

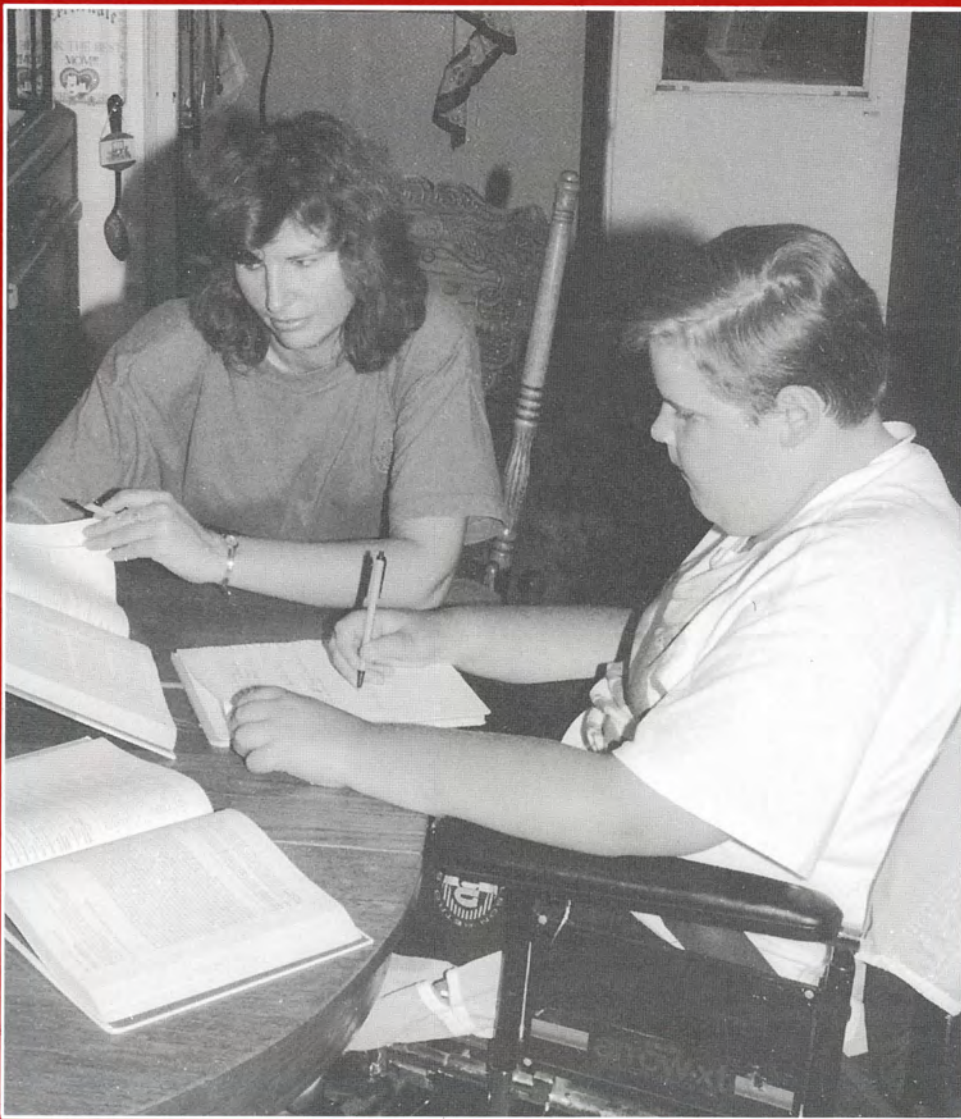
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Special Education

Love That Finds the Root

Lorna Van Gilst
• Editor •

"See my van?" Brent asked as we pulled into his driveway. "I'm gonna gas it up and go over to my girlfriend now. And we're gonna drive all night around town." Bold words for a ten-year-old. Especially a non-literate ten-year-old.

All evening at Friendship Club Brent had been wired. He had grabbed the tear-out stickers, licked a corner or two, and slapped them on the page—no time to line up the edges or tell the Bible story as he worked. Get the silly stickers on the page and squeeze the Elmer's glue. Smear glue on a clean sheet of paper. See if the paper sticks to the table. Ah—a magic marker! Will the lines wipe off the table?? I felt the tension grow within me. Yet this was a special night. For the first time Brent had agreed to stand with the rest of us to sing, remnants of his dinner still clinging to his smile. He'd even done the motions of the song.

Usually Brent is too tired to stand, he says—or even too tired to sing. "I can't read the words," he tells me. But he remembers. I ask him what Peter and John said to the lame man. "Rise up and walk!" bursts Brent. He reels off the whole story in three-month-old details I've long forgotten.

Some nights an hour with Brent is too long

for me. Let him out of sight and he'll tear up the room. And then I wonder why I keep coming back each Thursday night. Take the night he came with a little New Testament his sister had given him. He proceeded to shred the cover into tiny bits and throw them on the floor. None of my cajoling persuaded him to leave the Testament intact. That night he had to destroy. He thoroughly enjoyed both his destruction and my frustration.

Some nights he astounds me. "Where's Peter in my little Bible?" he asks, flipping through his now coverless New Testament. "Hey, here's a P. P-a-u—No, that's not Peter. That's Paul!" His smudgy face lights up. I share his joy. He's learning to read! A minute later he's tearing out the page and wadding it up.

I don't really understand Brent very well. But we are friends. I miss him when he's sick. He misses me when I'm gone some weeks. We're friends. We're members of the body of Christ. Through our love-hate cycles, we've developed a sense of care.

That's what it takes to teach, a bond of care. Care that takes us past the tantrums, past the compulsion to destroy, past the spaghetti sauce on the face.

Professionals remind us sometimes that we all have handicaps. We all struggle somewhere along the line. But that's a simplistic response for a huge challenge. Students with handicaps severe enough to disrupt class present unusual challenges to teacher patience. Teachers don't need to hear again that "we all have handicaps." Teachers need to hear that Christ's love enables us to love the student who grabs the glue and tears the pages and tries the patience.

A grandfatherly pediatrician who taught a course called Organic Causes of Learning Disabilities gave us, all teachers, some very wise advice: "Remember," he said, "when your students do things that irritate you, they're probably giving you another message. There's a deeper cause behind every inappropriate action. Find out what it is."

That sage advice has served me well over the years, and this year again in my weekly meetings with Brent. God's love gives me the patience to look past the annoying actions to see the child God has created, to find the deeper cause for what that child does, to love him through glue and magic-markered hands and spaghetti face, to love him not for what he does but for who he is, a covenant child of God.



Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs in Christian Schools

Steven R. Timmermans

Although the place of special education programs in Christian schools was seldom discussed twenty-five years ago, shifts in attitudes have slowly brought about changes. In addition, the current trend in education promotes inclusion of students with special education needs. Noting the growing role of special education in Christian schools, we can identify the issues facing all Christian school educators.

A Brief History

Special education has a relatively brief chapter in the pages chronicling the history of Reformed, Christian schools. First, separate institutions were established reflecting society's view that the mentally ill and the moderately and severely disabled should be set apart from the community. Elim Christian School in Palos Heights, Illinois, and Children's Retreat at Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, were early pioneers. They developed significant special education programs that were often models for public schools that lagged behind in developing such services. During those early years, however, the more mildly disabled students remained undetected or under-served in Christian school classrooms. Most often there was no bridge between special education developments at these institutions and the general education tasks of the Christian schools. Not only did soci-

etal opinion keep these two purposes separate, but also the organizational culture of the two endeavors was distinctly different. Whereas the institutional approach followed a medical model with professionals in charge, the Christian day school movement was distinctive because of the degree to which parents assumed the responsibility for the vision and the support of their local schools.

An important shift occurred in the late 1970s as parents with children at one of these institutions began to desire the same type of parent-run Christian school for these disabled children as they had for their other children. This goal of a small group of parents must be understood in the broader context of that era, for public opinion had changed significantly since the 1950s. No longer were disabled children placed in institutions for their education. In 1975, U.S. President Gerald Ford signed the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which mandated an appropriate education for children in the United States regardless of disability. Parents wished for their disabled children that which was offered in every public school in the country: an appropriate place for them in the local school.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, a group of parents organized the Christian Learning Center for moderately disabled students and housed the school in the same building as a

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regular Christian school. Although the entry of these students into a regular Christian school environment was revolutionary, what happened next was even more significant. Having Christian special education teachers and regular education teachers in the same system—even the same building—served to shrink the gap between Christian special education for the moderately disabled and the special needs of students in regular Christian school classrooms. Although the original intent of the Christian Learning Center was to serve only the moderately disabled, by its second year, the Christian Learning Center had hired two resource room teachers to serve the special needs of students in regular Christian school classrooms.

At nearly the same time, Calvin College began offering the learning disability endorsement, first to undergraduates and then to graduate students. The birth of the field of learning disabilities in the '60s provided these specially trained teachers the methods and materials for instruction. Corrine Kass, who developed the learning disabilities program at Calvin College, was an early leader in the field, having been the first learning disabilities specialist at the U.S. Office of Education in the mid-1960s.

These two independent developments, the Christian Learning Center and Calvin College's learning disability endorsement, were significant, yet there were other key factors as well. Christian school teachers across North America became increasingly more aware of atypical learners in their classrooms as a result of increased services in public education and by means of exposure to graduate education that had suddenly begun to offer a variety of programs in areas of exceptionality. Parents, too, contributed to this heightened awareness, for in every community, services were now available in public school classrooms and resource rooms.

It is the exception to find a CSI (Christian

Schools International) school today that has not addressed the needs of students with learning disabilities or similar problems in its program, either by means of added staff (resource teachers or reading teachers) or program supplements (volunteer aides). In a way similar to the Christian Learning Center in western Michigan, Elim has begun to assist Chicago-area Christian schools with special education needs. But the story does not end here.

A second shift in public opinion has occurred since the mid 1980s: the Regular Education Initiative (REI) was introduced in 1986 by Madeleine Will, then Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education, U.S. Department of Education. As the parent of a child with Down Syndrome who had greatly benefited from mandatory public special education, Ms. Will lost confidence with the special education system as her son moved into adulthood. Despite years of special education, her son failed to find employment. She concluded that the separate and segregated nature of the special education system had failed to prepare her son for inclusion and participation in the real world. The REI suggested that the categorical and separate nature of special education programs created two educational systems: special education and general (or regular) education. Believing that such duality allows general education to abdicate responsibility for disabled children, the REI seeks to abolish the dual system and give general education the responsibility for the education of disabled children.

What does it mean to give the responsibility for the education of disabled children to general education? Most often, it means that the disabled child with moderate (and sometimes, with severe) obstacles to his or her learning is placed in a regular classroom. The regular education teacher is responsible for planning his or her education. Sometimes the regular education teacher has a special edu-

cation teacher who provides consultation—advice on how to include the exceptional child in the teaching-learning activities of the classroom. Other models provide for the regular education teacher and special education teacher to co-teach. In some classrooms, for example, nearly forty children (a minority of whom have special education diagnoses) are co-taught by a regular education and a special education teacher. Still other models arrange for the disabled child to be “pulled out” for direct instruction from a special education teacher.

Many Christian and Catholic schools have adopted the REI, more often identified as “inclusive education.” Such ready adoption is due, in part, to the philosophy of education behind inclusive education. Other factors, however, may contribute to its acceptance as well.

Inclusive Education: Beliefs and Assumptions

One group of Christian schools has presented the case for inclusive education in this way:

Expanding our vision of Christian education to include more diverse services to special needs students does not require a new philosophy. The very reasons which have always been used to establish support for Christian education also provide sound justification for Christian Special Education. The mission we have identified for our Christian School is inclusive. All covenant children must be given the opportunity to benefit from appropriate Christian education services (Berends, 1989).

Thus, the mission of Christian schooling is best understood as a calling—most often written without mention or identification of types of students for whom the intended mission is not applicable. Inclusive educa-

tion, then, is a call to accountability: if children's education from a Christian perspective is necessary and important, we should assume that to be true for all children. That is the belief of many.

We would do this issue a disservice, however, if we were to accept this belief without careful examination. It may be possible with only modest program expansion to address the special educational needs of the learning disabled student with average to above average intellectual ability in a Christian school. But then consider the multiply-handicapped child dependent upon a ventilator for breathing and a tube for eating: it seems nearly impossible for a Christian school to address this student's needs. However, before identifying the spot on the continuum of disability to which the Christian school mission extends but does not go beyond, we must realize that beliefs cannot be arbitrarily separated from practices. Services that we *ought* to include should not be immediately ignored because of our perceived inability to meet such needs. So the next question is, to what degree do our beliefs match our ability to provide appropriate education services? Here we must examine our assumptions.

As I encounter various educational enterprises that claim to provide inclusive education, I am struck with three assumptions common to all three inclusion models. First, all assume that regular education students benefit from inclusion as well as do special-needs and learning-disabled students. Second, all assume that the regular education milieu is beneficial to some degree for all disabled students. Finally, related most closely with the REI original impetus, all assume the long-range benefit of inclusion is for ultimate greater societal participation for the disabled individual.

In a fourth area, however, there are differing assumptions. Two of the models, consultation and co-teaching, suggest that the dis-

abled student can learn in the regular classroom at all times—if sometimes minor and sometimes significant adjustments are made to the curriculum and instruction of the regular classroom. For pull-out programs, however, the assumption is that opportunities for learning are also necessary outside of the regular classroom; moreover, the special teacher is given the responsibility for this instructional time. In other words, some maintain that the pedagogy of the regular classroom can be sufficiently modified to be fully inclusionary; others suggest that regular classroom instruction must be supplemented with an alternative pedagogy. With such differences of opinion, one wonders whether pedagogy within the regular classroom is sufficiently pliable and malleable for a disabled student (both for the learning disabled as well as for the moderately disabled, physically or cognitively). Is this a case where our philosophy of education has led us to inclusionary practices before we have been able to respond with appropriate pedagogical innovation?

Pedagogical Factors

Regardless of the model of inclusion used, the regular classroom teacher must extend his or her pedagogy to include the disabled student. Because pedagogy is related directly to learning theory, we must examine whether our theoretical assumptions about learning are capable of addressing a wide range of learning styles.

Fundamentally, learning is knowledge construction. Children and young people, as learners, are more than sponges. As teachers, we are doing more than passing on great stores of information for our students to acquire. Rather, learning is a constructive activity in which the teacher is dynamically involved. The learner builds upon an existing knowledge base as the teacher helps scaffold the learning experience in such a way to make meaningful bridges and connections in the student's learning processes. As the learn-

er grows and develops, the teacher prompts the development of metacognitive skills, so that the learner actively monitors his or her learning state ("Did I understand what the teacher just said?" or "What can I conclude from this experiment?") and takes necessary action when the results of self-monitoring indicate trouble ("I need to re-read this section, because I don't understand," or "I'll ask the teacher about this last step, which didn't turn out the way I expected"). In the Christian classroom, the ultimate goal is for learners to understand that God is the author of truth and, in response, they should live responsibly using their knowledge and skills to honor God and contribute to God's establishment of peace and justice.

We must ask whether the inclusion of disabled students in the regular classroom allows us to continue to rely upon this same mechanism in service of the main goal of Christian education. Do educable mentally impaired seventh graders come to social studies with a range of background knowledge similar to other learners in the class? Do learning-disabled fifth graders with reading disabilities monitor their reading comprehension in a way other fifth grade students are beginning to monitor? Do students in wheelchairs learn in ways different from their "normal" peers?

A realistic assessment suggests there are significant differences in knowledge bases and metacognitive skills among some of these learners. As a result, trainable mentally impaired students and many learning-disabled students learn differently from so-called "normal" students whereas some physically-disabled students without cognitive deficits do not. Thus, the inclusion of the atypical learner in the classroom expands the range of student differences with respect to background knowledge and metacognitive skills. The teacher, as a result, has a greater challenge to assist the learning of the group of students and, in particular, the atypical



learner. Helping the atypical learner to build the bridges and construct meaning requires more time, creativity, and individual attention. If the teacher in the regular classroom does not have the necessary time and instructional strategies for addressing a now broader range of background knowledge and metacognitive skills, the atypical learner will not meet the objectives of the teacher's lesson.

In response to this dilemma, some have suggested that the objectives for regular classroom learning must be revised for the atypical learner. For example, if the goal of the second grade lesson is the discovery of compound words, the objective for the atypical learner with significant delays is not the same as, but found within, the class's objective: to identify the initial letter of each word. Although the accommodating nature of this approach is evident, it requires the teacher to engage in an entirely separate lesson within the scope of the main lesson.

Teachers are experts at planning and managing a number of simultaneously occurring activities. Reading groups, centers, and the like have all demonstrated that teachers can have multiple instructional events occurring at the same time in the classroom. However, these examples are subtly different in that they rely upon independent work: the teacher works with only one group at a time. Thus, for our inclusive education example to work, the atypical learner must be capable of independent work for extended periods of time.

This analysis results in three conclusions. First, because of significant differences in the building blocks of learning, alternative instructional strategies are needed for atypical learners in the regular classroom. Second, atypical learners in the regular classroom often require separate (but possibly linked) teaching objectives. And third, managing the differing learning needs of atypical learners in the regular classroom requires a mode of teaching that utilizes independent work on the part of all students—including atypical learners.

Every Christian school should be asking for which students its mission is directed. However, before concluding that the mission extends to all, teachers and parents should carefully assess their abilities and resources to provide alternative instructional strategies, separate teaching objectives, and appropriate modes of teaching. If the expertise is available, then atypical learners ought to be included. Which types of atypical learners should be included depends upon the available expertise—expertise not only of the specialized personnel, but also of the regular classroom teacher. Then, the model of inclusion should be selected based on the careful analysis of ways to meet the three necessary components. It is absolutely essential, however, to address these three components related to pedagogy before blindly instituting an inclusionary program based only upon commitment to a perceived mission of serving all of God's children.

If this current trend of inclusion is to truly

expand the traditional Christian school mission, our pedagogy must be adequate for the challenge. But if classroom teachers are ill-equipped to provide alternative instructional strategies, to plan a separate set of objectives, and to arrange for a classroom structure by which to juggle the learning needs of this greater variety of learners, then atypical learners will not be successfully integrated into the school; moreover, the pendulum will swing back to a more exclusionary form of Christian education.

ENDNOTE

* A recent reauthorization has given this act a new title: Individuals with Disabilities Act.

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Are Students and Teachers At Risk?

Kenneth A. Pudlas

Risk

A love for children is one reason often given for entering the teaching profession. I hope this is a motivation of all teachers, along with a desire to enable all students to reach their full potential. In Scripture we are told of the importance of children (Matt 18:5,10). Scripture also tells us that those who seem weaker are indispensable (I Corinthians 12:14-26). The term "exceptional" is commonly used to refer to students who, because of mental, physical, sensory, or emotional differences from the norm, need special educational adaptations in order to meet their full potential. Referring to those considered weaker, Helen Keller suggested that it is not enough to give the handicapped life; they must be given a life worth living. One means to that end is through an appropriate education.

Teachers in regular classrooms, both in public and private schools, are increasingly likely to encounter students with special needs. The potential alienation and rejection faced by these students, as suggested by Van Dyk (1991), is not confined to public school students; nor are the risks confined to students.

Background

Integration of exceptional students into regular classrooms gained impetus in America during the egalitarianism of the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in legislation that promised to all students a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This became known popularly as "mainstreaming." A variation known as the

Regular Education Initiative (REI) later gained popularity in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The term "inclusive education" or simply "inclusion" is used currently to describe the philosophy wherein all students are educated together, regardless of any handicapping conditions or special needs they may have.

There are several assumptions underlying this approach. One is that students with special needs will learn more effectively if they are integrated throughout the entire school day. A second assumption is that the special needs students for whom, historically, these approaches were intended (those with mild mental handicaps or learning disabilities) are not sufficiently unique to justify specialized educational intervention. There is also an implicit assumption that all concerned will benefit from the social integration that is expected to occur. Failure to examine the validity of these underlying assumptions and to assess the effectiveness of programs can lead to failure.

In the intervening decades since the integration movement began, progress was made in providing support for both regular and special class teachers and exceptional students. In fact, special education became a valid field of study and a professional major in many university teacher-education programs. The needs of exceptional students were identified, and schools were able to employ these specialists as necessary. Thus, some educators react with justifiable alarm at the apparent trend to homogenize the school population, especially in the absence

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of adequate support services.

Some evidence suggests that the concept of universal mainstreaming lends itself to greater potential abuse than does a categorical approach (Kronick 1989, 6). It would appear that special needs students fare no better in a number of Christian schools, as indicated by the results of a study of Association of Christian Schools International and American Association of Christian Schools by Sutton, Sutton, and Everett (1993). Their data indicate that less than six percent of these schools were operating a special education program, and that those few teachers who were involved in special education were often the least experienced and least qualified (72). If anyone ought to be in the forefront in meeting the special needs of exceptional students, it should be Christian teachers, those who are guided by a biblical mandate rather than merely by public laws and policies.

Thus despite the apparent defensibility of this approach or ideology, it may put both students and teachers at risk of failure (real or perceived). Christian schools should not, in following the approaches adopted by public schools, at the same time replicate their errors.

Potential Risk Factors

To illustrate the risks, an excerpt from a letter written by the mother of a teenager follows:

He was the happiest, most well-adjusted toddler and preschooler that any mother could wish for. We were told by the specialist when he was eighteen months old that there would be many things that he would never be able to do because he had cerebral palsy. Not so! He accomplished everything they said was impossible without fear, tension, or stress before he started school. . . . [I]t was mostly his fine motor movements and speech that were affected.

"Bob" started school as a well-adjusted child and was mainstreamed into kindergarten. It was not long before Bob's teacher informed us that his speech was not good enough for regular class and he was segregated into a class at a school many miles

from home which dealt with children with speech problems. *This was after she failed him.*

He stayed in segregated classes until grade four, by which time he had been taught to speak clearly, was up-to-date on all school work, and was very excited about going back to a regular class. What a shock he was in for! . . . He was the butt of every cruel and vindictive child in elementary school. . . . He was on the outside looking in. . . . His nose was flicked by those same peers over several months, during class and play, until the side of his nose split from his face. His teachers never saw any of this. They were too busy. He begged me not to say anything as if, had he or I said something, he would be hurt more or nobody would like him. . . .

Bob never became a behavior problem at school. His frustrations were bottled up until he got home from school, and then he would explode. . . . I love my son dearly, but if the need arose I would never put another child through the misery he has endured. *Mainstreaming may be the answer, but it destroyed the love and laughter in my little boy's face* (emphases added).

Granted, as the empirical purist would quickly point out, this is only one anecdotal report. It is, nevertheless, an actual case, and it does illustrate two important areas of risk: (1) students' risk of peer rejection, and (2) the risk of regular class teachers' inefficacy.

Just what is the nature and purpose of special education? As Christian educators, ought our biblical world view affect the nature of the educational experience we offer? Are we losing sight of the original goals in an attempt to "do the right thing?" An illustration may offer insight:

Once two hunters drove down a country road in northern British Columbia in search of moose. They parked their truck at the side of the road, hiked a few hundred yards into the bush, and . . . BANG!

Although they claimed to be interested only in securing meat for their families, this particular animal did have trophy-sized antlers. As darkness was approaching, each

hunter grasped one side of the antlers and began pulling the recently-deceased toward the road. The thick underbrush caught the out-turned antlers and impeded progress. One of the hunters (an educator) turned to the other and suggested that they would have an easier time of it if they dragged the animal by its hind legs. This proved to be a much easier way, and after some time, the teacher turned to his companion and said, "Now, isn't this much easier?", to which his companion replied, "Yes, but aren't we getting kind of far away from the truck?"

The application? Quite obviously, in taking an apparently easier approach, the hunters had lost sight of their goal. It is possible that in adopting a particular approach (inclusion, for example), teachers and administrators may lose sight of the goal of special education: the removal of barriers that prevent exceptional students from reaching their full potential.

Regular classroom teachers, neophytes in special education, may unwittingly place students such as Bob at risk. Why? Because they may be unfamiliar with the unique needs of such students, yet be forced to accept such students because of administrative decisions. Thus a teacher's sense of professional competence may be threatened, and at the same time, students may feel trapped in a situation over which they have no control.

Self-Esteem Index

Within some Christian circles, self-esteem is a somewhat controversial subject (see, for example, Joose 1990), with some people suggesting that it is a product of a secular humanistic world view. One of the goals of education, however, is to have students develop a healthy sense of self. Teachers also need to feel positive about their efforts. The relationship between these goals and the success in attaining them can be illustrated in the following manner:

SE=Success/Aspirations

Here, self-esteem (SE) is seen as part of a mathematical equation. The desired result is one, or 100 percent, thus requiring a balance between success and aspirations. Using literature on self-esteem as a basis (e.g., Coopersmith 1967) we can note the poten-

tial risks of full inclusion of special needs students. We identify four interrelated factors as the aspirations: power, significance, competence, and worth. The experiences of both teacher and student in an inclusive setting affect each factor.

Power refers to an ability to control one's environment in a mature and appropriate fashion. It is important that both the teacher and the special needs student have a sense of having participated in the decision regarding class placement. This is not likely to happen when a particular approach (such as full inclusion or integration) is adopted without consultation.

Significance refers to a sense of being valued for being alive, a significant member of the group. The experience of Bob, cited previously, indicated that he was not a valued member of the peer group. Teachers, too, may see themselves as powerless to help special-needs students, and thus may feel insignificant in the life of the students or their families.

Competence refers to the ability to perform competently in areas that are important to the individual and society. For a special-needs student who does not have adequate support, that sense of competence may be all too rare. When faced with the reality of a student who requires a significant amount of extra attention, the sense of competence on the part of the teacher might project a disinviting attitude (Purkey 1984), thus compounding the problem. Further, in order to avoid a sense of failure, the regular class teacher without adequate support is more likely to refer the exceptional pupil for help elsewhere.

Worth refers to the ability to live according to the rules of society and to do so flexibly. Society ascribes certain roles to individuals. When those expectations are not fulfilled, sanctions are imposed, and in extreme cases individuals are removed from society at large. The desire to live within the rules (loyalty to the peer group for example) was so great that Bob endured abuse rather than inform against his fellow students or resort to violence at school. In many instances, special-needs students may not even know the rules of the micro-society of the school, and

so are castigated by their peers. Such students may also be labeled by teachers as "behavior problems," and action appropriate to this or some other label taken. As for teachers, with the imposition of inclusion, "for some, it clearly may be an issue of feeling threatened or losing an established identity" (Davis 1989, 443).

Minimizing Risk and Preventing Failure

How, then, can real or perceived failure be prevented? Several suggestions follow.

First, educators need to be aware of the well-documented effects of teacher expectations on student achievement (see Good & Brophy 1987; Alderman 1990). Confidence and determination are key teacher attitudes. Teachers who can combine a high sense of their own efficacy with realistic expectations of their students' abilities will be most successful in teaching special-needs students. Thus proper pre- and in-service education in exceptionalities is essential for two reasons. First, it is an important means whereby teachers can gain confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their students. Second, it enables teachers to gain knowledge of the capabilities of special-needs students, and thereby set realistic and achievable objectives. After all, if special education is about removing barriers, teachers must know what those barriers are.

Further evidence of the importance of adequate support for teachers comes from research that shows there is a relationship between teachers' effectiveness and their tolerance for handicapped students (Gersten, Walker, and Darch 1988). They suggest that "if the necessary technical assistance could be provided on how to implement teaching models that are effective for all students, it is likely these skilled teachers with high standards would be the first to accept handicapped students into their classrooms" (437). In other words, the best teachers would be willing to accept special needs students if adequate support were available.

But what about Bob? He, too, needs to experience power, significance, competence, and worth. Canfield (1990) suggests some of the means by which this can be achieved: assuming responsibility for his present situa-

tion and changing those aspects over which he has some control, recognizing or developing areas in which he can be successful (perhaps in extracurricular activities), using support groups in the classroom to help overcome the sense of alienation, and identifying strengths and resources. Many of these suggestions fit well within the framework of what a Christian school ought to be offering. Houk (1991) provides some additional suggestions, specifically for boosting teen self-esteem, that can be applied to special-needs students.

Educators in both public and Christian schools must bear in mind that the unique benefit of placement in a regular class lies in the potential for social integration. One-on-one tutoring is most effective for academics, and would be more closely approximated in a smaller special class placement. Thus one measure of successful inclusion would be assimilation and acceptance by peers. This is certainly consistent with biblical teaching regarding love and acceptance. As a practical step, teachers who are attempting to integrate special-needs students may need to include social skills training in their curricula, to enable all their students to "live within the rules of society." In any case, mere physical proximity is not enough to ensure integration.

Christian teachers have a unique opportunity to help children learn that God values all human life. Formed in his image, we all have inherent worth. Christian schools, operating under scriptural principles, ought to be providing for the needs of *all* their students, thereby obeying the injunction against partiality (1 Timothy 5:21).

The task may seem overwhelming. The life of the Old Testament prophet Nehemiah, who also faced a daunting task (he was to rebuild the wall around a city), may offer some encouragement in the form of four principles he applied in fulfilling his assignment. First, he obtained administrative support. Teachers must be able to communicate their needs and concerns candidly with supportive principals and school boards. Second, Nehemiah did a thorough needs assessment; he surveyed the ruins to determine the scope of the task. Teachers need to

have a thorough assessment of the abilities and needs of their exceptional students in order to set realistic expectations. Third, Nehemiah obtained the necessary supplies. Teachers of special-needs students must have access to the appropriate materials and resources for them. Fourth and perhaps most important, Nehemiah did not single-handedly attempt to do the job

(see Nehemiah 3); each section of the wall was completed by a particular group. Teachers of students with special needs must make use of the professional and paraprofessional personnel available.

Teachers are certainly faced with an increasingly daunting task. The likelihood of having one or more students with identified exceptional needs could be per-

ceived as just one more onerous burden. However, given the necessary support, and recognizing the importance of cooperative effort, concerned teachers can help ensure that all students, including those with special needs have a sense of significance, are enabled to discover their gifts, and reach their full potential.

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Challenges and Opportunities

Special Education in Christian Schools

Holly and Rick Eigenbrood

Since the initial passage of federal legislation in 1975 guaranteeing the provision of education for students with disabilities, there has been a tremendous growth of special education in U.S. public schools. Provincial legislation has stimulated similar special education growth in Canada. Though Christian schools are generally not required by law to provide special education services, many Christian schools have established special education programs to some degree. These programs run the gamut from very limited resource rooms or learning assistance programs for students with mild learning disabilities to comprehensive programs that include special education services for students with even the most significant disabilities. A number of Christian schools, however, provide little, if any, special education, although they seriously struggle with how they might provide such services.

Special education in Christian schools offers both unique challenges and opportunities for Christian schools. The unique challenges exist because special education is expensive. While public schools do receive extra federal and state money, Christian schools generally are ineligible for extra funds. Additionally, Christian schools have less accessibility to support services such as school psychologists, speech technicians, and physical therapists. In spite of these challenges, many Christian schools, both large and small, have made a commitment to provide special education services to students with special needs.

As Christian schools move into this area, they have the opportunity to be unique and distinctive in the way they structure special education services. It may be tempting for

them to model the public school's system of structuring and delivering of special education, but doing so would be wrong for two reasons. First, the current system of special education in public schools, though strong in many ways, has been severely criticized for a number of weaknesses. Examples include categorical labeling for eligibility, excessive paper work that interferes with instructional time, overuse of standardized assessment that is irrelevant to instruction, and an overemphasis on pull-out programs. Second, special education in public schools is inconsistent with a Christian view of the child and the school community. Special education has a tendency to marginalize students by labeling them, placing them in segregated programs, and operating in a way that discourages collaboration between regular and special education. It has fostered an "our student"/"their student" mentality—students receiving special education are referred to as "special education students," not just students. Even when those students spend a large part of the day in regular education, the labels they receive and their identification with a specific program cause them to be viewed as mainstream guests, not part of the regular school community.

Because Christian schools are not required to follow the same regulations and provisions as public schools, they can recognize the strengths but avoid the shortcomings of public school programs. They have a unique opportunity to structure special education in a way that is consistent with a Christian view of the child and the school community. Special education in Christian schools should allow each child to participate as a full member of the school commu-

nity while using his or her unique gifts to respond to God's call to investigate and learn about creation.

Eliminating labels

Most public schools label students according to one of thirteen or more disability categories (e.g., learning disabled or mentally retarded) in order to receive special education services. However, educational needs, rather than labels, should determine the type of special education a student receives. For example, it is much more instructionally relevant that a student with comprehension difficulties can decode at grade level than that he or she qualifies for the label of learning disabled. Labels do not inform instruction. In fact, they have a tendency to further marginalize students.

Instructionally relevant assessment

Much assessment in special education in the public sector is geared toward determining whether or not a student is eligible for special education under a specific disability category. This type of assessment is very expensive and very time consuming. Unfortunately, it is also unnecessary and often irrelevant to instruction. Assessment should emphasize an instructionally relevant problem-solving approach that identifies 1) specific areas of difficulty, 2) educational goals, 3) possible instructional approaches, and 4) student progress. Traditional special education assessment has focused on how the student is different, while a problem-solving approach focuses on relevant curriculum and instructional issues.

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A fourth grader, not a special education student

Students with special education needs should be part of the general education school community. Every effort should be made to educate students with their same-age peers, that is the same group of students they would be educated with if they did not need special education. All students should generally start the day together in a regular class or homeroom. There should be no special education homerooms or study halls. Students should attend the same school building they would attend if they were not in need of special education. Students should be segregated from their peers only when they need services or instruction that cannot be provided in the regular classroom. The student is first of all a student who belongs to a school community. The fact that he or she receives special education services is secondary.

Pull-out as a last resort

While removing a student with special needs from the regular classroom to provide specialized or supplemental instruction will always be a necessary characteristic of special education, it should be a last resort. Whenever possible it is better to modify instruction in the regular class so that the student can continue to be part of that class. Such modifications may include reduced requirements, peer tutoring, visual or auditory aides, and curriculum modification. It may even be necessary for the teacher to consider a completely alternative set of teaching behaviors that benefit children with a wide variety of learning abilities and styles.

A special education teacher can often serve a student with special needs more by helping and supporting classroom modification than by pulling the child out for supplemental alternative instruction. There are, however, clear examples of situations where pull-out is appropriate and advisable. Examples include speech therapy, physical therapy, functional curriculum for students with

severe disabilities, reading instruction for students with severe reading difficulties, and counseling.

Fostering understanding and community inclusion

Students with disabilities may need support to help them learn to function as fully-included members of the school community. Research has consistently shown that simply having a student with disabilities in the same physical setting does not necessarily lead to community inclusion. However, such inclusion can be fostered through an accepting instructional climate in a classroom or school and through the use of specific support activities. For example, in a classroom where cooperation is emphasized, classmates are much better at accepting an individual student with a disability. Support programs such as "circle of friends" and "peer tutoring" have also been effective for fostering acceptance and community inclusion. Circle of friends is a support group made up of four or five of the student's peers. The group meets regularly under the guidance of a facilitator to help the student solve social problems, learn appropriate social skills, and develop true friendships in and out of school. Peer tutoring involves using either same-age or across-grade peers to help the student academically. Paired spelling practice, oral reading together, exchanging math fact flashcards, or quizzing one another for tests are a few ways of incorporating peer tutoring in the classroom.

Special education is one of the true blessings in Christian schools. It has been a joyful gift for many students, parents, and teachers. But because of the cost it has also been a financial challenge that requires schools and their supporting communities to make significant sacrifices. However, if the Christian community truly believes that all of God's covenant children should have the opportunity of a Christian education, the

added expense of providing special education for some can no longer be viewed as optional. Including students with disabilities in the Christian school community is a wonderful opportunity for everyone within that community to learn to accept and appreciate individuals with disabilities, as well as the diverseness of people in God's world.

It is important that the opportunities are not missed and that the school committed to providing special education services also works hard to make Christian school special education truly distinctive and symbolic for what we believe a Christian school should really be—a Christian community of learners.



FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

Inclusive Education

Bill Van Dyk and Barb Newman

Bill Van Dyk is principal and Barb Newman a teacher at Zeeland Christian School in Zeeland, Michigan.

Zeeland Christian School is a different place from what it was five years ago. A major factor in this change has been "inclusive education." It emphasizes the idea that all children have a right to belong. Specifically, it asserts that mentally, emotionally, and physically impaired children can learn how to be children better from children in regular education than from adults or other students in special education. At Zeeland Christian, we have "included" eighteen students with special needs in preschool through eighth grade. Two students have graduated from this program and moved on to Holland Christian High School. The students in this program have needs that range from Down Syndrome to being autistic, medically fragile, or more mildly impaired. We run the program in cooperation with the Christian Learning Center, which is located in Grand Rapids. The Christian Learning Center provides expertise in the areas of staff development and special-needs education.

The program in Ottawa county began at Zeeland Christian School because of its central location and a K-8 program that was housed in one building. Like most good marriages, inclusive education began with a commitment, has had a few minor problems, and is now firmly established. Most of the early problems involved defining the roles of Zeeland Christian and the Christian Learning Center so that the relationship was a harmonious and productive one. When the program began in 1989, it worked so well that Jenison Christian, Holland Christian, and several schools in the Grand Rapids Christian school system have begun similar programs.

In the inclusive education program, the regular education teacher provides the social home base for the child with special needs. Then the special education teacher works with the parents, other specialty teachers, and the regular education teacher to develop a plan specifically geared to the needs of each student with special needs. Once this plan is in place, it is implemented through the cooperative efforts of the students,

Chris



the regular education teachers, and the special education teacher. Students with special needs are included in the program based on their abilities. In general, students with special needs are included in regular education about 70 percent of the day. We presently have five students with impairments in a full inclusion program, spending 100 percent of the day in the regular education classroom.

Take Chris, for example. Chris joined our program this year from a public school setting in New Mexico. He came to our doors complete with a big smile, a feeding tube, diapers, and some cognitive and language delays. In Michigan Chris is labeled SXI (Severely Multiply Impaired). After getting to know Chris, we placed this five-year-old child in one of our preschool classes, which meets four mornings a week. Mrs. Borgman, his teacher, takes responsibility for Chris and his social learning. He completes all of the activities to the best of his ability, and the other children know him as a friend and classmate. The special education support staff initially took care of the tube feeding and toileting concerns, but Mrs. Borgman has gradually incorporated some of this into her day as well. She is excited to serve Chris and said, "If I am teaching kindergarten next year, I would really like to have Chris in my room. He has come so far. I have really enjoyed having him in class."

After his friends go home at noon, Chris spends the rest of his day in a special education classroom that focuses on his individual needs. These needs are determined through a joint planning process with regular and special education staff, public school therapists,

district consultants, and parents. The special education teacher at Zeeland Christian serves as his primary planner and case manager, but each person is responsible for Chris in a different way. In the special education room, Chris receives academic, motor, and self-help instruction. As Chris progresses through the grades, the team will decide how much of the day he will spend in regular education and how much time he will spend in the special education room. In most cases, children receive alternative instruction during part of the regular education reading and most of math. In all cases, however, the child understands that he or she is fully "owned" by the general education classroom.

In addition to his preschool friends, Chris has two other circles of friends. He has difficulty walking outdoors, so several fourth grade students have been part of his life. If they are late for any reason, Chris says, "Where me friends?" As Chris gets older, his circle of friends will be more limited to those in his classroom. With preschool as a part-time program, others have stepped in to fill that role.

Chris also has ten middle school students who have committed to doing his noon tube feeding. They come two at a time, eat in a special education classroom, glove up, and enjoy the daily ritual. Chris is very popular at school. His sixth grade friend Brigit says, "Chris is very enthusiastic and funny. He gets to know you very well. Next year, if I was asked to do it again, I would be glad to do it."

The miracles God has done in his life are amazing. God has used this inclusive program to help Chris grow by eating pureed

foods, getting rid of the diapers, learning some number and letter concepts, understanding that Jesus lives in his heart, realizing that Zeeland Christian is his school, and knowing that he is just as much a part of Christ's body as his preschool friends. His parents attest to the new program in the home-school notebook. "We are so impressed with Zeeland Christian and with the CLC. . . We thank God for the remarkable progress Chris has made and will continue to make!"

Christian schools with inclusive education programs are leading the way for public schools. Most public schools that have talked about inclusiveness accept its premise but have been unable to implement a program to the extent that Christian schools in western Michigan have. Inclusive education is a program that is easily exported.

The most exciting aspect of inclusive education is that while students such as Chris are being blessed, they are also blessing others. Brigit learned to tube feed someone. Chris's preschool class learned to accept and love someone with physical, language, and learning challenges. His teachers have been convinced that God continues to do miracles. His parents have been enfolded into a loving community. Most important, the Zeeland community has had an opportunity to function as God commands in I Corinthians 12. In doing so, they have created a community that exemplifies the vision Christ has for his body—with a sense of unity and belonging.

Size Doesn't Fit All

Sharon Clousing

Sharon Clousing is Director of Children's Services at Elim Christian School in Palos Heights, Illinois.

Employed as a public school psychologist for eight years, I had opportunity to influence special education placements for classified students. My graduate school program emphasized policies to include all students in their neighborhood schools, out of the philosophy that all students had the right to attend school with their brothers and sisters.

In the spring of 1988 I accepted an administrative position at Elim Christian School, which is a separate facility for special education students. I was surprised at how happy the children were at Elim, and I found myself wondering why they seemed happy at school when they were not included in their local schools.

Wanting a meaningful research topic for my doctoral dissertation, I decided to examine the components that make special education placements beneficial. Interviewing parents of children who had been in both integrated and separate educational settings, I began to analyze their reasons for choosing one setting over another.

A main theme emerged regarding their choice of separate educational settings. This theme focused around friendships their children were able to develop.

Families felt that their special education child had meaningful friendships in the separate educational setting, sometimes for the first time in their school experience. They spoke about these friendships in specific detail, telling about phone calls going back and forth, and visits or invitations that were

real rather than token. These "equal" friendships gave their child joy and increased socialization and self-confidence. Having a group of peers who were cognitively similar stimulated friendships based on mutuality rather than on artificial supports.

Mutuality

The concept of mutuality fit with the social reference theories researched and reported in 1954 by L. Festinger. He found that people want to be with other people who are cognitively similar and that cognitive ability was the best predictor of mutuality, followed by values, interests, and goals. Festinger also found that as the distance in cognitive abilities increases, the interactions decrease. His findings led me to understand why special education students were happy and participated well in school life at Elim, even though it was a separate educational placement. I also began to realize that sufficient mutuality in relationships is necessary for any human to thrive. We all want to belong, we all want to fit in, we all seek groups in which we are comfortable and in which interactions and conversations go smoothly.

Walter Wangerin, Jr., writes in *As for Me and My House*, "Personal meaning and human value arise only in relationship. Solitude casts doubt on them. Identity, too, is discovered only in relationship. Lacking companions at the level of the soul, I finally cannot find my soul. It always takes another person to show myself to me. Alone, I die" (58).



So, the human being creates himself or herself through a comparative process, a web of relationships, and lives through social attachments. Through caring and connecting we live and achieve and create, becoming more fully human.

As necessary as mutuality seems to be, I also find that it cannot be willed. It is a connecting of two humans based on sufficient sameness, and when the base is not present it will not evolve. Many special educators are now advocating social skills training, hoping this training will help the special education students to fit in when they are included in regular education settings. However, they have found that when the artificial supports are faded, interactions diminish. Loneliness hurts. There is enormous difference between being allowed to be with peers and being appreciated by peers.

One mother who had fought to have her daughter, who is handicapped, included in a regular education setting, was advised by the school psychologist to shadow her daughter for a day. She writes, "I stood behind a tree at recess and watched Suzy standing alone. There was a group of girls on each side of her, in front of her, and behind her. How desperately she struggled to maintain her dignity by keeping her head high and to appear as though she were just 'hanging out, too.' Her designated buddies ran by and offered a rather contrived wave or pat on the shoulder. You see, they are children themselves, and at this age their own social status must be a priority. It must not be compromised by becoming too friendly with Suzy."

Why couldn't the designated friends be more friendly with Suzy? Had this not been set up in the school so that these designated friends for the special education students were admired? Would the rest of their friends assume they were similar to Suzy if they spent too much time with her? Do we define others and ourselves by the people with whom there is close and frequent association? The answers are quite obvious. We are most frequently with and most comfortable with those who are very similar to ourselves. We must know how important these

mutual relationships are because we are quite clever at finding similar others and nurturing relationships with them. As we get older and more independent, our world becomes larger; we become even more selective then, and relationships mirror ourselves even more closely.

Much inclusion research and many initial inclusion programs are started with the youngest students. For the youngest students the discrepancy in abilities and skills is not yet great. However, as students age, become more independent, and choose their own groups, the discrepancy in abilities and skills determines choices in friends. Older students choose similar others, with cognitive ability being the single best predictor of whether a relationship will evolve or die. Reciprocity in relationships and in interactions is important because then both parties benefit and the relationship will maintain over time. Since all humans depend on a web of relationships to develop and thrive, it is necessary that relationships have a natural basis for existing and do not depend on artificial supports.

Research gives voice to those who are struggling to be heard. Family after family whose children first were included in regular classrooms and now are at Elim spoke about how their children are thriving and feeling good about themselves. Since the self-concept is mediated by a comparative process, individuals with mental retardation who have increased contact with others not like themselves, and hence make social comparisons with them, often have lower self-esteem than do those with fewer contacts. Students at Elim are finally able to feel good about themselves because all of the students are cognitively similar to their own levels. They can participate, rather than only observe. They can be themselves without constant fear of judgment. They belong and thrive.

Ideology

Polarities in our social institutions need to absorb each other sufficiently to achieve balance and harmony. The welfare of the student must be our guide. Philosophies, policies, and ideas can guide, but do not have to

dictate. A principle too rigorously and exclusively applied will be diminished by pressure from its opposite assumption.

Balance on the continuum between extremes is a worthy goal. We cannot place philosophy above people, or the individual needs of a special education student above the needs of the rest of the class. Rather we must focus on the needs of children, understanding what is necessary for relationships to evolve. Without mutual relationships, a child shuts down. With reciprocal relationships a child, any child, can thrive.

Certainly, our Christian schools teach our children how to live together. However, diversity is not lacking. The better basketball players make the varsity team, and the best are the starting five.

"Love one another," Christ commanded. To love requires emotional strength, and one building block toward that strength is a healthy self-concept. Mutual friendships with reciprocity strengthen each of us. Equity in social networking is necessary for anyone to survive, and mentally challenged students deserve a supportive setting in which they too can make friends and be a friend while being taught Christ's greatest commandment.

ROOM FOR **GROWTH** IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Pleas from Mothers of Children with Disabilities

Joe P. Sutton

Many Christian educators would agree that the Christian school movement in North America has grown significantly over the last several decades. But has Christian education *really* grown? We can measure growth by the increased numbers of Christian school campuses and students served by Christian education. Another gauge is the extent to which Christian education is made available to *all* students. Perhaps this is where Christian education has missed the mark. There is evidence to suggest that one particular group of students, those with disabilities, are not all being provided Christian education that is commensurate with their unique needs. Recent figures are both alarming and disheartening.

Only 6% of AACCS (American Association of Christian Schools) schools offer special education for students with disabilities (Sutton, Everett, Sutton). The situation is equally bleak in ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International) schools, where only 8% provide special education programming (Sutton). The prospects are brighter in CSI (Christian Schools International) member schools. Glen Walstra, CSI's director of programs and policy, estimates that approximately 50% of the Christian schools in CSI make special education available.

Reasons why Christian schools have generally excluded disabled students vary from ignorance, to misinformation, to lack of finances. The legitimacy of misinformation and ignorance as valid reasons becomes highly questionable when one recognizes the amount of basic information on the needs of disabled students that pervades most professional teacher conferences today. In addition, teachers seeking advanced degrees in many graduate schools across this country are generally required to take at least one introductory course in exceptional children education. If Christian educators are continuing their professional preparation as

they should, they cannot escape the universal appeal to educate disabled children properly.

Similarly, limited financial resources offer a weak excuse at best for not providing special education in Christian schools. Psalm 50:10 makes it clear that our Lord has abundant resources. If we trust the Lord as we ought, exercise careful planning, and make use of creative fund raising, then God will provide the extra monies necessary to financially underwrite small-scale special education programs in our Christian schools.

If the figures reported above are accurate, then what will it take for Christian educators to wake up and recognize their educational responsibility to children with disabilities? Children with disabilities (or potential disabilities) cry out daily in the classroom through their continued poor academic and behavioral performances. Yet the absence of special education programs in Christian schools today suggests that schools are ignoring the cries of these children.

Perhaps it is time that parents voice their concerns. What follows are the testimonies of three mothers. All three make compelling arguments for Christian schools to develop special education programs.

Daniel, Age 10 months, Mentally Retarded

About ten months ago, I gave birth to a baby boy. He is a wonderful little boy. We had no idea when I was pregnant that anything was wrong with him. It was a normal pregnancy, but the baby was born, and the first time I saw him I knew something wasn't right. I thought that he probably had Down Syndrome.

At our church about eight months before Daniel was born, a family had a little boy with Down Syndrome, so I was very familiar with the characteristics. I

knew right away when I saw Daniel's face that something wasn't quite right. He had breathing difficulties, too. At the hospital, I didn't say anything when the doctor first brought him to me. Soon after, though, I made a comment to one of the nurses about one of his features. She didn't say anything back to me. But an hour after he was born a pediatrician came in and told us that Daniel did have Down Syndrome. They would have to test him to be sure. There are three different kinds of Down Syndrome. Daniel has trisomy 21.

About six hours after Daniel was born, he got pneumonia, which complicated matters. One of my first thoughts was that this baby would die, but the Lord was really with Daniel. The Lord had a purpose for Daniel to stay alive, and I knew that the Lord had a purpose for his life.

Daniel's therapist placed him in about the upper 10% of this population of students for muscle tone. Daniel is not very far behind right now—he is in the eightieth percentile based on his present age.

Some people think this experience would be devastating, but it's really wonderful how the Lord works! We think about all the things we read in our devotions, or we just listen to a sermon, thinking how the message applies to our life. The Sunday right before Daniel was born, our pastor preached on prayer. I had gone home not really thinking about its direct application to me, as many of us do sometimes. Daniel was born the next Wednesday. But it was not until Thursday that I realized that I needed to really start praying, that the sermon my pastor had preached the previous Sunday was for me.

I thank the Lord for the ministry of

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my teachers and pastor because it was exactly what I needed in my life at that time. The Lord hasn't closed doors at all. The Lord has instead widened our family's ministry. Already I've met several other parents who have had children with Down Syndrome. Some are older, and some have little babies. In fact, three months ago we found out about a Christian couple who were going to have a baby with Down Syndrome, and we were able to help them and minister to them by showing them our Daniel. I thank the Lord that we were able to minister to that family.

We don't know what the future holds for Daniel, but we know that we will need to trust the Lord for his education. We're very concerned about this. My husband thinks about the distant future and what kind of education will be available for Daniel. We know that, aside from the Lord's working in his life, a big part of Daniel's success will depend on the kind of Christian school special education he will receive.

Scott, Age 6, Learning Disabled

I have a six-year-old little son, a very normal-looking boy. Of course, we have always considered him to be that way in every way. He loves sports and competition. Even a walk down the driveway turns into a race with him! He is very caring and very sensitive toward others. He is very complimentary toward his family. His response to anything I do for him is, "Mommy, I appreciate that." While other children his age don't really notice things like that, Scott does. Socially, Scott is very shy when he comes into contact with someone he doesn't know. He wants to withdraw, and it takes him a while to get to know someone. We have not had Scott in an isolated environment. We have always had him in the public arena.

He has been involved in several educational programs through the years. He went to the 3-year-old preschool two to three days a week. He went to four-year-old preschool every day. About that time we first started noticing that Scott had a problem. He learned more

slowly than other students. We initially thought that it all was going to come together for him and that things would soon click. For many children things do eventually come together and click. With Scott, however, it never happened.

We started having him tutored in the four-year-old preschool. We also had him tutored during the summer after that school year. We continued the tutoring until his kindergarten school year, but we were not getting anywhere. Our oldest son has attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, and so we mentioned Scott's problems to his doctor. He suggested that we have Scott tested.

We followed the doctor's recommendation and found that Scott was at-risk for a learning disability. We also found out that Scott had processing problems. He always struggled when we asked him something. He would say, "I know . . . I know what the answer is . . ." but he couldn't give it to us, so we would just encourage him. Scott also had auditory discrimination skill problems and some visual perception problems. His examiners also told us that Scott was probably experiencing some developmental lag.

At that point, we were relieved to know what was wrong with him. Our concern turned to finding ways to help him. Much prayer went into seeking the right help for Scott. Our Christian school did not have a special education program, and regular tutors we had employed in the past had not helped Scott very much. We finally secured the help of two special education professionals, who worked privately with our son for two hours a week throughout the summer—one hour on his arithmetic skills and the other on reading/writing skills.

Scott's skills increased tremendously during that summer. More than anything, however, Scott learned to have self-confidence, and he learned that he could do things. Prior to getting him this professional help, when I would pick Scott up from school, he would sometimes cry and say, "Mommy, I don't want to go back . . . it's too hard."

To see him, now that he is able to learn and that he can accomplish something, has made it worth it all.

After the summer was over, we wanted to find the best educational setting for our son. We enrolled him in a separate, special school setting for learning disabled students. It was a private, non-Christian school just for severely learning disabled students. For Scott, it did not work out, however. On the first day of school, Scott began to develop feelings of inferiority. As he observed other more severely disabled children in his classroom, he started having feelings again that he could not accomplish anything and that there was something really wrong with him.

We decided to take Scott out of that school and to place him back into a Christian school, even though the Christian school did not have a special educator to help him. The Christian school has allowed him to repeat kindergarten, but he is now at the top of his class and feels good about himself. Moreover, he really does feel that he can accomplish something now. We recognize the value and need of Christian school special education and hope that it will become a reality one day—for our son, Scott, and for others like him in Christian schools all around the country.

Bradley, Age 18, Learning Disabled

Our son, Bradley, is eighteen years old. He is a senior at a large Christian school in the Southeast. He was home schooled until his junior year. My husband and I are both professionals with several graduate degrees. My husband is currently a marketing executive. I am a publisher/editor. Yet we have both served in educational capacities in the past—my husband as a school administrator and I as a teacher.

It was more than a year ago that Bradley's English teacher sent a note home that said, "I think Bradley has difficulty processing information." His first progress reports upon entering his senior year were mostly D's. Yet he had been a B+ home school student. We

could not understand what was happening. One of the reasons we missed Bradley's learning disability was his extreme giftedness in the areas of communication and analytical skills. He could do things around the house that were truly "exceptional" and so we overlooked some of his other learning problems and academic weaknesses.

The Christian school requested that Bradley be evaluated. The evaluator found that Bradley had something called a specific learning disability in spelling, reading comprehension, and mathematics. Although the meeting with the evaluator was less than encouraging, we found the response from the teachers at the Christian school to be warm and understanding. Most of Bradley's regular teachers admitted, however, that they did not know how to deal with a student that had a learning disability.

Because the Christian school did not have a special education resource program where Bradley could get specialized help for his disability, we had to employ a professional special educator to work with him after school hours several times each week. This has opened doors to what has been a very positive experience for our son. The special educator developed unique learning strategies that have allowed Bradley to learn more efficiently. He also made suggestions on how the regular classroom teachers could accommodate for Bradley's learning disability and modify instruction/testing situations for him so that he could be able to show his best work.

It has been over a year and half now since we discovered our son's learning disability. Bradley will be graduating in

just a few months. You may be wondering how it is with him now. The progress has been phenomenal! He is now making B's at the Christian school. He was selected as one of two students to represent his high school at Boys State, a federal/state-funded summer camp experience for students demonstrating elevated leadership abilities. He has been selected for inclusion in "Who's Who Among American High School Students." He holds a school campus job where he has been appointed to supervise the work of thirty other students.

We attribute the strides made in the past eighteen months primarily to the Lord's goodness and a major change in our attitude about disabled students. Our son's special educator told us early on that, although we must recognize our son's weaknesses and limitations, we must not dwell on them. We must accept him as he is, which is how the Lord created him, and focus on his strengths and gifts. God has a way of turning a person's limitations into assets for his glory. That is exactly what has happened, but we did have to secure special educational intervention for him.

I never picked up on the fact that our son had a learning disability. That is something that has and continues to bother me. Our son has two older siblings who are both graduating from college this year—a brother, 23, and a sister, 21. They were home schooled, too, and they studied the same basic college preparatory curriculum their younger brother had. Yet they have not struggled with their learning as Bradley has.

I must say that I am very skeptical of traditional educational programs that are currently operating in our Christian

schools nationwide, in particular the ones that exclude meeting the needs of children with disabilities. There is a tremendous amount of ignorance and misunderstanding among students, and even more so among teachers, in Christian schools with regard to what disabilities are and why special education is needed. I am convinced there is a critical need to increase awareness among people in Christian circles.

Christian education still has room to grow. Certainly, we need to love students, but more than that, we need to *serve* them by teaching them appropriately. To do anything less is to continue in a myopic manner, disregarding their created uniqueness. For us to fail in providing them with a Christian education commensurate with their unique needs is to move dangerously close to selectively choosing whom we will and will not prepare for the Lord's service. We would all do well to remember that "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things . . . to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NIV).

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The author wishes to thank the three mothers, who have chosen to remain anonymous, for sharing their testimonies about their children for inclusion in this article. The mothers were participants in a panel discussion delivered to a group of graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in a course titled "Introduction to Exceptional Children" at Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina in December 1991.

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MY SON HAS DYSLEXIA

A LETTER TO A FRIEND ABOUT PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Jim Rooks

Dear Roger:

It was good to see you and Patricia the other day and hear that things are well with you and your family. But, Roger, I was concerned to hear of William's reading difficulties. I have been thinking about our conversation and I would like to try to clarify a few of the things I said to you and offer some additional information that could help you in understanding William's dyslexia.

By the way, you used the term dyslexia where I might say reading disability, because the latter term has less connotation of disease. However, I will use the terms interchangeably in this letter, assuming both refer to the same phenomenon: an unexpected and seemingly unexplainable difficulty in learning to read. It does sound as if William has a reading disability. He is smart, he has grown up in a language-rich environment, his older sister learned to read without difficulty—in short, there is no good reason for William not being able to read.

I believe you assume, Roger, that William's reversal of letters and numbers are indicative of a visual problem that hinders his progress. That is a very widely held idea. It goes back to Hinshelwood (1885), who first drew attention to the dyslexic condition, calling it "word blindness." However, you and Hinshelwood and many

others are probably misguided in thinking that a visual problem is causing William's dyslexia. In fact there may be two inaccuracies in your assumption. First, dyslexic children actually do not make more reversals than other children of similar reading ability, and second, the majority of reading disabled students do not have a visual-perceptual problem.

Research shows that all students make reversal mistakes. William's reversals are probably no more frequent than those of any other student of the same reading ability. It is possible, but not probable, that William has some kind of visual processing problem. Back in 1979, Vellutino was the first to make a convincing case against a visual-perceptual deficiency in disabled readers. Since that time researchers have become more and more convinced that while there may be a deficit in the ability of reading disabled students to perform certain visual tasks, this is not the primary cause of their reading disability, but more likely a consequence of their being weak readers.

So what is the problem, then? Over the course of the last fifteen years research on prereaders and reading disabled students has brought to light the critical importance of phonemic awareness. We now know that 1) preschoolers who have a strong awareness of phonemes in words are most likely to be reading well after a few years of

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school instruction; 2) a lack of phonemic awareness is the characteristic that most commonly separates normal readers and the reading disabled; 3) if children in grade one do not have at least a modest level of phonemic awareness, it is not possible for them to learn to read.

I think William may be lacking in phonemic awareness. That means he may be insufficiently conscious that words can be divided up into discrete sounds (phonemes).

Let me explain why phonemic awareness may be so important for learning to read. English is an alphabetic language (as opposed to a logographic language like Chinese, for example). In alphabetic languages letters are used to map the individual abstract sounds of speech. I stress the term abstract because that is part of what makes phonemic awareness difficult. The sound units are meaningless when abstracted from words, and they do not really exist on their own in speech in any one particular form. Besides, the individual sounds represented by the letters change according to their context, making their recognition even more difficult.

So that may well be the problem, Roger. While I am personally convinced about the importance of phonemic awareness in understanding reading disabilities, I should point out that it is not yet a well-known and popular idea among teachers. But lest you think that this is only my opinion, I invite you to listen to just a few of the many researchers who are part of the emerging consensus on the importance of phonemic awareness:

Most reading disabilities are caused by deficits in the ability to analyze language into speech sounds smaller than the syllable. (Wise 1991, 312)

The evidence is compelling: toward the goal of efficient and effective reading instruction, explicit training of phonemic awareness is invaluable. (Adams 1990, 331)

The aspect of language that these (weak readers) young children typically lack, however, is phonemic awareness, an understanding that speech is composed of

a series of individual sounds. (Yopp 1992, 696)

We now know that an awareness of the phonological segments in words and the ability to manipulate these segments are of crucial importance in reading acquisition. (Blahman 1991, 52)

The discovery of a strong relationship between children's phonological awareness and their progress in learning to read is one of the great successes of modern psychology. (Bryant and Goswami quoted by Liberman and Liberman 1992, 354)

Let's return to William, now. If William lacked phonemic awareness, he would have not understood that the sounds he hears correspond to the letters he sees. While he may have learned the names of the letters and even some basic phonics rules, he did not progress to the all-important step of an analytic, generative understanding of letter-sound correspondence. Without such an ability William would have been forced to go through the primary grades without being able to make sense of the reading instruction he received. The teacher may have put five words beginning with "p" on the board, and William did not make the connection between the pronunciation of the word pig and the fact that the initial sound is represented by a "p."

I am not saying that he did not learn to read at all. It is quite likely that William did learn some words by associating the pronunciation of the word with particular visual features of the letters. However, without phonemic awareness and the knowledge that there is a direct, systematic correspondence of letters and sounds, William would not have been able to sound out new words that he encountered. Without a grasp of the alphabetic principle, his association of certain words with certain visual features of the letters may have been quite idiosyncratic—e.g., the tail on the letter "g" helping him remember that the word was "dog." This kind of random association of visual features with words would have broken down as he was called on to remember more and more words. William needed a more systematic and

generative understanding of the spelling-to-sound correspondences.

That's my speculation on how a lack of phonemic awareness may have hindered William's progress in reading. Actually, most of William's kindergarten companions may have come into school in a similar state to that of William, not being consciously aware that words are comprised of individual phonemes. Research shows that kindergarten children may be able to match rhyming words (showing a very low level of phonemic awareness), but most of them cannot segment words into their individual sounds or do other more sophisticated tasks that demonstrate phonemic awareness. In other words most kindergarten students cannot correctly give an accurate answer to the question: "What is the first sound in the word cat?" While kindergarten children may be conscious of syllables within words, phonemes are more abstract and present more difficulty for young children.

During his kindergarten year, however, William may have parted company with the majority of the students. While most kindergarten children lack a high degree of phonemic awareness, they develop such an awareness over the course of the first year in school. Without direct instruction and training to increase his phonemic awareness (which is not an explicit part of most kindergarten programs at this point), William likely left kindergarten and even grade one with as little phonemic awareness as he entered. And that would be a problem, given the compelling evidence that phonemic awareness is a powerful predictor of later reading achievement; a grade one student weak in phonemic awareness will likely be a weak speller and reader even at the end of grade four.

I am suggesting, then, that William was weak in phonemic awareness when he entered kindergarten and grade one. As well, it is likely that William did not receive any sustained, direct instruction in phonemic awareness in kindergarten and grade one. However, phonemic awareness can be taught. Benita Blahman reports on kindergarten children increasing their phonemic awareness in 11 weeks of training for 15 min-

utes a day. If William had received phonemic awareness training, his awareness of phonemes would have improved as well as his ability to make sense of his grade one reading instruction. Much grade one reading instruction assumes an awareness of phonemes. Just as grade one teachers provide activities for their children to instill an awareness of words, William needed activities to help him develop an awareness that words were composed of sounds.

Well, Roger, I know that is kind of a quick and dirty introduction to phonemic awareness, but I felt compelled to make you aware

of this. You know very well that learning to read is the most important part of a young child's academic development and that we need to do everything we can as parents and teachers to help all children learn to read. Thankfully, after a seventy-year hiatus there has been a resumption of cognitive work in psychology, and this research has been yielding some very important discoveries about the reading process and obstacles to learning to read. The importance of phonemic awareness is one of those discoveries that we teachers and parents need to educate ourselves about. Below I have listed a few impor-

tant and accessible articles that would be helpful in assessing and teaching phonemic awareness in sensitive and appropriate ways.

Roger, William is fortunate to have you and Patricia as parents. I am confident that, with your continued support and encouragement, he will not only become a proficient reader, but will go on to develop his gifts and discover the task of service that God has prepared for him.

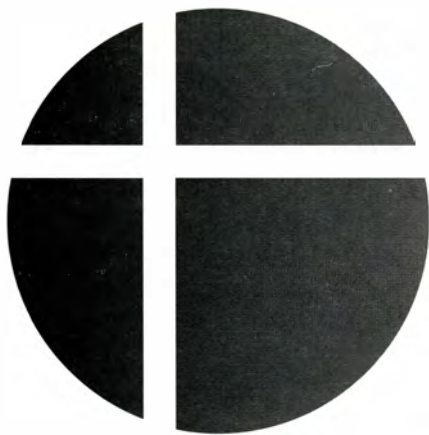
Love to Patricia and the kids,

Jim and Arda and the rest of the family

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- *Popular articles which contain suggestions for teaching phonemic awareness
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The Death of a College Student

Arden Ruth Post

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It was a crisp, sunny, fall Friday, the latter part of October, and the beginning of Parents Weekend at Calvin College. Our Educational Psychology class was about to begin at 8 a.m. when Chris, a history major from Lansing, Michigan, came up to me with a troubled expression on her face. "I hear there's been an accident," she said. "A blond guy was hit by a car and we think it may be Kevin from our class."

My thoughts swirled. It couldn't be Kevin. There were other blond guys at Calvin. I had just observed Kevin two days ago in his teacher aiding placement at Rogers High School. We had talked of many things: high schools, his witness to his supervising teacher. Kevin hoped to convince him to reexamine the gospel message. We had also talked about Parents Day, Saturday, when he was scheduled to be part of a panel on the topic "Letting Go." We were going to give the perspective of both parents and students on the changes that take place when students go to college.

Two thoughts went through my mind in rapid succession. Surely it wasn't Kevin; he would walk through the door any minute, coffee thermos in hand, his trademark. Second, I hoped that if he had been in an accident, it would be minor enough to permit him to still give his talk to the parents the next day.

Soon, however, our fears were confirmed when a message reached us: Kevin DeRose, a junior English major from Palos Heights, Illinois, had been hit by a car while he was on his way to class. He had two broken legs and possible head injuries. The class heard the news with relief, focusing on the broken legs. "Whew," they seemed to say. "We'll help him get around!" Immediately Joel announced he would collect money to send flowers, and the class responded eagerly. Here was a constructive way to channel nervous energy. Here was a way to do some-

thing, thereby making us feel better.

Thoughts of canceling class were quickly dismissed because the Central High School Young Educators Society (Y.E.S.) was scheduled to participate in our class that day. Besides, we needed to be together. Our class, a variety of individuals from various parts of the U.S. and Canada, had become a community in the short time we had been together. The students shared a common goal: high school teaching. They had shared fears and frustrations, joys and triumphs in their studies, their teacher aiding, their personal lives. Now they shared an anxiety about one of their own.

Updated reports on Kevin's condition continued to reach us during the morning. They sounded ominous. Word reached us that the morning chapel service would focus on Kevin's needs, and most of the class attended. Chaplain Cooper later visited our class and led us in prayer. And so the morning dragged by.

Our Central High School visitors provided a pleasant diversion. We discussed the life of a college student with them. They gave us insight into what makes a good high school teacher: enthusiasm for the subject, love of students, ability to relate to students' needs and problems, willingness to spend time with students. They reminded me of the saying "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care!" The morning was providing a real-life, although unwanted, opportunity to see for ourselves how much we cared about one of our own. The Y.E.S. sponsor, Mrs. Reed, later sent a note expressing thanks for their visit, and noting that she and her students were impressed with the depth of feeling the Calvin students showed for their stricken comrade, their ability to carry on in the midst of adversity, and the evidence of a strong Christian faith.

At noon the class dispersed, having set up a telephone chain to relay information on

Kevin's condition, unaware that the news to be relayed would be worse than they ever expected. Kevin's parents, relatives, and friends, who had been maintaining an increasingly discouraging vigil at the hospital, received the news that Kevin had suffered irreversible brain damage. Machines were keeping him alive. The Kevin that we knew had already gone to heaven. His parents made the courageous decision to donate his organs for transplant.

The end. This was it. A lively, energetic college student with a love for the Lord and a sense of mission in his career choice was gone in just one day. How could a day that started out so brightly, the beginning of a weekend of celebration, end so tragically? How could a young life, full of hope and promise, end so abruptly?

It didn't make sense. It still doesn't, that is, unless we trust the Lord and his promise to sustain us in loss, to make good come from tragedy. James Dobson, in his book *When God Doesn't Make Sense* (Tyndale House, 1993), reminds us that we may never come to fully understand a tragedy during our earthly life. Like the saints in Hebrews 11, we may face situations that require us to hold on to our faith even when we don't understand what God is doing or permitting to occur.

What can be said about Kevin's death? What did it accomplish? Can we find any earthly good to arise from it?

In the immediate aftermath of Kevin's death many in the college community reflected on their own mortality and their relationship with the Lord. The students in the high school where Kevin did his teacher aiding asked to attend the memorial service at Calvin College. A busload of them, along with Kevin's supervising teacher, heard Chaplain Cooper's gospel message. They also heard an impassioned plea from Kevin's parents about committing their lives to the Lord. In the physical sense five people were given

a new chance of life and health through the donation of Kevin's organs. We could see some good to come from Kevin's death, but, still, did it have to happen? We tried to understand.

Our next class session would be a trying time for all of us. During the week many students had stopped to see me, wanting to talk about Kevin, about death, about the effect on our class. We dreaded meeting together because we'd have to face the fact that one of us was irretrievably gone. And it could have been any one of us.

We were confronting the fragility of life; our own lives could end just as suddenly and tragically as Kevin's.

The students raised honest, poignant questions in private to me during the week. I realized that others would be dealing with similar issues, even if unexpressed. And so our next class began with the topic of death, a topic not usually included in the Educational Psychology curriculum of the Education Department. We talked about the death we were dealing with as well as what we can apply to future teaching situations if a student in our future classes should die.

I began talking about the stages of encountering death and dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Each of us could be in a different stage in dealing with our loss, and we could fluctuate among the stages. We had tried denial the previous week, not wanting to believe the seriousness of Kevin's condition. Probably now we had moved on to anger. Maybe some had come to acceptance, but my visual impression of the class seemed to indicate that we had not arrived there yet.

Then there were other emotions to deal with. I posed a series of statements, anonymously gleaned from those who had spoken to me during the week. They expressed a variety of feelings that students were having and permitted different reactions, varying degrees of affectation. The class listened solemnly and their faces reflected not only sadness, but recognition, and understanding. I titled my remarks "It's okay."

"It's okay if . . ."

- you feel a sense of loss at Kevin's death.
- you didn't want to come to class today.
- you're afraid that a pallor will hang over

the class for the rest of the semester.

—you're wondering about your own mortality.

—you're scared that you might have an accident.

—you're uncomfortable about the extent of the sadness some classmates feel about Kevin's death.

—you're not quite as sad as some and wonder why.

—you're wondering how the class would feel if you died.

—you're wondering if you're as important to the group as Kevin.

—you're thinking that Kevin's death elevated him to a more important status than he would have had in life.

—you're thinking that too much fuss has been made about the incident.

—you're remembering with humor some of the funny things Kevin did or said.

—your memories bring a smile or laughter.

"and it's especially okay, in fact, its great if . . ."

—you're reexamining your own commitment to the Lord.

—you're asking whether you will go to heaven when you die.

—you're reflecting on how you live right now.

—you're wondering how worthwhile your extracurricular activities are.

—you're thinking you'd like to do some community or Christian service.

The point was that people's feelings will range among many emotions, their sense of loss will vary, their introspection will run along different lines. Recognizing and sanctioning the disparate emotions was important to create an atmosphere in which we could go on.

The class was able to generalize beyond our own experience to their future classes. What should or could they do if faced with the death of a student, a terminally ill student, a death in a student's family? They tackled the first issue, brainstorming about some principles to keep in mind if they have a death in their classroom, fully cognizant that every situation will be different:

1. *Prepare* the class ahead of time, if possible,

when a serious illness or accident threatens to take a class member.

2. *Talk* honestly about death. In Christian schools, talk about life with the Lord after death. In public schools, talk about what the family believes or has said, if appropriate. Check with the principal about what is permissible to say.

3. *Remember* the student—both the good and the bad. Memories seem to help, as does a sense of humor. Students may need reassurance that it's okay to laugh at something humorous the deceased did or said.

4. *Reassure* students that a variety of feelings and reactions are perfectly natural.

5. *Read* a children's or adolescent literature book that treats the subject of death with sensitivity and straightforwardness (see separate box). Be sure to review the book thoroughly before sharing it to determine whether its content is appropriate. Discuss the book with the class and make application, as appropriate, to the particular situation.

6. *Don't forget* the student. Make occasional reference to the deceased, when a memory fits appropriately into class activity. As time goes on, most classmates will feel comfortable with such reference, developing pleasant memories and allowing further release of emotion.

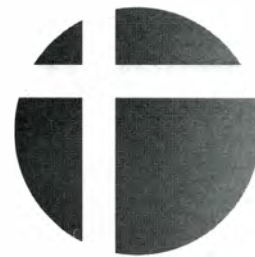
7. *Keep in touch* with the family. The family may wish to be remembered and informed about significant class events. Sometimes family members may like to talk to a class, sharing memories and providing mutual comfort.

Since Kevin's death, Dr. William De Rose, Kevin's father, has had many opportunities to speak with people who are grieving. He says, "Invariably, they always get around to asking the question 'When will I be able to forget? It hurts so much to remember.' I always tell them that they will soon come to realize that they don't really want to stop remembering; soon that will be the last thing they will want to happen. What they really want is for the remembering to stop being so painful. With

the passage of enough time will come the day when a memory may still bring tears to their eyes, but it will also bring, at the same time, a smile to their mouth.

"With that same passage of time, however, comes the inevitable realization that the rest of the world, as it should and must, is forgetting. So, instances that show that the rest of the world has not yet completely forgotten are special rays of unexpected sunshine."

For us in the Educational Psychology class at Calvin College, Kevin's death had a profound impact on our classroom community, on our personal reflections, perhaps on our future teaching careers. We parted in December with an unusual closeness, a greater maturity, an appreciation of life, happy memories of a departed friend, and most important, a deeper reflection on our own commitments to Jesus Christ.



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 Boyd, Candy. 1986. *Forever Friends*. (gr. 5-9)
 Bunting, Eve. 1988. *A Sudden Silence*. (gr. 7 & up)
 Carrick, Carol. 1981. *The Accident*. (ps-gr. 3)
 Cohn, Janice. 1987. *I Had a Friend Named Peter*. (ps-gr. 2)
 Conrad, Pam. 1991. *My Daniel*. (gr. 5 & up)
 de Paola, Tomie. 1987. *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs*. (gr. 2-5)
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 Fassler, Joan. 1983. *My Grandpa Died Today*. (ps-gr. 3)
 Gaeddert, LouAnn. 1989. *A Summer Like Turnips*. (gr. 2-4)
 Giff, Patricia. 1982. *The Gift of the Pirate Queen*. (gr. 4-6)
 Green, Marth. 1991. *Grandpa's in Heaven*. (gr. 3-8)
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McDaniel, Lurelene. (gr. 5-8)

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Six Months to Live. 1985.

Why Did She Have to Die? 1986.

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Mazer, Norma. 1987. *After the Rain*. (gr. 7 & up)

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Niptrom, Carolyn. 1990. *Emma Says Goodbye*. (gr. 4-8)

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Young, Alida. 1991. *Is My Sister Dying?* (gr. 5-8)

Zolotow, Charlotte. 1974. *My Grandson Lew*. (gr. 2-3)

See *Children's Books in Print 1993 Subject Guide* (Reed Publishing) for a complete list. This is a list of current and classic books on the subject of death. It does not carry an endorsement of them. Teachers need to study them thoroughly to ascertain their appropriateness for their own students.



FAMILY OF THE WEEK



One student's father demonstrates his work as an auctioneer.

"What is your favorite restaurant?" "What color is your bike?" "What jobs do your mom and dad have?" "What is your favorite food?" These are a few of the questions children may ask a classmate when it is his or her turn for Family of the Week.

In the fall, the first grade classes at Abbotsford Christian School study the family. We explore different types of families, talk about why God created families, and share the joys and challenges of living in a family. This theme introduces a Family of the Week feature.

Each child is assigned a week of the year as his or her special week. Sometime during that week, the child sits on a stool or special chair, and the rest of the children have an opportunity to ask questions about

the child's home and family life. Some of this information might be written on the blackboard and used for mini language lessons. Or the information might be put together in a classroom family book for reading practice.

During this week, many other events help the children become more familiar with their classmates and families. The special child's parents might come in to share a unique talent or hobby with the other children; the child's pet might make a visit; or the whole class might visit the child's home or a parent's business. The week becomes a great opportunity for teachers to get to know the parents better, especially the dads, who usually don't come into the classroom on a regular basis.

Often the child will bring photo albums or pictures depicting him or her as a baby and pre-schooler. The classmates love to look at these pictures.

At the beginning of the Family of the Week time in the fall, we send home a list of suggestions for parents to make the week special for the child. Parents are encouraged to do as little or as much as they like. Some parents have difficulty sharing a talent or hobby, but most are willing to come in and read a story or two to the class, or possibly even bring a treat. However small the activity is, it helps to make that child feel special, and it enables the teacher and the rest of the class to get to know the child and the family better.

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SOMETIMES WE FAIL

Dathene Stanley

I dreamed that she came back. After two weeks of absence from school, the eleven-year-old whom I will call Jessica returned as if nothing had happened. In my dream I didn't say anything about the absence. I was just glad that she was back.

However, it was only a dream, and Jessica never returned. But I missed her, that little animal-like child who resisted taming and resisted fractions and diagramming, and even sitting in a chair. Like a wild animal, she came out to play but retreated with shrill screeches when threatened. And sitting in a chair threatened her.

That summer her mother had asked if I would take Jessica into my new experimental school, and I received her with open arms. This child who carried the blood of two races had a spirit that transcended poverty and broken home and the many uprootings of her young life. I loved Jessica, and I was eager to teach her.

But working with her was not easy. She was either turned on or turned off. In the turned-on moments, she poured out work in record time. She wrote charming poems. She created stories with delightful images. She dashed off three lessons of math in an afternoon.

She who had never sewn in her life took to the sewing machine as if she had been born there. She roared through her seams,

and they were straight. Her two-piece outfit was charming. When Jessica was turned on, the world had no limits.

But for just as many days Jessica was not turned on. She hung her head and brooded. She mumbled and irritated the other students. She made silly faces. She couldn't do her math. Or grammar. Or social studies. Either Jessica could do everything or she could do nothing.

One day I discovered that she often came to school without breakfast, and that helped explain the morning lethargy that was so typical of her. I had already noticed that she "came to" in the afternoon. At four o'clock when classes were finished, Jessica was ready for me to explain diagramming or Latin conjugations. Then she remembered her French vocabulary, and then her stories had charm. Because she was not often picked up until after five or six, I tutored her privately many days. On those days my family had to settle for quick sandwiches for supper. Then, weary from a day that began before five, I dropped into bed. Taming a little wild animal used up my energy.

But the turned-on days made it all worth while. It was that way her last day. "Do you notice I'm in my working mood today?" she asked cheerfully. Indeed I did. It had been a bad week, and in the first three days she had done almost nothing. She

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had bugged the other children. She had been sent to the kitchen twice because she was too distracting in the classroom.

On Tuesday of that week I sent a note home to Jessica's mother, telling her what work Jessica should do at home to catch up. I asked her to sign the note and return it. But Jessica's mother went out that night, as she did many nights, and the note was not signed and the work was not done.

Jessica's non-working mood continued until Thursday of that last week. Then, as suddenly as she had turned off, she turned on. On Thursday she did half a week's work. And on Friday, that last day, she whole-heartedly threw herself into the remaining half.

At recess that day, Jessica and her friends worked on a school play they were preparing as a surprise for me. It was about our school, and Jessica played the leading part. "Oh why, oh why, do I have to go in the kitchen again?" she sang, dancing across a make-believe stage. Her friends rolled in laughter.

That afternoon our Shakespearean reading was the best it had ever been. Jessica's portrayal of Brutus in his death scene rivaled any portrayal on or off stage. We doubled up in laughter, and tears streamed from our eyes.

We died with Brutus, and we lived with Shakespeare. We said that someday we would have to perform for an audience.

As four o'clock and the end of the school day approached, I evaluated Jessica's progress and found that she had almost completed the week's assignments. Students were to turn in all assignments before leaving on Friday, and I told Jessica to hand in the few remaining items to one of my family members, since I had to make a trip into town.

Jessica's mother arrived to pick her up while I was in town, and she was angry that Jessica had not finished her work. She had planned to go out that night, so she left Jessica without saying when she would return. When I returned from town, I found a morose, unresponsive Jessica. Knowing that no more work would be done that night, I told her to finish at home on Saturday.

The next Monday Jessica wasn't in school. The classroom seemed silent. Nothing was broken that day. No one mumbled. And no one sang. "Shall we finish *Julius Caesar*?" the others asked.

"No, let's wait for Jessica," I answered.

But Jessica was not in school Tuesday either. Finally her mother phoned. She was

taking Jessica out of the program. There were other things in life besides Jessica's school work, and she couldn't take so many late Friday nights.

We finished *Julius Caesar* without Jessica. Brutus was already dead anyway. The climax was over; all else was downhill. The girls dropped their little play. Without the kitchen scene it lacked drama. The curtain had accidentally come down, and no one had the heart to raise it.

In my dream, Jessica had a turned-on day when she returned. Her spirit had again transcended reality. Of course, she didn't return, but I like to think the dream was true anyway. I did not succeed with Jessica or with Jessica's mother, but in the end, perhaps it didn't matter. Jessica would transcend another uprooting, another shock, as she had all the previous ones. Perhaps Jessica would always have her turned-on days and her turned-off days. But I know that on those turned-on days, wherever Jessica was, life would be bigger because she was there. Wherever Jessica was, those around her would cry more, but they would also laugh more. Jessica made even failure worth the effort.

FAIL
SOMETIMES

Jeff Fennema

THINKING THIRTEEN

I'VE GOT THE JOY, JOY, JOY, JOY DOWN IN MY . . . RULES??



Last year, as our seventh grade students were studying the Maccabean period in Bible class, I included the words *Pharisee* and *Sadducee* in their spelling lists. I also asked them to tell me which group possessed the lesser amount of joy in their lives.

After the spelling test, we exchanged our thoughts about the question at hand. Most felt the Sadducees had less joy because they did not believe in a bodily resurrection or eternal life, and thus their hope was only in the present. Having been conditioned to await a "correct" answer, my seventh graders sought out my revelation of truth. After a pause I affirmed the choice of the majority. "It was the Sadducees because . . . they were sad, you see?"

Have you ever been "boo"ed by your students? It's a very humbling experience. It didn't help that I appeared terribly pleased with my pun. After I compromised my inner mirth with the fear of a classroom rebellion, a few students shared why they thought it was the Pharisees: "Because they were so worried about rules."

Ah, rules. Yes, God is indeed a God of

order; there can be no doubt. The Pharisees were very cognizant of this. Their study and understanding of God's law proved compelling. Their piety was admired by the common people. Obeying God's commands was paramount; after all, this was how one showed his love to God.

These holy men understood God's truth. Why, then, were they Christ's antagonists?

Initially they carried the finest intentions. However, they succumbed to a base, human desire—the need to control. They epitomized the cultural mandate gone bad. They embodied the antithesis of joy.

Christ's teachings threatened the Pharisees' social order. His joyous message of mercy and grace conflicted with the dour rigidity of the establishment. When Jesus chastised the Pharisees for elevating tradition to a sacred standing, they were offended (Matt. 15:1-12). When he placed human need above one of their laws, they became incensed (Matt. 12:10-13). And when they saw their power eroding due to Christ's teachings, they became completely irra-

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tional (John 7:45-52). Here were some people who needed joy.

Joy cures jealousy. When we rejoice with others, we don't dwell on our perceived injustices. Joy replaces self-righteous bitterness. When we celebrate with others, we don't have time to wonder why they aren't more like us. Joy supersedes the need to control. When we exult with others, we don't wish to uniformly regulate their behavior.

Authority can be intoxicating, and teachers are placed in authority over students. We like to believe we know what is best for them. Certain rules must exist to help fulfill the school's purpose. A chaotic environment does not lend itself to learning. Yet we cross over a line when preference routinely becomes policy. We then create a new role for ourselves as regulation commissioners, and it detracts from our initial mandate as educators.

We all know that our students' identities are being shaped. Middle school and junior

high students continue to discover themselves during adolescence. Testing the parameters is part of finding out who they are. Without rules we would find ourselves monitoring a monkey exhibit. Yet we don't want our edicts to result in apathetic lethargy.

Young adults express their joy in various, and sometimes unique, ways. Whether on paper, through words or actions, these declarations can sometimes push the limits. Acknowledging and channeling their exuberance is far more desirable than squelching it for its inappropriateness or for some other stringent reason we erect. It would be tragic if we couldn't share our students' joy and therefore despised them for it, as Michal did with David when he danced before the Lord.

I recently read a description of how wild elephants are tamed. After their capture they are tied down with such force that they are rendered immobile. After a period of violent crying and shaking, the animal lies very still,

its spirit having been broken. It can be tied with a rope to a tiny peg, and it will not wander away, though it could do so.

I want to believe that I have never suffocated a student through my need for rules and regulations, but I know that is not true. I want to believe that I have joy in my life that is seen in everything the students and I do together, but I know that is not the case. I want to believe that when I go overboard with my need to control, I am an agent of orderliness, employing one of God's attributes; but I know that is not true either. No, I have re-imaged God, and order has then become a god unto itself as I stand before it in reverence.

Some of my students intuitively knew that the Pharisees lacked joy because they were too worried about rules. I wonder if my students sometimes see the same joyless worry in me.

Cattails

Cattails, thicketed
along a little lake

grow parallel
in plenitude.

In buff and beige
and mellow creamy tones,
each blends with each.
Harmonious.

They live and grow
as they meant to do.

No Willy Lomans among them;
they know who they are.

Elva McAllaster

QUERY QUERY QUERY QUERY

Marlene Dorbo

A senior member on our staff in my department constantly tells me what to teach and how to teach. This is becoming very annoying. I like teaching at this school except for encounters with this colleague. I am relatively inexperienced, but not incapable. How can I handle this tactfully?

I'd like to think the veteran teacher is simply trying to be helpful. The manner and frequency perhaps make the overture irritating. The intent, however, may give evidence of genuine concern or sincere desire to share acquired knowledge and skills. Most experienced teachers recognize that college doesn't, and probably can't, prepare the novice for every classroom encounter.

Learning about the various methods and practicing pedagogy in a supervised environment is quite unrealistic. Don't allow your senior colleague's annoying habit to dampen the excitement and adventure of teaching. Good teachers glean all they can from various sources, especially veterans, and artfully weave the tidbits into their own program and style of teaching. Beyond the labored lesson plans and stacks of papers emerges the personality of the individual.

You may have to address this colleague. Perhaps a note or gesture of appreciation will conclude the matter, especially if you comment about how you have gained confidence and ability in handling the class and subject matter. No one is served if ill feelings remain.

Working together as a staff can be difficult at times, but if you can focus on the purpose, rather than on individual approaches, you may find the environment more comfortable. A positive school climate enhances learning for both teachers and students.

Some parents complain that their kids have too much homework, and

the teachers at our school don't seem to agree about the necessity of homework. I know kids' lives are already busy, but I don't look at homework as just busy work. I believe students need to build on the skills learned at school. What do you think?

Homework nowadays is often viewed as an additional stress placed on students and an interruption or hindrance to a fleeting, carefree childhood. Together with sports, music lessons, church activities, television/VCR, video games, and similar forms of entertainment or diversion, homework can overload students, producing hastily completed or rebelliously avoided assignments.

Routinely assigning homework is no longer popular with many teachers and parents, not to mention students. Some educators view homework as unimportant to learning; others relinquish it reluctantly, defeated by the competition and lack of productivity. Even strong proponents of homework admit that they assign less homework hoping to increase the likelihood that students will complete the work and do it better.

Traditionally Christian schools with strong parent support have been able to maintain academic standards and homework requirements suitable for the grade level. But homework must truly represent extended learning so that all persons involved benefit. An appropriate homework assignment should encourage responsibility, accountability, and wise study habits.

In spite of so much emphasis on building student self-esteem, I find increasing student problems in learning, responsibility, and respect. After teaching a couple of years in this environment, I am wondering why some improvement isn't resulting from

efforts. Does it take longer to see results, or isn't that a solution?

Advocates of teaching the development of positive self-esteem rely on studies that show a direct correlation between self-esteem and school performance. Critics claim that this "feel-good" approach has gone too far at the expense of the academics. Some truth, perhaps, exists on both sides.

Sometimes teachers and parents think that building self-esteem is always praising and stressing the positive. Yet, a Denver clinical psychologist, Susan Heitler, says that "just as too few good words can injure a child's self-esteem, constant and unrealistic positive feedback also can be harmful."

Clearly, responsibility is a key ingredient to self-esteem. Opportunities to succeed, rather than undeserved compliments, produce genuine "feel good" attitudes toward self and abilities. Certainly some students need this extra boost more than others; however, all students can use some tools for learning how to handle problems in life. Many self-esteem-building components can fit into the curriculum without sacrificing academics. Christian school teachers, though, have so much more they may offer students by modeling respect and creating a positive environment. The world stresses appearance and performance to measure a person's worth; such attributes can change or fade. Since God can use both strengths and weaknesses to serve him, all students can feel worthwhile. Helping kids discover these truths and seeing themselves and others as image-bearers of Christ can build up individuals and community.

John Bolt

by John Bolt

Christian Schools International, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993.

221 pages, plus 39 pp. of notes. Hard cover: \$25.00; paperback: \$17.50.

Reviewed by N.H. Beversluis, professor emeritus, Education Department, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.

This book by Professor John Bolt about narrative teaching offers a bonus of enough other discussable content to vitalize the professional half of your faculty meetings for a long time. Without jargon or obfuscation, often in helpful pro and con fashion, he explores a wide array of issues—ranging from New Age theory, action education, and the evils of educational progressivism to good and bad imagination, book censorship, culture wars, and much more.

The book also offers surprises: An ordained clergyman warning against evangelism and indoctrination. An educational revisionist silent about the subtleties of “integral” curriculum and “responsive” discipleship. A systematic theologian urging not a more analytical but a story-telling mode of teaching. A faddish-sounding proposal that becomes not another anti-intellectual assault on substantive curriculum but a potentially organizing focus for such a curriculum. Not least, a Christian-story goal understood not as yet another religious goal alongside slogans about “biblical knowing” or “integrating faith and learning,” but as a possible new way of working at such goals.

Before Bolt discusses narrative as such, however, he requires us to tour two-thirds of the book for context and background—the cumulative impact of which is somewhat overwhelming. For the fewer than 200 pages of his 6 chapters he offers over 350 endnotes (30 pages) and a bibliography of 100 sources (6 pages). Although adding up to something of a cognitive overload and suffering here and there from some repetition and even irrelevance (as well as occasional right-wing social-political tilting), the book is well-written and enlightening, offering a tightly packed cornucopia of research and comment.

Contemporary Crises. In his first two chapters (over 40% of the book), Professor Bolt quotes and discusses views of many critics in support of the thesis that contemporary society is in a state of moral, cultural, and educational disintegration. A major cause of this crisis, says Bolt, getting right to his narrative thesis, is the gradual loss in modern culture of a cohesive cultural story—a story supporting not only shared social and moral values, but also the historical memory of a cohesive community. In this no-story vacuum, postmodern society has created a mosaic of many stories, all of them not only claiming but granting to all others (except, says Bolt, to Christianity) their own right of existence—along with their own moralities and truth claims.

Christian educators, says Bolt, must be on guard against this environment, in which he discerns a four-fold demonology of old-line individualism and secularism allied with postmodern relativism and paganism. It is an environment, he says, in which contemporary society has "lost its soul" and in which supporters and opponents of those disintegrating forces are locked in all-out "culture wars" (38-40). In such a world, Bolt says, Christian schools must in a new and aggressive way tell the Christian story and recruit the young into that story.

Internal Problems. But these schools, Bolt says, must be clear about that story's distinctiveness. In Chapter 3 he cautions in passing against claiming that certain theories (e.g., open classrooms, cooperative learning) are distinctively Christian theories, and identifies as "threats" what he takes to be four distortions of Christian education's purpose. They are indoctrination, evange-

lism, prophecy, and excellence. Emphasis on excellence has never struck me as a problem (although attitudes about it have), but Bolt's discussion of the other three is, if I may say so, excellent (but on prophecy see below).

Bolt presents a different problem in Chapter 4, where he cautions against over-emphasizing “Christian mind.” Although he deplores, in a perceptive and wide-ranging discussion, the absence of an all-embracing Christian mind in contemporary society and presses the need for such in Christian schools, he concedes that more than mind education is necessary. Apparently agreeing (but not clearly so) with Nicholas Wolterstorff in this matter, he holds that along with a Christian way of thinking, schools must also promote a Christian way of living. Here I have three comments.

Action and Thinking. First, it is amazing that in all of this chapter's yes-and-no consideration of action education, whether in Bolt's discussion or in his quotations from Wolterstorff, we find neither a spirited warning about the educational sin of anti-intellectualism nor an emphatic affirmation that action requires thinking—such as fact-gathering, seeing relationships, analyzing, understanding, clarifying insight, and whatever other intellectual burdens the Lord expects schools to lay on activists. Wolterstorff's rather bland prescription of "giving reasons" to students for acting in a certain way and his granting that to foster action "we will regard some knowledge as relevant" hardly qualifies (149-150). Neither does what Bolt says about the need for a Christian mind in education.

Not Much Action. Second, despite all the

pros and cons about action education, it is not clear that Bolt really favors much of it. This is evident in his discussion in Chapter 3 of "prophecy," the word he uses there to describe the "threat" of the school's promoting social reform. Objecting to this, he asks: "Has the Christian school failed in its task if its students don't picket nuclear power plants, attend anti-abortion rallies, protest against war, write letters for Amnesty International, and join marches on Earth Day?" (116-117). Clearly, Bolt does not see this as failure. He does grant in a number of places that Christian schools should promote in students a judging of culture and a testing of the spirits. But in other places he warns that such prophetism can create psychological and pedagogical confusion in unready students and can politicize and polarize the school community.

Christian Calling and Action. Third, apart from that ambiguity, Bolt appears also to have religious reservations about the school's promoting cultural change. These reservations reflect his view of Christian calling in the world. The Reformed view typically is that we have a dual calling: one, to bring unbelievers the gospel of repentance and forgiveness (our missionary calling), and the other, to celebrate and do the world's work as faithful stewards (our cultural calling)—and in both to work at changing what is wrong, evil, and sinful in the world. This latter goal many of us express as the "transformation of culture" goal.

Bolt is not enthusiastic about this emphasis. He not only does not use the above language; he seems to take an opposite line—one he had also set forth in an earlier book (*Christian and Reformed Today* 1984). In that book he took issue with what he said was an over-emphasis by Christian educators on cultural calling, on creation, on the restorative work of Christ, and especially on the "transformation of culture" theme. Christian schools, he said there, should give more prominence to godly living, to the Holy Spirit, to our missionary calling, to the dangers of worldliness, and to endtime themes in the Bible.

In this book he goes further, especially in the endtime language and apocalyptic scenario at the conclusion of his first two chapters. There he says, for example, "It is now

doubly clear that our situation is increasingly like that of the Medieval monks." He speaks of "a darkening age" and quotes other writers about the new "barbarians" running wild, "pillaging and destroying everything in sight," and about our living in a time that is like those earlier times when the faithful "simply retreated behind the stone walls" of their monasteries, nourishing "the flickering flame of civilization" (94-95).

Clearly, both books exclude a rousing affirmation of Kuyperian transformationism. But is Bolt now also proposing a kind of Reformed monasticism as the Christian calling in the world? Is he proposing that his doom and gloom survivalist scenario be a revisionist version of the Christian story we must tell the young? It sounds so, but I doubt it. Although I have problems with some of Bolt's views on this subject, including the above sort of otherworldly escapism, his book gives ample evidence of stopping short of such revisionism. I suspect that in this matter his own prophetic exuberance has him off balance—pushing a necessary caution too hard and too far. In fact, he expresses contrary views in other places, at one point objecting to the extremism of doomsday cultural critics. There is, he says, "much that is good in Western civilization and in North American society" and adds that Christian schools must show "what is relatively good and what is relatively evil" in our society (121).

The Way of Narrative. Whatever questions about Christian calling remain, Bolt's proposals about story education, in Chapters 5 and 6, do hang together. What do those proposals come to? It is important to be clear about what is not proposed. For Bolt, a narrative mode of teaching is not an educational fad. Nor is it another progressivist assault on the school's intellectual responsibility or curriculum responsibility. Nor is it a device for extending the school's devotion period or for providing back-door entrance to evangelism and indoctrination. What Bolt does have in mind is scattered about on several levels.

On the first level, Bolt presents an inspiring array of multi-faceted comment by contemporary writers. Narrative, as I impressionistically construe the general spirit of that comment, entails a different way of being—of recording experience, of knowing, of think-

ing, of choosing, of persuading, of learning. Narrative is a way of balancing the abstractions of logic and system with the immediacy of the particular, the concrete, and the uniquely personal. Narrative needs the gift of imagination and in turn nourishes it—a gift without which none of us is truly human. And much more. You need to read the chapter, and savor it.

Narrative and Community. A second level takes us to one of the two dominant ideas in the book: how story functions in, and for, "communities of memory." At its best, says Bolt, the Christian community (family, church, school) is such a community of memory. It exists with a past, a plotline, a future—a story. The community must be instructed by its story and must perpetuate the story—in all of its components. Those components include its history—not just story fragments or episodes, dramatic as each may be, but history as extended and stretched out across time. Such story includes the community's myths, its symbols, its conflicts, its failures, its triumphs, its beginnings, its future—all of it as both memory and vision, and all of it forging personal and community identity. The strength generated by that self-knowledge and identity must sustain the community's members—and therefore especially also its teachers. In Bolt's view, teachers who have themselves been incorporated into that story must accept as their endgame the pedagogical enticement and recruitment of the young into that same story. This is his second dominant idea.

Narrative and Curriculum. On a third level (Chapter 6), Bolt connects story to the curriculum. Here he offers only minor help, but that's fair enough: teachers will need to carry on from there. What is clear is that narrative for Bolt apparently means not a more Christian-content curriculum but a more Christianly-focused curriculum. Telling the Christian story, he insists, should be done in the manner not of a church but of a school. "The school," he says, "is the place where the broader community seeks to pass on to the next generation its civilizational memory, its cultural wisdom. Put this way, we are clearly affirming the case . . . for cultural literacy as the characteristic task of the school." Teachers, he says, are "custodians of a civi-

lization and students its heirs" (189). This, I take it, is the rousing language that some curriculum reorganizers among us regard as heretical but which used to be enthusiastically called liberal education. Of course, in a Christian school, that liberal education needs Christian baptism—just as secular pedagogical theories do. For both, a Christian narrative focus could be of direct and continuing help.

Narrative as Recruitment. Recruitment into the Christian story is a work of God's grade, but teachers must ask how they can help. Although Bolt is not specific about this, there are clues. First, I take it that the above cultural-literacy goal implies that not everything in the curriculum is to be unnaturally weighted down with religious homilies or twisted into Christian story. This could turn students off as moralistic or phony. Next, wherever possible the curriculum should be organized in the narrative mode, especially literature and history—and, of course, Bible studies and church history. Also, a biographical focus should be sought for its human particularity and drama and its modeling power. Above all, the curriculum must build the long story, not offer just anecdotal and episodic events—although of course, abundantly including such.

All of this would be Bolt's "Christian Great True Story" (intertwined, as he suggests, with Kieran Egan's "Great True Stories of the World." That true story would unfold "the grand narrative plot" of the Bible from creation to Pentecost and move along through history to present time. The account would invite students to sit in at a roll-call of the saints, from Stephen and Polycarp to John Huss and John Calvin, from the Huguenots and Puritans to Abraham Kuyper and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the many others—all of this story coming to be seen as the same story the young are today challenged to enter (193).

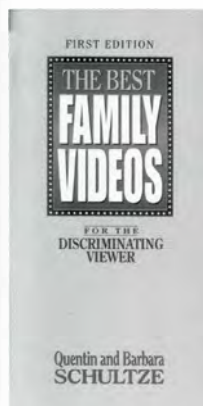
Assumed in all this recruitment strategy is that narrative not replace cognitive learning but foster such learning. Bolt agrees with Kieran Egan that children have "conceptual tools" with which to "learn the most profound things about our past" (196-197). The Christian story is not fantasy or fairy tale. It is anchored in fact, in event, that can be known. Narrative's joining together of such conceptual knowing with a liberating imagination can, Bolt implies, better help young persons identify with The Great Story's models of costly discipleship—men and women in real history actually bringing God's love to the lost, suffering persecution, opposing vio-

lence, serving the needy, and promoting social justice. For the young, such story encounters can gradually, with God's help, become beckoning signposts of God's multicultural and universal community of memory. Professor Bolt urges Christian schools to celebrate that community and to tell its story to the generations until the Lord returns.

A Homiletic Endnote. About a dozen years ago, soon after my retirement, I wrote some notes about "education as story." From that writing I recall two exhortations. In the spirit of John Bolt's fine book I now challenge Christian teachers with them: First, that in places like Psalm 78, Hebrews 11, and the long story-sermons in Acts, God is reminding you that great teaching is possible in the narrative mode. Second, that from time to time you should ask each other three questions: What version of the Christian story are you professing? How can you best tell/teach that story in your classes? How can you improve your enticing and recruiting of God's sons and daughters into that story? Your regular asking and answering those questions is really nothing else than discussing rudimentary educational philosophy—something still required by your school board, right?

THE BEST FAMILY VIDEOS FOR THE DISCRIMINATING VIEWER

(First Edition)



Quentin and Barbara Schultze
Chicago, IL: Northfield
Publishing. 1994, 202 pp.
\$5.99 (paperback).
Reviewed by Gerry Ebbers,
Director of Development,
Dordt College

For everyone who has wandered the aisles of a video store, searching shelf after shelf, looking for something "good" to take home, this pocket guide will be a welcome asset. Divided into two sections, contemporary and classic, this helpful guide lists hundreds of "good" movies for child, family, or adult viewing. The contemporary section lists movies of the past ten years while the classic section includes both older and foreign movies.

Included in the listing for each movie is a brief story line, an indication of the appropriate audience, a note about the content and whether or not there may be anything objectionable, and finally a list of the topics or themes with which the movie deals. The director, lead cast, running time, and an overall letter grading are also listed. Each of these divisions is explained in a key in the front of the guide.

Anyone who is familiar with Schultze's critique of the movie industry will appreciate the standards used to choose the selections. The guide is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather selective, listing the "best" according to the criteria established. In the introduction, the Schultzes explain the five standards they used. For example, selections must be "well-written, well-directed, and well-performed;" "positive in outlook;" and "relatively free from gratuitous language, graphic violence, explicit sex and the like."

Although everyone using the guide will probably find one or two movies missing or some included that are questionable from a personal point of view, nevertheless, the guide goes a long way in meeting the needs of parents and individuals who long for just such help in navigating the video maze. Future editions will be welcome.