

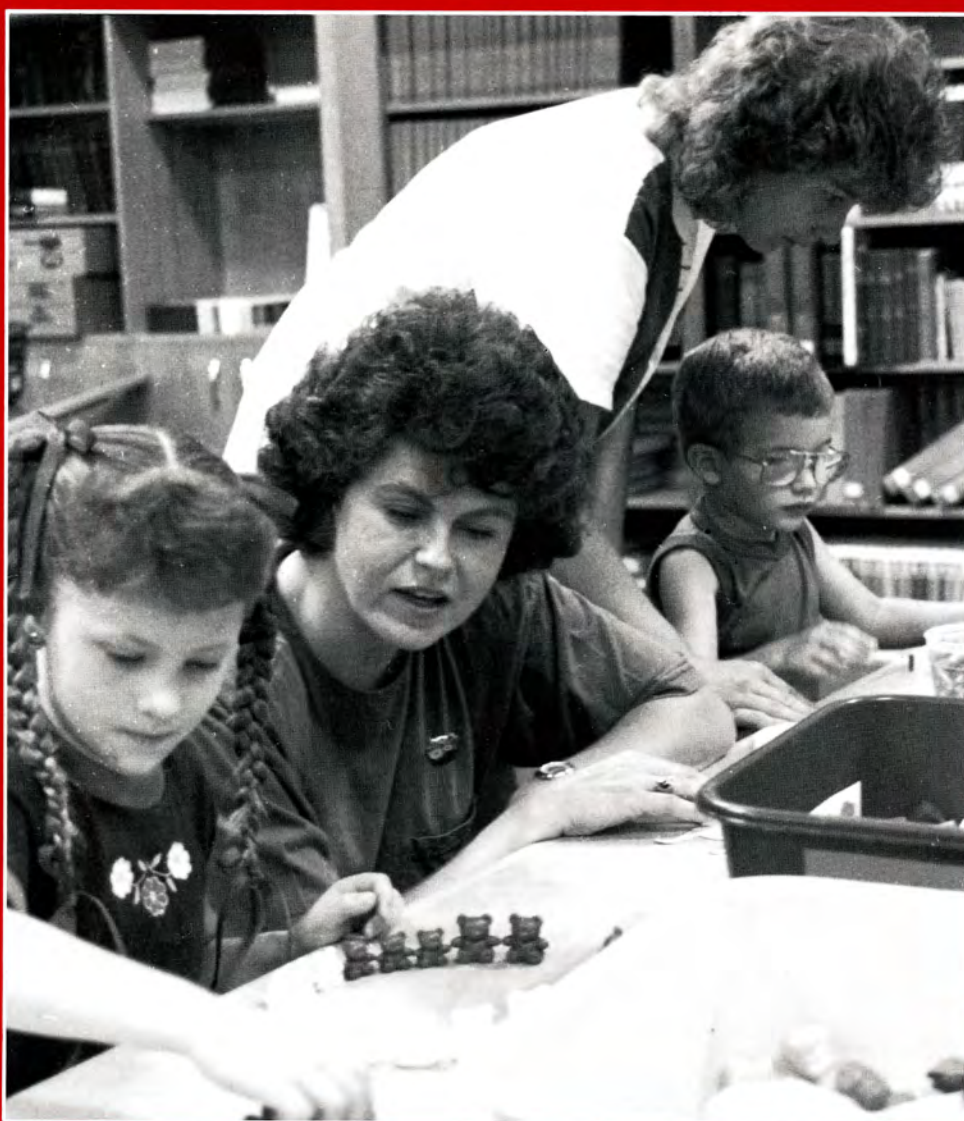
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Communities for Learning

THE SCHOOLS WE DON'T DESERVE

by Gloria Goris Stronks

"Wouldn't it be great if they made school so good you'd want to talk about it on Saturday?" Matt, an eighth grader, grinned as he straddled his mountain bike. "But that'll never happen 'cuz schools will always be the same," he shouted over his shoulder as he took off.



In 1985 the book *The Schools We Deserve* appeared on the educational scene. In that book Diane Ravitch reflected on the educational crises of our times, asking such questions as the following: Why doesn't educational reform work very well in North America? Where does our incessant urge to follow fads and fashions in education lead us? Is it really true that skills and process are all that matter in schooling? Her conclusion is that we will always get the schools we deserve, and, unless we take the steps needed for change, we are likely to permanently "... veer from one pedagogical extreme to the other, perpetually dissatisfied with the results, disappointed in our schools and our teachers, not recognizing that the fault lies not in the institution but in our own inadequate thinking" (316).

The Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship team, after spending a year visiting Christian schools in different parts of North America and meeting with groups of parents, teachers, students, principals, and board members, is convinced that the people of each school community need to examine their thinking about Christian schooling. We believe that what is needed is a new commitment that Christian schools



Members of the 1991-1992 Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship team (from left) are Steven Vryhof, Doug Blomberg, Gloria Stronks, Peter DeBoer, Harro Van Brummelen, and Robert Koole.

should be places where students and teachers together live and learn to live as responsive disciples of Jesus Christ. The ethos, the whole environment of the school, must speak one clear message:

In this place we will all work together to encourage each other in learning to unwrap the gifts God has given us. We will learn to bear each other's burdens and rejoice with each other in the good times. Above all, in this place we will learn to seek God's shalom.

Were the Christian schools we visited such places? Some came close. In some schools the air was alive with learning and support. Teachers and students were actively engaged together

in learning and leading each other to further learnings. Teachers and students together were "creating a space in which obedience to truth is practiced," to use the words of Parker Palmer. A hospitable environment for learning was the goal in those schools, not simply because it made students feel safe and happy or because it made learning painless. Rather, a hospitable environment was considered necessary to make painful learning possible. Those schools were working hard at understanding and practicing what it means to live in community.

Other Christian schools, however, were places where teachers clearly implied that the way people learn is by acquiring factual information, bit by bit, in what Paulo Freire refers to as the "banking model of education." The

teacher "deposits" information in the head of the student, and the student who accumulates the most facts is the winner of the academic competition. Success in those schools was a matter of striving to win at different kinds of competition, whether they are social, athletic, musical, or academic. This striving for individual success created an environment of competition at the expense of others.

Most Christian schools fall somewhere between those two extremes. There are many teachers, students, principals, and parents who continue to believe their own school should exist but wish it would be better, more

two people, or a small group of people have, with God's help, made important things happen? Of course it has, many times over.

- When most of the Christian Reformed people had moved out of the city into the suburbs of Chicago, a small number of people insisted that a Christian school must remain to serve the city, and Roseland Christian School took on a new purpose and identity.

- Three teachers knew it was God's will that Christian schooling should be provided for children of lower-income families in Grand Rapids, and the Potter's House Christian School came

been revised and is now called *Living in Hope*.

- Two teachers had lunch together at a Christian Educators Association meeting and shared their concern that Christian schooling needs more fundamental rethinking. Out of that concern, the Chicago Conferences were started, leading to the publishing of *12 Affirmations* (Baker Book House, 1989), which has guided discussions for many school faculties and boards.

- One teacher made a suggestion at a Chicago Conference. He stood up and said, "Perhaps the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship could take the study of Christian schools as its topic for one year," and the present study was born.

It would be safe to say that every significant event in Christian schooling, whether it was the beginning of a school or a major change in a school, started with one or a few people who firmly believed that change was in keeping with God's plan for his people. Sometimes these few people felt put down and laughed at. Rarely were their ideas adopted and supported immediately. But they always dared to take risks and encouraged others to do so.

It is possible for Christian schools to be spaces for learning in which obedience to truth is practiced. It is possible for them to be hospitable environments for all students.

We would not dare to suggest that we have worked hard and therefore are worthy of having schools like that. Rather, if we dare to reexamine our schools and if we dare to risk making changes, all the while trying hard to live in obedience to biblical guidelines, by God's grace we will get the schools we don't deserve. ■

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

"Many teachers, students, principals, and parents continue to believe their own school should exist but wish it would be better, more distinctively Christian."

distinctively Christian. However, they aren't certain just what changes are needed to make their school better. The CCCS team has worked hard at describing what a Christian school ought to be like, what forces are at work to keep it from being all that it can be, what changes are needed, and how teachers, parents, students, and board members can work together to have schools better than the ones they deserve. That information will appear in our forthcoming book, *A Vision with a Task: Christian Schooling for Responsive Discipleship*.

But what if only a few people in your school community think the school ought to change and become better than it is? Does any effort for change then become hopeless?

I was watching the television program "Northern Exposure" the other night. An old man, talking to a small group of the inhabitants of Cicily, Alaska, about changes in their town, said, "One person can strongly influence another person. And two people together can be a powerful influence to make important things happen."

Has it ever happened in a Christian school community that one person, or

to be.

- Two teachers in a Christian middle school were convinced that the competitive spirit, left over from the days when they were a junior high school, was destructive to the spirit of the calling of their school. Together they influenced their staff and community, and today that school is a very different place from what it was.

- One fourth grade teacher, after carefully studying the language-experience approach to the teaching of beginning reading, provided encouragement and direction to the first and second grade teachers in using that approach in their classrooms. Five years later the entire K-6 school is using a literature approach to the teaching of reading, science, and social studies and has integrated skill instruction into the program.

- A small group of high school teachers planned units for helping students learn Christian perspectives on societal issues. At one point, one of them said, "We really should write these up for other teachers who might be interested." That was the beginning of *Man and Society* (Christian Schools International, 1980), which has recently

LIFE IN CLASSROOMS

by Harro Van Brummelen

Twenty-five years ago Philip Jackson wrote about the “daily grind” in his classic *Life in Classrooms*. Classrooms and schools, he said, deviate little from four standard routines: seatwork, group discussion, teacher demonstration, and question-and-answer sessions. In reality, he continued, classrooms are about “the crowds, the praise, and the power.” More than anything else, they teach students to be patient.

A generation later, would Jackson still feel this way about schools? We’ve gone through several educational pendulum swings and technological innovations, but I suspect that his basic views remain intact. I remember articles in the 1960s predicting that, with advanced computer technology, by 1990 schools, classrooms, and teaching would be a thing of the past. Yet, today, we still have schools with individual classrooms, each with their own teacher and individual student desks. Classroom work is still most often based on textbook content, according to observers. We still set strict rules for group conduct for the sake of individual learning. We still make classrooms function on the basis of giving or withholding praise. And the teacher is still the authority figure with the power to reward or to punish, to pass or to fail.

The past two decades have seen critical theorists write countless pages berating schools for what they believe to be an oppressive and unjust system. They have, however, failed to design and implement workable alternatives. Jackson himself, meanwhile, doubts that research has given us any new insights into teaching and learning, and calls, instead, for more thought about the moral purpose of teaching and its importance for the future of society. (See, for example, Jackson’s 1987 response.)

During the past year, the team at the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship visited many Christian school classrooms throughout North

America. Yes, we saw bored students and even some bored teachers. Yes, we saw arbitrary structures and rules that stifled rather than encouraged response and creativity. Yes, we saw behavioristic reward systems that undermined long-term responsible student action. And yes, we saw teachers wield power in ways that promoted North American individualism rather than a biblical concept of covenant community.

But we also saw an overall picture far more positive than that painted by critical theorists. We saw students exhilarated about their learning activities. We saw teachers who spend hours far beyond the call of duty to design learning to meet the needs of each student. We saw classrooms with learning centers and field trips and service activities that simultaneously thoroughly encultured students in “the basics.” Above all, we saw teachers who were exceptionally dedicated to their work in serving their students, and who sensed deeply that their “moral purpose” was to guide children in the truth.

Our positive assessment resulted in part from our different presuppositions about life and about education. We did not start with the assumption, for instance, that schools are deliberately structured to manipulate and exploit, even when that may sometimes occur. Rather, like Jackson, we saw much willingness to recognize the need for improvement, but also some inertia and fear to bring about change. Moreover, we agree with Jackson that any proposed improvements must be related to our “moral purpose” or religious quest, not to some narrowly-based research results. The Bible, for instance, recognizes the need for both order and freedom, and holds that knowledge must lead to faithful, just, and responsive action.

Twelve years ago Nick Wolterstorff set the vision of “responsible action” before our schools. While that goal is still valid, we believe today’s cultural and educational milieu calls for a slightly

different emphasis, one that we call “responsive discipleship.” As we near the turn of the century, we especially need to encourage our students to respond creatively and responsibly to God’s call. We help them use God’s gifts within and around them, at their own level of ability and development, celebrating the lordship of Christ over every nook and cranny of life. In school, students systematically learn about life but also learn to understand reasons for the dynamics of life in society and to re-integrate this knowledge with their everyday experience in commitment and trust. Disciples are not blind followers. Rather, they respond in their own unique way to the overall call. Schools must be organized to allow and encourage such response.

Most educators in Christian schools agree with this thrust. But often Christian school communities have not consistently thought through—let alone implemented—the consequences of what it means to educate for responsive discipleship. How do we provide a setting in which students unwrap their individual gifts to serve God and his people? How do we organize learning so that students experience a Christ-confessing community sharing each other’s joys and burdens? How do we help students become disposed and committed to seeking and proclaiming the need for God’s shalom—his mercy, peace, and justice—throughout society? Too often, despite our best intentions, our schools foster individual intellectual or athletic trivial pursuits with little long-lasting value. Rather, we need to foster whole-bodied response as outlined, for instance, in Romans 12.

How can we plan more effectively to encourage responsive discipleship? There is no one way. In God’s world, we’ve barely begun to understand the complexity of learning, and we may celebrate diversity of gifts among teachers and students. Still, some practices are particularly promising. Classroom units developed, for instance, along the rhythms of problem-posing,

distancing and focusing, and responding have the potential to nurture students to be and become responsive disciples. Let me give two examples, each based on what teachers have done in their classrooms.

An English teacher in a Christian high school asks what motivates people to make important choices about their lives. He uses a mixture of short stories, poems, news articles, teenage-oriented comics, and rock music to have his students deal head-on with decisions

"Disciples are not blind followers. Rather, they respond in their own unique way to the overall call. Schools must be organized to allow and encourage such response."

people make about their use of time and money, their sexual conduct, drugs, and suicide. The video *The Man Who Planted Trees* is a springboard to discuss what it means that God calls each of us to use our gifts to bring about shalom in our own lives and those of others through "planting trees." Along the way, the students distance themselves from their everyday experience through the mediation of the various works, and focus on thinking critically about their form and content.

After the in-class activities, the students choose a "tree-planting" organization such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, or a Christian group promoting justice at home or abroad. They make contact with the one chosen and take a school day to visit its offices and interview key personnel, focusing on the motives that led people to work for the organization.

The students respond to what they learn by making oral reports to the class, posters to illustrate the work of the organization, and journals in which they

consider how they can and must make personal choices that affect not only their own lives, but also those of others. They gain respect for altruism, for renouncing power and prestige in order to serve others, for seeking reconciliation in broken situations. They experience how it is possible to bring about biblical shalom, even if in only a limited way, in situations crying out for justice and compassion. They discuss what global interdependence, cultural diversity, and biblical justice mean for the ways they live in and out of school. In the process, they develop many abilities in a meaningful content context: analysis and critical thinking; oral, written, and aesthetic communication; and personal and group interaction skills.

But units nurturing responsive discipleship are not limited to higher grade levels. A kindergarten class studies the farm for four weeks in an integrated unit. The teacher wants her children to discover God's bountiful provision for food and life, as well as the realization that our North American food wealth gives us a responsibility to care for others. At the start, the teacher draws on suburban children's limited experience with farms and poses the problem of how the children have food on their table each day.

The books read and discussed, the poems recited and the songs sung, the stories they dictate to their buddies and write in their journals, and the math and block and barn centers all focus on the farm theme. The children make drawings and collages in response to farm stories and dramatize farm animals. Together they write a "big book" about a day on the farm. The teacher reads stories and asks higher-level questions concerned with predicting outcomes and imagining different endings. On a field trip to a dairy farm they explore how farmers operate their business and what problems they face. They learn how a calf is born as well as how milk reaches their homes. They help provide food for others by

spearheading a school food drive to help the local food bank.

None of this, perhaps, is so unusual. But what is significant is how the teacher deliberately fosters responsive discipleship in each child. The teacher structures her centers so that she can ask shy but bright children to help ones having difficulty with certain tasks. She makes quibbling children decide for themselves how to resolve their problems peacefully. The children choose their own learning center during activity time, setting a timer to take turns if many students want to be at one center. She keeps close track of which children visit each learning center and carefully evaluates individual emotional, social, aesthetic, physical, intellectual, and moral/spiritual development, motivating each child through personal feedback. Her unobtrusive but well-established routines allow for a great deal of freedom, encouraging responsiveness and responsibility and care for classmates as well as for the less fortunate in the world.

The children are left with a sense of God's intention for farms, with the importance of treating his creatures with integrity and restoring God's shalom at least partially where brokenness has occurred.

To foster responsive discipleship, life in classrooms embraces but involves much more than cognitive learning. This is accomplished by teachers who plan integral units whose content and learning structures explicitly foster unwrapping students' gifts in a supportive Christian learning community that promotes Christ's shalom—and who are responsive disciples themselves as they implement those units with loving, tactful pedagogical thoughtfulness. ■

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PLAYFUL PLACES?

by Douglas Blomberg

Ted Sizer has a chapter in *Horace's School* in which he contends that schools should be "thoughtful" places. Thoughtfulness has a couple of important connotations. One has to do with being thoughtful—caring—in our relationships with each other, as students and as teachers. The other concerns the thought we give to our learning and teaching, the trouble we take to reflect on what we are doing. Christian schools should certainly be thoughtful places in both of these senses.

But Christian schools should also be playful places, places that nurture the freely-given responsiveness that is at the heart of our image-bearing.

Talk about the importance of play in schooling often makes people nervous. They think about students fooling around and wasting time, being involved in activities that are not really serious. But maybe it's because we're too serious about schooling that many of our efforts are wasted.

Schooling often focuses on students getting the right answer. Teachers decide beforehand what has to be learned, and they carefully plan their lessons to get the information across. Quizzes, tests, and homework assignments bolster this view. So, teachers give the information, teachers ask questions about the information, and students answer the teachers' questions.

We're so serious about this business of education that we think no time can be wasted. We know the answers, so the most efficient thing to do is to give the answers to the students. We leave little opportunity for students themselves to ponder over what questions (and hence,

what answers) are important. We give little space to students to explore a territory for themselves.

This approach to schooling is reflected in the words of a graduate student. "This has been difficult," he said, "but it's been very rewarding. Normally, the professor asks the questions, and we give the answers. This is the first course that I've had in which I've been expected to come up with the questions. And that's hard. You really have to think."

Our structures for teaching are often so rigid—and more so as students proceed in school—that we leave no room for play. A rope has play in it when it is not stretched taut; it has a certain "give." Sunlight entrances us as it plays through the trees. Firelight plays on the walls as it dances freely back and forth. People play when they feel relaxed and confident enough to let themselves go, to risk a joke, to try out an idea, or to follow a flight of fancy.

It is only in giving students such opportunities to play that we respect their God-imaging call to respond freely from their hearts. Within the boundaries of faithful response that God has established, he calls us to play, to search, to explore, to risk, to express our individuality according to the gifts he has given us.

We think through our metaphors. If we look at Adam in the garden when he is naming the animals as if he were engaged in a process of scientific classification, then we will conceive our responsibility of dominion—and also the purpose of schooling—in the same terms. But Adam wasn't wearing a white coat.

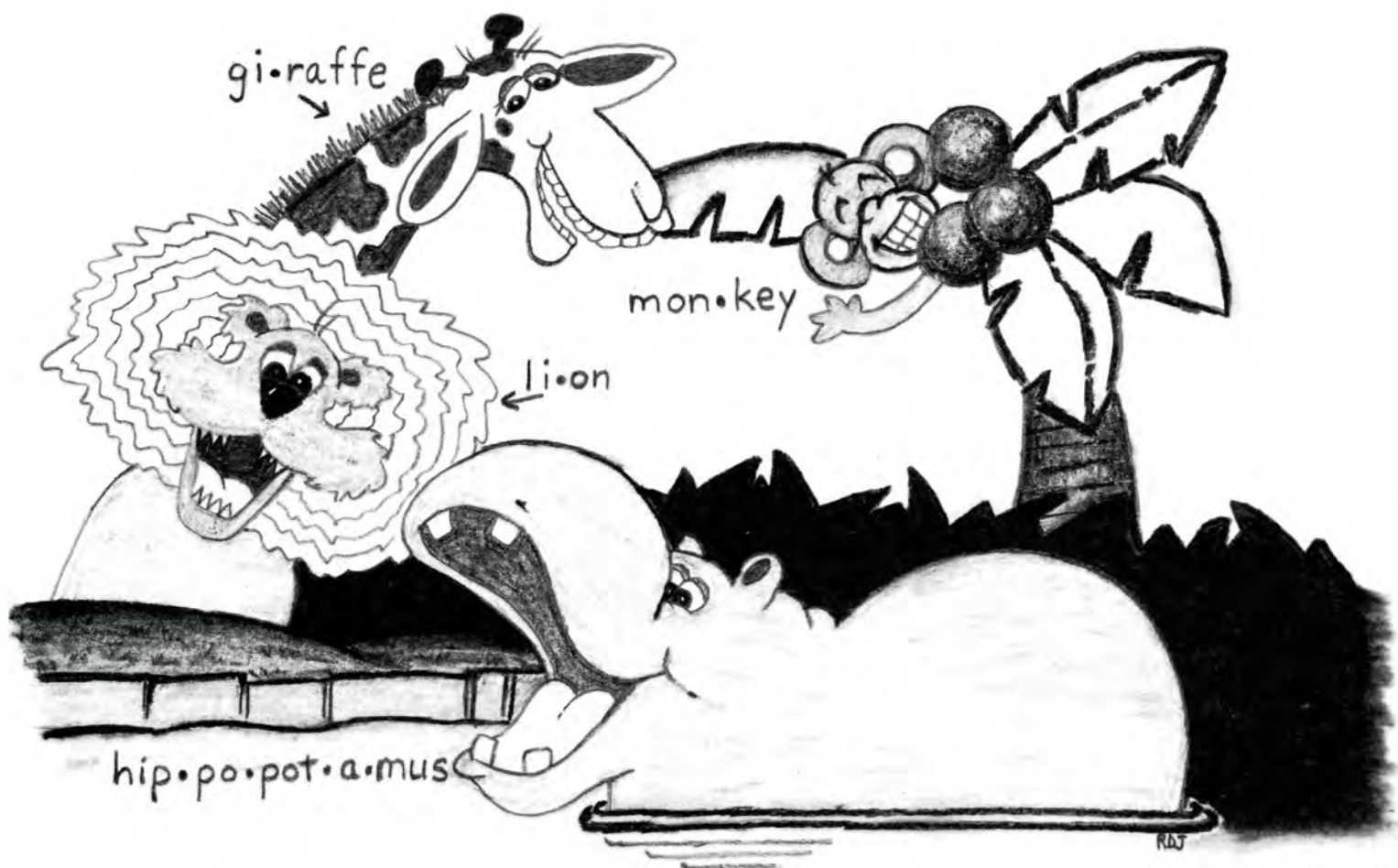
God paraded an amazing me-

nagerie before Adam. Imagine his astonishment, wonder, and awe at the imagination of God as each new creature was revealed to him. Adam must have laughed with joy, a whole-bodied, personal response of thankfulness to the Creator.

But an equally amazing thing was this: God did not say, "Adam, this is a tiger. Please write the name in your book. Are you sure you have the spelling right? Now, I want you to note down the characteristics of the African and the Indian elephants. Remember, there will be a test on this next Tuesday."

No, God brought the animals to Adam and invited him to name them. In the excitement of meeting these wondrous beasts, another adventure was given to Adam. He had to find the words that described them. He had to wrap his tongue around various combinations, to play with sounds, until he found just the right way of identifying each one of them. Though the Lord knew these creatures from before the foundation of the world, he did not take from Adam the *response* ability for which he had been created. God asked Adam to be faithful to their uniqueness, to respect what he had made, but he gave Adam the freedom to respond according to his own nature as creative, imaginative, and thoughtful image-bearer.

The Bible's wisdom literature highlights for us how different the Israelites were from their neighbors. Others—the Greeks in particular—tried to erect philosophical systems that would help them penetrate to the essence of the world so that they could control it. The Israelites, however, were willing to remain open to the constantly puzzling



nature of things. They knew that God alone is in control.

The Israelites accepted that creation is dynamic. It does not function according to natural, inflexible laws, but in response to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Creation changes and challenges. The God of the Bible is the God of history, the God who acts in and reveals himself in the midst of human affairs. He is the God who made personal himself in the midst of human affairs. He is the God who made persons to bear his image. He is the God who believes in growth and personal choice, because he gives us the power to make real decisions.

In other words, he gives us the power to entertain—to play with—various possibilities. He invites us to weigh up options and to exercise judgment and wisdom. He calls us to participate with him in the ongoing

shaping of the world.

If this is the way that God has made us to be, it is not surprising that it is through playfulness that much effective learning occurs. When teachers help students to learn, they can demand that they learn answers that have been pre-determined, or they can ask them to entertain ideas and to search for meaningful connections. Though the former can lead to great success on paper-and-pencil tests, it is in active engagement with the challenges creation presents that “real” learning happens.

Teachers can be like those parents who show their child the “proper way” to put together a construction set on Christmas Day, robbing the child not only of much pleasure but also of much real learning; or they can be like those parents who sit alongside their child on the floor, ready to offer assistance as the child struggles excitedly to see what

goes with what.

Learning that changes the ways we understand and act in the world is a process in which we actively make connections between different parts of our experience. In schools, such learning will allow us to see the links among the various facets of our school learning and the link between this learning and our ordinary lives.

Christian schools that nurture responsive discipleship will thus be playful places, in which students are not constrained by teachers’ truths but, rather, set free by the Spirit of Truth. ■

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Closing the gap between structure and mission

by Peter P. DeBoer

I'm intrigued by claims that style of management is the key to the high quality of Japanese autos. In Japanese management the old top-down style is softened considerably by managers consulting with the workers, eliciting ideas about improvement of manufacturing processes and the quality of the workplace (including recreational facilities, scheduling, and child care). Reciprocally, the workers offer a remarkable sense of loyalty to the company. CEOs avoid obvious "perks" such as specially marked parking slots; managers are not paid the exorbitant salaries of some American CEOs; and often managers even dress as the workers do. In general, the management structures express a spirit of ethos that coheres with the mission of the company and results in worker satisfaction that is highly motivated toward achieving quality.

I'm also intrigued by the leadership styles of certain school administrators and the remarkable results that often flow from adjustments to the structure of a school.

Take Dennis Littky, for example. (See Book Reviews for a brief review of *Teacher: Dennis Littky's Fight for a Better School*.) With the state basketball tournaments about to begin and Thayer High's boys' varsity team involved, Littky decided he wanted something better than a pep rally that would merely honor the team. He wanted to recognize not just the basketball team, but celebrate everybody. So a committee went to work and organized not just an evening program, but an all-day "up-with-Thayer" festival for 350 students and the Winchester community. The vocational teacher organized a wood-carving demonstration. Two boys did a weight-lifting demonstration. A science class set up a blood pressure booth. The home-ec classes set up sewing projects and set out pastries, cookies, and other goodies. The students engaged in a tug-of-war

and a softball-in-the-snow contest. Parents and the community at large were invited to the evening's festivities in the school gym, where they found students in one booth selling carnation corsages by the hundreds. To increase attendance, the students were awarded points for every person they brought with them, and the class with the most points won free pizzas. Every student in the school won recognition of some sort as the cheerleaders, honor students, athletes, club participants, musicians, class leaders, and the rest paraded to center stage to receive their awards.

No really big deal, but it was Dennis' way of creating a structure—in fact, a sense of community—that he felt was coherent with the mission of the school, an expression of Thayer High distinctiveness.

Structure and Mission

Distinctively Christian education ought to be evident not just in classrooms, not just in curriculums and pedagogy, but also in the larger structures that we build into the school and in how consistently those structures meet the mission of the school. But beware: our mission as Reformed Christians ought to help determine which structures we think acceptable. Surely some will promote our mission; some may not.

Let me provide two examples, one in the religiously fundamentalist tradition, the other in the Roman Catholic. I think both of these schools have structures that are coherent with the schools' missions.

Bethel Baptist Academy

Bethel Baptist Academy is described by Alan Peshkin in *God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School* (1986).

The word *total* in the book title significantly describes life at BBA: in its doctrinal foundations and commitment to teaching the truth of the Word of God; in the total commitment of time expected of the teachers not just in teaching from Monday through Friday, but from driving buses early in the morning to attending mid-week church services and into the weekends for retreats and Sunday school; in the remarkably focused attention on cultivating student feelings, character, and spirituality and the relative neglect of skills and knowledge; and in the determined control the administration exercises over teachers (via contract and handbook), parents (who must pledge never to be critical of the school), and students (through their pledge, and under the weight of pressure to report errant behavior; via chapel; via an elaborate system of demerits that can lead to paddling and dismissal; by means of stringent student leadership selection processes, the shaping influences of a summer youth trip, and other devices). And when the students graduate, most of them are ready for Bob Jones University.

Like it or not, Bethel Baptist Academy is remarkably successful at consistently nurturing its students (and teachers and parents) in the way that Bethel Baptist thinks they should "go."

St. Benedicts

St. Benedicts, in the heart of Newark, New Jersey, presents an interesting contrast (see Gilbert T. Sewall, "Great Expectations, Successful Schools" in *Education Week*, Feb. 29, 1984, 19, 24.), though there are some similarities as well.

Here, by way of an academic curriculum, firm rules, high expectations, peer support, and manageable size, approximately 350 inner-city minority black and Hispanic teenage boys (most of the black students

"We may want to redraw the school calendar to create additional school days and allow quality time for teachers to interact with each other on a weekly basis."

are Baptists) are being educated well enough so that upon graduation some enter Swarthmore, Dartmouth, Rutgers, and Holy Cross while others go on to community colleges or the armed forces.

The Roman Catholic fathers at St. Benedicts have devised some intriguing structures to induce conforming behavior. For the incoming freshmen the summer session is especially taxing. Freshmen must arrive with sleeping bag, prepared for a live-in week-long initiation into the ways of St. Benedicts. It starts at 6:30 each morning and ends at 10:30 at night. Students may not call home. They are drilled in school history and traditions, required to write essays on what they hope to achieve in the future, engage in exhausting calisthenics, and serve each other at meals. These freshmen must continue to observe special rituals throughout the school year, including carrying a notebook at all times and walking on the proper side of the halls.

Then, in May—after a school year that includes such conventional studies as English, social science, math, natural science, religion, and physical education—all students suspend formal studies. The upper-classmen spend five weeks off campus doing a variety of projects, including children's theater and urban field studies. The freshmen, after three weeks of physical preparation, do a week-long 42-mile backpacking trip along the New Jersey section of the Appalachian trail. All students then return for a mandatory six-week summer session of remedial and enrichment courses.

In addition, the entire student body is organized into cooperatives, each named after an illustrious teacher or alumnus. A month after school begins in the fall, group leaders meet in strict secrecy and systematically draft each boy in the freshmen class into one of the cooperatives (done in National Basketball Association style, with the least successful group from the previous year getting first pick). Hence everybody

feels chosen and has a chance to belong to an identifiable group of about twenty to twenty-five that meets, not only to compete as cooperatives against other cooperatives, but within that group to exercise discipline and to offer academic help for those who are struggling.

Two schools, arising out of two contrasting educational traditions. Both are bent on inventing structures that are aimed at achieving the mission of the school. By all reports, both are remarkably successful at achieving their ends.

The Challenge to Examine Structures

I think the Christian school as we know it faces the challenge of reexamining its structures, especially in light of its mission.

Schooling in many public and even some religious independent schools, over time, has developed a fairly refined production model by which we have accommodated structures that are more characteristic of factories than schools: in building design, with teachers as technicians, in scheduling, with prepackaged curricula, with nearly uniform fifty-minute class periods at middle and high school levels, in the accumulating of credits, in testing/grading/ranking of students, by the competitive atmosphere. They don't come close to expressing the distinctive character of our Christian schools.

But if the mission or vision of Christian education calls for the unwrapping of God-given gifts of remarkable variety, the bearing of burdens in a community of learning, and a seeking after justice and peace through a program consciously aimed at responsive discipleship, then our challenge is to provide a model of Christian education that is not just an echo of its secular counterpart plus Bible study. There has to be a searching, biblically-based look at "deep

structures" to find some viable alternatives.

We may want to rethink the competitive atmosphere we often create in our schools. We may want to consider introducing collaborative learning in classrooms and all-school public service requirements. We may want to redraw the school calendar to create additional school days and allow quality time for teachers to interact with each other on a weekly basis, and periodically with parents and students. We may want to reach out and include a greater diversity of students, from those who are physically and mentally challenged to those who differ from us in race, ethnicity, and even creed. We may want to reexamine the system of reporting grades, and the very foundations on which academic/social/cultural/spiritual evaluations rest. We may want to wonder whether our schools are truly Christian communities for living and learning and practicing servanthood and, if not, what we can do structurally to make them so.

Bethel Baptist Academy and St. Benedicts have introduced some viable alternatives to school-as-usual. Dennis Littky and other innovative educators are out there with their attractive wares. We may want to embrace some of these structures and reject others.

The challenge of self-examination beckons. What we must do is reflectively close the gap between the mission and structure of the Christian school, between its vision and task. Somewhat like the Japanese challenge to the old-style system of management leading to a better built auto, we may find that some structural changes will help us to equip the children of God "for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17) even more "thoroughly" than we've been able to do thus far. ■

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COMMUNITY *in Teaching*

by Robert Koole

At a recent Christian Educators Association convention Michelle and Darren saw each other for the first time in five years. They had taken many of the same classes in their teacher education programs at a Christian college and had moved to different parts of the country. After sharing some personal experiences, their conversation turned to their work:

MICHELLE: You've been in the same school for five years now? What are some of the things your faculty does together?

DARREN: Oh, we have monthly social events that most of the teachers attend. The teachers are very friendly. Our principal really encourages a congenial atmosphere.

MICHELLE: That sounds quite similar to the first faculty I worked with. We developed a real sense of community in our staff devotions and by being personally sensitive toward one another. I felt really strengthened in my faith, but something was missing. In my third year I noticed that I sometimes felt alone in my teaching. I thought that it was just me, but when I shared my feelings with several of the more experienced teachers, they said that those feelings were a normal part of their work. They seemed to accept a certain amount of loneliness as a natural part of teaching.

DARREN: I know the feeling. The other teachers and I may be on the same wavelength through our devotions, but I don't know what is taught in other classrooms. We have subject area meetings four times a year, but those are used primarily for briefly reviewing content outlines and textbook decisions. We rarely discuss our goals for teaching

and learning. Teaching methods are considered to be a personal matter except for occasional evaluations by our principal. So, I tend not to ask others for advice about teaching, nor do they ask me.

MICHELLE: Did I tell you I moved this year? Well, I'm already finding that my new school is quite different from my first school. Besides an atmosphere of personal care and regular devotions, we discuss issues in education and share ideas about our teaching practices. I don't feel alone in my classroom anymore because I often talk with others about what is or is not working in our teaching. We're open about our work, which helps us as a team to explore new ways of teaching.

DARREN: That sounds interesting, but why do you need new ways of teaching? My students successfully complete their course requirements with the methods that I've always used.

MICHELLE: When I see students excited and eager to learn, I feel challenged to look further and continue to learn about teaching myself. The encouragement among the faculty spreads that desire to grow.

Many Christian schools are in the process of developing their school as a community of learning. Discussions and practices related to building a community of learning often focus on what happens in schools and classrooms between teacher and students and between students and students. However, these same schools sometimes fail to give adequate attention to the development of community among the adults in the school. If we are serious about developing schools as Christian communities of learning, we also have to encourage the development of a community of learning among teachers.

Teachers in Christian schools are called to be a community of faith, personally and communally working out the message of salvation for *teaching* and *learning*. As a community of faith we are personally responsible to develop the gifts that we have received and communally responsible to encourage our colleagues to develop their gifts. Each one of us falls short of how we ought to teach. It is Jesus Christ in us who enables us to be the teachers that we are. He accepts our weakness and picks up the pieces of our teaching, weaving them together in students' hearts and minds. Jesus sets us free from the burden of the frustration, the loneliness, the insecurity of knowing that we fall short. As Christians we are able to accept one another as Jesus accepts us and on that basis begin to share what he has done and is doing in us as persons and as teachers.

The unity we experience in our faith should link us in a community of teaching in which collegiality is supported and encouraged. A collegial community is one in which teacher-teacher relationships are characterized by trust, openness, support, and collaboration in day-to-day teaching.

Not Only "Nice Guys"

Collegiality in this sense must be distinguished from *congeniality*. In many schools teachers have friendly, cordial relations, enjoy each other's company in the staff room and halls, and respect each other as people. Good personal relations do not ensure collegiality. Congeniality may allow teachers to feel that, because they get along well, they also agree on the direction of their teaching. Yet their actual teaching continues to be done in isolation from each other and, too often, in contradiction to one another.

Collegiality is not something we choose to develop with some or all of the teachers with whom we work. Rather it is something that we give to one another as teachers. We do not choose with which teachers to associate in our school. Instead, we are called to be members one of another. Teachers in community enable one another by affirming and supporting each other's gifts and not pointing out faults. A community of teachers shares joys and carries burdens. A community of teachers celebrates the presence of shalom in teaching and together also mourns the brokenness that so often is there as well.

A community of faith provides the basis for developing shared goals and commitment to a common purpose for teaching and learning. Shared goals are developed along with a process of team building (Hekman) in which teachers are involved in mutual decision making, group problem solving, and the deciding of individual and communal responsibilities.

Talk It Over

Christian schools can encourage collegiality by providing opportunities for teachers to converse with one another about teaching and learning. Such conversation is presently inhibited by school schedules and by a school culture that discourages bringing differences of opinion out into the open. What are the topics of conversations among your colleagues? What proportions of these conversations usually deal with teaching and learning? student behavior? personal/social matters?

Besides opportunities, teachers should develop trust, acceptance, and mutual care among one another so that they will openly and freely assist each other in the daily joys and troubles of

teaching and learning. Voluntary collegial support groups provide avenues for teachers to assist each other through the discussion of topics or issues that arise in day-to-day teaching. Groups of three to six teachers could agree to meet on a regular basis to share successes and to ask for assistance in working through problems.

Teachers can foster collegiality via study groups that meet on a monthly or bimonthly basis for expanding knowledge about teaching. Teachers in this type of group would together establish the format of their meetings. The overall goal would be to stimulate each other's knowledge and practices regarding areas such as how students of different backgrounds and different learning styles learn, the content of a particular subject area, the goals of Christian schooling, and contemporary issues in society and their impact on schooling.

Christian schools can strengthen collegiality by developing structures that enable teachers to plan curricula together, to teach in interdisciplinary teams, and to observe and teach one another. Joint planning of curriculum units encourages teachers to share ideas, materials, and resources as they work out goals for learning. Interdisciplinary teams allow for teachers to develop units that build cross-connections between subject areas and take responsibility for all the learning of a particular group of students.

The development of a community of teaching does not occur without difficulties or tensions. Tensions arise from conflicts within each teacher and between different teachers. As we work more closely together, we gain strength from the different gifts each one has. We also become more aware of the weaknesses we have. The task of developing a community of teaching has to be taken on with a great deal of sensitivity, mutual care, and trust. We have to approach our work with genuine understanding and patience, filled with a realism that growth in community begins when we begin to accept our own weakness (Vanier). Our human limitations, fear, self-centeredness, and aggression set up barriers between us. We can emerge from these barriers only if the Spirit of God touches us, breaks down the barriers, and heals and saves us. We do not develop or fashion the ideal community that we have designed. Rather, a community of teaching is created by God through Jesus Christ, a reality in which we may participate (Bonhoeffer). ■

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"Collegiality is not something we choose to develop. . . . Rather it is something that we give to one another as teachers."

WHY IS NELS:88 IMPORTANT?

by Steven Vryhof

"You have a firm grasp of the obvious. Why bother?" might be your response when I tell you what I've been doing lately. My research involves analysis of the Christian school supplement to the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). After studying a sample of 776 eighth graders, I now know, among other things, that Christian Schools International students do well academically and that they are mostly white. Big deal, right? Why bother?

What exactly is NELS:88?

NELS:88 is a national probability-sample survey of eighth graders sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago. It is the third project in the Longitudinal Studies Program (LSP) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education. It follows two other major surveys, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72) and High School and Beyond (HS&B). The aim of the LSP program is "to study the educational, vocational, and personal development of students at various grade levels, and the personal, familial, social, institutional, and cultural factors that may affect that development" (NELS:88 *User's Manual*, December 1989, 1). Unlike NLS-72, which surveyed 19,000 seniors, and HS&B, which surveyed over 30,000 students as sophomores, NELS:88 begins longitudinal study of *eighth graders*, providing trend data about critical transitions experienced by students as they leave elementary school and progress through high school and into college or their careers.

A major feature of NELS:88 includes the integration of student, parent, teacher, and school studies. The base year design included responses

from four major actors in the educational process: surveys and tests of *students*, and surveys of *parents*, *school administrators*, and *teachers*. The student questionnaire gathered information about basic background variables and a range of other topics such as school work, aspirations, and social relationships. The student tests measured cognitive ability in four areas of the curriculum: reading, mathematics, science, and social studies (history/government). One parent of each student responded to a survey designed to measure parental aspirations for the child, family willingness to commit resources to children's education, the home educational support system, and other family characteristics relevant to achievement. Two of each selected student's teachers (from any two of the four subject areas) completed a teacher questionnaire designed to collect data on school and teacher characteristics, evaluations of the selected students, course content, and classroom teaching practices. Finally, the school administrator completed a questionnaire to generate information about the school's teaching staff, the school climate, characteristics of the student body, and school policies and offerings. This wealth of data can provide point estimates of student achievement that may be cross-sectionally related to factors such as school type, programs, family characteristics, and the like.

For the first time, Reformed Christian schools, known by their umbrella organization, Christian Schools International (CSI), were oversampled in the NELS:88 data collection effort. The two-stage stratified probability design of NELS:88 generated a nationally representative sample consisting of 815 public and 237 private schools, involving 24,599 students. However, because this original sample would not permit separate analysis of CSI schools, an augmentation was necessary. Of the 58 schools initially contacted (out of approximately

280 CSI schools located in the United States), 41 schools agreed to participate, providing us with 776 CSI eighth graders.

The NELS:88 data are well-suited for analysis of the CSI schools because of the large sample size, the opportunity for national comparisons with the other sectors (public, Catholic, independent, other religious), and the level of detail in the testing information. Of particular interest is the extensive attention given to the role of parents. The NELS:88 survey gathered data on "the effect of parents' attitudes and behavior on educational choices, the correlates of active parental involvement in the school, parental guidance, and the parents' role in the educational success of their children" (*User's Manual*, 5). Such attention is especially significant for the CSI schools because they are usually organized by parent-controlled societies and run by parent-elected boards. Such an arrangement already suggests a greater degree of parental involvement than the authority structures found in the public school, the Catholic school, or the pastor-run fundamentalist academy. In addition, the high quality and quantity of the NELS:88 data will enable analysis of such key factors and wide-ranging issues as social capital and community involvement, equity and choice, and school effectiveness.

Because NELS:88 is a longitudinal study, the respondents are re-surveyed regularly. The CSI eighth graders of 1988 took tests and answered questionnaires in 1992 as twelfth graders, providing us with a very complete, first-ever, statistical portrait of the practice and effects of Christian schooling.

Is it necessary?

The more educators know about the importance and capability of such a data set, the more excited they will be that such a data set exists. The CSI community has never before had the

opportunity or the desire to do serious statistical analysis of our schools and their effects. Many Christian educators have always been skeptical of such research, choosing neither to fund it nor to trust it. Part of such an attitude may be due to ignorance: many are uncomfortable around numbers and dislike the way they have sometimes been misused. As a result of this skepticism toward statistical research, our level of educational discourse has been focused on or limited to philosophy and technique: "I think we should be doing such and such." "Really? Well, I think we should be doing this and that." No one has the hard facts to back up recommendations for practice. And as Michael Fullan said, "Remedies remain pie-in-the-sky as long as competing *shoulds* fight it out without an understanding of *what is*" (Fullan 1982, p. 39).

NELS:88 will give an understanding of what is, *and* it will help us to *explain* what exists. Without high quality data, the problems of Christian schooling go undetected, and

the successes go unexplained. For example, if Christian schools enjoy high academic scores (and, as you can see below, they often do), is such achievement due to the conditions of sponsorship—usually societies made up of parents with a similar moral and religious orientation? Or is it because most Christian school students are from white, two-parent, \$40,000-plus, English-speaking households? Believe it or not, today's sophisticated statistical methods can answer such questions.

What will NELS:88 data do for the Christian educator?

If we can make the effort necessary to fully examine the NELS:88 data (and, because of the magnitude of this data set, a great deal of effort will be needed), we will have a better understanding of

information ranging from population characteristics to instructional effectiveness to school climate to parental involvement to student aspirations for the future. Who are we? What are we doing? What effects are we having? In addition to what our own researchers and scholars uncover, we can utilize the findings of scores of federal and university researchers who will be mining this data set over the next several years.

Armed with such information, Christian educators can enliven the discourse on what makes for good Christian schooling. We can protect and support what is working, and we can set about fixing what is not. ■

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CSI EIGHTH GRADERS: WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

I selected the following tidbits from the NELS:88 data set to give a sample of some of the information it contains. These items are offered in random order and are not designed to make any particular point at this time. I hope they will whet your appetite for more. Note: the respondents here are students; the items here measure students' *perceptions*.

RESPONDENT'S RACE/ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Value Label	CSI Percent	National Average
ASIAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER	2.0	3.5
HISPANIC	2.4	10.4
BLACK, NON-HISPANIC	3.6	13.2
WHITE, NON-HISPANIC	88.5	68.6
AMERICAN INDIAN	3.5	4.2

FATHER'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Value Label	CSI Percent	National Average
NOT FINISH H.S.	5.8	14.9
GRADUATED H.S.	22.6	28.1
JUNIOR COLLEGE	9.7	9.7
COLLEGE LESS THAN 4 YRS	8.0	7.4
GRADUATED COLLEGE	20.3	13.2
MASTER'S DEGREE	12.6	7.4
PH.D., M.D., ETC.	8.3	4.4
DON'T KNOW	12.5	15.0

RESPONDENT'S FAMILY HAS A COMPUTER

Value Label	CSI Percent	National Average
HAVE	52.8	42.2
DO NOT HAVE	47.2	57.8

MOTHER'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Value Label	CSI Percent	National Average
NOT FINISH H.S.	2.2	14.9
GRADUATED H.S.	28.0	33.8
JUNIOR COLLEGE	12.8	11.3
COLLEGE LESS THAN 4 YRS	11.3	8.4
GRADUATED COLLEGE	26.1	12.3
MASTER'S DEGREE	8.1	6.1
PH.D., M.D., ETC.	3.1	2.1
DON'T KNOW	8.5	11.2

DISCUSSES THINGS STUDIED IN CLASS WITH PARENTS

Value Label	CSI Percent	National Average
NOT AT ALL	5.8	11.6
ONCE OR TWICE	31.6	36.4
THREE OR MORE TIMES	62.6	52.0

(continued)

HANDICAPS and GIFTS

by Jerelyn Schelhaas

Our church ran a program a number of years ago called "Discover Your Gifts." We all filled out some sort of an inventory and came up with the things that we did well. We were then encouraged to use the gifts we discovered—teaching, preaching, pie-baking, singing, car-driving, whatever—for the good of the body, for the edification of the church just as Peter suggests in the verse, "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

It was a good program in that the hierarchy of gifts was shaken up somewhat, and respect was given to some people who effectively ministered to the church in quiet ways. But most important, we were reminded that the gifts we had were given to us not to be stashed away for private use, but to be opened publicly and shared with everyone like a Christmas gift of fine chocolates. Even people whose gift was a Midas Touch, the gift of making money, were encouraged to use it for the body.

Paul's instructions about the use of gifts are clear. Listen to Romans 12:3-6: "For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to grace given to us, let us use them."

Our Christian schools are currently involved in the same sort of thing—"Discover Your Gifts" programs—although in the schools they go by different names like "Gifted and Talented," "Enrichment," "Enhancement," "Wings," "Olympics of the Mind," and "Future Problem Solvers."

In each program the first step is identification. In some schools the program seeks to identify the gifted, implying that it will be used for a selected group of students. Some schools try to identify the gifts in each child, implying that the program will be used for everyone. The identification process shows the inherent difference in the two approaches, which really makes them different programs, with different goals.

I would like to describe to you a third variation on the theme, which was implemented by a friend of mine in her fifth grade classroom. I'll call her Janet.

Circumstances in Janet's class one year prompted this plan, and it brought about such wonderful things that she continues to use the approach today.

One particular year Janet happened to have in her room a student who was physically handicapped. (That may not be the politically correct word, but at this point it is the word I need to use). The little girl had had some disease that left her legs so weak they could not hold her weight even though she was very light. The little girl used a wheelchair but could be lifted onto her desk seat or onto the rug on the floor. Janet realized that the presence of that student in her room could shape an unusual year; it could be a year of awakening for her students.

On the first day of school Janet

discussed the girl's handicap. It was obvious—she couldn't walk. Janet told the rest of the students about the causes of the handicap, the complications, the adjustments that would be necessary. She invited the girl to talk about the problems, too. Then Janet told the class of her own handicap—true, it was minor compared to the girl's wheelchair, but it was a handicap nonetheless. Janet's handicap was that she was overweight, and she seemed not to be able to do anything about it because whenever she got anxious or busy, which was most of the time, she couldn't stop herself from eating. Consequently, her extra weight sometimes made her feel unattractive and weak-willed.

Then she asked the children to think about what handicaps each of them had. Her contention was that all of them had a limitation of one kind or another. Janet was surprised that it didn't take the children long to share what they felt were their handicaps, some little, some big. One said his penmanship was so bad; another said he couldn't understand math; one said she got sick to her stomach every day before she came to school; one said he lived in a home without a dad; one girl who had had glasses since she was four said her eyes got tired when she had to read for a long time.

Then Janet asked the children, "Is there any way that we can help each other this year? Everybody has a limitation of some kind. What are you good at that could help someone who is limited in a particular way? What about our friend in the wheelchair?"

The children were eager to help. They couldn't lift her; that would have to be done by Janet, but they could push her wheelchair or open the door for her or carry her lunch tray for her. They had good legs; their legs could help her.

Slowly at first, but gradually seeing the connections, they matched gifts with handicaps. The girl in the wheelchair had good penmanship. She offered that gift to anyone who needed help with posters or invitations or special projects. Gifts of artistry, math understanding, and oral reading were offered to meet the needs of students limited in those areas. One boy offered his dad. As the year went on, everyone was expected to develop themselves as much as they could, but when they had reached the

limit, they were encouraged to ask for the help of someone's gift. The class playwright got plenty of chances to develop his gift, and the product of that gift was given to the class to produce. The set was built by the boy whose handwriting went uphill, but who could drive a nail clean and straight.

In the context of handicaps Janet's students saw the purpose of God's gifts to them. Janet says that that year was the best year she has yet had and credits it to the fact that she and the students began the year admitting their handicaps and acknowledging the presence among them of God's good gifts to ease those handicaps. No one had everything, and no one had nothing.

When I hear of gifted and talented programs being instituted in a Christian school, I think of Janet, and I look for the element in the program that says, "These gifts are from God for the use and strengthening of all."

Gifted and talented programs in our schools reflect biblical principles in as much as they expect that "to whom much has been given, much will be required." But if the student who is allowed to take advantage of the program comes away with a feeling that he or she is somehow better, or more desirable, or more clever, or more gifted, or more talented, or more worthy of honor than someone not in the program, then the program does

not belong in a Christian school. Or if a student not selected for the program is made to feel that the Gift Giver passed him by or gave him just a booby prize, a trinket of a gift, then the program fails as well.

In seventh grade our son was in a program called Odyssey of the Mind. The four kids chosen for the project were labeled "gifted." I would call them verbally creative. In the project they were asked to create an elaborate solution to a given problem. Within that solution they had to build from scratch a vehicle to be mobilized by something other than a battery or electricity. The four decided to move their vehicle by using a plunger—creative idea on paper, might work well in a story. But when the "demonstration and evaluation" day came, the driver pushed his heart out but got nowhere; the wheels rubbed, the plunger slipped or stuck at inappropriate times. There was a student in their class who could have helped them, but he was not "gifted." His test scores showed him to be only average. He knew how to put wheels on an axle and keep them free, but he wasn't on

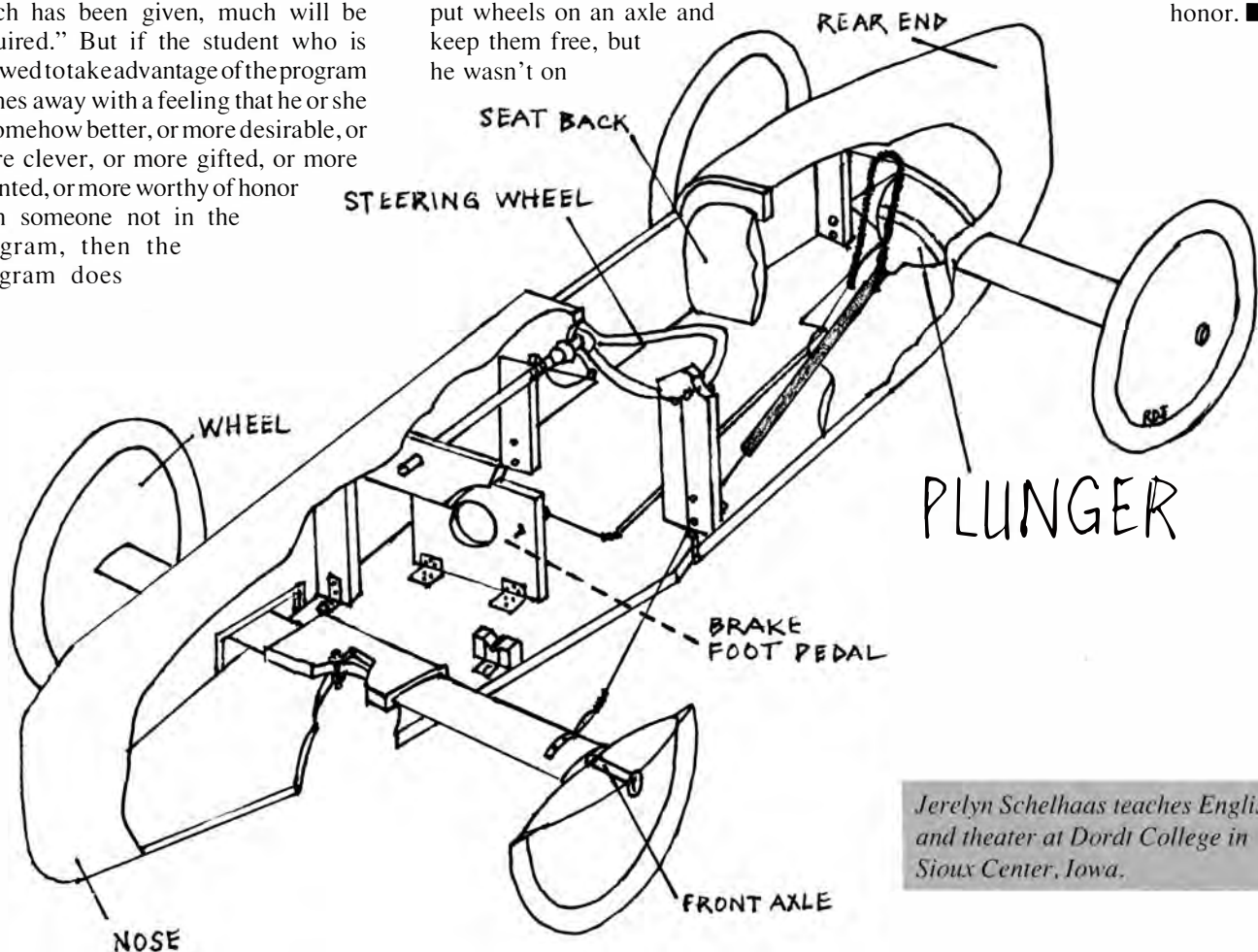
the team. He was back at school, doing the daily round of twenty dull worksheets.

You see, a limited definition identified a few verbally creative kids but ignored the gift the team really needed.

The problems of this world are complex; their solutions demand a variety of gifts and approaches. People need confidence that what God has given them is not a consolation prize at a carnival. The gift counts. Someday, if not right now, it will be needed. It is valuable. Schools must teach that.

Those who are easily marked as gifted need to know not only that their gift is to be used for others (as the Bible teaches and the church practices), but also that their handicaps are real, too, and that God has given someone else the gifts to help them.

It seems to me, gifts have to be developed in the context of others' needs and our own handicaps—not in the context of special privilege, special recognition, or honor. ■



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ISOLATION OR INOCULATION: WHY CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

by Robert W. Bruinsma

Below are indicated five possible reasons for supporting Christian schooling. Read each reason quickly and decide how strongly you **agree** or **disagree** with each of these as a valid reason, scoring a one if you strongly agree, a five if you strongly disagree, or any score in between.

A. Christian schools provide sheltered environments for my child(ren) to grow in.

1 2 3 4 5

B. Christian schools demand that each child do his or her best, that is, use his/her talents to the fullest.

1 2 3 4 5

C. Christian schools maintain the traditions of our parents, that is, to nurture children in the fear of the Lord.

1 2 3 4 5

D. In Christian schools there aren't any drugs or swearing.

1 2 3 4 5

E. We like to see strict discipline in school; that's why we want our children in a Christian school.

1 2 3 4 5

2. *Christian schools foster individual excellence.*

One of the critiques that is often leveled at so-called "private" schools is that they are elitist and foster a sense of excellence that is primarily designed to help make students "winners" in our highly competitive society. And there are, unfortunately, many private schools like that. Although Christian schools should promote excellence, it is an excellence for a different way—an excellence defined by communal servanthood rather than individualistic success, an excellence that turns secular notions of success up-side-down. It is an excellence where to be first is to be willing to be last, where to be great means a willingness to be small, where to succeed is defined in serving those whom Christ called "the least of these my brethren." To be a servant in God's kingdom does not imply that we don't need well-educated and well-trained people, but it does mean that the focus of that training and education has to be quite different from that usually associated with the term "excellence" in our society.

3. *Christian schools maintain a tradition.*

We must be careful never to do anything in our lives simply as a matter of tradition or, as a Reformed sacramental form says about baptism, ". . . out of custom or superstition." That doesn't mean a tradition doesn't count for anything. To the contrary, we can't help but foster certain traditions, i.e., ways of doing things, as human beings. But we must always be ready to examine our traditions in the light of

Although each of these reasons may have some validity, I submit that any one of them separately or even all of them together are not sufficient to justify the tremendous amount of energy (to say nothing of the expense) of establishing and maintaining Christian schools.

The Reasons Examined

1. *Christian schools offer shelter from the "world."*

Christian schools should not exist simply because "public" schools are "bad" or because there is a bad world out there from which we wish to shelter

our children. Of course we should be afraid of the power of sin, but we should recognize first of all that sin is as much *in us* as it is *out there*. And, although we are not to be *of* the world (i. e., of sin), we and our children are certainly called to be busy *in* the world because it is God's world.

Scripture; we must always be able to articulate why we wish to maintain a tradition. Simply to say, "If it was good enough for Grandpa, it's good enough for me," is *not* good enough.

4. In Christian schools there are no drugs or swearing.

First of all, that probably isn't true, as much as we might wish that it were so. As was mentioned in response to the "shelter" argument, we and our children take our sin with us wherever we go. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't expect positive life-style differences among members of a Christian school community as compared to a secular, non-Christian school community. It means we have to keep a realistic picture of ourselves and our children as redeemed *sinners*.

5. Christian schools maintain strict discipline.

For most people, the term discipline is associated with order, control, and/or punishment. The root of the word discipline is *disciple*. Thus, in a biblical sense, to discipline someone is to make someone a disciple, i.e., a follower of Christ. If this is what is clearly meant when people say they want good discipline in a school, I would have no trouble with defining this as a major reason for sending a child to a Christian school. I'm afraid, however, that it often means no more than that children will be forced to sit in neat rows, be respectful of their elders, do lots of homework, and not cause any "trouble." All those things may be well and good, but they fall far short of a biblical concept of discipleship.

Christian schooling is inoculation for discipleship.

A Christian school is, in my view, a Christian cultural instrument to be used to further Christ's redemptive work in the world. By saying that it is a "Christian cultural instrument" I mean that Christian schools must be places where children and adolescents are helped to become effective witnesses and workers in this here-and-now world. The Christian school message to our

children and our culture is this:

Jesus is real. He makes all the difference in the way in which you *think* about things and *act* in the world. Learning is not simply the acquisition of information. When you learn that there are numbers in the world, you must come to know that God made laws for numbers. When you learn about photosynthesis, we want you to stand in awe of the amazing relationship of your breathing out carbon dioxide, which plants need, and the plants' making of oxygen, which you, in turn, need to breathe. And you must come to know, in a deeply caring way, that that is one reason you should care about taking care of trees (as well as the fact that trees are your fellow creatures, and if you love the Creator you will love the things the Creator has made). When you learn to mix colors, you'll be helped to discover and develop the creativity the Creator has given you. When you learn to read stories, to write stories, and to act out stories, you'll come to do that not because you get a mark or a prize, but because you're developing a love for story itself, and because you are a part of a community of believers that exists primarily because of God's telling of the greatest story ever told and he wants each one of you to be a character as he continues to write his story.

In that kind of a conception of Christian education, it is important to realize that isolation will never do. A better model is inoculation. We all know, of course, what an inoculation is—the injection of a weak form of disease into our body so that our body can build up defenses against this disease and be ready to fight it if it attacks us in a full-blown form. Similarly, a Christian school must confront its students with the world in all of its beauty and ugliness. It must do this in a developmentally sensitive way, of course. We recognize that young children may need a weaker form of an inoculated virus than do

adolescents or adults.

Let me use the issue of pornography as an example of an inoculation approach in Christian education. As much as we should abhor the existence of pornography in the world, we must recognize it as perverted expression of a legitimate part of our human nature, i.e., our sexuality. We must also realize that our adolescent children are daily bombarded by all sorts of pornographic images in advertisements, T.V., videos, magazines, and movies. Rather than keeping pornography out of the Christian school, I would like to see it brought in and analyzed and discussed by sensitive, Christ-believing teachers who can critique the human debasement that lies at the heart of pornography. These teachers must also be able to guide young, sexually-awakening students in an exploration of what a healthy Christian sexuality is.

Thus, I'm recommending inoculation combined with Christian modeling and the presentation of reasons by teachers in such a way as to encourage students to consciously embrace a life of responsible Christian action.

We as Christians must affirm the *positive* reasons for establishing Christian schools: this is God's world, these are God's children, schooling is an inherently value-laden enterprise, and so, our children need to be nurtured and schooled in a consciously Christian environment. Christian schools must always treat children with respect because students reflect God's image.

In the final analysis, schooling of any kind always holds up a particular vision of life to its students; it seeks to create disciples of some idea, ideal, or ideology. A school always calls forth some form of imitation. Christian schools must help make children imitators of Christ, for, says Paul in Ephesians 5:1,

As children imitate their parents
You, as God's children,
Are to imitate him. ■

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THE KEY TO THE TREASURE

by Carol M. Regts

We never quite know our students, do we? Somehow they defy classification or definition or comprehension, quicksilver-slippery changing moods or work habits or attitudes or conduct. In our quest to know and to pinpoint and to fathom, we forge stoically up-over-down-around our mountains of ingenious assignments and scheme our way through creative lesson plans that so rarely fully match expectations, time, or students. Always we are searching, with pen in hand or pencil lodged behind an ear, to find the key that unlocks the mystery of our students. The key that unlocks the mystery of the intelligence glinting in pulsing flames or hiding in dull shadows behind the eyes of these children peopling our days. Oh, to find the key that unlocks the mystery of each one's God-image.

Sometimes, as I crouch at my desk in the quiet after-school hours scratching comments to writing projects, I think I can, out of the corner of my eye, see that key glimmering. And for all its illusiveness after I turn into the glare of dust-speckled sunrays, I yearn to hold that key so tantalizingly real in its promise of opened doors. I yearn for doors opened so that the mystery is revealed, the mystery is understood, the mystery is educated.

Yes, a single key. Not one key for me and another for you, not a different key for each of us teachers. No, a singularly majestic master key resting with sturdy and solid balance in the palm, its ancient white-gold weight warm and reassuring. A key that slides oily-smooth and magic into the lock on the doors to our students' mysteries, into any lock, into each and every lock. It fits fragile diary-tiny locks, sturdy cedar hope-chest locks, burglar-proof

dead-bolt locks, ten-combination bank-safe locks, and even Doomsday black-box locks. The glory of such a key. The power and promise and certainty it would give.

Just think of it. Any lock that key would open, yes, open any lock without hesitation and with but a sighing, satisfyingly soft click. Oh, the doors that we could then fling wide and the treasures of our students' mysteries into which we could delve, the emerald chains we could wrap in glorious clumps around our fingers, and the rubies we could watch trickle down to shimmer seductively in the spotlight we would unshakingly hold. The light of all our skill and all our imagination would then shine so fine. The ooh's and the aah's we would hear as we nonchalantly rolled a twenty-karat diamond across a swath of brushed velvet glowing in amber light or as we calmly steadied the magnifying glass that shot a pinpoint of light into the very heart of a fire opal. What rich teachers we would be to handle, polish, and display these mysteries, these glories we unearthed in our students.

With what wild abandon would we race to each student, the other students at our heels, feverish in our desire to slip that key into each lock, to open each door, to discover each cache of virgin intellect. We would barely stop to catch breath, would pause only a moment to gasp in awe at how each could be so different yet so beautiful before going to the next. And then we would discover the doors to rooms, oh yes, the myriad rooms behind the treasure behind the door once held fast by the lock. Our students would be dancing for joy, yelling, "Do me next! Me!" And then they would be stopped momentarily in

their tracks at the sight of what was just uncovered in a fellow student and whisper solemnly, "No. Keep opening her doors. I want to know more about her." Our agony would be how to stop with one and to go on with another and who that would be and when to go back and how far to go then before moving on before coming back.

We could hardly wait for the next day to come so we might begin again. And those times when we couldn't be with our students to open the doors, we would talk to each other, would share the wealth of our discoveries, would marvel at the different prizes we had found behind the doors others had yet to unlock. We would swap different wattage light bulbs for our spotlights as we chattered on and on about which light, cloth, or twirl of hand to use to show the gems to best advantage. We would learn ways to open more doors, to open them in timely fashion so that everyone would be able to see and appreciate and trust and grow and want to seek out more locks.

Perhaps we might dare to duplicate our key for our students to use. They could unlock the doors to others' as well as their own mysteries. They would not need to wait for us to delve into the treasure that makes them pearls—pearls not of this world, but priceless unearthly pearls.

Soon teachers and students would find that our keys were not quite the same, that our keys would change to fit our individual palms snugly, hanging somehow loose and awkward in another's hand. We would be amazed. Each person would be thrilled to have used the key so often and well that it melted into unique contours. Each would

polish his or her key, keep it shiny bright and oily clean, exchanging tips on maintaining sheen and sharpness, adding designs to meet one's fancies. Though never would we be blinded to the graceful, comely features of anyone else's key, secretly each of us would be a little proud of the magnificence of our

own key. How precious a gift that key would be. . . .

But what if we would unlock Pandora's box and every single beastie flew away into a sudden evil-swirling smog choking our classroom, every single one flew so that we would face a

ghost town of doors hanging open aslant on vacantness? What if we were left without hope of a treasured mystery, without the hope of another door to unlock?

What if all our students were crowded around eagerly and we would unlock a door that opened onto misshapen seed pearls, dimstore rejects?

What if we came to a lock we could not open? Would it be the key that had lost its power or the bearer of the key that had lost his ability, her faith?

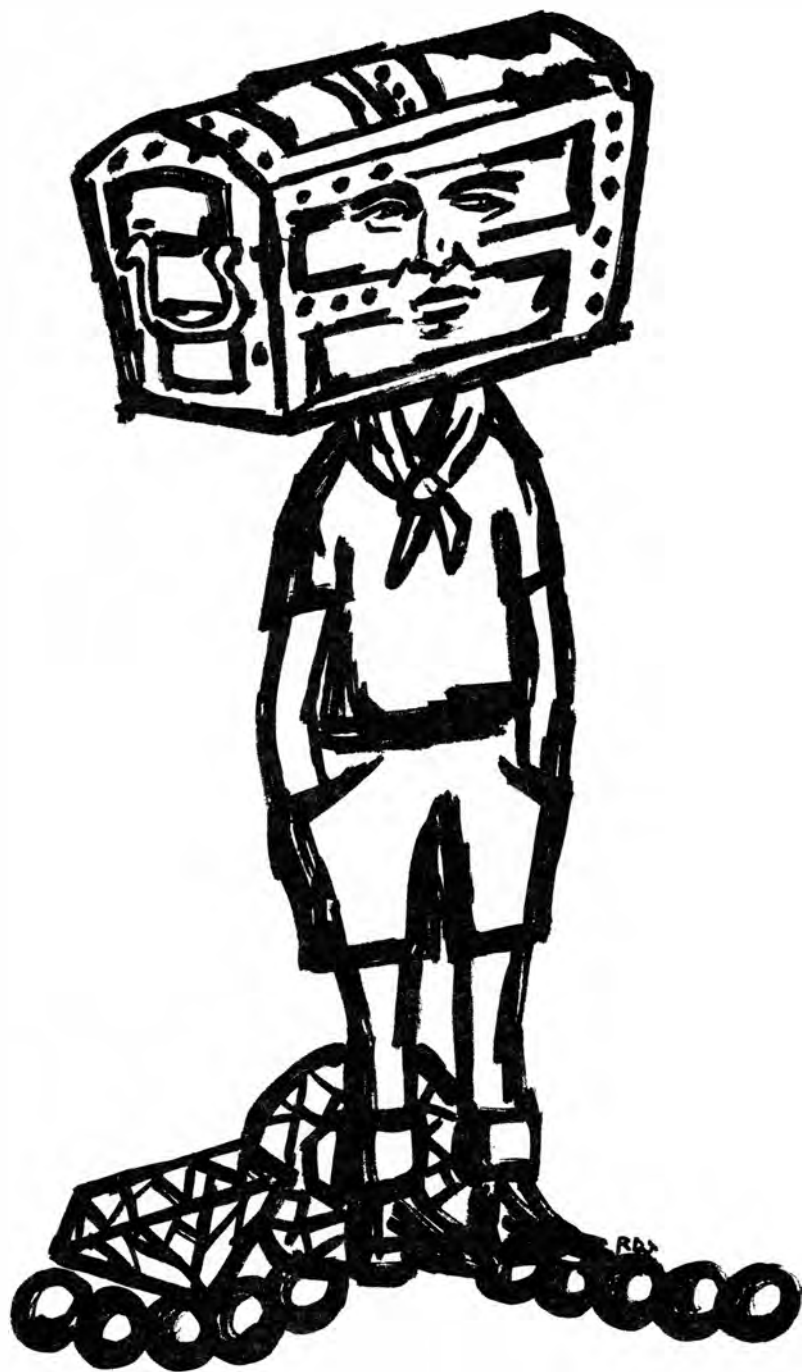
What if someone would decide one key's shape unlocked better, one key's embossed designs were more beautiful, one key's weight hefted more effortlessly, one key's metal were more durable? And what if that one key were yours, not mine?

What if you would lose your key . . . and thereby your and your students' treasures were lost? What then? What would be the gain in the face of such loss?

The clock ticks a minute past 5:00, and the building custodian stops in to see if I have fallen asleep at my desk. My stack of papers shifts and tumbles over itself. I become aware of the red pen in my hand, of the unfilled minuscule boxes in my record book, of the blank spaces in my plan book, of a dull fatigue behind my eyes.

Yet, even as I shuffle everything into my briefcase before taking it home as my evening's companion, I notice a scintillating glow off to the right, out of the corner of my eye. It's there. The key is there. If I just knew how to reach it . . . if I just continued seeking jewels behind the locked doors behind the eyes of my students . . . if I just kept cultivating prayerful vision . . . then I might come close to gaze upon, even to touch and hold those mysterious jewels set in gold. Jewels set in God. ■

Carol Regts wrote this article when she was teaching language arts at Eastern Christian Middle School in Wyckoff, New Jersey.



CHINA'S DYNAMIC DUO OF CINEMA

by Stefan Ulstein

Like most things in communist China, the film industry took a great leap backward under Mao Zedong and his ideologies. I remember seeing a grainy, black and white propaganda film in the 1960s in which American soldiers, played by Chinese with blond wigs and huge rubber noses, went rampaging about in some Vietnamese hamlet. Art, like technology, industry, and education, took a backseat to political correctness.

But much has changed in China, and Chinese filmmakers are now making some of the most exciting and technically brilliant films in the world. The big change came in 1982 when the dust began to settle from the madness of the Cultural Revolution. The Beijing Film Academy—China's only film school—accepted twenty-eight new students out of a pool of three thousand applicants. Many of the students were entering middle age, and their formal education had been drastically foreshortened by the years of ideological purges and re-education camps. The professor announced that they couldn't make films if they hadn't *seen* films, so the class was immersed in a marathon viewing of movies from around the world.

China now makes about 150 films a year on a budget of \$15 million. That's equal to a one-picture salary for Michael Douglas, Eddie Murphy, or Arnold Schwarzenegger. But in spite of the economy-class production budgets, some Chinese films are visually and dramatically stunning.

Still, it's one thing to make movies that play well in one's own country, and another thing entirely to create a film that will dazzle audiences around the world. Many Chinese movies are difficult for Westerners to understand.

They seem long, emotionally overwrought, and unevenly structured.

The most accessible Chinese films to date come from the collaborative team of director Zhang Yimou and actress Gong Li. *Elle* magazine has called Gong Li the most beautiful woman in world cinema today. While Li is indeed a stunning beauty, it is her powerful screen presence and enormous dramatic range that make her sizzle on the screen.

The films themselves are works of enormous beauty. Zhang Yimou understands color and texture better than any filmmaker in the world today. To capture the "golden hours"—the time when the late-afternoon light reaches its warmest hue, he spent weeks filming for just an hour or so a day to create the mood shots for *Raise the Red Lantern*.

Yimou and Li's first film together was *Red Sorghum* a visually dazzling story about a woman who is sold into marriage with an autocratic leper who runs a sorghum winery. The leper dies mysteriously, and the woman lives happily with her new lover—until the Japanese show up and start brutalizing everyone. The legacy of World War II is still a strong part of China's worldview.

Red Sorghum was a spectacular debut, but the violence in the Japanese invasion sequences literally sent Western viewers running for the lobby. *Red Sorghum* was a powerful but uneven international calling card for Yimou and Li. Japanese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese producers were quick to recognize cinematic genius and rushed to finance their next feature.

Zhang and Li found their stride in *Ju Duo*, which was Oscar-nominated for best foreign film in 1990. Gong Li again plays a woman sold into marriage—this time to a miserly dye

Teachers who would like copies of the press kits for *Ju Duo* and *Raise the Red Lantern* may write to Stefan Ulstein, English Department, Bellevue Christian School, 1601 98 NE, Bellevue, WA 98004.

factory owner who is rumored to have murdered his other wives.

Ju Duo falls in love with the miser's adopted son, whom he also brutalizes, and the two struggle to find happiness. *Ju Duo* is one of the most visually powerful films ever, and the story plays out like a Greek tragedy or a biblical epic. Unfortunately for Yimou and Li, the octogenarian rulers of China suspected that the miser was a metaphor for their own merciless dictatorship, and they banned the film in China. Because it was financed with money from abroad, however, it played in North America and Europe, where it met with huge critical success. *Ju Duo* is now doing a brisk business on video tape.

Also nominated for an Oscar, *Raise the Red Lantern* met with rave reviews from critics across North America. *Seattle Times* critic John Hartl told me, "*Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* were the first Chinese films that completely knocked my socks off."

In *Raise the Red Lantern*, Gong Li plays Songlian, the fourth wife of a rich merchant. Every morning the wives, who each have a separate residence within a grand feudal compound, must stand at their doors with their servants. The master's servant then places a red lantern in front of the residence where the master will spend the night.



Chinese actress Gong Li, called the most beautiful woman in cinema today by Elle magazine, as she appeared in Zhang Yimou's film *Raise the Red Lantern*.

It's a wrenching tale of four women who turn on one another because they are powerless before the master, who manipulates them like so many chattels. Each time Songlian trusts another person—a fellow wife, a servant, or Feipu, the master's bookish son, she finds herself cut adrift or betrayed. Her own attempts to manipulate the others end in tragedy.

We never see the face of the master. He is omnipresent, but unreachable. The walled compound of the family mansion is both fortress and prison. The four wives and the myriad servants exist only at the pleasure—and for the pleasure—of the master.

Both *Ju Duo* and *Raise the Red Lantern* are excellent films for older teenagers. They deal with the big issues in modern China: the vice-like grip of old, cruel leaders on the new generation, the traditional repression of women, and the lack of respect for human dignity.

Modern Chinese social critics have suggested that China is unable to build a working democracy because, unlike Europe and North America, it missed the development of democratic ideals that came with the Reformation and the Enlightenment. For all the upheaval of revolution and civil war, China is still steeped in feudal values that create a small ruling elite and a vast, oppressed populace.

I spoke to Zhang Yimou when he visited Los Angeles to promote *Raise the Red Lantern* this year. He was reluctant to talk about his films as political metaphors, but he did admit that China's worldview is still mired in feudalism. Referring to the scenario in *Raise the Red Lantern*, he commented, "I'm not saying that Chinese people still act like the people in the film, but to a large extent they still *think* like that." His sentiment was echoed by my student, Joyce Lee, a Taiwanese who

accompanied me to the press screening of *Raise the Red Lantern*. "I find it so sad," she said, "that my ancestors treated one another like that."

China, which contains approximately one-fifth of the world's population, still has a long way to go in recognizing the rights and dignity of its people. As the last holdout of communism, it's bound to be a big player in the world news over the next few years. Teachers who want to give their high school or college students an introduction to Chinese cinema and Chinese thought would do well to start with the films of Zhang Yimou and Gong Li. ■

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CHINESE CINEMA: THE DIRECTOR SPEAKS OUT

I found it difficult to get my interview with Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou rolling because of the lag caused by translation. Since I had seen and discussed the film at length with my student Joyce Chiayi Lee, I asked her to continue the interview in Mandarin. The following is a translation of her interview. SU

Lee: I found *Raise the Red Lantern* very sad. I was hoping that the son of the first wife would reach out to Songlian and help her, since they seemed to share a friendship.

Zhang: In the novel, the son has more of a role, but I couldn't keep it that way in the film without making the story too complicated. In the book, their friendship grows, and then she finds out that he is gay, so it's a more complex relationship. In the film, he's like a meteor in the sky. He just appears for a very short time, and then he's gone. We wanted his role to light up Songlian's hope for escape, and then just fade out.

Lee: That worked very well. I was left with a tremendous sense of sadness and missed opportunity.

I was very impressed with the costumes for the four wives. They each seemed to reflect the wife's character. Did you design the costumes specially for the characters?

Zhang: Yes. The costumes, I feel, are very important to the mood of the film. There were three ways to get all the costumes. First, we found some old costumes made seventy years ago and changed some of them a little to use in the film. Second, we went to find costumes that are used in the opera.

Lee: Oh, those are the ones the third wife, the opera singer, wears.

Zhang: Yes. Not only the third wife, but Songlian (Gong Li) wears some of them too. Third, we went all the way to Shanghai to find some very old tailors to make some of the costumes. There are not many people left who can still make these garments, only some tailors who are seventy or eighty years old. We spent three months to find all the costumes. It was a lot of work!

Lee: They are very beautiful.

I also wanted to ask about the big house in the movie. The setting of the house added so much.

Zhang: First we went to the south to find a house because the setting of the book is in the south. We were trying to find a house that was very organized and prim. But we couldn't find one there because the houses we found had gardens, ponds, mounds, and so on. So we went to the north. Finally we found this house called Chou Family Castle Village near Taiyuan, Shanxi. We felt that this house fit all the needs we had.

Lee: The house looks very powerful and splendid. Were the original owners government appointees?

Zhang: No. In fact, the Chou family were businessmen. Their ancestor sold tofu and that was how they got rich. The people from Shanxi are said to be the best business people in China. The Chous owned several banks all over China by the end of the Ching Dynasty, but their fortune declined with the Republic.



Student Joyce Chiayi Lee interviews Zhang Yimou.

They were important people, though. When Empress Tsi-shi took refuge in Shanxi, they took her in. In return she gave the master of the family an honorary title.

Lee: Are there many of those grand family homes left in China now?

Zhang: No, not any more. In fact, the Chou family had two more homes that were even bigger and grander, but they were ruined during the Cultural Revolution.

Lee: What a pity!

Zhang: Yes. It really is a pity that so much was destroyed and ruined.

Lee: How did Gong Li prepare for her role as a woman of pre-Revolution China? It was so different from her upbringing in communist China.

Zhang: We let her look at some documents on the background, but we couldn't really tell her how to imagine the old life that happened seventy years ago. That would be too unreal. Even for me, it is already too far.

Lee: One final question. How did you choose the Taiwanese filmmaker, Hou Hsiao-hsien, as executive producer?

Zhang: I like his films very much. I've always wanted to work with him, and I finally got the chance when we met at the Hong Kong Film Festival. Several of us got away from all the journalists and stayed in a hotel room talking all night. ■