that students need to be given the freedom to write from their own experience in order to enable them on their quests toward self-discovery.

English teachers cannot expect the average student to write stories that dig deep into the nature of the human condition and discover answers to life's big problems. However, teachers can expect students to bare their feelings in a creative way and learn about themselves and their place within a family or other communities like school or peer groups. If we expect our students to write with the depth and meaning of Margaret Atwood or Flannery O'Connor, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. Most high school students are writing for themselves; and even though they are taught to write for an audience, most often, as they write, they are coming to an understanding of various relationships and the variety of emotions that are attached to these relationships.

Of course, this therapeutic approach to writing cannot walk alone. I teach my students to write because I want them to learn how to build a sentence, how to tie together paragraphs, and how to develop character, setting, and plot. The skills of writing are important, but I also teach students that writing allows them to engage in what I think is an essential exercise in self-discovery.

When the Bavarians settled in Michigan in the 1840s, they immediately began sending letters back to families and friends in West Germany expressing how they were coping in a different country and culture. These immigrants to America quickly discovered many of their own joys, fears, and frustrations when they reported on life in the United States. Their emotions filtered through their pens, and the Bavarians understood themselves and each other more clearly when they wrote these letters.

Writing can have similar effects for students. If a student continuously writes about family conflicts and violence, perhaps this is a way of working out problems he or she faces at home. Perhaps this is a way of calling out for help. Or, when a student writes only about animals on the family farm, he or she is still learning the writing process and is understanding self through this process.

My English teacher did not like my story because I did not write what

he would have liked me to write, or I did not write up to the potential of which he had me pegged. Writing exercises are for the students. If a teacher has done his or her job in allowing students to use their imaginations, then what comes out of a student's creative imagination has to be accepted, provided, of course, the student adheres to the mechanics of writing.

The ultimate goal, then, is to encourage the student writer to use skills and imagination in relating what experience teaches. This means the teacher must challenge the student to explore the imagination and apply the skills of writing to that imagination. A teacher cannot expect students to zero in on a meaningful topic when the teacher merely writes down the due date. Students need focus when they are given writing assignments, and teachers need to provide students with the proper channels to write.

I have used five exercises that work well in encouraging students to focus their writing while allowing their imaginations the space to roam freely:

● **Norman Rockwell is Worth a Thousand Words**

Norman Rockwell had the ability to capture a wide range of feeling and emotion in just one painting. Over the years, I have collected Rockwell pictures (mostly from calendars) and have displayed them at the front of the class for my students' perusal. I instruct the class to look at each picture carefully and choose the one that strikes an immediate story in their minds. I then allow each student to take a picture and write a one- or two-page short story based on the picture.

Rockwell pictures provide a variety of sub-topics as well. A teacher may ask students to write down a list of five possible story titles or ideas that can be taken from a particular picture or to write a character analysis of an individual in a picture. Rockwell's ability to sketch personality into the faces of his characters makes this an interesting assignment for students.

● **People Pictures**

Many writers believe that character development is what builds a great plot. With this exercise, I look through magazines for a picture of a non-famous man or woman. I present the picture to the class and instruct students to write a page in first person narrative, expressing the picture-person's thoughts. (I do not allow students to talk at all during this exercise so that what each student comes up with is completely original and individually creative.)

I then instruct students to write their own paragraph about the person in the picture, as if they were telling a friend about his person. Here, students develop the character of a person, giving him or her a job, a family, a bad habit, or a peculiarity such as a high-pitched laugh.

A second step is to present a picture of another person and ask the class to go through the same procedure and write a scene where the two characters meet and speak to each other. This exercise, too, may spark the beginnings of a short story.

● **Team Writing**

Education experts today are urging teachers to instill cooperative learning in the classroom. Although writing seems to be a solitary activity, teamwork in this area can also be a valuable experience for student writers.

Students are placed in groups of two, three, or four (the number is up to the teacher). The teacher instructs students at the beginning of the exercise that, together, the students in each group are going to write one short story. The teacher allows five minutes for one person in each group to begin their story, then asks the students to stop, pass their papers to the person beside or behind them, read the paper they have just received, and continue the story, writing for a second five-minute segment. This process is repeated until the teacher feels enough time has been given.

The end result of such an exercise will be unpredictable to everyone involved, and the teacher should ask the students to read their finished products. Such an exercise is valuable not only because it helps spark imagination in students, but also because it gives students a role in a situation that requires concrete effort and input by each group member.

● **Incomplete Sentences**

Teachers who assign smaller writing exercises, such as journals, will also give their students some direction to ignite their imaginations. Giving students a half sentence or just a couple of words will often bring on a few ideas. Here are some examples: "They knew they would make it if it stayed light enough to . . ." or "Linda turned away, unable to look . . ." or "She drove home, unaware of the. . . ."

Students finish the sentence and build a short scene around it. This type of exercise may also grow into a more comprehensive student work.

● **Word Associations**

Just as taking part in practice drills will help an athlete's performance in a game, so good warm-up exercises to other writing activities will energize student imagination.

Writing teachers want their students to be aware of their senses—what they feel, hear, smell, see, taste—when they write. To help students with this awareness, I usually write a sentence on the board and ask students to jot down two things for each sense. For example, a sentence might be, "You are walking down a sidestreet on a drizzly day." Students will write, "My Nikes were squeaking" or "Little puddles dotted the sidewalk" or "My shirt stuck to my back as it rained."

I usually ask students to share their lists with the class, and I follow up this exercise assigning a descriptive paragraph of a rainy sidestreet.

These writing activities have allowed students to feel good about their imaginations and have helped them discover untapped creativity hidden deep inside them.

Enthusiastic, creative, and, most importantly, positive teachers allow students the freedom to write for themselves; and often the result is an eager response from student writers. **CEJ**

Ron B. De Boer teaches in the English department at Eastwood Collegiate Institute in Kitchener, Ontario.

—by RANDALL HEERES

Flannery Will Get You Somewhere: A Writing Seminar

We want more for our students than the veneer of knowledge. One important challenge is to assist students in developing effective and meaningful reading skills. We also want to foster a passion for fine literature. A third worthwhile challenge is to help students view their own thinking, talking, and writing about literature as valuable and still evolving.

Traditional high school literature survey courses have their value and advantages, but they may become fragmented, hit-or-miss attempts to give students a sense of literary culture, perspective, or careful reading and thinking. Seldom, it seems, do students acquire a deep understanding of and appreciation for particular authors or genre.

One excellent method for cultivating reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills is presented in Brooke Workman's book *Writing Seminars in the Content Area* (National Council of Teachers of English 1983). The author's three examples of writing seminars fully described in the book—seminars on Hemingway, Salinger, and Steinbeck—provide useful, practical ideas for meaningful and intensive study of a single author and his work. With minor modifications to suit a particular school schedule or curriculum, Workman's techniques could provide any high school English teacher with a creative way to accomplish measurable and unmeasurable results. The seminar could be adapted to fit other subject areas as well.

Workman's method allows for flexible scheduling. At Northern Christian High School in McBain, Michigan, the seminar lasts about fourteen weeks, during which the seniors read most of the published work of the author and write at least five papers. Workman's models are for twelve- or eighteen-week seminars. A teacher could, with some effort, condense the process to perhaps eight weeks; but the shorter format would adversely affect the intensity of work on student writings and related seminar activities, such as class presentations, conferences with students, films, and guest speakers.

Because the seminar encourages student thought and written discourse, the five essays are the focus. Each essay, approximately 1250 words long, argues a thesis about a particular story or some aspect of the writer's life as related to the writings. Some essays require extensive research. The completed essays are photocopied, read in class, discussed for about twenty minutes, and evaluated by the students. Students complete checklists or write paragraph evaluations, commenting on thesis, organization, support and evidence, and mechanics.

These class sessions enable the students to become more objective about their own writing. They learn to edit and proofread more carefully. They also become caring, tactful, and precise evaluators and critics. Their comments at the end of the seminar demonstrate such growth as clearly as do the steadily improving essays: "I learned a lot about revising my writing"; "I learned how to write better introductions and conclusions"; "The seminar taught me how to be more critical of my own work"; "I grew in confidence as a writer"; "I learned to beat my procrastination habits."

Clearly, the seminar incorporates much of what a high school English teacher may hope to accomplish. Students measure themselves as writers against goals they have set for themselves at the start. They see progress in their critical and appreciative reading skills, learn sound research skills, and become a community of writers who share ideas, encourage one another, and exchange useful source materials.

Any author could be the center of the seminar, provided that primary and secondary sources are available. For three years the seminar at Northern Christian studied F. Scott Fitzgerald and his stories. One year the seminar group discovered Flannery O'Connor.

I was initially concerned that my seventeen-year-old Protestant northerners might find O'Connor's fiction

Seminars can study any author in-depth, such as Flannery O'Connor. . .

Ernest Hemingway. . .

or John Steinbeck.

The seminar incorporates much of what a high school English teacher may hope to accomplish. Students. . . see progress in their critical and appreciative reading skills, . . . and become a community of writers who share ideas, encourage one another, and exchange useful source materials.

Randall Heeres teaches English at Northern Michigan Christian High School in McBain,

elusive or too challenging to suit them. However, the class enjoyed her work from the first day. O'Connor inspired them in many ways: "I liked her sense of humor"; "I enjoyed her use of biblical allusions"; "It was great being able to associate her ideas with what we believe because she is Christian, too"; "Her perspective on human sinfulness was an eye-opener for me"; "I am very impressed with her powerful symbols."

Reading Flannery O'Connor in class gave us many moments of laughter. Her striking characterizations, powerful themes, pointed description, and dialogue entertained, challenged, inspired, and provoked. The students become increasingly aware of her style and intentions.

Class discussion often reflected that students considered O'Connor's spiritual vision as evident in her fiction and occasional prose. Students often commented about their own faith in the light of the author's portrayals of human depravity and of God's all-powerful grace.

Two particular highlights of this seminar, unequaled in the Fitzgerald seminars, were the visit by Dr. Henrietta Ten Harmsel and a conference call to Dr. Sarah Gordon of Georgia College, home of the Flannery O'Connor Collection. The class was genuinely thrilled to have their ideas and conclusions verified and their questions answered by knowledgeable experts.

The Fitzgerald and O'Connor seminars have served my college-bound seniors well, a conclusion based on follow-up surveys. They have learned how to engage literature and how to write articulate and cogent essays.

The seminars have also allowed the classes to consider the role of the artist in society, the beliefs that have shaped a famous author, and the connections between the writers' lives and their fiction.

For at least part of your students' high school careers, challenge them with the more thorough and intensive study than they typically face. Give Brooke Workman's seminar method a try. **CEJ**

—by AL WISSELINK

Responding to Literature

I'm sure I speak for many teachers when I say that I'm always looking for new ideas and strategies in teaching a novel. This year I had the privilege of being introduced to a totally new approach by Dr. Mary Kooy, who spent several days in our school as a language arts consultant. This approach is the use of a Reading Response Log while reading a novel—one that the whole class is reading or individual novels that the students have chosen. It offers a chance to ask questions, to wonder *aloud* about the literature. Rather than summarizing what happens or answering a number of questions about a chapter, this approach enables the student to respond personally to what happens in the novel.

Various suggestions are given to the students about how they can respond, such as

—I was impressed or struck by . . .
—I noticed that . . .
—I wonder about . . .
—I predict . . .
—An interesting word/sentence/ thought is . . .
—This part reminded me of when . . .

Through Dr. Kooy's encouragement, I used this approach for the first time using the novel *The Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden (Dell Publishing Co., 1960) in my grade four class. It's a story about a cricket, a mouse, a cat, and a boy and the adventures they have at a newsstand in a subway station in New York City. As you read the following samples taken from some of the students' Reading Response Logs, I'm sure you'll agree that this approach does much more to promote the students' reading, writing, and thinking skills than does answering a list of questions. **CEJ**

Al Wisselink is a grade four teacher at Abbotsford Christian School in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

The following examples are taken unedited from the children's log books. Here the teacher considers content, not mechanics.

Chapter 2
Mario

I don't know why Mario wants to keep a cricket for a pet. I apreciate how Papa Belnia tries to break up the arguments. I think Mama Belinia is VERY scared of bugs.

I think Mario is a very nice guy. I think Tucker must be very intersted in Mario to stay up all night and watch him. Armin Wisselink

Chapter 3
Chester

Now the story makes me feel happy because the Cricket and the Mouse becomeing friends. I don't understand why there has to be a CAT. This story is interesting to me.

Julia Koning

Chapter 5
Sundy Morning

Now I now who Orpheuse was and the beautifu music he had played. I like it that Mario's cricket is becoming a friend to Mario. Julia Koning

Chapter Twelve
Mr. Smedley

I would be neet to see a cricket singing. it would be wered to see a elephant sing or a lion, snake, bird or a bug. I thinck the Bellinis are going to put the cricket on T.V. and let the cricket sing. It would be neet to have a sing dog. Travis Bowman

Chapter Thirteen:
Fame

I was impressed or struck by the way 783 people were late for work. After stopping to listen to Chester play some songs.

Some neat words are delecaciy, midst, theatrical, Entomologist, commuters, anxiously, enough, Philharmonic.

A neat name is Mozart

I don't understand why encores aren't spelled oncores.

I predict Mario will let Chester go.

This story makes me feel sad by the way Chester is so sad and uncomfortable were he is; but I think It's very nice of him to do this just for the Bellinis so they won't be so poor.

Erinn Smith

Chapter 15
"Grand Central Station"

I was really able to tell that Chester, Tucker and Harry wanted to be together but they couldn't. Before we read the part when Tucker suggested that Chester could visit next summer, (since Chester knew the way) I thought of it when we were reading another part. I think it was a good time for Chester to leave when Mario was sleeping because I think it would be kind of like a mystery. (I like mystery books) Melanie Olthuis

—by H. K. ZOEKLICHT

"Point of View"

This first week of school at Omni Christian High School was much like other first weeks had been. The last Friday in August was very warm; the lawns were neatly cut and well sprinkled; the sidewalks were lined with tall, bright, multi-colored zinnias and brilliant orange marigolds. Within the school building the oven-like rooms smelled of Pine Sol and fresh varnish. Staff and faculty were filled with high resolve for 1991–1992. At mid-morning, directly after chapel, there was the ritual refreshment break in the faculty lounge. That scene too was unchanged, except for one remarkable thing.

While the still-relaxed teachers and staff streamed into the faculty room for some comfortable talk and good coffee, long-time Bible teacher John Vroom smiled smugly at his colleagues as they enjoyed some of Folger's finest and some thick, rich pastries from Jaarsma's. Vroom (and this is the remarkable thing) held no pastry at all in his pudgy hand. Instead, he ostentatiously opened a small can of Slim-Quik and gently poured its bubbly, brown contents into a white paper cup. Completing the ritual, he patted his substantial stomach with one hand and hoisted the cup to his lips with the other, saying as he did so, "A sound mind in a sound body." Then he added, "Saint Paul, I believe," and noisily quaffed his liquid diet.

"Hey, John," cracked good-natured coach Rabbit Abbot, "better watch out! Tommy La Sorda says that if you drink enough of that stuff your fingernails get soft and you get crabby."

"Not me," beamed the confident Bible teacher. "I've never felt better. You must have that wrong." He lifted his cup once more to drain the last drops and said, "You just drink three of these a day and have a reasonable dinner at night, and the pounds just vanish. I've lost four pounds already." Vroom sucked in his stomach and proudly showed his colleagues how loose his trousers were around his waist. "I'm thinking of walking to school this year, too," he announced.

Susan Katje, pert director of the library, grimaced and chose to change the subject. "Whew!" she gasped. "It's sure hard to be in school when it's so hot. It must be close to eighty-five degrees out there." Katje fanned herself with a sheet of typing paper as she wiped her forehead with a brown paper handtowel from the restroom.

"It's close to that in room six," offered Gene Poel, young student teacher in mathematics. "South side, you know. No shade," he said, pointing to the south and looking around for affirmation.

"Maybe," said Katje, smiling warily around as she spoke *sotto voce*, "maybe you'd better go into administration, Gene." Seeing that Principal Esther Carpenter was still on the far side of the room, the librarian added, "Our devoted principal has got an air-conditioner going full blast in *her* office." Katje gestured with her thumb in the direction of the office.

"You're kidding! I don't believe it," protested a puzzled Coach Abbot. "Did you see the memo she just put in *our* boxes?" The coach waved a slip of paper before reading it aloud: "Faculty and staff are reminded that in the interests of dignity and decorum in our profession we shall wear appropriate clothing *at all times*. Sorry, this does not include shorts." Abbot added, "It's signed by Esther Carpenter, Principal."

The coach forced a smile and said, "Well, I guess we've got to keep up appearances here." Then, laughing, he pointed toward John Vroom and said, "Besides, John's legs aren't ready for display yet, anyway. Right, John?"

Mathematics teacher Slim Primus, not liking the negative tones of the conversation, put his hand on the shoulder of Gene Poel, his young student teacher from Servant College, and changed the topic. "Hey, gang," he said enthusiastically, "you ought to hear what Poel here is planning for our math students this fall. Tell 'em, Gene."

The young teacher blushed and hesitantly laid out his plan. "Well, uh, you see, uh, I'm sort of trying to organize a mathematics team here at Omni, with the help of Mr. Primus, of course." He glanced appreciatively at his supervising teacher. "We've been invited as a school to take part in the Tri-State Mathematics Competition at Central University in early November. We, uh, plan to go up on a Thursday night with a team of five students, do our thing on Friday and Saturday, and come back on Saturday night."

"Sounds good, really good, Gene," encouraged Lucy Den Denker, English teacher. "That's a wonderful thing—to support those fine students that way. Good for you! Is Omni going to chip in to cover the cost, or how does that go?" Then she added, "I'll bet we don't do that, do we?"

"Well," said the student teacher, glancing briefly at Principal Esther Carpenter who, buttered muffin in hand, was sauntering toward the group, "that's still a problem. We're sort of counting on using the school van and also getting a little money for meals, the way Rabbit's ball teams do." Poel looked toward the amiable coach for affirmation and added, "The lodging is free at Central. They're the hosts."

"Sounds like a winner to me," endorsed science teacher Matt De Wit in his booming voice. "Let me know if I can help. It's high time we get behind things like that. Gives some visibility to academic stuff," he declared.

"Me too," put in history teacher Jack Ezel. "That's a first-rate idea." Then an impish look came over his face as he added, "We could have a pep rally sixth hour. You know—give them a good send-off." He looked teasingly at Coach Abbot. "You know, the way we did for the Eagles for the regional

tournaments last spring? Right, Ren?"

"Yea," drawled the coach without enthusiasm. "We could do that." He looked around to sense the general reaction to Ezel's mock proposal. "Wait a minute," he laughed nervously. "Better check our football schedule on that. I think the football team has a game on that weekend, and then they'll need the van." He looked at the two mathematics teachers as he spoke. Pulling out his little pocket schedule, he eyeballed it quickly and said brightly, "Yep. Game that weekend, over in Otley. The van will be in use."

Still another voice chimed in. "If you're planning a pep rally sixth hour on that Thursday, count my English Lit class out. I have enough trouble with choir rehearsals and with real pep rallies. I'm not giving up any more time. No sir." This came emphatically from Rick Cole, English teacher. He shook his head vigorously.

"Hey, lighten up a little," complained Ginny Traansma, "Why shouldn't a math team have the same privilege as a ball team?"

"That's not a real team," came from the coach. "They don't even have a name, for Pete's sake." But then he broke into a broad smile. "Maybe we could call 'em the 'mathletes,'" he proposed. And then, "Better yet, we could call'm the 'zeroes.'" There were audible chuckles around the group.

But the mathematics teacher did not smile. He looked straight at the coach. "Ren," he inquired, "just why is skill in numeracy less important here at Omni than skill in sports? Why is success in solving an equation less important than, say, bouncing a ball?"

Coach Ren Abbot flushed at the direct challenge. "It isn't," he said emphatically. "And I never said it was. That's an unfair kind of accusation. But, Slim, you've got to deal with reality. The fact is that people who support this school with their hard-earned dollars do so partly because we have a good sports program. That keeps them interested in Omni, even after their kids have graduated. How many of them do you think would pay money—actually buy tickets, I mean—to come and watch your numbers game?" Abbot smiled once again at his own wit.

Now Jenny Snip, school secretary, spoke. "Just wait a minute, Ren," she teased, with a half smile on her face. "Maybe it's not such a bad idea after all. We could have the math team wear T-shirts with Omni printed on them, or a big 'O' and then maybe a quadratic equation or something. . . ." Snip's voice faded as she sensed a lack of enthusiasm for her humor.

"You can't letter in math," said the coach incredulously. "I've never heard of anything so dumb." Then he sensed that Snip was needling him and broke into a smile.

Principal Esther Carpenter had been listening to the talk intently and with some amusement. "You know, Slim and Gene," she said to the mathematics teachers, "I think your idea has a lot of merit, in theory. We all know that mathematics is very important, especially these days. Japanese students, for example, are way ahead of American students in math, aren't they? We need to do more any way we can. However," said the principal, "there's really no money for something like that in our budget, you know. Maybe we can get some parents to drive you and your 'mathletes' up to Central. Wouldn't that be a better way?"

"Nope," grinned the disappointed Primus. "It wouldn't. But it looks as though that's all we're going to get."

"Well, I'm not sure about that," said Carpenter. "But, look, it's time for class. Why don't you stop in the office later today to talk about this?" Then, wiping her forehead with a napkin, she whispered, "It's a lot cooler in my office, anyway." Then she turned to leave.

The bell rang. The Omni crew trooped off to hot classrooms and sweaty students. The disappointed mathematics teacher thought, "I've got to stop ragging on the coach. I'm never going to do it again." He looked back at the beat-up old table on which the gleaming coffee maker and the leftover pastries rested. And there was John Vroom, furtively slipping a jelly doughnut into his briefcase.

Truly, nothing had changed after all. It was the beginning of another good year at Omni Christian High School. **CEJ**

—by SHIRLEY VAN STEDUM

Mission Possible

As an art teacher, I am frequently asked how I come up with ideas for art projects. Usually, I am unable to articulate the creative process that blends observation, experimentation, and inspiration in often unexpected ways. However, with the project "Mission Possible," these ingredients were very clear in my mind, and the major objective of this assignment was to create a situation in which the students would experience a similar creative process.

The genesis of this idea was a garageful of styrofoam packing blocks that I never could throw away because I knew "there was an art project somewhere in all that stuff." Added to that was the enthusiasm of my fifth and sixth grade students for a filler assignment that had originated from some informal class discussion.

In the fall, during one of my art sessions with this combination class, we had some extra time, so the class decided to draw the ultimate student desk for the future. The students took to the assignment enthusiastically, drawing desks with automatic paper correctors, computers, TV monitors, food dispensers, and, of course, video games.

The drawings were imaginative but limited in skill, with lots of words to indicate what the various features were. I felt there was another art project in the conception stage. Perhaps a three-dimensional assignment using forms rather than lines and words to express functions might stimulate the students' imaginations and increase their skill levels.

However, the means by which this could be accomplished eluded me until the day I unpacked the mini-lights for my Christmas tree and noticed how the configurations of the styrofoam packing material reminded me of some kind of futuristic switchboard. My thoughts flashed back to my students' drawings and the packing forms in my garage. Suddenly, the connections were clear in my mind, and the project began to evolve.

The task for the students would be to create a model of a futuristic school desk using styrofoam blocks and any other available materials. Since time, space, and materials were limited, this would have to be a group project. This could be an unexpected bonus, since one of the goals of my art class was to instill an appreciation for the ideas of others. The assignments would have to be carefully structured in order to help utilize the input and skill of everyone in the group. I did not want this project to disintegrate into one in which the most able or most aggressive student did the majority of the work and the rest stood by passively. Everyone had to be involved in some aspect of the construction. The overall goal, therefore, would be to have a hands-on, three-dimensional experience that would stimulate imaginative thinking, use problem-solving techniques, and encourage cooperative group work.

But it was spring, and introducing a new project that involved a lot of thinking and cooperation was sure to fail unless I hooked the kids into this in an unusual way. Past experiences had taught me that students of this age love mystery and games and can still be involved in some imaginative role playing. A television rerun of "Mission Impossible" provided the format. The activities would center around "Mission Possible" in which four groups were to design and build a student desk that would be used on an unnamed planet where the United States was

The overall goal. . . would be to have a hands-on, three-dimensional experience that would stimulate imaginative thinking, use problem-solving techniques, and encourage cooperative group work.

establishing a secret colony in the year 2020. These desks had to be built in utmost secrecy because only one model would be selected, and spying was a real danger.

I sprang the ideas upon the students unexpectedly. Dressed in "classic Columbo" with trench coat, hat, and dark glasses, this secret agent slunk quietly into the classroom, glanced around furtively, slipped the tape into the recorder, punched the button, and slithered out of the room. Each succeeding session was begun with taped instructions, although the arrival of the tape was always a surprise. In one case, it was delivered to the classroom by my version of R2D2 (styrofoam blocks built around a remote-controlled model car).

Since art was taught in a regular classroom, students would listen to the taped instructions and then proceed to the assembly area (gym) where each group was assigned to a secret capsule (refrigerator box), which contained an envelope with specific instructions, styrofoam blocks, and plastic bags with basic supplies such as tape, scissors, pencils, and rulers. The box also served as the basic form to which the styrofoam could be attached. The instruction sheet gave specific tasks and time frames for that session, which forced each group to make some plans and decisions and to distribute the tasks among themselves. Also in the assembly area was a station (table) where students could get help from a special agent (teacher) in charge of hazardous materials (glue guns, X-Acto knives, paint). Ten minutes before the end of the session, a buzzer sounded and each group placed unassembled parts in large trash bags, stored the projects in the janitor's room, gave the instruction envelopes to the special agent, and returned to the classroom for debriefing.

The students responded to this secret space project with more enthusiasm and vigor than I had anticipated. Soon we had four large, different, and complicated desks being constructed in the gym. There was a desk with a long tunnel and an exterior video camera for monitoring spies; a desk with a computer board and a radar-receiving station; a desk with vacuum tubes that whisked homework, microfilm, school supplies, and snacks to the students using the desk; and finally, a desk that contained a bed, a candy machine, and a giant TV screen that flashed information about current sales at the mall. These were definitely desks reflecting students' interests.

Like real space endeavors, we had our fair share of problems. The two major ones were insufficient time and inadequate storage space. This activity should have taken at least six art classes, but we ran afoul with the hectic schedule of the last month of school and simply ran out of time. The desks became so large that they had to be stored outside. Though we carefully covered them, we were undone by the vagaries of springtime weather when the wind blew the covers off during the night and the rain ruined the projects.

Despite the loss of the final products, "Mission Possible" was a wonderful, creative experience for the students and me. I was impressed by their enthusiasm, intensity, and creativity. All the objectives of the art unit were met. Each group was cooperative, inventive, and self-directed. Mission accomplished! **CEJ**

Shirley Van Stedum is the elementary art teacher for both Van Dellen and Highlands Ranch elementary schools in Denver, Colorado.

—by JEFFREY FENNEMA

Media Survey Follow-Up

Good News, Bad News, and a Challenge

Last December we published a media survey in which we asked for feedback from readers. We received dozens of replies from all over Canada and the United States. A large number of teachers used the surveys in their classes, and we have compiled the responses. This was certainly not a scientific study. Nonetheless, some interesting trends were uncovered.

The popularity of magazines was dependent upon the age of the reader and his or her specific interests. Many types of "youth" magazines were mentioned, and the favorite articles seemed to focus on famous people or sports. On the average, most students read magazines approximately one hour per week.

The students seemed to like a level of energy in their music. Pop/rock and Christian pop/rock were chosen as the favorites. Rap, soft rock, and even heavy metal had some support; but heavy metal more often was voted "most disliked," along with country music and opera.

M.C. Hammer, Vanilla Ice, New Kids on the Block, and Poison were mentioned often as favorite musicians, while Amy Grant, Sandi Patti, Michael W. Smith, and Petra were the popular Christian music artists. On the average, students said they spent five to fifteen hours per week listening to the radio.

Sitcoms were the overwhelming choice of students in the area of television. *The Cosby Show*, *Family Matters*, *Full House*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, and *Growing Pains* were viewed as favorites. *The Brady Bunch* was also popular among a wide variety of students. Biting comedy shows, such as the *Simpsons* and *Roseanne*, received a big "thumbs down," and *PeeWee's Playhouse* was also deemed unpopular. On the average, students said they watched about five to fifteen hours of television per week. This may be low, since most people claim to watch less TV than they actually do.

The VCR seemed to be the most popular accompaniment to each home's television. Anywhere from 75 to 95 percent had a VCR, while just over half subscribed to cable. Those who had cable showed a high level of usage in watching movies from networks like HBO and Showtime. A large number of movies had been rented for the VCR, and, while a trip to the theater was not the main venue for watching films, many students had attended recently.

Most of the students reported that 75 to 90 percent of the movies they watched were seen with their parents' knowledge. Likewise, movies rated G and PG-13 were the main choice of viewers. About one third of the students had seen R-rated movies, and few had seen a film rated NC-17 or X.

Those questioned watched anywhere from one to eight films per week, and the commercial hits were the undeniable favorites. *Home Alone* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* were mentioned most often. Others included

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, *Pretty Woman*, *Ghost*, and *Three Men and a Little Lady*.

Cited as the absolutely worst types of movies to see were horror flicks—"they're too scary." The favorite types of movies included adventure, comedy, and family. A number of older students seemed to be in love with romantic films.

What can we glean from this poll? Did these results affirm our beliefs? Were we surprised by some answers? Three trends stand out initially.

First, Christian influences appear to be making an impact in music. The four Christian artists mentioned most often have all been around for awhile. They have created an arena in which other Christian artists can deliver the gospel message.

Second, the advertising business is alive and well, at least in the world of films. Kids continue to see those films that are heavily advertised on television. They are told which movies will be popular, and they help to make them popular. Many films that require deep thought and introspection are left on the shelf. Few students seem to be cultivating an appreciation for film as art or serious communication. Entertainment sells.

Finally, most students disliked the bizarre and dark humor found in some television shows. In an effort to appear witty, did these shows cross a line and, in effect, turn off students? Do we sometimes do the same thing in the classroom?

The good news is that Christian school students seem to be showing some restraint in what they see. They don't report a great fascination with heavy metal or 2 Live Crew. Relatively few report a great desire to watch the soft-core pornography and slasher movies that are targeted toward kids.

On the other hand, most see the realm of film, television, music, and journalism as mere entertainment. In a society where the mass media are increasingly important as conveyors of ideas, attitudes, and values many of our students are content with mainstream commercial offerings.

We didn't include books in this study, and that might be something to do in the future. Although studies show that more North Americans are reading books than ever before, *what* they are reading may be changing. American publishers marketed 39,000 titles in 1990—down from 53,000 in 1988. Book publishers, like movie and television producers, are reducing the number of titles in hopes of finding that one blockbuster that will send them smiling to the bank.

The challenge for mass media education in the nineties is threefold: to create an awareness of media manipulation, to cultivate a taste for the substantial, and to train up the next generation of media producers. If Christian schools are to have a real impact, we must not just opt for what is safe or be content to criticize what is unhelpful. We must create the kind of media we would like to see. We must train up film directors, television producers, and musicians with something to say, and equip them to say it well. **CEJ**

Jeffrey Fennema teaches junior high language arts at Lansing Christian School in Lansing, Illinois.

Teachers often complain that kids come to class uninformed, uninterested, and unprepared to benefit from the curriculum. Reading begins in the home, but busy parents often lack a plan for encouraging a focused approach to reading. CEJ *asked political scientist Robert Hibbard what kinds of political and current events reading parents should encourage. We quote him here:*

It is important for children to develop the habit of reading about their world as soon as they're able. Publications such as *Big Backyard* and *Ranger Rick* from the National Wildlife Association provide a good start for new readers. *Clubhouse* magazine is a Christian publication from the Focus on the Family organization. Although not a "world studies" magazine, it is a magazine that children can have as their own, and it gives them exposure to life's issues, with a Christian perspective. Cobblestone Publishing (Petersburg, N.H.) offers magazines for young readers in the areas of U.S. history, world history, people and culture, and geography.

I particularly like *God's World* out of Asheville, N.C., a weekly paper that discusses current events from a Christian perspective for children of mid-to-late elementary age. An edition for adults is also published.

By the time a student is in high school, the world should not seem so "foreign." Students should know some basic facts about historical events, person/place name identifications, and some current events.

Newsmagazines, though considered "adult," are usually easily understood by high school students, particularly if a foundation for world study has been laid earlier in their reading experience.

—by BRUCE ROTTMAN

Abe Tjoelker— Keeping Pace with Time

The small, conservative Dutch town of Lynden in northwest Washington state conjures up certain images in Reformed Christian circles. It's the town where the downtown sidewalks are "rolled up" on Sunday, where grass that is too long is illegal, where churchgoers outnumber citizens on a given Sunday, and where basketball is nearly a second religion. At the town's entrance are the two cemeteries, and at the other end are the two school systems. From birth to death, the citizens of Lynden know their roots.

One of the teachers whose roots go deep teaches at Lynden Christian Elementary School; she is a woman of age sixty with a sparkle in her eyes: Adrianna (or "Abe") Tjoelker. Heritage surrounds her: her two brothers and three sisters all live within nine miles, and she happily resides with her sprightly ninety-one-year-old mother, who still gives her advice. But as Lynden has changed—it grows less Dutch and more popular each year—so has Abe.

When she was twenty-five years old, Abe decided that she had had enough of serving doughnuts at the old Dutch Maid Bakery and set off for Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Reformed Bible Institute. After her teacher training she returned to the Pacific Northwest, first teaching a class of eleven students in British Columbia, then teaching a class of thirty-four in the U.S. border town of Sumas, Washington, for two years, and moving on to Ebenezer Christian School (only four miles from Lynden) for seven years. Abe has been teaching fourth graders at Lynden Christian ever since.

A brush with tragedy didn't slow Abe down. She had to take a year off from teaching fourteen years ago when she had a tumor removed from her pituitary gland. She lost her sense of smell and the vision in her right eye. With some minor adjustments in the classroom and at home, she manages so well that one might never realize what she has been through. To her students, she is a perfectly normal teacher with a great sense of humor.

Former students echo that feeling. What they do remember is the annual end-of-the-year wiener roast, or the letters they wrote that Abe surprises them with after they graduate. One former student, Lorraine Bajema, still has a box full of letters her classmates wrote her when Lorraine's appendix was removed twenty-seven years ago. Another student recently wrote to Abe, remembering a touch on her shoulder from years ago. "You never know," Abe reflects, "what really touches them."

Abe herself fondly remembers some of the inquisitive students she has had—a boy who worried that heaven would run out of room for the redeemed; another who shocked her by praying for the dead. She can remember what subjects particular former students liked, even twenty or more years later.

And yet, as Lynden has changed, so has Abe. "We were so terribly strict then," she recalls. Encouragement was frowned upon. Now she enjoys giving her kids rewards and reminding them that they should "never compare themselves to anyone else," but should just do their best.

As the times have changed, so have the students. They are bolder—freer to pray, and more audaciously forward in the classroom. Abe's class remains relatively structured, but she enjoys cooperative learning—to a degree. Too much of it, she fears, can discourage accountability. Years ago "everything made students excited," partly because they had less. Today's students are more jaded, from affluence and television. Today's teachers have materials galore to use in their classrooms. Photocopiers have eliminated using carbon paper to copy materials for her students, who are no longer denominationally homogeneous.

But some things never change. Her students still enjoy creative writing. She still loves the students' art that adorns her classroom walls. She still attends the Second Christian Reformed Church, with her mom, who has grown slightly hard of hearing (though Abe seldom raises her voice at home, telling her mother "you hear what you want to"). Abe can be strict, but she still has a big heart and a good sense of humor.

Abe remembers that, at the dinner table on the farm, when Abe was a girl, her mother prayed that some of her children would grow up to be teachers. Mom got her wish (doubly so, for Abe's younger brother, Art, teaches sixth grade at Lynden Christian). More importantly, for twenty-nine years students have benefitted from a kind, firm, and persevering teacher, whose blend of the new and the old has enriched hundreds of lives. **CEJ**

Bruce Rottman teaches at Lynden Christian High School in Lynden, Washington. He is CEJ *regional editor for the Pacific Northwest.*

—by PHIL WARNERS

Teachers' Credo

1. Rededicate yourself to the ideals of Christian education in whatever capacity you're serving. Catch a glimpse of the vision our predecessors had one hundred years ago.

2. Encourage, support, and rely on each other. Be willing to share each other's burdens and bind together in friendship and love.

3. Love children. Remind yourself that each student is a child of God, and for each child Christ was willing to sacrifice his life.

4. Love learning. Look for opportunities to stay current in the field of education, but also look for those chances to learn just for learning's sake. Never stop being curious.

5. Remember that teaching must be more than a job. It must be your calling, your lifestyle, your passion. Teach with a fervor that will energize young minds.

6. Instill in children a love and respect for God's created world, and at the same time help them realize that a greater home awaits them.

7. Empower children with a sense of responsibility for each other. Help them to see that kindness and caring go a long way in making the world a better place.

8. Transform your classroom into a community, a haven, where children feel free to choose, free to risk, free to show emotion.

9. Affirm each child daily. Help each student internalize that he is vital, worthwhile, and necessary in God's master plan.

10. When everyone at school is content, status quo is accepted, and we all are comfortable, have the courage to make some trouble! Be innovative! Be creative! Be daring! Be bold! Continue to excel at the task before you, for truly you are doing the Lord's work. **CEJ**

Phil Warners teaches at Creston-Mayfield Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

—by L. RUTH RICE

UNIFORMS

CRUEL AND UNJUST PUNISHMENT?

Clothes. . . influence not only others' perceptions of the wearer but also the wearer's self-perception. "One is less likely to act like a rambunctious hooligan when dressed like a gentleman."

"It must have been terrible. . . sounds like a prison. . . . How could you bear it?" These comments could be reactions to a harrowing experience that I heroically survived. On the contrary, they are the most frequently heard remarks and outbursts of indignation about one particular area of my career in South African public schools (grades one through eight)—the required standardized uniforms. Abiding by a dress code was simply an accepted part of academic life, which I certainly did not find restrictive or unnecessarily burdensome. Instead, uniforms were not only cost- and time-efficient, but they also played an important positive role in developing character and regulating behavior in school.

Uniforms are extremely practical. They cut down clothing costs and time spent deciding (or squabbling over) what to wear. Although the initial outlay is expensive, uniforms are economical in the long run because they can be worn year after year or can be passed down to younger children (King 52). Also, parents are not pressured to keep up with fashion trends that can change from one week to the next. In addition, no time is wasted choosing the outfit for the day, a problem, according to some, that even boys face (Landwehr 26).

Does a prescribed dress code, as one Lutheran teacher claims, inhibit the natural maturation process of learning to make choices (Wentzel 53)? A principal of a Catholic elementary school using uniforms rightly points out that children already have a countless array of decisions to make in a single day, such as whether or not to get up, to brush their teeth, or to use the red or blue markers (Geglio). Prearranging their school clothes is one way to help children.

The strongest and most persuasive argument against incorporating uniforms in a school is that a prescribed dress code goes against North America's cherished tradition of rugged individualism and rights, particularly the right of self-expression. Indeed, the protection of First Amendment rights is why students in the United States are not routinely subjected to dress codes in public schools. Children, though, already have many opportunities to dress creatively after school, on weekends, or during vacations. Some schools also allow a measure of leeway in the finer details of their uniform. In the schools I attended, for example, students can choose from a variety of sweater styles (cardigan, pullover, vest).

Some might still contend that denying children the right to dress exactly as they please is an unjust and unnecessary limitation of their freedom. I wonder, however, whether denying this "right" does not do more good than harm.

Peer pressure is strong. It can be both divisive and distracting, as a school in Baltimore discovered. Pressure to wear the "in" clothes was

so great that uniforms were introduced to cut costs for low-income families and lessen social stress (Solomon, "Standard" 31). Newspaper reports of students killing each other for some classy name-brand clothing are not unheard of, either. Once again, incorporating some sort of dress code into school policy seems to be a viable remedy. Of course, not all students are going to murder a fellow student to get his new pair of designer jeans, but the equalizing element of uniforms deserves some consideration.

While blurring socio-economic differences (and thus a measure of individuality) within a school, uniforms distinguish students of the institution from all others in public. A principal at a Catholic elementary school says that uniforms remind her students who they are—children of the parish—as well as where they come from—the long Catholic tradition (Geglio). Janet Landwehr, a teacher and principal of a Lutheran school, says uniforms "increase public awareness of the school" (24). This distinctiveness in dress can go a long way in promoting respectable, good citizens of school property, for whenever a uniform is donned, the wearer becomes the embodiment of his or her school's standards and beliefs. I remember cases when public acts of kindness (e.g., relinquishing one's seat on a bus for an elderly person) or selfishness (e.g., trespassing on private property) caused admiring or irate bystanders to contact the school involved and praise or berate the behavior of the institution's students. Since the school's reputation was at stake, noteworthy conduct was acclaimed as a good example to follow, and the offensive behavior was severely censured and punished.

Peer pressure to wear the "in" clothes can be very strong.

Psychologists have recognized that first impressions do count and have a tendency to persist even when later proven to be false (Solomon, "Dress" 21). What one wears is a silent communicator and can be very persuasive. What else gave birth to the "dress for success" phenomenon? Negative first impressions can unwittingly affect relationships.

Unless a child is exceptionally mature and skilled in looking beyond the external to the internal, I believe that uniforms can significantly deter unjust prejudiced and discriminatory behavior. Learning to look beneath the surface of individuals' sex, race, and religion to establish character is complicated enough without also having to deal with the distracting element of their attire.

Clothes, however, influence not only others' perceptions of the wearer but also the wearer's self-perception. One is less likely to act like a rambunctious hooligan when dressed like a gentleman. Maureen Bantle, a public school teacher for twenty years and currently the principal of a Catholic institution with a specific dress code, noticed the improved behavior of uniformed students. She believes even young boys, who tend to play roughly regardless of what they are wearing, still sit and walk differently. She also notices the different atmosphere in the building on the more informal jean day. (My former junior-senior high school principal readily acknowledged that overall disciplinary problems in the school decreased on the "Sunday best" dress-up day during homecoming and snow festival weeks.)

Children, like adults, are engaged in a profession, but, unlike adults who have diverse career options, a child is generally limited to being a scholar. The sterile whiteness of a nurse's uniform is a constant reminder of one's position as a professional health care official. A child's school uniform could be a reminder of his or her occupation as a student of knowledge, over and above being a fashion figure, social belle, or athletic jock. To paraphrase another elementary school principal, uniforms give students "an attitude of work" (Distelruth), thus making them more academically than socially minded.

Uniforms, then, may not only save time and money but may also help promote authentic social relationships by decreasing harmful first impressions that hinder communication. They may reduce the pressure on students to measure up to peer dress codes in order to be accepted, and act as a restraint to unruly conduct. Perhaps more importantly, they remind a student of his or her scholarly vocation. Is wearing uniforms, then, "cruel and unjust punishment?" I would answer with a resounding "No!" **CEJ**

L. Ruth Rice now lives in Colon, Michigan.

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Every year I start out full of enthusiasm for the new school term, but soon the excessive work and the kids' attitudes drain me. How can I prevent that from happening?

Many possible reasons could cause this difficult situation. Health habits and personal life stress can be contributors. An underlying fear of burnout, old age, or inadequacy may be preventing open discussion with staff or administration, who play an important role in developing a positive working environment. Or maybe the trait of self-motivation was never well-developed and the lack surfaces more acutely in the teaching career.

Even quite possibly, the teacher has too high expectations. Starting out with excess enthusiasm, not pacing the classes and school year, can leave one dissatisfied with later performance. Class preparations cannot include dramatic, high-energy lesson plans every period of every day. That would be unrealistic, and maybe even unfair, to the students.

The teacher needs to find a variety of ways to "sell" the subject and maintain sanity. More student participation allows for more teacher recognition and, ultimately, more pupil appreciation. To deter boredom for teacher and students, change your teaching style and assignments. I Corinthians 15:58 challenges us to "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." *Abounding* is to be "rich in" or "filled with," which indicates a wealth of ideas and methods that keep us overflowing with innovative techniques of doing his work. *Steadfast* and *unmovable* focus our attention on him, not ourselves, lest we lose sight of why we do this demanding task. ■

We talk about teaching as a profession, but what does it mean to be a professional? Is it a matter of educational degrees, experience, or success? If we teach, are we automatically professionals?

The term *professional* is thrown around at convenience to cover any area of teaching. The dictionary defines a professional as one who "belongs to a recognized profession," or "an occupation requiring an education," listing teaching as one example. By such definition, the answer to the question would be yes, if we teach, we are professionals. There seems to be no indication of the worthiness of bearing the title.

In my search for a more concrete answer, I read an interesting article in the October 1990 issue of *Education Digest*. In "Professionalism in Education: A State of Mind," Peter J. Clamp asserts that "professionalism has little to do with seniority, personal ambition, remuneration, holidays, office size, or mode of dress" nor "years spent in a university, degrees attained, social standing, or even real or imagined codes of conduct or etiquette." Rather, it is "a state of mind" and "stands on a firm foundation of attitude and behavior." Clamp contends that "one earns the designation through integrity, commitment, trust, and honest hard work," and suggests other necessary attributes such as competency, reliability, and genuine caring. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards gives five criteria for teacher professionalism:

1. An exemplary commitment to students and to students' learning
2. A commanding depth of knowledge of the subject matter and of how to teach it
3. Exemplary management and adaptation of the educational environment
4. Ongoing professional growth grounded in research and practice
5. Collaborative, creative leadership among colleagues, parents, and/or community-at-large

The Christian teacher, however, has an obligation to God to be worthy of such a calling. A commitment to God's placement in a particular school with a specific task demands our best. In return, though, we benefit from his strength, encouragement, and joy. **CEJ**

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

CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.

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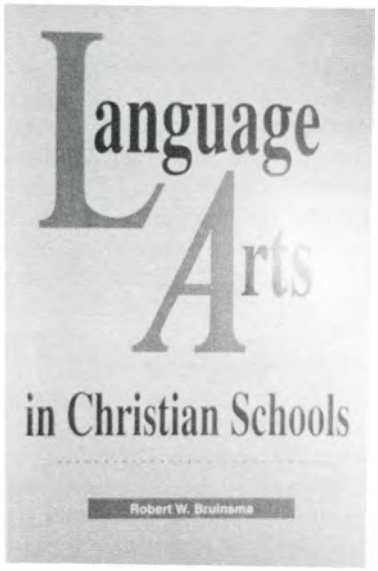
—by STEVE J. VAN DER WEELE



Language Arts in Christian Schools

Robert Bruinsma

Christian Schools International,
139 pp., $10.30, $8.25 CSI members.

Reviewed by John Vriend, Assistant Professor of Education at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario.

There is an active and healthy discussion afoot about how reading, writing, and literature can best be taught in the elementary school. Bruinsma has been part of this discussion in earlier *CEJ* articles alerting teachers to the weakness and expense of many basal reading programs. This recent book is an interesting addition to this discussion, while it also provides many practical suggestions.

Bruinsma begins by relating language to Christian love and service. "The Scriptures make clear that our chief purpose is to be lovers," writes Bruinsma, "lovers of God and of our neighbors" (7). This central point of the first brief chapter sets the stage for his belief that language instruction should "primarily be example and demonstration" to encourage children to "use the gift of language as a joyful and useful service to God and their neighbor" (8).

In language development, Bruinsma emphasizes the importance of understanding sounds, speaking, and language patterns—all learned in the pre-school years. It is his point that learning to read and write ought to be as natural as is learning to understand and use oral language (114). Well before formal schooling starts, children have "an extensive vocabulary and have learned ninety-five percent of the functional grammar they will ever need" (9). Therefore, says Bruinsma, teachers can and should emphasize composition because it "satisfies young children's egocentric urge to project themselves into events and activities" (15).

Often, however, when "language learning goes to school," problems develop, suggests the author. Too often language is "disembedded" or taught as a series of separate skills not flowing naturally from the child's own experience. This is wrong, says Bruinsma, because "education means 'to lead out' rather than 'to pour in'" (20). In this context he defines language arts broadly as "listening, speaking, reading, and writing as linguistic gifts of pleasure and service for ourselves and our fellow human beings and for God" (21). Following Kenneth Goodman's *What's Whole in Whole Language?* (Scholastic 1986), a language-centered approach includes intrinsic motivation, contextualized learning, responding to personal/social needs, risk taking, whole texts—and a rejection of basal readers (29–30). This approach is contrasted to a skills-centered approach that Bruinsma associates, rather too completely and too easily, with rationalism and behaviorism.

These considerations lead Bruinsma to reject basal readers, programmed learning, isolated skill sequences, and a back-to-the-basics emphasis. It also renders suspect workbooks, grade school grammar, test scores, or any curriculum organization suggesting the sequential teaching of common knowledge and skills to all students.

Notwithstanding this rather uncritical use of a progressive educational philosophy, Bruinsma provides a good number of helpful and well-supported suggestions: teaching phonics only as needed and as a means to an end; providing worthwhile children's literature rather than artificial material produced with a controlled vocabulary; tapping into trade books and classroom libraries; giving evaluation a pedagogical focus; encouraging listening and speaking skills; and emphasizing composition in elementary school. He also gives a clear evaluation of reading theories and stresses that "unless teachers consciously program significant blocks of time for sustained reading, children simply will not develop the proficiency to become good readers" (71).

Unfortunately, Bruinsma gives little direction concerning the *content* that should take the place of the inadequate basal readers. In fact, he seems to accept the view that process will make this a moot question. Individual teachers can provide curriculum; the students themselves will select worthwhile material given the openness, creativity, and encouragement that Bruinsma supports.

It is exactly this optimism that is the work's major weakness. Bruinsma's enthusiasm is not tempered with enough Christian realism. Individual teachers *do* need communal guidance on literature helpful for Christian school programs. Skill development, sequential learning, and some core of worthwhile content *do* need attention in Christian schools. It is inconsistent to assume that, while all basal readers are inadequate and wrong-headed, most "whole texts" and children's literature can be accepted rather uncritically as healthy alternatives.

Children's literature today reflects the confusion of our culture, pushes the basic goodness of humanity, and excludes respect for the authority of Scripture. Bruinsma's critique of

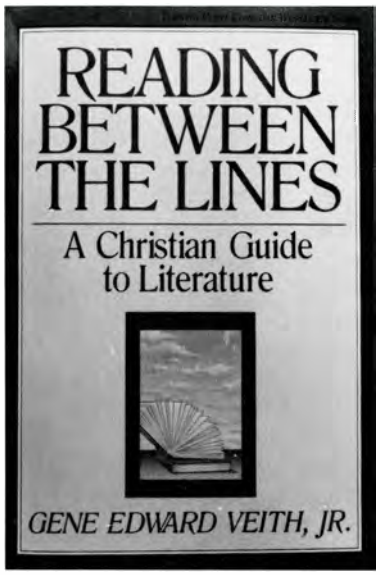
behaviorist and rationalist influences on Christian education are appropriate, but there should be more of a critical eye for the progressive themes that have shaped his own pedagogy.

However, my main concern is directed toward Christian Schools International (CSI). It seems to have given semi-official status to this particular approach to language arts by publishing the book itself and by sending a copy to every member school. Is this book now to be the authoritative answer to the language arts discussion?

A related concern is that the distribution of this volume suggests that CSI is no longer considering language arts curriculum or anthology development for the elementary school. Such a development would be unfortunate because Bruinsma, as he himself notes, does not intend his book to serve as a distinctive language arts curriculum (5).

Furthermore, CSI should not be giving general support to this particular emphasis in theme-based curriculum organization, intrinsic motivation, process over content, and the like.

This critique, however, should not lead us to set the book aside. My guess is that, regarding language arts, it is closer to the truth than were the old basal readers. Bruinsma's proposal for an informal, creative, and classroom-directed whole-language program is well worth reading and trying. ■



Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature.

Gene Edward Veith, Jr., Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and Associate Prof. of English at Concordia University-Wisconsin.

Crossway Books, Division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois. 1990, 245 pp. $9.95, pb.

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

This book should make all teachers of literature stand tall and shed any residual apologetic airs they may have about their discipline and the importance of guiding young people in their reading and interpretation of literature. This is, indeed, a book about reading—the urgency, the pleasure, and the utility of reading literature.

The author contends, with passion, that in our age, when people rely so heavily on mere images in their perception and understanding of the world, those who will determine the agenda and shape the direction of the nation's discourse are the readers—and especially Christian readers. Readers bring knowledge, logic, breadth, and discernment to a discussion about life and experience. Reading reinforces such human activities as planning, imagining, and disciplined reasoning. Thus, directly and indirectly, it aids us as we confront the problems of the world.

Christians especially should take the art of reading seriously. As in the Middle Ages, when the very privilege of reading was threatened by the barbarian invaders, the Church kept the light of learning alive through the commitment and assiduity of the monks. For Christians take language seriously—both the Word and the word. Language derives from the divine *Logos* and is capable of transmitting thought and explaining reality. Christianity is the enemy of illiteracy. It urges people to use the great gift of reading to enhance their understanding of people, nature, society, history, art, and other human concerns. Reading encourages people to discipline their thinking and to communicate their faith responsibly and effectively. Reading, says Veith, is essential to the survival of the Christian faith.

Literature can bring about such awareness, understanding, and knowledge with particular effectiveness. It far surpasses, for example, the activity called "values clarification" in the schools (carried on for the most part without any reference to transcendent norms or realities), teaches more effectively than more abstract expression, offers what TV programming—including much religious programming—cannot begin to offer, and offsets the dominance of the image in the popular mind. Literature reinforces the patterns of thought that Christianity requires for its dissemination and defense.

Veith enriches his discussion about literature with well-crafted critiques of philosophical movements, especially, but not only, as these movements have sponsored aesthetic theories and practices. In these sketches—admit-

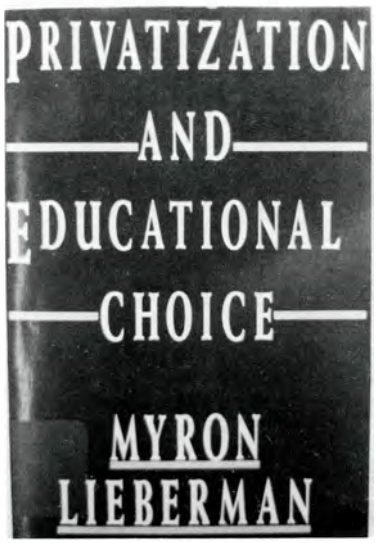
tedly brief ones—he manages to extract the pith of such movements as the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism, and Post Modernism, and to probe their weaknesses from a Christian point of view. He also deftly exhibits how some of these philosophies—especially the recent ones—cannot account for themselves, and that their advocates commit intellectual suicide by their very methodology.

The author's *ad hoc* comments are also worth tending to. For example, parents should not hesitate to expose their children to the unexpurgated version of, say, "Hansel and Gretel" and other Brothers Grimm tales. These stories touch on areas that children frequent in their own mind, and the conclusions give them a sense of moral closure. I like his advice about reading: read widely but critically, with discernment, testing the spirits. His warnings against being seduced by the rhetoric of contemporary movements is apt; "Christian existentialism," for example is a contradiction in terms. Do not ask for Polyanna fiction, and do all you can to encourage writers to do authentic work. And, if you aspire to being an author, be a servant, not a dilettante; write for an audience, not just for your own indulgence.

This book will serve a student well during his or her late high school and college years. It will also help teachers remind themselves, however briefly, of some of the contemporary discourse about literature, including a brief treatment of deconstructionism. I would like to have seen some attention given to Northrop Fry's formulation of literary types, and was surprised not to see any allusion to Henry Zylstra's *Testament of Vision*. Surely the play *Antigone* is as much about Antigone as about Creon. But these are minor reservations in what can be a very useful book for evangelicals as they confront the world of literature.

Professor Veith provides a useful reading list of the time-tested classics, but also reserves a choice spot on his shelf for current Christian authors: Larry Woiwode, Annie Dillard, Madeleine L'Engle, Walter Percy, Walter Wangerin, John Updike (with reservations), A. N. Wilson, J. F. Powers, Luci Shaw, Hugh Cook, James Schaap. Rudy Wiebe belongs in this company as well. These authors, and other authentic writers—many of them essayists using the techniques of literature—are exerting a powerful influence on their readers and, thus, in our world. May their numbers—both the authors and the readers—increase.

A timely essay in the January 1991 issue of the *Atlantic* by Douglas Wilson, "What Jefferson and Lincoln Read: An Essay on Literacy and Achievement," concurs with Veith's emphases. ■



Privatization and Educational Choice

by Myron Lieberman

St. Martin's Press, New York. 1989, 386 pp. $35.00.

Reviewed by Donald Oppewal, Professor of Education, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

What is remarkable about this book is its even-handedness in dealing with the controversy surrounding choice. The author's credentials are impressive, and his writing style is lucid. Lieberman has been in the ivory tower as well as immersed in the hurly-burly of school politics: a university professor as well as a teacher-union negotiator, and a book writer as well as a consultant to federal, state, and local education agencies.

Lieberman's experiences as social theorist and political pragmatist make him especially well qualified to address the broad question of educational choice. He casts a jaundiced eye upon all simplistic polemical views from whatever end of the ideological spectrum. In the process he exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of proponents and opponents alike of whatever topic he is discussing. He is particularly passionate on the subject of vouchers, coming down hard on both the objectors to and the proponents of this plan. He takes up, in turn (chapter six and seven), the various arguments for and against the concept of vouchers, exposing, for example, the weakness of the argument that competition between private and public schools will automatically improve the quality of both. He is equally hard on voucher opponents who see in the various proposals the demise of public schools or a violation of separation of church and state. His conclusion:

> To be enacted, voucher plans must appeal to several constituencies. These constituencies have not as yet reached consensus on a voucher plan that is both politically viable and acceptable. (255)

Lest the reader thinks the author is so even—indeed that he has no bias, hear his own thesis, stated early in the book:

> My view is that contrary to conventional reform proposals the only ways to improve American

education are to (1) foster private schools that compete with public schools and among themselves and/or (2) foster for-profit competition among service providers within the public school system. (4)

He treats the whole range of what he calls "modes of privatization," both imaginatively as well as extensively. His list includes

1. Contracting (with independent contractors)
2. Vouchers
3. Load shedding
4. Franchising
5. Subsidies to nongovernmental suppliers
6. Voluntary service
7. Sale of governmental assets
8. Construction or purchase of public facilities with leaseback arrangements.

While some of these terms are familiar to those who have thought about choice, few have laid out so comprehensively all the forms that fit the slogan. Presidents and governors have made political points by favoring "choice" while keeping their real agendas hidden. Educational bureaucrats have also, sometimes reluctantly, suggested that some form of choice is worth pursuing, and the proliferation of magnet schools in urban districts reveals that even reluctant administrators have gotten the message that the pressure for respecting parent choice is mounting. It is indeed a clear call for change, one that cannot be denied any longer. Lieberman's cool, calm treatment serves the cause well.

A review such as this is not the place to detail each of the eight forms that educational choice could take. But one can say that each one is held up for support and scrutiny to gauge the potential as well as the political opposition to each.

The good news for readers of this journal is that someone who cannot be disposed of as a narrow polemicist or easily labeled as a religionist, a free enterprise economist, or a civil libertarian has come forward with proposals nourished by social wisdom and political sagacity, with insights that capture the best of what various special interest groups have said for years.

While the cost of this book is considerable, Christian school supporters could justify the expense by forwarding it to legislators, political action groups, and other friends or, even, enemies of choice. Anyone can find in this book some form of privatization that is acceptable. Thus, the proposals, if implemented, would serve the long range goal of social change in favor of parental choice—an idea whose time has come. **CEJ**

NOTICE:

As we went to press, the *Christian Educators Journal* learned that H. K. Zoeklicht, veteran columnist for *CEJ* and author of the controversial "Asylum" feature, has been stricken with a strange and as yet undiagnosed malady while vacationing in Acapulco, Mexico. The family has gathered, but no further news has been received. Future columns are, therefore, in doubt. We shall keep readers informed. Cards may be sent to him in care of *CEJ*.

We introduce Sara Henderson whose cartoons will be featured regularly. She draws her subjects from actual experiences in her kindergarten classes at Maranatha Christian Academy in Edina, Minnesota.