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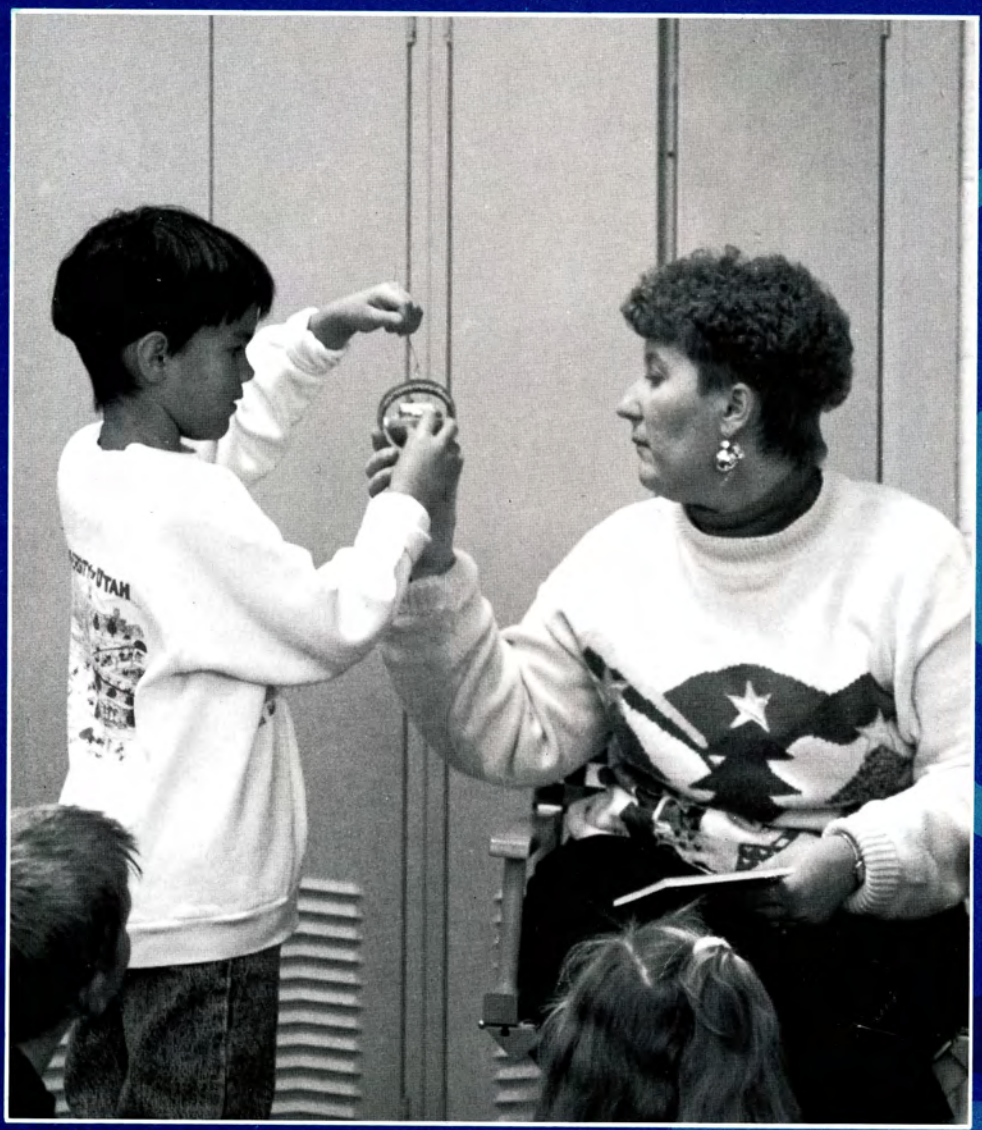

Classroom Connections: Student-Staff Relations

When Gender Matters

by Lorna Van Gilst

Twenty-two years ago a graduate student sat in my classroom and observed how I related to my seventh graders. I don't remember the exact research questions or the statistics derived from that study, but the researcher concluded that I favored the boys in the class over the girls.

I was appalled to learn I was showing favoritism. I admitted that the boys were more fun to teach. They responded more spontaneously and seemed more willing to show originality of character than most of the girls in that class. I called on the boys more because they seemed to get more easily sidetracked by the Castle Air Force Base B-52's that swooped down over our town in target practice for action in Vietnam.

War games or not, I realized I had to pay more attention to the girls, though it seemed they mostly preferred to let the boys have center stage. I knew it was important for me to show interest in their ideas too, and to help them express those ideas.

Now I'm the researcher, and I've been observing students and teachers. My emphasis is neither statistical nor gender-oriented, but I find women in college classrooms still sitting quietly docile while the men dominate discussions. And that troubles me.

One day an instructor in a writing class asked the students to highlight every gender-exclusive term they found in their essays: he, his, man, mankind, businessman, mailman, and so on. She told them to replace those terms with inclusive language. Then she stepped out briefly to make copies of another draft. As soon as she shut the door the room exploded! "What difference would it make?" the men asked. To remove the masculine forms was to remove a piece of themselves. The women meekly acknowledged that masculine pronouns didn't matter to them.

"What do you think?" they asked me. Ten years ago I would have agreed with the students. "Man" and "he" were generic terms. But the nature of language is creative, not static. Usage and meanings are fluid. We no longer say someone is "queer." We now use personal voice in essays in which the aloof objective voice once reigned supreme. My colleague and I disagree on appropriate use of "which" and "that." I am losing the battle I have staged against confusion of "like" and "as," except on the pages of CEJ. Journalists have their stylebooks; grammarians have theirs. I play both roles, and thus, when the two clash, I have to make concessions to myself.

But gender-exclusive language is tolerated only by those insensitive to potential readers, unless the text was written more than ten years ago. Such use is irresponsible today.

The gender issue is deeper than mere bending of old rules. I hardly know how to explain why. But I know today that when I read text that assumes generic use of "he," "his," or "man," I sense that females are excluded for one reason or another. And when men are asked to read text that substitutes exclusively feminine forms for "he," "his," and "man," those men bristle and mutter, "Feminism."

It's not feminism that keeps young women from developing their full potential of thought, however. More likely, it's socialization--in a world that encourages young men to find fulfillment in skill and independence, and young women to find fulfillment in dependence and appearance, largely in the minds and eyes of men. Already in their childhood games, boys and girls play differently. In a 1976 study of fifth-grade children's games, J. Lever found that boys' games lasted longer than girls' games, and boys tended to quarrel through their disputes and repeat the disputed play to make it fair, whereas girls who squabbled tended to end the game (*Social Problems, 23* 478-487). Those early differences in children's play take on added significance as children grow into adolescence, especially at school. In my own experience, I have noted that, in general, adolescent girls seem more hesitant than boys to take on aggressive roles that lead to academic success, fearing social rejection if they become too vocal. I have known young adolescent girls who purposely tried to get B's rather than A's so they would be more socially accepted. In the context of a large group setting, women students hesitate to risk saying something foolish in the presence of men, so some of them say nothing at all unless pressed to respond.

As teachers, we are responsible to enable each of our students to know that she or he is a full partner in the learning community, a partner made worthy by God. We need to understand how we are socialized to fit molds. And we need to acknowledge how those molds can misshape the lives God asks us to live in praise and service to him.

We need to show our students that each one has a significant place in our classrooms, that we will hear each student's voice, masculine or feminine.

Trinity sponsors Search '92

Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, launched a summer enrichment program for 151 students in grades 1-8 from twenty-five private, public, and home schools last summer. Twenty faculty members offered two-week classes for SEARCH '92 (Students Excited About Reaching Creative Heights).

Each student chose two different classes and attended each session for an hour every morning. Classes included projects, experiments, field trips, and various hands-on activities.

Classes offered included Birds and Weather, Hand-in-Hand Math, Creative Art Workshop, Introduction to Creative Movement: Ballet, Puppet Dramatics, Space Science for Young Astronauts, 708's Discover Chicago, Exploring Spanish Language and Culture, Let's Try Calligraphy, Write-On! Tell It Like It Isn't, Physical Science: Investigating Matter, Archaeology: "The Big Dig," French-Alons-Y, Computer Science, and Lights, Camera, Action.

The SEARCH program included no grades or tests. On the final day of SEARCH approximately 300 parents, teachers, and friends attended an open house, which included performances from various classes.

Printed with permission from the Trinity Christian College Bulletin.

Teachers focus on "Talents Unlimited"

Teachers from south central Iowa Christian schools started their teaching year with a workshop for teachers called "Talents Unlimited."

When teachers recognize talents besides academic ability, they can plan lessons that will encourage the growth of many talents. Their students, then, can see their many strong points and grow in confidence in these other areas.

Many of the talents mentioned in the workshop are "practical smarts" that are needed by children and adults. These skills include planning, decision making, forecasting, many forms of communication, and productive thinking (of unusual ideas).

Children and their talents vary widely. Someone who is good at memorizing facts may lack creative abilities. Another student may do poorly on a standardized test but excel in writing a story or improvising.

"Talents Unlimited" encourages teachers to help each child develop his or her one, two, or five talents.

by Ruth Ver Meer
Printed with permission from the Oskaloosa Christian School October 1992 Highlights.

Institute opens creation museum

Visitors flew in from New Jersey, Illinois, Utah, and Texas to attend the opening of the Museum of Creation and Earth History at the Institute for Creation Research in Santee, California, last September. They viewed exhibits, videos, science experiments, and animal demonstrations and took guided tours of the museum.

The 40,000-square-foot museum was two years in the planning and construction and promises to be a major tourist draw in the San Diego area. The museum is open Monday through Saturday. Admission is free, and groups of twenty or more can arrange guided tours by calling 619-448-0900.

Court case filed for religious education credits

On September 22, The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools filed an action in the Ontario Court of Justice (Divisional Court) to stop the Ministry of Education's policy and practice of discriminating against Alliance high schools in the matter of religious instruction credits.

The seven Alliance high schools affected, all in the Ministry's Central Region, have been putting the credits for the religious instruction courses (Bible) on the official Ontario Student Transcript. They have followed the very same procedures and rules by which the Ministry has allowed the identical credits in Roman Catholic Separate schools. When the principals refused to stop this practice, their authority to sign the transcripts and the Ontario Secondary School Diploma was removed by Ministry officials. Ministry inspectors then signed these documents, crossing out any religious instruction credits.

Although Ministry officials have acknowledged that there is no law which disallows such credits, the Ministry has refused to reconsider its stand and negotiate a solution.

The Alliance court action argues that the Ministry has:

—*infringed our freedom of religion*, since it is a requirement of our faith that parents ensure their children's education in a manner consistent with that faith;

—*infringed our right of equal protection of and benefit of the law* as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights, since our students and principals have been denied rights and benefits available to their counterparts in the Separate school system;

—*acted contrary to its own policy as stated in* Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior (1989) which is that each school is to help the students in its community develop their potentials as individuals and as contributing, responsible members of society. This development is to include moral development which "depends in part on a consideration of ethical principles and religious beliefs."

The real issue is this: Can the Ministry treat independent schools as if they are public schools, and can the Ministry dictate curriculum, thus denying religious freedom and academic freedom?

No one has ever challenged the Ministry's control over diplomas before in Ontario. The Alliance Board believes that the time is right to strike a blow for curriculum independence in Ontario.

Being with Students

by Bruce Hekman

At a recent conference there was much discussion about whether Christian education is primarily a process or a product. With the current emphasis on results in education (or rather, the oft-reported failures of the North American public schools to produce graduates who can compose, construe, and compute) the assumption seems to be that schools produce a product whose quality can be definitively measured. This assumption has led to a host of teaching practices that are product oriented: mastery learning, objective-based teaching and testing, state and perhaps soon federal competency testing for students and their teachers. In this model of schools the relationship of teachers and students is an "I-it," to borrow Buber's description. Education is doing something to students so that they will graduate with measurable skills, knowledge, and competencies needed by our technological, knowledge-based society.

As important as it is for schools to take responsibility for the quality of the education their graduates receive, this discussion about process or product attempts to draw a false distinction between the two. It also ignores a very obvious fact about life for children: for them, school is primarily a social experience, and their happiness, satisfaction, and ability to learn and be educated depend first of all on their feelings of belonging, inclusion, respect, and esteem in the social setting that is their classroom and their school. It is the quality of the relationships with our classmates and teachers we remember first when asked to reflect on our school experience.

When school is perceived as a place where people gather to do educational activities *with* each other, rather than *to* each other, then children and their teachers thrive. They are secure enough in their relationships to take risks, to work hard, to try things they might have thought too hard or difficult if confronted by these tasks on their own.

In Christian schools there must be modeled an "I-thou" relationship between teacher and student, student and student, teacher and parent. It is a relationship made possible by our common confession in the lordship of Jesus Christ. In Christian schools, a community of scholars has gathered voluntarily to work together at the very serious task of preparing each other for a life of responsible service to the sin-ravaged world in need of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Noticing

There are several features of schools in which members of the community desire to honor and esteem each other. The first of these is the ministry of noticing. In a relationship of mutual esteem and respect, people take an active interest in each other and learn gradually how to "read" each other. Wise and caring teachers often stand outside their classrooms to greet students as they enter and to notice what they wear, how they look, how they may be feeling. Caring principals do the same, greeting staff and students as they enter the building in the morning, or saying good-bye as they leave. The ministry of noticing draws the staff to eat lunch with students, to attend their recitals, performances, games, contests, and other out-of-classroom activities. The ministry of noticing accords the other person respect and dignity by saying in subtle ways, "You are important to me. How you look and feel matters to me. I'm interested in you as a person, not just as a student."

Listening

The ministry of noticing leads very naturally to a second characteristic of *doing with* rather than *doing to* students—active listening. A gentle question for a student who seems to be discouraged may lead to a painful confession of strife at home or school, or of discouragement with the demands of the teacher's classroom. Careful, active listening is characteristic of every relationship that's important. Active listening is one of the signs of respect and esteem. It is also an important reminder that our students are not empty clay pots waiting for us to fill them with the pure gold of our knowledge and wisdom. They have active, sometimes broken, often anxious lives of their own that we ignore at our peril as educators.

Bearing

Noticing and listening lead to the ministry of bearing. "Two are better than one," Ecclesiastes 4:9 tells us, "because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up." Although we are all well-acquainted with this precept and have experienced it many times ourselves, we often don't apply it in the classroom. We tell the students what to do and expect them to do it on their own, without help. But sometimes students are confused or unable to do what we ask on their own. Being with students involves the willingness, even eagerness, of the teacher to "get into the harness" with the student to help them learn to do what we ask.

The ministry of bearing is an enabling ministry. It is a way of saying to students by our deeds as well as our words, "We are in this learning business together, and I will try everything I can think of to help you make sure you succeed and do not fail." We too often make the judgment that students who do not do their assigned work are lazy and deserve to fail, when in fact they may be unable to do the work. Teachers are too often guilty of expecting a child's previous teachers to have taught the skills of organization, reading, writing, and spelling. They are unwilling to bear the burden of the child who, for whatever reason, hasn't learned those things well enough to do the tasks assigned by the

teacher. Doing school *with* students means accepting students where they are and enabling them to move as quickly as possible forward. Doing school *to* students means giving them the orders and letting them fail or succeed on their own.

Rejecting Labels

A climate that labels others is not conducive to the "doing with, being with" approach. One of the keys to working successfully with students, especially students who seem to be struggling or alienated, is the ministry of withholding judgment. I don't mean to suggest that teachers and principals must never make decisions based on existing information. I am recommending that important decisions (to expel a student, for example) be made as patiently as the situation allows.

As most of us have learned to our shame at one time or another, it is too easy to blunder to a wrong conclusion about someone else's behavior in our haste to find categories and labels for that behavior. A child chronically late for school may be punished with endless detentions without the teacher fully understanding the reasons for the tardiness, which may include a heavy burden of responsibility for younger children in a broken family.

Insecurity and fear are often masked as belligerence. Before we understood something of learning disabilities, very bright children were labeled retarded and sent to special schools totally inappropriate for their education and growth toward maturity.

As soon as we put a label on a student, we stop looking for further evidence for the causes of the problem we are trying to solve. Withholding judgment is a way of saying we aren't satisfied with what we think we know, and we aren't satisfied with the ways we are trying to cope with the problem we face. We will keep looking and keep noticing and keep believing that every child can learn far more than he or she is now learning.

Looking for Needs

Lewis B. Smedes offers an insight that is helpful to teachers and parents when confronted with the unacceptable behavior of others, children or adults. Too often we quickly ascribe motives to others' behavior and make judgments about others based on our assumptions. Smedes suggests we look past the behavior to see unfilled and unmet needs, instead of looking only at the surface to see naughtiness. Withholding judgment and looking for unmet needs reaffirms our commitment to others even when things aren't going well. "Being with" students means staying with them as they struggle to find their balance in a world that may seem for a time to have no room for them. Walking together through the valleys of life is a very important way for us to be God's hands and the expression of his unconditional love for our students.

Being with our students also means we are eager to prevent trouble. In too many schools students are read the "thou shalt not's" from the student handbook at the beginning of the year, and then we all sit back to see who will be the first kid caught violating a school rule. Being with students means we don't want them to get into trouble, and when we think we see it coming, we step in to warn them. It means that responsible adults are always with students, in every activity and situation, not to play "cop," but to be alert to potential danger and trouble (such as on the elementary school playground), or in the parking lot as high school students come and go.

This kind of being with our students should be viewed as a valuable opportunity to engage in the kinds of ministries this article is outlining, and not another onerous task that teachers shouldn't have to do. It means that teachers don't let students get hopelessly behind in their school work before intervening to find out what's wrong. It means that principals sit down with students who seem to be lurking around the fringes of acceptable behavior to let them know they have noticed and are concerned. It means that teachers, staff, and parents work hard to understand and teach their students the spirit of the school's culture, its vision of life as a community, and the roles for each of the participants.

Shepherding

Being with students means that sometimes we will take an active shepherding role with a particular student. Shepherding begins with finding a sympathetic, understanding adult on the school staff who seems to have the best relationship with a struggling student. The shepherd is asked or volunteers to take a special interest in that student. The shepherd spends time with his or her "sheep" every day, even if it's brief, most of it informal. The shepherd monitors the student's progress by consulting directly with the student's other teachers to find out how things are going, what assignments are due, when tests are scheduled.

The shepherd becomes that student's advocate, finding help if needed, recommending changes, giving advice to the student's other teachers, but most of all encouraging and helping that student to persevere and keep working and to take an active role in solving his or her own problems.

Shepherding is a low-key, non-threatening, non-official way for a caring staff to notice, listen, and bear the burdens of a struggling student. The principal or guidance staff can coordinate and provide support for shepherds, as well as serving as shepherds to some students. School aides, volunteer parents, bus drivers, and office staff can become shepherds for students, too. It is a simple, eloquent way for adults in schools to model servant leadership and to illustrate the principle of being with our students in the voluntary community of scholars we call our Christian schools.

Being with students in school should be the distinctive characteristic of all Christian schools. It is the model for schooling implicit in the passage from Deuteronomy 6:5-9, which so often finds its way into our brochures. It is the model for schooling that is obedient to our calling to live together under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Bruce A. Hekman is headmaster at the Christian Academy in Tokyo, Japan.

Teaching for Failure

by W. Dale Brown

I've been a teacher long enough to know how little I know about teaching. The quaking returns with every new semester–"Will they see the ignorance in me?' and "How many will I lose right from day one?" The depression comes back at every semester's end–"Can I say good-bye again?" and "Has it made any difference anywhere?" The failing I always remember.

Failing as a teacher is so easy, a snap answer here, a wrong move there. And there's always that warning of Christ's about the millstone around the neck for anyone who would dare mislead a child. Despite all our training and stacks of resources on pedagogy, teaching remains a precarious and mysterious business. As I walk into the classroom to confront those new faces with my carefully constructed syllabus, I puzzle over how I might awaken them to the wonder of metaphor and the power of stories well-read. I study their faces for signals, knowing what will be the fruit of my failures. I've been to the mall. I read the newspapers.

Now and then comes a card or a letter with a sort of thanks scribbled somewhere between the lines, and I'm glad again in my profession–but never entirely at ease. Every new semester is, at least in part, a lesson in more things that won't work, more ways to fail. From talking to students about their classes to visiting classes taught by others, from remembering my own days in one of those unwieldy desks to watching myself pace in front of a group of unimpressed students, I've at least learned something about how we often fail our students. For sure-fire mediocrity, try the following:

1. *Assume the classroom is your kingdom. You are the ruler and the students are your subjects.* One important element of failure in the classroom is that students never get the misguided idea that the place belongs to them, that they have some responsibility for the learning, that anything is going on beyond their challenge to find out what you require and provide it for you according to your exact specifications. The issues of your course are, after all, yours. Don't expect your students to be very interested or invested.

2. *Assume you are infinitely brighter, better informed, and deeper-sighted than any of your students.* Anyone who has ever spent more than five minutes in a teachers' lounge knows that all students are rimless ciphers, not students at all really, just bodies taking up space in our rooms. Therefore, never let them think you might actually learn something from them.

3. *Feature grades. They keep the power relationship in focus.* Don't let students forget that no matter how chummy and chatty things get in the classroom, you'll still be dispensing those final judgments. That way they'll be sure to know it's about a grade, not about learning, about a diploma, not about life.

4. *Organize slavishly. The textbook or the lesson plan or the syllabus--these are the center of the universe. Don't deviate.* Picking up on the issues floating around in the hallways of your school can be daring and risky business. You never know how long such spontaneous conversation might go on. And think of all the content that might thus have to be cut out of the course. Play it safe. Forget the world beyond the classroom doors. The news of the day and the movements in your students' lives have little to do with the material they need to master for the examination.

5. *Use your notes from your college courses.* What else can be said about this subject that wasn't said long ago by your own worthy instructors? And watch out for students' questions; they are often just delaying tactics. (A finely-timed touch of ridicule here and there will greatly decrease students' desires to interrupt the flow of things with their outbursts.)

6. *Assume all students are basically the same.* Their names and stories are, of course, unimportant and peripheral. They have nothing to learn from one another, because they're all just kids with the same problems of motivation and similar social cargo. Obviously they have nothing to teach you.

7. *Avoid personal anecdote.* Keep everything on a formal, impersonal

basis. You never know where this "teaching out of the context of relationship" business might lead. Wax eloquent on an abstract level, but never let your humanness show. Be wary of humor, for example; laughter or irony might cause them to see you too well. And never let them know where you hurt; that's pouring blood on shark-infested waters.

8. *Never ask them how the class is going.* You are the only one who really knows enough to judge whether or not learning is occurring. Evaluation is just a waste of time that allows them to take cheap shots.

9. *Refuse to adapt your pedagogy and/or the classroom environment to the fads and whims of educators who talk about the possibilities of small groups and sitting in circles and the like.* We've been through these waters before. You learned from a lecturer while sitting in straight rows with your classmates. So can they. (You can also guarantee failure, of course, by trying to keep up with every new educational movement and sure-fire technical innovation.)

10. *Forget about such categories as the spiritual, the emotional, or the social.* Your job is all about giving information. And you might remember too that the information is the product of your own specialty. Don't worry yourself over other subjects and other areas of knowledge. The spiritual stuff can be embarrassing, the emotional messy, and the social is none of your business.

My fanciful survey ends with ten because that's as lengthy as any refrigerator list should get. I could go on and on with my mythical directives, but maybe the suggestions here can spark some reflection on what we are up to as we try, as Frederick Buechner says, "to teach gently the inevitability of pain."

Maybe teaching is finally about loving people and creating a place where we can be honest with one another about the facts and feelings of our lives and studies. Such teaching methodology is difficult to transmit via an education course, and good teaching, of course, is not necessarily that which defines itself by breaking conventions. And, yes, I know that what's good for the goose is almost never exactly right for the gander. Nonetheless, we do share some common challenges. Unless we repent and become servants in our classrooms, unless we learn to yield up the power and pomp of our positions in favor of a shared experience of spiritual and intellectual growth, we may as well save our breath.

W. Dale Brown is associate professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Making a Case for Case Studies

by Daniel R. Vander Ark

Jim sat under the tree, eating his lunch, amid the dust and dirt of the forms for the replacement sidewalk sections. He hardly heard the comments of his fellow workers, all older than he. Jim wondered whether he could do what his boss had told him to do.

Jim's summer job was earning him more money than he had ever made before. He was saving for college and had been very grateful when he finally heard the news from his dad that he would be able to work for his dad's friend who owned a construction company. This summer Jim was part of a crew that was setting forms and leveling ground for a Redi-Mix company to pour the cement for replacing sections of sidewalk. When he first started, Jim learned the technique of setting the forms and leveling the ground to five inches below the form, the exact specifications of the city building code.

But two days ago the boss, his dad's friend, had stopped by to observe Jim's work. He took the shovel himself and showed Jim how to mound up the ground in the middle while leaving exactly five inches next to the forms. Jim had said, "Doesn't it have to be five inches all the way across so that the concrete is five inches thick all over?"

The boss responded, "Listen, do it the way I'm showing you. Just follow directions; that's the way we do it. I hired you to do the work, not to question how we go about our business. I'm not so sure I should have hired college students."

Jim had had trouble that night thinking about much else. After the boss had left, Jim asked the foreman why the dirt needed to be mounded in the middle. The foreman had explained that doing that meant less concrete was needed to do the job and that increased the boss's profit. The foreman said, "When the building inspector comes around after this is done, he just measures down at the side of the walk; that's five inches so he'll be satisfied and approve the project. Nobody is going to crack the concrete and check the depth in the middle. Don't you get it? It will save the boss a ton of money if he doesn't have to pour five inches of concrete all the way across; it's good business. Besides, two inches in the middle is plenty thick. It's not for cars, you know. A few bicycles and people walking aren't going to damage this walk."

This morning, Jim couldn't think about much else. The Redi-Mix guys had come, poured the concrete, and left. The concrete had been leveled and brushed. It was hardening fast. But Jim couldn't get out of his mind his many questions: Should he just shut up and do what he was told to do? Should he quit just because he kept wondering whether it was right to do? Should he go plead with his boss? Should he ask for a different job within the company?

He had thought of talking with his dad, but he knew the boss was his dad's best friend. His lunch lay half-eaten when he heard his foreman say, "Well, boys, time to get back to work." He got up, brushed off his pants, and wondered what he should do.

This is a case; it's a case because the essential facts of the "story" actually happened, because the narrative is engaging, because it poses questions that need answers, and because it leads readers to probe the principles underlying their proposed decision for the characters in the case. Also it is a superb teaching tool; good teachers will use it often because it helps students to learn to solve problems and think critically on their way to becoming discerning Christians.

The case study technique has its highest reputation at the Harvard Business School, a two-year graduate program culminating in an MBA. One of the school's earliest professors, Arthur Stone Dewing, in the 1920s claimed that the technique taught students to act as well as to know, that it was efficient in time, and that it increased a student's "sureness, a precision" in making decisions. Bertrand Fox, another professor thirty-five years later, claimed that a case helps a student to listen carefully to the views of one's peers, to express one's self, and perhaps to persuade others to one's point of view. He claimed cases were lessons in confidence and humility of one's judgment.

The reasons why Christian teachers ought to use cases are even more compelling. I have claimed in other places that a prime goal for Christian schools is to teach *discernment*, that ability to separate truth from falsehood, the valuable from the tawdry, the good from the bad, the kingdom of God from the kingdom of darkness. God tells us that we ought to test the spirits. In an age when people take appearances as truth, when whatever exists is right, when opinions are accepted as reasoned judgments, Christian teachers can lead students, through the use of cases, to make decisions based on biblical principles.

Teachers who use cases help students gain corollary skills: to read a text carefully to discern meaning, to discover assumptions that lie behind opinion, to speak and write clearly with a persuasive edge, and to connect learned principles to actual situations. Discussing cases well calls for a good leader, a teacher who can stimulate students to talk (although cases written with the edge of requiring a decision lead students to talk without much prompting), one who can point out opposing viewpoints, who can summarize arguments occasionally, and who can gently and effectively ask, "What makes you say that?"

Writing cases

A good case study involves issues and people whom the students could imagine being. The Harvard Business School insists that all cases discussed be ones that actually happened. The best ones for students are those that dramatize an ethical conflict (historical, contemporary), that describe situations engagingly, and that leave the actual decision hidden until after students have discussed the alternatives the character in the case faced. A good case hints at the actual dilemma immediately and refocuses the decision at the end. In Jim's case, I posed his dilemma early, gave the background to engage the reader (enough sensory detail to make it seem as if it might happen to the reader), offered some of Jim's thinking that made the decision difficult, and then put Jim at the crossroads with the same decision he was pondering at the beginning. Most good cases for students are very brief, they use human speech to draw the reader in, and often they lay out in separate paragraphs each of the sides of the dilemma. Good cases are short stories set in actual experience. Some names and places may need to be disguised to protect the participants.

The Case in Any Class

Although the case study approach to teaching arose in the Harvard Business School, teachers in any subject area can use the approach with success. By writing engagingly, a church history teacher could put Martin Luther's dilemma about staying with the Church in case study form. A math teacher could write a case of an advertiser who must choose the "right" way to present statistics. (Profit for a company goes up from $.02 to $.03 for the year or goes up 50%). A government teacher could write a Supreme Court case in terse form and have the students role-play the justices. A science teacher could readily locate the essential facts and arguments about an environmental issue and present the case to students. Certainly a business teacher would know of issues facing companies in this area; for example, the newspaper almost every day recites stories about company officers who must decide whether or not to lay off employees.

The case study method is an excellent teaching device for Christian teachers. Teachers who use it must be willing to write the case in an engaging way, pointing up clearly the essential dilemma and making the arguments on each side reasonably apparent. These teachers also need to handle class discussions wisely. The situation encourages teachers to have students *write* out their decision about the issue and offer reasons why they made the judgment they did. That exercise forces students to read the text carefully and provides them with clear, persuasive written material for a later discussion. The case method encourages teachers to design small groups to wrestle out the issue and report their findings to the whole class for another discussion. And, holding the results of the actual case until after the discussion usually brings another round of class talk about the issue.

If Christian teachers are to teach discernment, students need more than lectures about it, or even biblical citations about the need for it. Students need practice in it, practice in solving hard problems, real problems. They need to know the difference between what appears to be simple and what is complicated. Teachers who use cases regularly in the classroom will help their students toward that end.

Daniel R. Vander Ark is principal at Holland Christian High School in Holland, Michigan.

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Positive Christian Discipline: The Winning Edge

by Rosalie B. Icenhower

We're all familiar with Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." We know it, we accept it as true, and as parents we attempt to remember it in times of discouragement. But the Christian school teacher also has a responsibility in training the child in ways that are pleasing to the Lord, by exercising positive *Christian* discipline, the winning edge that Lee Canter's "Assertive Discipline and Beyond" course does not have.

More Than Punishment

In fact, the definition of the word "discipline" in *Webster's New World Dictionary* is "training that develops self-control, efficiency." It isn't until the fifth definition that it says, "Treatment that corrects or punishes."

Christian discipline is the training we do in the name and love of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father. It must be our prayer that every student attending a Christian school will experience that kind of discipline. Anything less than that exemplary model taught by Jesus Christ is not fully *Christian.* Humiliating a student in front of his or her peers or getting into a shoving match with a student does not fit the definition. Neither does an "anything goes" attitude. What, then, does? Reasoning out the purposes for our discipline efforts is a good starting point.

Discipline is needed in schools first of all because habits are easily formed at an early age. It is much easier to acquire any habit, good or bad, than it is to extinguish it. That is not to say that poor study habits and behavior patterns we establish in younger years can never be broken or changed, but it will be more difficult for the disruptive child, for instance, to change the pattern if he or she is allowed to persist in it for any length of time.

Second, we need discipline in our classrooms so that we can have an effective learning climate. No one can learn to full potential in a chaotic room. A master teacher was once asked by the principal of another Christian junior high to evaluate a situation that had gone from bad to worse in just three months' time. She was asked to observe a particular class and assess what needed to be done. Kids were walking around, talking, shooting peas and spitwads, sharpening pencils, furtively sipping soft drinks concealed under their desks–while the harried-looking teacher was attempting to lecture in a tired, monotonous voice. It did not take the intellect of a genius to figure out that absolutely no learning was going on in that classroom. Positive Christian discipline was needed, indeed *demanded*, before teaching and learning could take place. While this is an extreme illustration of the point, we can readily see that chaos does not breed good learning skills.

Third, the whole reason all of us need discipline in our lives is that we have a fallen nature. By virtue of our relationship to Adam each of us has a rebellious spirit that needs to be brought under control of the Holy Spirit. Life-long, we need to be trained and disciplined and corrected by God's Spirit. How wonderful it is when students at a young age can learn some of these valuable lessons in a Christian school!

The Christian teacher needs to set goals, the first of which is to cultivate a personal devotional life. Apart from this, there is no way for any of us to become the role models we must be for our students. As we spend time in the Word of God and in prayer, we become like Christ. Becoming like him enables us to model discipline in our own lives, not only for our students but for their parents and our professional colleagues on the school staff. We learn to work and walk together–to share our woes and joys, our defeats and victories, our concerns and answered prayers.

Second, we as teachers need to set professional goals for ourselves. As we plan each week's activities, we must take into consideration what is to be accomplished, what is to be defined, taught, or reinforced, and how it will be handled. What response do we expect from the students? This may seem rudimentary to us, a rehash of Education 101, but more teachers will fail because of a lack of good planning than because of a deficiency in knowledge of a particular subject area.

Obviously you feel you were called to be a teacher. Determine then, by God's grace, to be the best you can be, both professionally and spiritually. Be a well-disciplined professional, and positive Christian discipline will begin the moment students walk through your classroom door.

A Teacher's Role

Being a teacher does not call for an iron-fisted approach, nor does it call for us to be a "buddy" to our students. Either approach is doomed to failure. In

this day of sagging standards, you may be tempted to tell students, "Just call me Karen." Before you do, however, stop and think: what little child would choose someone fifteen or more years older for a pal? What high schooler wants anyone over twenty (over the hill, dude!) to be in his or her peer group? There is no way in this world we can become a contemporary peer of our students; but we can become their friend, their confidant, the one who can point them to a closer relationship with Christ, by being a caring, compassionate teacher.

In your role as a teacher, establish learning routines. This doesn't mean the same thing as *rote learning*. It means that we show our students when there is work to be done and how to get started. We hold them accountable for work we clearly assign. I often advise teachers not to read the cumulative record files for their students until late in the year. Another teacher's opinion should not become a self-fulfilling prophecy for what students may be able to do in your class. There has been growth over the summer, physically, emotionally, and (hopefully) spiritually. Let students know that a new year is a chance to begin over, no matter what may have transpired the previous year. Once you lay the groundwork for learning in a positive way, many of the discipline problems will dissipate.

A good learning environment does not magically appear like Jack's beanstalk. It takes work and planning. The curriculum may be a new and demanding one requiring careful study on your part. But once you have it in hand, your enthusiasm will enable your students to become motivated and confident as well. Plan more material than you think you will need and several ways in which it can be presented, but don't consider that plans are sacred words carved in stone. There are times when even the most experienced and creative teacher will find it wise to back off or to drop a lesson and come back to it later when the students are ready for it.

Discipline through Structure

Most children feel more secure with structure than without it. The teacher who is warm, comfortable, and relaxed with students can still be structured. Whether the classroom is traditional or one featuring hands-on centers and peer coaching, there still must be someone who is truly in charge. The teacher must represent authority without being authoritarian. One thing that helps many teachers in doing this is having a poster on the wall with rules stated in behavioral terms, such as, "In this classroom, we keep our hands and feet to ourselves." Students may have a part in establishing these rules, though the teacher may wish to modify the consequences for breaking them. (Children's ideas of "justice" often are surprisingly stringent!) Just having written guidelines posted helps a class to know what is expected and where the teacher's tolerance limits are. Whatever the rules may be, I suggest that they be kept to five or fewer in number, the behavior easily observable, and the rules enforceable.

Read the Situation

How may we defuse those potentially explosive, disruptive activities that pop up no matter how carefully classroom plans are laid? How do we handle them in a truly Christian way without resorting to derogatory remarks or loss of temper? It we can keep our eyes and ears open for potential problems, we can make sure the disruptive act will lose its sizzle. Let me illustrate:

A loud, piercing shriek emanating from the classroom next door, followed by loud banging on the floor, nearly jolted a teacher right out of her chair. When she expressed alarm, Jared, one of her students, piped up, "Oh, that's just my sister Jennifer in fourth grade. She does that whenever she doesn't get her own way." The fifth grade class was "treated" to these second-hand tantrums several times a week. Near the end of the school year, Jared's teacher told him, "Please inform your sister that when she comes to this class next year, she won't be allowed to act like that because I have a strict policy against it." The teacher was planning ahead, establishing her standards, preparing the girl psychologically to make a change in her behavior. Jared told not only his sister but their parents. Later the father told the teacher they had been pleased to see the changes in Jennifer because she had been reminded often of this message.

Over the summer the teacher wisely concocted a strategy that would break the focus of attention from Jennifer when she was angry. On the first day of school the teacher announced that since she had a large class and there was a great amount of work to do in fifth grade, there would not be time to allow everyone to have separate tantrums. She suggested that when frustration was too intense for a child, that person should slam his or her books on the table, stomp his or her feet, and yell. That would be a signal for everyone to do the same, the teacher explained, so that all anger could be handled at once, but the class could not do this more than once a day.

Right on cue a few days later when Jennifer began her first tantrum of the year, the whole class slammed books, yelled, and kicked their feet. After thirty seconds or so, the teacher rang her handbell for silence and went on with the class as if nothing unusual had occurred. After three or four such incidents, the girl decided that tantrums were too much fun for everyone but herself, and she never staged another one. That classroom became known as the quietest, calmest one in the school!

Sometimes a worrier becomes as much of a disruptor as the tantrum-puller, though quieter about it. She or he constantly raises a hand during reading, for instance, to ask what the science assignment will be later in the day, or to ask all sorts of "what if" questions, not out of a desire to learn nor even out of curiosity, but as a tool to gain attention.

Being blessed with a first-class worrier one year, a creative teacher came up with a "worry envelope," a large manila envelope with the words of I Peter 5:7 written on it, "Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you." He fastened it to the wall and instructed the children to write anything they were worried about each day and put their notes into the envelope. Then the next day he would read the notes and the class could solve problems together. After a few days the worrier dropped her annoying interruptions. The envelope remained on the wall for the rest of the year, and students continued to use it for genuine problems they wanted help in thinking through, and for prayer requests.

Understand Your Students' Needs

What about the student who continually threatens to rearrange another's face? Most of us have had our share of those students, too. If we get to know our students as well as we should, the management of their problems is sometimes apparent. A chronically angry offender had a dramatic turn-around when his teacher placed him at a separate desk away from his classmates. This actually made him feel special, something the boy desperately needed because of the turmoil in his home. His teacher set firm rules to let him know that inappropriate behavior would not be tolerated, but she also provided him with consistency, fairness, and love. This fellow is now in college on an academic scholarship, a talented and popular young man who professes Christ as the Lord of his life. Whenever he is home on vacation, he contacts the elementary teacher who helped him to change by understanding his needs.

It would be foolish, of course, for anyone to offer a gilt-edged guarantee stating that if a teacher does thus-and-so, a major problem will evaporate. We may consult with colleagues, the counselor, or the principal for ideas. Certainly, we also have a great resource in prayer. Each child is unique, and the One who formed each child can lead a teacher to find an individual way to meet his or her needs. It is also possible that the serious problem-maker needs professional counseling that we cannot provide at school. We would be terribly remiss to ignore dangerous signs of suicidal tendencies and other abnormal behavior, and we need not feel guilty about handing serious cases over to competent outside professionals if the parents are agreeable to it.

If the school is to maintain its credibility and integrity in providing quality education free from disruptive or manipulative tactics from a handful of students, then we must practice positive Christian discipline–training that develops self-control and efficiency. Training done in the name and love of Jesus Christ can give the teachers *and* students in your school the winning edge for the greatest year ever.

Rosalie B. Icenhower is a freelance writer and former Christian school principal from Bothell, Washington.

Weeding Out
New Age Ideas

by Marjorie Lee Chandler

New Age is a modern term for an age-old philosophy. The main premise, or worldview, is that everything is God–there is no separation between the Creator and creation. "All is one." Therefore, there is no evil. Educational tools sometimes borrow from this utopian view. This article aims to help teachers from kindergarten to high school discern the danger of New Age beliefs.

"How can I tell if a teaching method is tainted with New Age?" Christian teachers often ask. They're uncertain about what labels an outlook "New Age." "If a proponent of the New Age movement uses a technique, does that make it off limits for me?" "Where are the lines between helpful and harmful methods?"

The answers are found by considering both the teaching materials themselves and the uses of them. A responsible instructor or youth group leader checks out references in a lesson plan. What are the credentials of the authorities mentioned? What's the underlying goal? Does the outline include a biased position that contradicts biblical truth? If the material is a series, are initial lessons only a facade for more aberrant ideas presented later on?

What "worldview" is advocated in the material? Does the lesson encourage "being in control" of one's own destiny (a New Age, non-biblical concept), or does it give allegiance to God as Creator and Lord? The best yardstick for judging a method is whether or not it is consistent with scriptural teaching.

However, good judgment is complicated by the fact that bits and pieces from the metaphysical realm have spun off and filtered into our modern mainstream. Glitzy advertisements for New Age trinkets often promise something for nothing. Wire pyramids to wear or sit under and subliminal tapes to listen to tout painless and fast learning. Responsible research discounts these fads, but merchants continue to promise success, wealth, or wisdom–all with little or no effort. The Bible, instead, esteems even the work of slaves: "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does whether he is slave or free." (Ephesians 6:7-8 New International Version).

In the classroom, Christian teachers can remold secular teaching theories so they clearly glorify God. That way, the writer of an educational series will not be in control of the presentation. A classroom teacher who personalizes material can demonstrate how Christ wants to be involved in real-life experiences. This helps teacher and students alike to keep focused on the true Source of knowledge.

For example, if a lesson suggests that the students visualize a person or place not present, the technique is used differently by a teacher of New Age persuasion than by a Christian teacher. The New Age conviction encourages mystically absorbing the "wisdom of the ages" via deceased sages, automatic writing, and opening the mind to receiving unknown messages. A Christian instructor who uses visualization always informs students that this device is make-believe. Also, the suggested images involve only those from everyday life. For example, creative pathways for art, music, science, and mathematics can be stimulated by imagining how molecules move about or how a robin sounds at the first burst of spring.

And meditation on the attributes of Christ is a wholesome exercise that even little ones can enjoy. A teacher's bidding, "Think about a place where Jesus is with you," plants the seed for a wall collage of picture-stories depicting Jesus at the zoo, at a little league game, or at a bedside guarding through the night.

Theologically, the Christian perspective always differs from the New Age hypothesis of an unidentifiable "higher power." Those faithful to Christ avoid meditating on objects, such as a crystal, to receive cosmic vibrations supposedly, or visualizing oneself capable of supernatural potency, or being in touch with deceased beings. The New Age worships "self"; believers worship God in Christ.

Teachers of teens ask, "But what about New Age music? What about YMCA jujitsu, vegetarian diets, and relaxation regimes? Can my church youth group join in crusades for ecology and peace?"

Christians do not need to stop eating special foods, quit enjoying music, eliminate sports, or deny themselves relaxation. Young people need not eschew healthy and wholesome lifestyles; instead, teachers need to show their students how to honor God in these choices.

Listening to gentle music on a New Wave station may not be harmful in itself, but idolizing New Age artists and emulating their spiritual philosophies is dangerous. Likewise, if the director of recreation at the local community center encourages New Age ideology along with other activities, this is an unacceptable program for a Christian.

Learning judo for sport or self defense may help a youngster gain confidence and a new appreciation of how his or her body works. The bottom line is that parents and students must sort out the traditional trappings from the subtle underlying viewpoints expressed or role modeled by various teachers.

Relaxation techniques that lead to getting "messages" from "another plane" are also dangerous. Such methods seek to sublimate critical thinking so that false

concepts are more easily accepted. For example, in some journaling or creative writing classes the leader may suggest "clearing your mind" so that it becomes like a blank slate. The journaling process is then vulnerable to grandiose crystal-ball thoughts such as "I will soon be rich and famous."

Instead, for a Christian, relaxation is a time to enjoy resting from work–a time to be thankful and full of praise. And journaling can be a healthy way to understand and process the ups and downs of life. It even can help a Christian more clearly recognize God as Lord over all.

Although there is nothing wrong with a healthy diet, both teachers and youngsters need to be discerning about the literature in natural food stores. It may be enticing them to adopt a New Age outlook. "How can one know that?" is a good rejoinder to unrealistic claims such as body cells being rejuvenated by putting colored rocks in bath water or sleeping with certain healing potions under one's pillow.

Maria Montessori is regarded by some as a forerunner in New Age educational ideas, but Christians need not discount all of her classroom methods. For example, Montessori was one of the first to suggest that furniture be scaled to children's sizes. Obviously, a Christian pre-school can use little-people tables and chairs without being labeled "New Age." Likewise, the concepts of self-care and Montessori-tasks geared to developmental age rather than chronological age can be responsibly adapted in a Christian context.

For any age group, fear is not the right basis for choosing or rejecting teaching materials. Various methods may be used when presented from a Christian world view. Most importantly, a teacher's own commitment to Christ will permeate everything else in a classroom. Children learn more from non-spoken attitudes than they do from lesson plans. Even infants sense God's love through body language long before they can understand spoken words.

Christians are called to use all things honorably, to submit everything to the direction of the Holy Spirit. In the relationship between teachers and students, a God-honoring philosophy–not man-made methodology–is the hallmark of Christian education.

To better understand the New Age movement, it's important to know what some of the common terms mean. Following is a brief glossary of the more frequently heard words.

Ascended Master: A "highly evolved individual no longer required to undergo lifetimes on a physical plane in order to achieve spiritual growth.

Astreal: A non-physical level characterized primarily by emotion. It is described as the place where most humans go after they die and where they exist between earthly incarnations.

Aura: An apparent envelope, field, or colored radiation said to surround the human body and other animate objects. Its color or colors indicate different aspects of the person's physical, psychological, and spiritual conditions.

Channeling: The process of receiving information from some level of reality other than the ordinary physical one and from beyond the "self" as it is generally understood.

A "channeler" or a medium usually goes into a trance to establish contact with a spirit, ascended master, higher consciousness, or some other entity, then receives and repeats messages from "the other side" of the physical world.

Chakras: The seven energy points on the human body. The crown chakra is at the top of the head.

Higher Self: The most "spiritual" and "knowing" part of oneself, said to lie beyond the ego, the day-to-day personality, and the personal unconscious.

Karma: A Hindu term for the law of justice or cause and effect. It requires that the accumulated effect of one's actions in this life determine the type of existence the soul will have in the next life; you reap what you sow.

Mantra: A "holy" word, phrase, or verse in Hindu or Buddhist meditation techniques. The vibrations of the mantra are said to lead the mediator into union with the divine source within.

Monism: This literally means "one." In a spiritual framework it refers to the classical occult philosophy that all is one; all reality may be reduced to a single, unifying principle partaking of the same essence and reality. Monism also relates to the belief in pantheism that there is no ultimate distinction between the Creator and the creation.

Nirvana: This is literally a "blowing out" or a "cooling" of the fires of existence. It is the main word used in Buddhism for final release from the cycle of birth and death into bliss.

Pantheism: The belief that everything that exists constitutes a unity, and this all-inclusive unity is divine. God is the forces and laws of the universe but is not a Being with personality.

Paranormal: The faculties and phenomena in psychical research that are beyond the "normal" in terms of cause and effect as presently understood.

Reincarnation: The belief that the soul moves from one bodily existence to another until, usually following many particular existences, it is released from historical existence and absorbed into the Absolute.

Syncretism: The fusion of different forms of belief or practice; the claim that all religions are one and share the same core teachings.

Trance: An altered state of consciousness, induced or spontaneous, that gives access to many ordinarily inhabited capacities of the mind-body system.

World View: The New Age world view is that humanity's link with ultimate reality is based on the oneness of all existence and its essential unity with the divine. The biblical world view is that humanity's connection with God is through communion in a personal relationship with Him.

Yoga: Literally "yoking" or "joining"; any system of spiritual discipline by which the practitioner or yogi seeks to merge the physical, psychical, and spiritual. The goal . . . is the loss of self-identity and absorption into union with the Absolute or Ultimate Being.

Zodiac: Imaginary belt in the heavens . . . divided into 12 constellations or signs . . . used for predictions in astrology.

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Marjorie Lee Chandler assisted her husband, Russ Chandler, in the research for his book, Understanding the New Age *(Word Books, paperback edition, 1991.) A former speech and language the apist for Citrus College Child Development Center, Glendora, California, she is now a freelance writer.*

Sports Participation in a Reformed Biblical Worldview

by Tom Visker

This is the second part of a two-part article.

A Reformed biblical worldview is one that acknowledges the lordship of Jesus Christ over all areas of life. It does not allow a distinction to be made between the "secular" and the "sacred." All of the cosmos is sacred because it has been created perfectly by God. It also recognizes that sin has distorted God's perfect creation. However, by his grace and through Christ's victory over sin, God has restored his creation to its original goodness.

The creation, fall, and redemption motif is central to a Reformed biblical understanding of sports participation. In part one of this article an attempt was made to identify the creational structure of sports participation. Twelve characteristics of sport were identified as the form in which sport was created. The second part of this article is concerned with the "direction" that sports participation may take. The direction of sports participation refers to the pull of sin and grace on it. If, by God's grace, our sports participation is consistent with its creational structure, the direction is toward God. The pull of sin is a violation of the created structure. When we succumb to this pull, the direction of our sports participation is away from God.

The Direction of Sport

Discerning the pull of sin from the pull of grace in sports participation can be difficult. The Bible does not directly give us standards governing sports participation. There are no proof texts justifying our sports involvement, nor can we cite, chapter and verse, God's guidelines for playing sports. Lacking any explicit directives, how can we identify God's expectations for our sports involvement?

While we do not find specific directives for sports involvement, there are general biblical norms that give direction to our involvement. General biblical norms are themes throughout Scripture that should characterize our behavior in everything we do. By applying general biblical norms to sports participation, we allow the light of Scripture to dictate the way in which we participate. We see sports participation through the "spectacles" of Scripture. In doing so, we remain faithful to a Reformed *biblical* worldview.

Thinking in terms of relationships will help us identify these norms. In our relationships to God, to others, and to ourselves we must live obediently to our Creator. In the context of these relationships we can discern the direction of our sports participation. It can also be demonstrated that if we violate the biblical norms for these relationships while playing sports, we also eliminate one or more of the characteristics of the structure of sports participation.

Several passages from Scripture indicate what God requires of us in these relationships. In Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 the Ten Commandments establish the requirements for our relationship to God (first four commandments) and our relationship to others (the latter six commandments). Jesus summarized these commandments in Matthew 22:37-39 when he said we are to "love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your mind . . . and to love your neighbor as yourself."

Two passages in the New Testament provide a clear description of what should characterize our behavior in all of these relationships. Galatians 5:21-22 dictates that a Spirit-led life is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Conversely, verses 19-21 describe a sinful life as characterized by sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies. Similarly, the rules for holy living described in Colossians 3 indicate that our lives must be characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, and peace. Our earthly, or sinful, behaviors are described as sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying.

These passages provide a description of what should and should not be characteristic of our relationship to God, others, and ourselves in the context of sports participation. When our behavior in sports is consistent with God's standards for these relationships, our participation will be in accordance with the creational structure of sport and the direction of our participation will be toward God (pull of grace). However, if we fail to meet his standards for these relationships, we violate the creational structure of sport and the direction of our participation is away from God (pull of sin).

Application

Our understanding of the direction of sports participation will be enhanced through the use of several examples of negative behaviors while participating in sports. It is common practice in many sports for coaches, players, and fans to yell at game officials. Often the yelling goes beyond a simple disagreement over

a call to a personal attack on the character of the official. Our anger over the disputed call causes us to slander a fellow sports participant. In doing so we have violated the standards God has set for our relationship to others. More than likely the reason behind such behavior is that we have pinned too much importance on the outcome of that contest so that it becomes more important than it should be. Taking sports participation this seriously violates the creational structure of sport in that it is not to be taken seriously. Sports participation is a gift from God that allows us to step out of the serious realm of daily living and be involved in an activity that does not have any serious consequences.

A second example is in the role that our North American culture has given to sports participation. For many people sport has become a god. It has replaced God as the object of our worship. Compare the time, money, and effort put into sports participation with what is put into nurturing our relationship with God and you will see that sport is a major religion in North America. We are guilty of making sport an idol. Taking sports participation this seriously violates both the standards God has set for our relationship to him and the creational structure of sport.

A final example has to do with what motivates some individuals to play sports. It is not uncommon to hear players, coaches, and parents brag about individual accomplishments such as being selected to an all-state or all-conference team or being most valuable player or coach of the year. In fact, there are players and coaches who openly identify these accolades as goals for the season. A season would not be considered successful without these awards. These individuals are guilty of violating the scriptural norms for our relationship to ourselves. We are warned against selfish ambition, against thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. At the same time we violate the creational structure of sport by not playing the game because we love it but because of what we can get out of it.

Summary

The opportunity to participate in sports is a gift to us from our Creator. It allows us to maintain a balanced life by giving us time to play as well as to work. Using this gift in a manner that is consistent with the way God designed it is our way of expressing our gratitude to him for this wonderful gift. We do this when our participation in sports is governed by the biblical norms established for our relationship to God, others, and ourselves. As Christians, our task is to continually examine our behavior in sports through the "lens" of Scripture so that our participation will be pleasing to our God, who gave it to us.

Tom Visker is professor of health, physical education and recreation and head baseball coach at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

The A.D.
—A Priority Position

by Robert F. Topp

This article is reprinted with permission from the Christian School Administrator *published in January 1992 by Christian Schools International. It is the second in a series of three.*

"Mom, we couldn't play because they never got refs."

"He flunked algebra and he's still playing. I flunked music appreciation and got suspended from the team."

"Of course we don't have new practice balls. This school doesn't have *any* money."

"Coach, why can't we play more than six games in a season?"

"These uniforms are so gross!"

Comments like these come from discouraged students in small- to medium-sized Christian schools with weak athletic departments. Instead of fostering school spirit and enrichment in the lives of student-athletes, the athletic program can be clouded with disappointments because of insufficient or unwise management. That cloud can spread throughout the school, affecting discipline, academic achievement, and interpersonal relationships.

Some problems can be solved by dropping athletics or cutting back on the number of sports. Obviously, this is not ideal, but schools with severe limitations in facilities, money, transportation, enrollment, and ability to attract quality coaches need to consider the possibility. Dropping everything is drastic, but doing a few things well is better than doing many things poorly.

A better solution, however, is to make the athletic director's job a priority position. A knowledgeable, organized, energetic, and visionary A.D. can make an enormous difference. Exciting things will happen when Christian schools take the following four steps.

1. Find a qualified person.

The ideal athletic director is an experienced physical education teacher and coach who has done graduate school work in athletic administration. This type of person is hard to find, especially for small- to medium-sized Christian high schools. The athletic director needs personal qualities of organization, attention to detail, leadership, and vision, in addition to a strong background in the sports offered at the school. If an athletic director does not know how to find out the dimensions for lining a field, does not know current trends in most interscholastic sports, and does not know what's needed for a home contest in sports that he or she does not coach, then the program will suffer from mistakes and omissions.

Classroom teachers may be able to fill that role. Teachers of English, science, math, history, and Bible have been successful athletic directors. Non-faculty athletic directors have also been used in small Christian schools with good results.

All other factors being equal, the best athletic director is highly interested, organized, knowledgeable, and visionary.

2. Provide the necessary resources.

Securing adequate facilities and funding is often easier said than done. However, the shortage of either resource is not insurmountable. While building a gymnasium is a worthwhile investment, it can cost over a million dollars. Schools currently without adequate gym space will find that it costs much less to pay a professional Christian school athletic administrator to secure gym time in off-campus locations than to undertake a building program. Paying that same type of professional to manage any facility a school does have is also good stewardship and will minimize embarrassing scheduling conflicts or costly equipment damage.

The athletic director who is knowledgeable about community agencies will find ways to secure facilities. Meeting the right people in community recreation departments, YMCA's, armories, and public school athletics can open doors. Administrators should encourage their athletic directors to seek access to off-campus gym or field space. Rental fees for such facilities vary greatly, but if we agree about the value of Christian school athletics, we know that such spending is wise and frugal compared to the cost of new construction. This perspective can be compared to that of a young married couple who choose to rent an apartment for a time until it seems wise to buy their own home.

A new, small Christian school must do research to know how much money is needed for its athletic program. "Lots" is unrealistic, but "enough" is crucial. While "enough" will not purchase new uniforms each year, it will pay registered officials for all home contests, pay coaches a fair wage, and pay for necessary equipment, uniforms, and transportation. Hiring unqualified, "volunteer" officials and coaches is discouraging, potentially dangerous, and a disservice to the athletes.

3. Give the necessary time.

Are your school's games scheduled months in advance or just weeks? Does your school secretary spend more time talking to athletic directors from other schools than your athletic director does? Does equipment setup and field lining often take place during pre-game warmups at your home games?

The athletic director must be given time in his or her teaching schedule in order to do a quality job. Athletic directors who are in class all day cannot manage the athletic program well, may compromise teaching performance, and

will experience personal frustration and burnout. Many administrators are unaware of all the phone calls, paper work, inventory, scheduling, meetings, and games that the athletic director must handle.

A suggested guideline for an athletic director's office time is one period per day for every two sports offered in a given season. This should be in addition to the athletic director's teaching preparation period and class load. For example, a school with just two varsity teams in a season should give the athletic director one period per day. A school with four teams competing per season should give the athletic director two periods per day.

4. Manage the time and resources well.

In order to be successful, an incoming athletic director needs a clear job description, regardless of his or her previous experience.

The following recommended job description may be modified in schools where some of these tasks overlap with those of the principal or business manager.

1. Manage budget and purchasing.
2. Schedule and confirm all league and non-league contests.
3. Hire and supervise coaches.
4. Schedule registered officials for all home contests.
5. Control the use and maintenance of all uniforms, equipment, and facilities.
6. Promote the athletic program with the local media, as well as with the student body.
7. Oversee the athletic booster club.
8. Maintain necessary records.
9. Monitor academic eligibility standards for athletics.

Even Christian high schools with fewer than 200 students can show that they value their school athletic programs by making the athletic director's job a priority position. Doing so will definitely enhance the quality of the program.

Robert F. Topp teaches physical education and English at Annapolis (Maryland) Area Christian School. He has nine years' experience in Christian school athletic administration and is now A.D. at his current school.

Alternative Answers to Questions Students Ask

by Henry Kort

I think it was Brigitte Weeks who recently suggested that we "approach poets and their work with a cheerful lack of awe." Maybe, for the sake of our students, we should take that approach with theologians–especially the old "accepted" theologians. Students are still asking questions–the ultimate questions of our relationships with God–but they give a ho-hum reaction to the answers we give. What excited many of their grandfathers (and grandmothers) leaves many of today's students unmoved.

When our more perceptive students raise questions about some of the traditionally "correct" doctrines they were brought up on, I wonder if it would not be refreshing for them if we introduced them to alternative answers given by contemporary theologians. Below are three examples of the kinds of questions students ask, along with "answers" taken from the works listed as references. All three of the theologians quoted have roots in the Reformed tradition.

Total Depravity

Student: My neighbor doesn't believe in Jesus, but she is actually a good, loving person. How can we call her totally depraved?

Boer: In Christian witness the words "sin," "sinner," "sinfulness" can form a point of contact to introduce a Godward dimension into the discussion. In no way will this happen with the word "depravity." To tell someone that he is totally depraved will certainly offend and possibly outrage him, because it means only moral baseness, moral turpitude, which the secular as well as the Christian world denounces (39).

Harry Boer is not simply talking about being tactful in our Christian witness. He calls the doctrine of total depravity a "misnomer." "It takes," he says, "the Christian conception of sin an unwarranted step beyond the biblical permissible boundary" (55).

According to Boer, the root of the trouble lies in our theology of the image of God under the condition of sin. He takes John Calvin to task for allowing only a "minimal value" to the remains of the image left to mankind after the fall–remains that, according to Calvin, are just "misshapen ruins." These remains, says Boer, may indeed be "very weak manifestations" of what they once were, "but as true sparks of a once brightly burning flame they are like faintly glowing coals, not hardened and dead cinders" (48). Total depravity "heavily encumbers the missionary witness of the church by denying to it the indispensable element of the 'point of contact' with the hearer" (55). "Whoever hears the gospel is, because of his sinful nature, disposed to reject it, but because of the light and life vouchsafed to him as participating in the *imago Dei*, he is also capable of believing it" (96).

Harry Boer is not just another maverick. He knows his way around in the writings of the church fathers. For twenty-six years he was a teacher/missionary in Nigeria, rubbing shoulders with students and teachers from a whole variety of evangelical traditions. His concern is with the mission outreach of the church of Christ. He believes it is time we "emancipate" ourselves from those doctrines we formally profess but then turn around and ignore in the day-to-day faith and life of the church.

Teacher: What passages of Scripture seem to support Boer's position of "pervasive evil" (ix) rather than total depravity? What passages contradict his position? Is Boer fair to the Reformed tradition? In the final analysis, will Boer's proposals contribute to or in fact hinder the cause of missions? (See John Bolt, "A Smoldering Ember: Harry Boer's Continuing Battle with the Reformed Tradition" *Calvin Theological Journal*, April 1991, 111-124.)

Prayer

Student: Praying makes me feel better, and I know God likes me to pray to him, but besides that, does prayer really make any difference? God is sovereign; he has everything pre-ordained.

Van de Beek: One who enters into dialogue with God can sometimes persuade God. . . . The future remains open. But it can only remain open if people continue to think and talk with God as his partners-in-dialogue (331). God is a God with a history he makes with people. . . ." (261).

The traditionally Reformed idea presents God as being above history–a dispenser of all things. (See, for example, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day X.) There is a "model" in Scripture that suggests this position, but there is also a "model," says van de Beek, that suggests the position that God has a history; that is, that he interacts with his people–he changes. Van de Beek cites the example of the dialogue between Moses and God, where Moses convinces God not to destroy his people: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" (Exodus 32:14).

Oh sure, we say, but that example and others like it are only reported as anthropomorphisms–"as if," says van de Beek, "there were ever any other way of speaking about God than the anthropomorphic! *Everything* we say about God is said in human words. Since words are not used without purpose, the people who in human words and earthly images say something about God intend to say something that does justice to reality" (273). The examples of Moses and Job and of many others in the Bible can teach us that "to dispute with God, far from being inappropriate for a Christian, rather becomes him because he thereby shows that he is taking God with all seriousness" (331).

Van de Beek says that there are instances, in the Old Testament especially, where but for the prayers of God's people, history could have taken another course. The Spirit takes a zigzag course throughout history–even today–and some of the changes in course are due to the prayers of "partners-in-dialogue" with God. What certainty do we have then? Is a variable God one in

whom we can put our trust? Does the future depend on our prayers? "The Christian confession is that the almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, has expressed himself in Jesus Christ as the God who wants to be the God of grace" (292). In Christ God made a definitive choice. "To intercede with God is to put him on the spot on the grounds of his faithfulness. In Jesus Christ we have better arguments than Moses" (331).

Abraham van de Beek is professor of systematic theology at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. I. John Hesselink calls him "the leading Protestant theologian in the Netherlands today" (*Perspectives*, December 1991, 22). Van de Beek believes that the ideas of the "mutability" and "history" of God give us a different approach to the problem of evil–an approach that will help us live with God's relationship to suffering and sin. Van de Beek says, "If we journey with God, it is with the living God–with him who is making his history with us" (vii).

Surely, the teacher must lead the students through the extremes of van de Beek's model of openness and change. But the student–especially the gentle, sensitive student–will be encouraged not to underestimate the importance of his or her personal prayer life. "In situations of guilt and suffering we are not called to be passive, but to call on God to give signs of the coming kingdom. We can refer him to his own choice in Christ, to the healing of the sick, to his power to forgive sins, to his victory over death. If God wants to confirm his choice in Christ, he has to verify it. Sometimes God allows himself to be persuaded by people, agreeing with their arguments or proposals" (326).

Creation

Student: I really don't know what all the fuss is about. What difference does it make whether we believe that God created the world in a short period of six days, or if he created it in a long period of six geological ages?

Teacher: The fuss is about the veracity of the Bible. Some people believe that the Genesis account precludes the theory that the "days" of Genesis 1 span periods of billions of years.

Stek: Both ancient and modern attempts to integrate the "days" of the creation week with time as measured in our ordinary human experience–whether as the first seven days of our calendar or as eons corresponding to geological ages--fail, we believe, to take properly into account both the narrative perspective and the theological focus of the creation story" (240).

Student: I don't understand.

Stek: While Genesis 2:4ff. presents an account of God's ways with humankind in the arena of human history, the grand overture that precedes it [Genesis 1:1-2:3] presents not historical or scientific data but the fundamental theological (and its related anthropological and cosmological) context of that drama. It is the story behind *the* biblical story. And more than that, it is the story behind all cosmic, terrestrial, and human history" (242).

To use the creation account of Genesis to put limits or restrictions on the natural sciences is, says Stek, to miss the whole purpose of the account. It wasn't cosmological or geological history that the author of Genesis was concerned about. He was concerned about the religious issue–"the profusion of gods 'feared' by the nations and the need to establish in Israel the uncompromised faith that the God who had called Abraham and rescued Israel from Egypt and bound them to himself in covenant was the only God, the Creator and Lord of all" (249). To limit Genesis 1:1-2:3 to nothing but the origin of creation is "in large measure to trivialize it" (250). The creation story is not science, it is not history–it is doctrine, it is theology.

John Stek is professor of Old Testament theology emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary. It would be a "sad irony," says Stek, if our misunderstanding of the purpose of the creation account forces our students to choose between the Bible and the scientific accounts of cosmic formation. Our students of the physical sciences must have the conviction "that God has not deceived them either in his creation or in his Word and that the study of both must go hand in hand" (262).

Our students' faith is being assailed from many directions. Secular values, experiences of suffering and guilt, the bewildering discoveries of the natural sciences–all have their effects on our students' relationships with God. What we say about God will have to do justice, says van de Beek, "to the experiences of our time, the thought patterns of our century, our culture, and our language. Unless we do this we shall be speaking in a vacuum and our words will not register" (3).

To be Reformed means, first of all, that we believe that the Bible–both the Old and New Testaments–is the norm by which we try to give answers to the questions of our students. But to be Reformed also means that we try to give answers that are germane to the experiences of our day–answers that relate our students to God and neighbor in the age in which they live.

This does not mean that each generation must start from scratch. Our students too have to remember that, thankfully, we can build on the foundations laid by our fathers and mothers. Van de Beek reminds us that "what theologians and philosophers before us have experienced, digested, and said may and must be implicated in our own reflections, just as it is woven into our experiences. We are children of the history that lies behind us" (3).

Henry Kort teaches grade six at Ripon Christian School in Ripon, California.

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Celebrate Diversity: Cultural Lit

by Elizabeth Rudenga

Recently a class of fifth grade students from a local Christian school drew a map of the world. I was impressed at their ability to quite accurately depict different continents, but I noticed that all placed the North American continent in the center of their maps.

Ask your students to draw a map of the world, and examine their responses. Have they placed Canada and the United States in the center of the map? Now have them name their favorite book.

The local fifth graders named a wide variety of books, but most of their choices concerned familiar settings and characters. Children usually choose books about themselves or extensions of themselves, books that depict their own heritage. They feel comfortable, not confronted, in their favorite books.

We all tend to be ethnocentric, that is, we think of ourselves in a central, almost superior manner. Therefore, we need to encourage students to read books that depict characters from a variety of backgrounds.

Multicultural or multiethnic literature focuses on a racial, cultural, or ethnic minority group. Characters, settings, themes, or plots represented in multicultural literature are distinctive in some aspect, often culturally and socially unique compared to the white Anglo-Saxon majority. Illustrations, language, and settings reflect diversity. Multicultural literature introduces children to people of other backgrounds and allows readers to vicariously encounter experiences outside the normal range of everyday living.

People by Peter Spier is a wonderful book that presents a multicultural, non-ethnocentric point of view and at the same time offers a teacher the opportunity to present a Christian perspective. Books by Ezra Jack Keats, Tomie dePaola, and John Steptoe portray children living in a variety of cultures. The characters of Scott O'Dell, Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, Virginia Hamilton, and Laurence Yep represent various ethnic backgrounds, and they are inspiring, sometimes unnerving, yet inviting. Books often have a unique way of meeting children on their own turf and taking them into unknown territory, leading them step by step beyond everyday experiences.

Why include multicultural literature?

When students read of or listen to multicultural literature, they discover that people of other ethnic groups have different customs, values, and beliefs than their own. It is not easy or comfortable to read literature that confronts, challenges, or even defies existing knowledge. One goal of including multicultural literature and accompanying activities is to help students and teachers realize that, although people have different cultural practices, we can accept others and live in harmony.

To develop a positive understanding and expand knowledge students may need teacher prompts, guidance, and encouragement. One Christian school in the Chicago area held a week-long celebration of customs and literature from other cultures. Each classroom became a continent or country in order to observe their theme "Reach for the World." After research, teachers and students prepared their room to represent the designated area. Each day during the week students traveled to a country (a different room) to learn about another culture. Part of the experience included multicultural literature; students read or heard about different customs and cultural practices.

Reading multicultural literature does not imply that students must reject their own ethnic background. It does mean that, as they develop an understanding of their ethnicity, they also develop cross-cultural competency. Indeed, an additional goal in reading multicultural literature is to develop each student's awareness of his or her own cultural heritage and to realize the impact it has upon attitudes and knowledge. Multicultural literature can help promote growth in students' understanding of themselves and others. *The Black Snowman* by Phil Mendez directly touches on racism but also builds knowledge. It is the story of Jacob, a young Afro-American boy, a magic *kente*, and Jacob's attempts to accept himself and gain pride in his heritage.

Historical multicultural literature presents history from the perspective of various cultural groups. Too often history texts depict a rather bland, one-sided, non-controversial white chronicle. Multicultural literature is replete with historical nonfiction and fiction books that are exciting and moving. Moon Shadow, the main character in *Dragonwings* (Laurence Yep), comes to America from China in the early 1900s and encounters hardships as an immigrant. When a teacher reads Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to intermediate level students, children identify with Cassie, a young black girl, and her struggles in the 1930s. Milton Meltzer has written several outstanding books that feature different minority groups. Reading such books may fill a gap in knowledge and at the same time encourage children to recognize that other ethnic groups have had a distinctive part in history.

Samplings from Other Genres

In addition to the types of books mentioned above, multicultural children's literature abounds in a variety of genres. Use of traditional folktales, myths, fables, and legends develops an awareness of different languages and cultural backgrounds. *Lon Po Po* by Ed Young, a Red Riding Hood story from China and winner of the 1990 Caldecott Medal, is worth comparing with other versions of Red Riding Hood. *The People Could Fly* is an excellent collection of African-American folktales told by Virginia Hamilton. Biographies and autobiographies remind students that people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds have made important discoveries and contributions to society. *A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* by David A. Adler is a noteworthy biography for young children. Jean Fritz has written several superb biographies, such as *The Double Life of Pocahontas*, and carefully documented her work with notes, maps, and a bibliography. Poetry often reflects historical beliefs, traditional conflicts, or current beliefs and situations. Byrd Baylor has written a series of Native American poetic books. Contemporary fiction depicts struggles and triumphs in society today, and many of Ezra Jack Keats' books appeal to the young and illustrate African-American children growing up.

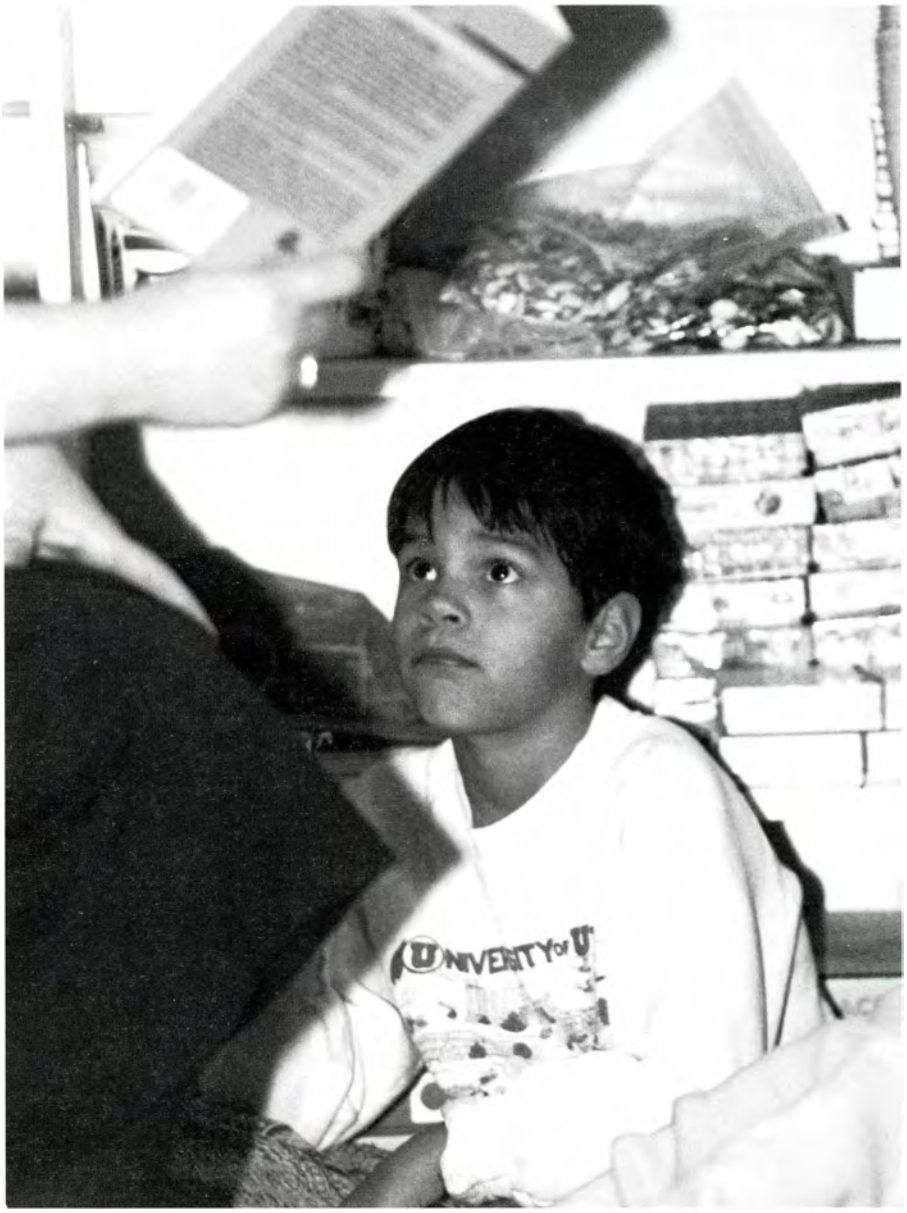
Breaking Barriers

For a variety of reasons many Christian schools lack a multicultural population and, until their beliefs are challenged, will continue to restrict their thinking to their ethnocentric bounds. Multicultural literature can be the avenue for them to broaden knowledge and change prejudicial or restrictive attitudes.

Students in Christian schools with a multi-ethnic constituency have first-hand opportunity to interact with students from other ethnic backgrounds. Yet, they too must cultivate a viewpoint beyond tolerance, an attitude of understanding and acceptance. Multicultural literature helps students in these schools to understand each other better and helps teachers connect with students from different backgrounds.

We must relinquish a sense of superiority in order to understand people of other ethnic groups. Multicultural literature helps us see life from another perspective. We walk in others' shoes. We come to appreciate the historical aspect of their people. We understand the conflicts and challenges they face. If we intend to reach out a loving hand, to extend the message of Christ, we must understand the culture and beliefs of other individuals. As we do so, we simultaneously examine and clarify our own beliefs.

Elizabeth Rudenga is assistant professor of education at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.



Classroom Humor

by Russell Heddendorf

Some time ago, I became interested in comic strips and the implication they might have for sociology. At first, I collected strips portraying the obvious: the sociologist as buffoon, for example, or those describing new and imaginative status symbols. But after some years of collecting, it became apparent that comics had another value for sociology, one that probed the paradoxes of society and its social problems.

Humorists, of course, have always kept a good supply of social foibles in their bag of tricks. But the style of the stand-up comic provokes more laughter than thought; we get the punchline but lose the target of the punch in the repartee. By contrast, comic strips, as a visual medium, offer the opportunity for analysis. We may laugh at them and then study the reason for that laughter.

Consequently, I decided to use comic strips on an overhead projector to illustrate and study some of the sociological questions we were considering in class. Having made that decision, I came to understand how humor unfolds the incongruities of everyday life for the reader. Whether pointing out the effect of recycling on garbage collection or the influence of public opinion polls on elections, cartoonists offer a rich commentary on social problems and the social realities they reflect. More than that, their use of humor often exposes truth that might otherwise have remained hidden.

Before going too far in this direction, let me reaffirm what any teacher knows today, that humor has a place in the classroom. Prior to this century humor was considered unscholarly in the academy. It was thought to demean the value of a serious topic and even the person or the instructor who used it. More recently, however, studies have noted some clear benefits derived from the planned use of humor in teaching.

For one thing, humor facilitates creative thinking. Laughter allows and even encourages divergent approaches to problems. As an expression of freedom, laughter directs the mind away from rational thought and toward unconventional ideas. In some areas of study, this freedom is a valuable contribution to creativity.

Laughter also reduces social distance, which, in some settings, may encourage group problem solving. Recent studies show that students who have a greater sense of humor have less social distance from their peers. As humor reduces anxiety about social roles, it stimulates an atmosphere of spontaneity and fallibility. The result, thus, may be a general reduction of anxiety and stress in the classroom.

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that humor may improve the acquisition and retention of information. Since comedy is largely graphic, humorous images are readily converted to abstract ideas for use in thought. The resulting mood may facilitate the merger of image and idea for purposes of learning.

Of course, humor may be counter-productive if it becomes synonymous with classroom demeanor. When used to create an atmosphere of "fun," humor weakens a desirable learning atmosphere. At such times, boundaries defining what or who is funny are usually ignored. At its worst, humor distracts from the educational goal and intrudes its own learning agenda.

What often is needed in a classroom instead of this liberating type of humor is an instructional sense of humor. One sociologist describes this kind of thinking when she refers to the humorist as a "disguised moralist," someone who uses humor to shape moral thinking. When pointing out a social or moral dilemma, the humorist offers the teacher an opportunity to interpret that dilemma. Specifically, humor may suggest the truth in a paradox that might not otherwise be apparent.

Let me illustrate the principle with a cartoon that appeared the day after the 1988 U.S. presidential election. One man says to another, "You did your patriotic duty? You mean you voted?" "Naw," says the other, "I responded to a poll."

The point is so obvious that we're inclined to chuckle and continue reading. In that election, especially, people thought that the influence of polls rivaled the influence of the voting process itself in determining the outcome. What the cartoonist adds is the suggestion that patriotism, too, may be redefined in our thinking by public opinion polls. Having made this point, the cartoonist reveals an emerging problem in our changing election process: responding to a poll may be seen as a substitute for voting or even for patriotism.

Laughter exposes the paradox that is here and then resolves it. In a sense, it's silly to think of responding to a poll as comparable to voting, but we also know there is enough truth to the possibility that it cannot be easily dismissed. Laughter softens the threat of this possibility by taking the ambiguity and moving it from the serious to the humorous, from thoughtfulness to playfulness. Consequently, we don't

have to understand the paradox if it isn't taken seriously, and we don't have to feel threatened if it should recur.

This cartoon illustrates well the major components found in humor. First, there is some principle or system to be questioned. In this case, there are two: the principle of patriotism and the system of a national election. Then there is some "flaw" or contradiction in the system that's pointed to by the punchline. Here it is the idea that responding to a poll can be a substitute for voting or for patriotism. Finally, laughter may reconcile the contradiction between the system and the exposed weakness. The suggestion is that a threat to the system need not be taken seriously. Laughter, instead of thought, may resolve the problem.

But perhaps the problem should be taken seriously. As any comedian knows, "humor is a serious business," largely because the paradoxes of mundane life often mask a deeper social meaning. Laughter reveals this dialectic of the humorous and the serious when we approach a joke with the simple but serious question: "Why is that funny?" Without that question, laughter merely exposes the problem and nothing more. What is remembered is the humorous quality of the problem, not the seriousness.

In the classroom, students benefit greatly from this dual quality of humor. School can be fun when humor is seen in the serious business of learning. This cultural sense of humor gives a new and liberating meaning to study.

Left with this meaning, however, students enjoy the fun and nothing more. Laughter, not thought, reconciles the problems of life. In fact, much of modern culture has stagnated at the comic stage. Children, especially, are vulnerable to the mentality of this "fun culture" that offers amusement and little else. As Neil Postman has suggested, we are "amusing ourselves to death." Seeing the humorous without the serious gives an incomplete and distorted view of life.

What is also needed is an instructional sense of humor that exposes the serious in the humorous. Critical thought is enhanced when students are encouraged to interpret the meaning of their laughter. Especially since they are developing in a world filled with hypocrisy and ambiguity. Students need more than laughter to face these problems. They need a way to make sense of the paradoxes so familiar to them in daily life. Instructional humor helps them to cope with paradox and to soften its threat, but then to think and to understand that threat.

Russell Heddendorf is professor of sociology at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

With the Heart of a Servant

by Cathy Smith

While this may look like a typical profile in *CEJ*, actually it's not! In reality, it is a thank you note to God.

Fully aware of my nagging insecurities, the Lord has steadfastly provided me with a succession of strong female role models whom I could emulate and who encouraged me, in turn, to strive for my goals. Heading the list is my optimistic mom, but there's also a Calvinette counselor, a high school Latin teacher, and a couple of special colleagues in the teaching profession. One of those peers is Thea De Groot, our former resource teacher at John Knox Christian School in Wyoming, Ontario.

I confess that a part of me resisted writing this note to the Lord publicly. First, I reasoned, few readers will believe that Thea could truly have achieved so much in the seven years that I've known her. Second, it requires humility to recognize how much farther I must travel to reach the point of serving the Lord with the selflessness of Thea. Nonetheless, she has so inspired me that the doubts were overridden by the desire to share with other Christian teachers her example of what the Master Teacher can accomplish with a willing assistant.

What Thea has done for me is personify the concept of servanthood. Certainly that is true in the manner in which she executed her professional responsibilities at John Knox. Our principal, Mr. William Hordyk, commented: "When Thea joined the staff in September 1985, the resource program was basically non-existent. Her first students ranged from grades 1 through 8. Since Thea has worked with the students, there are very few remedial students in the junior and senior grades. Her love for the students and her dedication to her work provided JKCS with a resource program that excels."

However, what has been even more amazing for me is the way in which that servant attitude is so consistently exemplified in all aspects of Thea's life. She has served the Lord with willing mind, hands, and feet not only in our school, but also within her family, her church, and in the community.

So where do I begin? At JKCS Thea was an advocate for all of the students, but especially for those with exceptional needs. She was the staff member who always placed the child's needs foremost. The students who visited Mrs. De Groot's Learning Centre appreciated her as someone who cared about each one of them personally. She visited several libraries regularly to choose exactly books that would be compatible with her fledgling readers and spark that fire of enthusiasm for learning. She sewed "reading pillows" for them from fabric carefully selected to reflect their interests. She purchased novels to send as surprise gifts to her reluctant readers in the summer. She maintains contact with former pupils and continues to laud their successes.

Thea was the anchor for students with special needs. When it became obvious that a couple of students would progress more quickly with computer assistance, Thea taught herself the necessary skills and eventually became the staff computer "expert." When the opportunity arose to integrate a visually impaired student, Thea coordinated the strategies and spent two summers at the Brantford School for the Blind learning Braille as well as a host of other requisite information. She assisted the staff, the student body, and the school community into putting into practice our credo that each covenant child deserves Christ-centered education.

You might expect Thea to have been engaged in these kinds of activities as the resource teacher on staff, but she was involved with the entire student body as well. She initiated cross-grade tutoring and reading partners. She created a study skills unit that she presented in the regular classroom a

number of times. She helped to form both a writer's club and an art club. Moreover, she was always available to lend a hand with any special event, regardless of whether or not it fell within her fifty percent time slot.

Thea viewed her role as a resource person as one that extended to the staff as well as to the students. She faithfully read professional journals and the latest research and shared pertinent articles with us. Nor was this assistance rendered in a patronizing way. Rather, Thea was the one who forever insisted that we work best as a team, sharing our ideas and talents. She liked to work in partnership to sponsor a club or team so that, as staff members, we would model cooperation for our students.

"Partnership" being her buzzword, Thea arranged for a variety of volunteers to supervise various programs for motor skills and penmanship. Naturally, it was Thea who organized a volunteer appreciation luncheon in June. In addition to all of the ordinary duties of a teacher, such as supervision and committee involvement, Thea also initiated the implementation of an enrichment program at JKCS.

As I came to know Thea more personally, I began to marvel at this cheerful and positive giving that never seemed to falter. I discovered that she has always been an activist in the Christian community. In the short time I've known her, Thea has served as a board member for a neighboring Christian school, volunteered her time and talents for Cursillo, served on a study committee for the local Christian high school, taught catechism in her church, formulated and presented a computer workshop for local Christian elementary teachers on a completely voluntary basis, served on the Special Education Committee of the Christian Schools International District 10 Alliance, and was a member of the Council for Exceptional Children in the community at large. Furthermore, those of us in District 10 know that Thea was one of the coordinators of our very successful 1991-92 Ontario Christian School Teachers Association convention in Hamilton. Again, Thea preferred partnership, sharing that task with Mrs. Janette Winter-Wassink. Finally, if I may stretch your credulity just a little further, a "hobby" of Thea has been her promotion of Third World Self-help Crafts, which she sells at various bazaars and fairs.

Thea De Groot in the John Knox Christian School Learning Centre.

Thea is married to Art, and they have three daughters. Thea and Art often step into the hurting situations of others and offer practical help. They invite guests into their home frequently, especially those who often don't receive hospitality–the single moms, those individuals in crisis, the lonely. Recently, too, Thea and Art's home has become a witness ground internationally; a number of exchange students have been placed with their family. While living with the De Groots, these teens attend church and the local Christian high school as well as experience active Christianity first hand.

Thea has been a staunch friend to me. She has enabled me to attend a number of conferences by extending concrete aid. She has listened to me and bolstered me in some tough times. She has never disappointed me. She really does sound too good to be true, doesn't she?

Perhaps now you might understand why we at John Knox were so sorry to see Thea leave. Ready for new challenges, Thea decided to return to university studies to finish her degree and pursue future service in the field of adult literacy. Perhaps now you see, too, why I feel compelled to thank God for her embodiment of genuine servanthood. In "The Servant Song" we sing, "Will you let me be your servant, Let me be as Christ to you. . . ." Spirit-filled, Thea has indeed been–as Christ to us–a kingdom-worker with the heart of a servant.

P.S. Yes, Lord, I do see the humor in your leading me to become Thea's replacement! I take it role models don't come free. . . . I'm leaning on you and often calling on Thea.

Cathy Smith is learning resource teacher at John Knox Christian School in Wyoming, Ontario.

Getting a Job with Disney

by Stefan Ulstein

Michael Swofford got fired from just about every job he ever had before he was hired by Disney Studios. Jobs for art majors being rather few and far between, he worked at a plywood factory and as a computer data entry person. It seemed that he'd never get to *draw* for a living.

When he finally landed a job at Disney Studios, he began as an illustrator on big animated features like *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Swofford is now a full-fledged animator, complete with screen credit for Disney's latest offering, *Aladdin*.

When a colleague and I offered to take some junior high artists to meet Swofford recently, they jumped at the chance. Here was a guy with the best job in the world. Imagine going to work every day and drawing cartoons for a living. We wanted to find out how someone with artistic talent could get a job at Disney Studios.

Swofford graciously showed us his sketch book portfolio–the one he used to land the job with Disney–and spoke to us about the kind of art training that would be most helpful for other aspiring animators.

"Actually, college art classes weren't all that helpful," Swofford said. "I went to a college that was very open to expression and experimentation, but what I needed was classical skills. I needed to draw the human form and learn to express movement."

Swofford told us that an animator has to capture the movement in the very first lines of a drawing. "If it doesn't happen in the first 30 seconds, it probably won't work."

His portfolio is full of quick sketches that he made at the zoo. Using a felt pen, he tried to capture the motion and form of gorillas, giraffes, and monkeys. He also had many sketches of live human models in various action poses. "Often I'll hold the pen at the end, so that I don't get caught up in trying to make it too perfect," he explained. "Most art classes teach you to do patient renderings, but what you need to do is capture the motion. That's especially true in animation because motion is everything."

Once the Disney people saw and liked his portfolio, they invited Swofford to take some animation tests. Each test gave him a problem and asked him to draw it within a specific time limit. One test began with a drawing of a walled court with no gates. The test: Draw a boy finding a way to escape.

Swofford's video tape shows his answer: An impish lad who jumps onto a sapling near the wall. The sapling bends over double with the boy's weight, then springs back to its upright position, catapulting the boy up and over the barrier.

The tests got more and more difficult, weeding out the underqualified. Swofford pointed out, however, that would-be animators are encouraged to try Disney again when their skills are more developed.

Swofford loves working for Disney, which was somewhat surprising, since

The Sultan's evil vizier, Jafar, gives his molking parrot sidekick, Iago, a disapproving glare.

A magical matchmaking genie wistfully looks on as his master, Aladdin, takes Princess Jasmine on a romantic carpet ride with his monkey Abu tagging along in Walt Disney Pictures' all-new animated Arabian Nights fairy tale, Aladdin.

Disney business people have a reputation for being tight-fisted and controlling. "Whether that's true or not," insisted Swofford, "the creative people are really fun. There are still animators there who came up on the Disney classics like *Peter Pan*, although the first generation, who brought *Snow White* to the screen in the 1930s, are gone now.

"We have weekly art classes at the studio where we learn new techniques and try out new ideas," he went on. "The teachers come from art departments in the universities and they really know their craft." Swofford insists that he, and most Disney animators, are craftspeople rather than naturally gifted artists. "You learn the craft, then you keep perfecting it," Swofford laughed. "I don't know if there is anyone who is naturally talented, but there are a lot of hard workers who have perfected their craft."

The work can be hard and demanding. During the final months of producing *Aladdin* the animators and illustrators worked seven days a week, twelve hours a day, to finish on time. "They even brought us food so that we wouldn't have to leave," Swofford said. "Every moment counted."

Animators like Swofford work with quick sketches. He showed us some examples, which were surprisingly rough. The animators are chosen for their ability to draw characters that communicate personality, emotion, movement, and other attributes that make the screen come alive.

When an animator has a scene roughed in, the illustrators do the "clean-ups" and "in-betweens." Clean-up illustrators smooth out the lines and produce a more finished-looking black line drawing. In-between illustrators duplicate the characters in hundreds of drawings that will be used to create motion. Each drawing will become one frame of film.

Background artists draw and then paint the sets, which are usually done on glass. In the old days, all the character drawings were done on clear acetate sheets, so that the illustrators could paint in acrylic color on the back side of the sheet. Now Disney uses computers to add the color to paper drawings.

Swofford says that he was probably ready to start at Disney a few years before he finally screwed up the courage to apply. "It all starts to happen with the portfolio," he stressed. "If they like your portfolio they'll call you in for a test. If you pass the test you get the job. You start out doing in-betweens and clean-ups, but if you're good they'll let you try your hand at creating characters, which is the real fun."

Swofford's first job as an animator was on the character of the genie in *Aladdin*. Using a script, and the recorded voice of Robin Williams, they began drawing the character. Williams' voice dictated the kind of character they would create. Later, Swofford was moved to the team that drew Aladdin.

"Finally," Swofford insisted, "Disney prefers to hire college graduates. Regardless of your drawing ability, they want someone who has stick-to-it-ness. You have to be the kind of person who will show up every day and see a project through. If you can do that, being an animator for Disney Studios is the best job I can think of."