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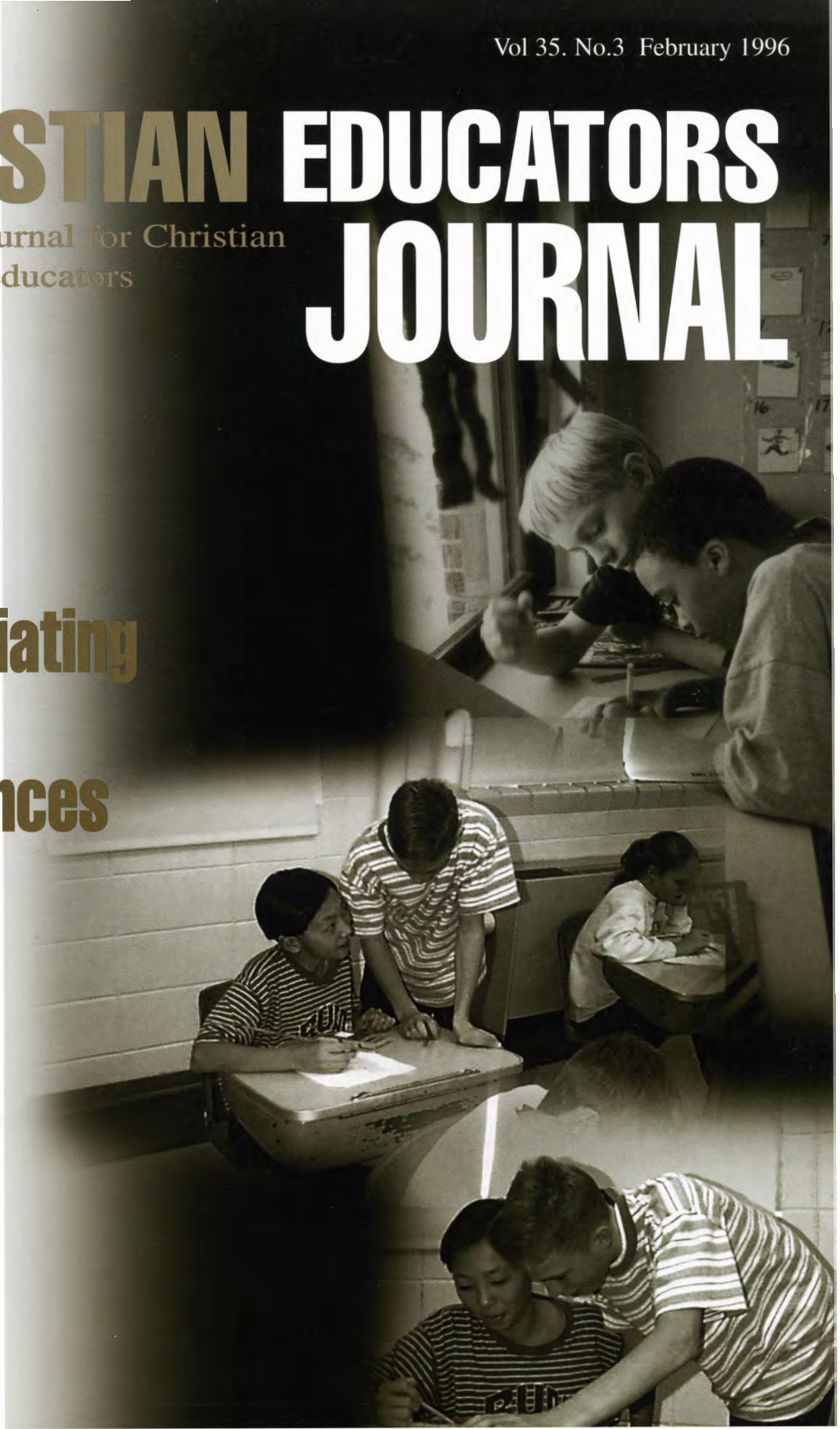
Appreciating Ethnic Differences



Lorna VanGilst

Love as Deep as Blood

Editorial

All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes.

The House on Mango Street—
Sandra Cisneros

I was pleased when a woman stopped me on the streets of Kharkov, Ukraine, to ask me the time—in Russian. "She thinks I'm one of them," I thought, flattered that I did not stand out as an American.

Yet my purpose for being in Ukraine was to share American culture, and to experience theirs. I had chosen to step out of my Sioux Center safety zone as a way for us to grow richer and closer to one another as members of God's creation.

Immersion in another culture is just one way to learn about the diversity and yet the similarity of the people God has created. We have a number of opportunities nowadays to host people from other cultures, to teach in non-native cultures, even to study in faraway settings. Such exchanges can transform us. They can help us see beyond ourselves.

But the irony exists: we white Anglo North Americans are more gracious about our distant neighbors than about the ones in our own back yard. Oh, we're civil enough to let them come into our territory, especially if they are tuition-paying constituents of our schools. But unless they're willing to embrace white Anglo cultural norms, we really have to stretch to open our hearts.

I've been trying to put my finger on the difference. I think it has to do with integrity. When people come to visit, they come for a limited time. We think of them as guests—temporaries. Of course there are differences one has to contend with: language barriers and habits that we may never understand, differences in sense of time, in sense of personal space, in eating habits, in styles, in ideologies.

But the differences that erupt into racial tensions, the attitudinal conflicts, run deeper—maybe as deep as blood. Kids who use racial slurs often come from homes where ethnic jokes and racial putdowns serve as entertainment, where attitudes form on the basis of a single experience or of stereotypes, not personal connections with people of different ethnic groups.

We quite glibly celebrate ethnic diversity in our schools and our churches one week of the year, counting every adopted Korean North American child we know and love in order to prove our own appreciation for ethnic differences. These cultural diversity weeks may have very positive effects—at least to help our students realize the richness of diversity. But one week of trying on saris or dashekis, one week of tasting tacos or borscht doesn't prepare us for the feelings of inferiority or superiority that occur when people fail to experience an equal sense of respect and dignity.

There can be no selfishness, no superiority, no patronizing power play among us if we are really to appreciate ethnic diversity. Certainly, there must be a transformation at the very core of our lives, a sense of who we are as children of God.

We must come to realize that we may be different from one another, but our worth comes not from how well we handle our society, but from how well we rely on the power of Christ's sacrifice to fill us with love for people of every race.

HOJOTOHO: Ms. Krumpeltree Discovers Her Inner Nazi

Hojotoho! Hojotoho!
Heiaha! Heiaha!
Helmwige! Hier!
Hierher mit dem Ross!

From The Valkyrie (Die Walkure)
—Richard Wagner

Karen Kalteissen

Ms. Krumpeltree's alter-ego is Karen Kalteissen, language arts director of the Upper School and Junior High language arts teacher at the Mustard Seed School in Hoboken, New Jersey.

It was one of those sultry days in August just before the start of the school year. The first marathon faculty meeting of the week had just ended, and the entire staff of Pumpkin Patch Academy was enjoying one last moment of peace in the faculty room before charging off to attack dusty closets and empty plan books. Mailboxes were as distressingly full as teachers' calendars.

"Here's your mail, Ms. Krumpeltree," said Mrs. Whalesaver, the secretary, dumping a large stack of magazines, catalogues, bills, and advertisements in the kindly old junior high teacher's lap.

"Heiaha," responded Ms. Krumpeltree with apparent ennui.

"Look at all this interesting stuff: Feeling Ethnic: *a Multicultural Sensitivity Manual for American Teachers . . . Multicultural Heroes of Eastern Ohio.* And look, here's a book called *Creating a Multicultural Bathroom Policy.*"

Ms. Krumpeltree yawned. "I am sick unto death of multiculturalism. Take it away."

"But what about this one?" persisted Mrs. Whalesaver. "There's a unit on African masks, a recipe for tortillas, a lesson on how to acquire Japanese yen, and a chapter called *Token Women Role Models of the Twentieth Century* featuring Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mrs. John F. Kennedy."

"I didn't know marrying a President made you a culture," said Ms. Krumpeltree, "but I'm still sick of it. Camille Paglia called multiculturalism trendy sentimentalism that—."

Mr. Featherpenny, the principal, shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "I—uh—don't think we quote Camille Paglia at Pumpkin Patch. . . ."

"Camille who?" whispered Mr. Pribble to Miss Klipperman, upon whom he depended to know such things.

"Feminist. Radical. Scary," responded Miss Klipperman, who, despite her conservative preferences, felt it incumbent upon herself to be widely read.

Mrs. Featherpenny, physical education teacher and wife of the principal, saw the panic on her husband's face. She leaned over and whispered reassuringly, "It's all right, dear. She's on the Public Broadcasting System."

"Anyway," continued Ms. Krumpeltree, "Paglia says multiculturalism is simply a 'continuation of the genteel tradition of respectability and conformity. [It institutionalizes] American *niceness* which seeks, above all, not to offend, and must therefore pretend not to notice any differences or distinctions among people.'"

"But is that so bad?" asked Miss Klipperman, the widely read but conservative peacemaker.

"In some ways, it's a great improvement," admitted Ms. Krumpeltree. "Goodness knows, there's been an embarrassing history of racism and eurocentrism in American curriculum, and it's a step in the right direction to celebrate the cultural richness of somebody other than dead white males."

"So then the trend toward multicultural education is a good thing?" said Miss Klipperman, tasting victory.

"When it's genuine, yes," said Ms. Krumpeltree. "The problem is that it's become such a hot marketable commodity that cultural authenticity is being undermined right and left."

The faculty shook its collective head in despair: Ms. Krumpeltree had been launched.

"There are really two parts to the problem," said Ms. Krumpeltree.

"Only two?" questioned Mr. Pribble politely, grateful there weren't three.

"Yes," said the junior high teacher. "The *multi* part and the *cultural* part. We don't mean *multi* at all. We really mean only a few politically correct ones. When did you last see a curriculum unit on Belgium?"

The faculty leafed through the mail, agreeing they found no ads for curriculum guides to Belgian studies.

"But that's not the worst of it," decried Ms. Krumpeltree.

"No, it wouldn't be," said Mr. Pribble.

"The worst of it is the horrendous disrespect we end up showing the very cultures we set out to appreciate. Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, somebody got the idea that to

make a culture palatable to students, it had to be cleaned up, fixed up, washed off, defanged, and ultimately rendered indistinguishable from the dominant culture in everything but externals."

Mrs. Sweetpoppy, the music teacher, looked thoughtful. "Actually, come to think of it, I've been rather distressed by all the gospel music I hear school choirs performing *in the style* of spirituals—but with no mention of God. That's not a very honest recounting of the slave experience."

"Spirituals without God," said Ms. Krumpeltree, "fit right in with Mexican Christmas carols without the Virgin Mary and Native American tribal history without fighting. Puritans without judgmentalism. The Middle Ages without the Inquisition. Japan without Pearl Harbor.

"What about *my* cultural heritage?" continued Ms. Krumpeltree, clearly wound up. "The only thing German you're allowed to talk about is guilt. You can admit to being German as long as you're prepared to apologize for it . . . or bake lebkuchen."

"Now, I think you're over-reacting a bit, Ms. K," said Mr. Featherpenny. "What have you been reading this summer?" questioned the principal, who was, in fact, quite accustomed to trouble from his teachers. "Please tell me it wasn't *Mein Kampf*."

"Heavens no," replied the sweet old teacher. "Actually, I spent the summer wrapped in the Germanic mythology that underlies Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*. I studied the libretti from *The Rhinegold, The Valkyrie, Siegfried, and Gotterdammerung*. I read every version of the Siegfried legend I could. I even made my way through the thirteenth century Nibelungenlied, one of Wagner's significant sources. And then all the reading fell away, and there was the music . . ." Ms. Krumpeltree sighed beatifically. The faculty yawned collectively.

Ms. Krumpeltree was too far into her private rapture to notice the boredom in the room. "Magnificent stuff. The inherent doom of Creation from its inception in the struggle between love and power. The proud, stubborn Wotan who knew not how to resist the cold, judgmental Fricka . . . the magnificent Brunnhilde who served Wotan most faithfully by betraying and disobeying him . . . the innocence of the Rhinemaidens, removed from the primal curse of the will to possession . . . the Valkyries, strong warrior women, riding into Valhalla crying *HOJOTO-HO*, each with a dead German hero slung over her saddle . . . the flawed hero Siegfried . . . the spark from Brunnhilde's self-immolation that contains the combustion of the cosmos . . . the Teutonic sweep of power and passion. . . ."

By this time, only a few stalwart colleagues remained awake.

Ms. Krumpeltree decided to conclude. "Thus, I spent the summer poised at the intersection of the Celtic, Arthurian, classical, and German mythos, bowed in the presence of the Cosmic, honed to art by one of the first contemporary minds to recognize the relationship between art, myth, and revolution. . . ."

"All well and good," interrupted Mrs. Sweetpoppy, "but even if Wagner wasn't personally responsible for the hijacking of his music by the Nazis—"

Mr. Featherpenny interrupted. "I—uh—don't think we say Nazis at this school."

"It's okay, dear," whispered Mrs. Featherpenny. "They say it on PBS all the time."

"As I was saying," continued Mrs. Sweetpoppy, "didn't he write something like ten volumes of essays that were virtual fuel for the fires of the Holocaust?"

"Yeah," added Ms. Prillybite, "and didn't he believe that all we had to do to save the world was shift the world's population to warmer climates where we would be disinclined to eat meat and embrace compassionate vegetarianism?"

Ms. Krumpeltree did not protest. "Yeah, he said that."

"And didn't Nietzsche once say that Wagner contaminates everything he touches, and that all music becomes sick with Wagner?" added Mr. Pribble.

"That's true," admitted Ms. Krumpeltree.

Ms. Klipperman added, "I once saw *Die Meistersinger*. Do you realize it's full of antisemitism? And it ends with an invocation to Holy German Art? And it, like the rest of Wagner, is virtually unplayable in Israel even today?"

"So I'm told," said Ms. Krumpeltree.

"And," began Ms. Prillybite, "didn't Wagner accept—even court—the patronage of mad King Ludwig of Bavaria, who was not wholly sane but was wholly, gaily enamored of Wagner?"

Mr. featherpenny pounded the table. "I'm sure we don't say *gaily enamored* at this school."

Mrs. Featherpenny whispered something to her husband. "Who's funding that station anyway?" he mumbled in reply.

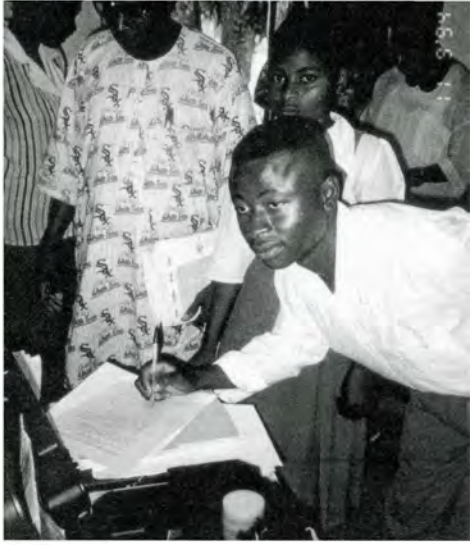
Ms. Krumpeltree decided to wrap it up. "Look, everything you say is probably true and much more besides. But the fact is the music. *Prima la musica.* Mahler said, 'There is *Beethoven and Richard and after them, nobody.'"*

For the first time in an hour, Ms. Krumpeltree took account of her audience. "Look, we're Christian teachers, called to do justice in a deeply radical way. Personally, I'm delighted that antisemitism is politically incorrect, and I hate Wagner's ideas on the subject. But that's part of his time, his place, and his art. I can't choose to throw away anything that makes me squirm, keep a few catchy tunes, and call it Wagner. . . or German culture." Ms. Krumpeltree shifted gears as she tossed the multicultural catalogues into the trash.

"But the most important point for us is that every culture has its dark side, every culture has its holocaust, and if you're having trouble finding it, a good place to start looking is in closest proximity to its most magnificent achievements. Refusing to acknowledge the parts that make us uncomfortable is tantamount to attacking the integrity of culture itself. So until somebody shows me a multicultural catalogue with the integrity and vision to embrace the full sweep, I'll just sink into the dark eroticism of the Liebestod . . ."

Mr. Featherpenny winced. "I know, PBS," he said.

The faculty nodded.



Head boy Jerry Bulam signs the agreement linking MKAR Secondary School in Nigeria with Calvin Christian High School in Grandville, Michigan

Link of Love

Jim Lont

Jim Lont is Director of Ministry Development for Worldwide Christian Schools based in Grandville, Michigan.

The Nigerian sun beats down on several hundred students standing in rows in front of their secondary school at Tarku. They are serious, curious . . . they become excited. Suddenly they break ranks and rush forward. Was it the pizza?

Dr. John Orkar, "a man from the bush," entertained and informed hundreds of students in linked schools both in North America and in Nigeria.

In a chapel service at a Christian high school in Lansing, Illinois, the buzzing stops as chapel begins and from the sides of the chapel the choir walks in singing a haunting African melody . . . then quietly walks out. The eyes of the students go to the screen where they see their friends at Katsina Ala (in green and white uniforms—their school colors too!) waving at them—white palms on black bodies. They smile in warm affection and think their private thoughts.

In Jato Aka, at another assembly, students ask questions of the visitor. Then one shy girl steps forward and simply says, with uncommon emotion in her voice, "Thank them for helping our school and for being our new friends." Principal Ignatious Dzer then gives me a very special gift for Bill Safstrom in their linked school. At Bellevue Christian School in Washington state, hundreds of students break into laughter as they see their principal in Tiv dress carrying that special leather bag.

At a happy assembly in Hull, Iowa, Tiv Team Leader Jane Lamfers puts on her beaded necklace as students from that vast farm country smile about plowing the "back 40" with their yam hoe, a gift from their friends at Makurdi.

These are only a few of the scenes I saw this past school year as thousands of students in twelve Christian secondary high schools, six in Nigeria and six in North America, experienced the joy of being linked by love.

Why?

A few years ago, I read this statement by Dr. John Stott: "More than ever before, Christians must become globally-minded Christians because we serve a global God."

As I reflected on the changes in our own society, Dr. Stott's words kept coming back to me. It was apparent that North American Christians were losing interest in the world. They were sick of its problems, and more and more Christians were supporting only "what they could see and touch." And I could sense that young Christians were more and more interested in "business" and less and less in missions. Somehow, the call of the foreign fields was gone. Mission agencies were finding it hard to get long-term, committed missionaries. I knew, however, that my young friends in North America didn't know what they were missing!

Working with God's people in many other countries, however, I saw the longing for hope in the eyes of their young, and realized that Worldwide Christian Schools "had come to the kingdom for such a time as this."Christian students here and there could learn about and encourage each other. If only they would take the time, and if only someone would introduce them, they would become caring, globally minded Christians.

Several times I had helped primary schools experience the joy of helping a school overseas. But now, six secondary schools in Nigeria were being helped by WCS to become model Christian secondary schools. So when teachers Henry and Angeline Visscher from Edmonton came home from serving these schools as volunteers for WCS in the fall of 1992, we went together to some Christian high schools to tell what the Visschers had experienced. We invited students and administrators to think about taking a special interest in one of the schools. Later I called this a program a "Link of Love."

One by one, insightful student councils, backed by visionary administrators, came to be linked in love. The rest is history.

The linked schools are:

Mkar - Calvin Christian High School, Grandville, Michigan
Taraku - Holland Christian High School, Holland, Michigan
Katsina Ala - Illiana Christian High School, Lansing, Illinois
Wuese - Sheboygan County Christian High School, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Makurdi - Western Christian High School, Hull, Iowa
Jato Aka - Bellevue Christian School, Clyde Hill, Washington

How?

Learning to love someone takes time, so linked schools commit themselves to each other for a student generation, three to four years.

During that period they learn about each other through video reports, exchanges of letters, and special assemblies—sometimes with Nigerian leaders.

They also help each other—most of all by praying for each other. They share their resources with each other—the resources of joy, assistance for student sponsorship support, and little gifts that say, "We're thinking of you."

For the past two years, students at Holland Christian High put on a "Fifties Car Hop" event. Students skate around the parking lot serving hamburgers. Recently they raised $900 for student sponsorship at Taraku. The offering at Illiana's spring concert this year was for study Bibles for students and staff at Katsina Ala. Principals encourage each other across the sea. Some teachers are beginning to share ideas with each other.

Involved, informed students here are beginning to become globally minded young Christians. I have no doubt the Spirit of God will use that in his plan to bring the gospel to the "ends of the world."

Goals of Link of Love Worldwide Christian Schools

The main goal of WCS is to "help provide Christian education for every nation." It does this through a carefully developed five-part program with "reliable, needy Christian organizations" (mostly in third world or "developing" countries.)

A secondary but complementing goal of WCS is to help North American Christians, especially Christian students, to "become globally minded Christians." As part of this goal, WCS links schools here with schools overseas.

Make It INTE

Mary Post is Resource Developer of Chicago West Side Christian School in Chicago, Illinois.

With all the talk about cultural diversity these days, you may hear some of your students making insensitive remarks. How do you address them? You want to be equipped to make a difference in people's lives, and you don't want to see children get hurt. Where do you begin?

Join us at Chicago West Side Christian School. Located in Chicago's inner city, the school has the mission to provide quality Christian education for children through a supportive academic environment in which each child is challenged to develop in intellectual, emotional, spiritual, creative, and social dimensions in order to participate productively and positively in God's world.

When the school doors open at 6:45 a.m., children are greeted by Jannie Jamison. All of Jannie's children have already graduated from West Side, but she is so committed to CWSCS that she continues to come each morning to direct the before-school program. Jannie has been on the school board for over twenty years, currently serving as its president.

Vanessa Bryant Young, in her fifth year as principal of CWSCS, came to the school with a wealth of experience from the public schools, including participation in a federally funded program called CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning.) She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in educational administration and also teaching an education class at Trinity Christian College.

As children swirled about and bouncing basketballs punctuated the background, these two women talked with me about cultural diversity in Christian schools.

Your student population is 100% African-American. What do you do to make them more culturally aware of a diverse society?

Vanessa: Exposure, exposure, exposure. Our students receive instruction, supervision, and nurturing from adults who are black and white. Visitors interested in our program are encouraged to talk with the children. Cultures are introduced through fine arts programs from organizations such as Urban Gateways. Countries and cultures are explored in classrooms. Our children are exposed to other cultures as they visit and perform in a variety of settings.

Jannie: We're in a rainbow world, and children need to know about and appreciate many cultures. We don't call it a melting pot anymore—we view it as a salad, where every culture has a unique contribution to the whole.

As other schools become more culturally diverse, what advice do you have for teachers?

Jannie: First of all, what you need to understand is that if you invite someone to the table, you need to offer them some food. Don't say that you are happy to have black students in your school and then do nothing to make them feel welcome.

Vanessa: If you've taught for fifteen years and you see your classroom becoming more diverse, continue to do the things that have made you an excellent teacher. Become personally involved with each child, build relationships with each parent, build a sense of community within your classroom that will affirm the value and dignity of all. Beyond that, view the introduction of every culture into your classroom as an educational opportunity—work with the parents and ask for their help in educating your classroom about a new culture, its history, its traditions, and its contribution to American culture.

Jannie: You also need to recognize that, within every culture, people are individuals created with their own identity. Don't generalize about cultures—determine to get to know each child as an individual.

Vanessa: And you really need to be honest with yourself. If you aren't comfortable in a culturally diverse setting, ask yourself if you are in the right place. The bottom line is, what effect will your attitudes have on the children? Your uneasiness will definitely transfer to the children and will be hurtful and harmful to them.

What can institutions do to become more intentional in their development of an educational environment that promotes acceptance and appreciа-

NTIONAL

Mary Post

Vanessa Bryant Young, principal, is on the left. Jannie Jamison, board president and before-school program director, is on the right.

tion of different backgrounds, cultures, and races?

Jannie: Let's begin with the colleges. Christian colleges need to integrate different cultures into the teacher education curriculum so they are an everyday part of children's classroom experience.

Vanessa: I see real progress in that area. For new teachers coming out of Christian colleges such as Trinity, there is an expectation that cultural diversity should be a part of all learning. For teachers who graduated years ago, you need to get to workshops, do some studying . . . but, honestly, you won't be able to teach another culture with the same passion as you can your own—it isn't your experience. So look to others, particularly minority educators and professionals, to have a role in your classroom as well.

Jannie: Socially, schools also need to do more to mix it up—there is no reason we should walk into institutions and see youth split into groups based primarily on ethnic background—and we're not just talking black and white here—translate this to Dutch and non-Dutch, too. But that has to be done deliberately in the classroom, in the planning of school activities. . . .

Vanessa: When you invite speakers for chapel, do you ever invite Christians of different cultures or denominational backgrounds? Do special assemblies represent a broad spectrum of cultures and ethnic groups? What are you saying to the students if every speaker comes from the same cultural or denominational fabric? Do you seek staff in-service speakers who address the possibilities within a culturally diverse classroom? Unless your staff claims ownership in creating a welcoming place for minorities, the day-to-day experience of minority children will still be less than desired.

Jannie: My own children experienced some very painful things in their high school and college years. I really believe students should be able to go through high school and college, and they should come out with friends from many cultures. But you have to understand that children are always going to seek what is most comfortable for them. It takes leadership from staff to create an educational and social environment where youth will become comfortable across cultural lines and will build lasting relationships.

Vanessa: Institutionally, have you worked through your feelings about race? Are you prepared to open the doors? Be sure you are ready, because if you are not, the children are the ones who will get hurt.

Jannie: If you are ready, find board members from diverse backgrounds and be prepared to listen to them. I volunteered to be on Timothy Christian School's board when my children were in high school there. The school needed black representation on the board.

As you search for staff, be conscious of the need for minority representation on the staff—all children need role models. And understand that minority staff will not necessarily come to you. You will have to recruit, to seek them out.

Vanessa: In all these things, whether you are choosing literature reflecting a range of ethnic experience, inviting speakers from different cultures, or making your board and staff more representative of your student population, your actions must be intentional.

We need to organize, to schedule, if need be, just like an appointment, until we all can honor God's design for human society and culture to be understood. Each of us—students, teachers, parents, pastors—we all must learn to understand from, care for, and enrich the lives of others.

What Does a Tutor Actually Do?

Mary K. Herbert

Mary K. Herbert teaches English courses at Long Island University and tutors writing at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, New York.

For over two years, I have worked as a writing tutor at a college and at a university in Brooklyn, New York. At first I volunteered an entire semester in which I received not one dime in salary but—as it turned out—a million bucks in terms of gratification and spiritual rewards. I tutored students two afternoons a week at a small church-affiliated college and at a large secular urban university in downtown Brooklyn.

The directors of the writing centers at both schools took a chance and welcomed me to their staffs. Their acumen about people and managerial strengths were put to the test. It was indeed a case of matchmaking: a tremulous ex-editor meeting an exciting new generation of students. I did not want to let them down, and I was eager to see if I could prove myself in these new academic settings. I discovered that tutoring has its own dynamics, its own challenges. Tutoring is a real job, a "calling" in every sense, and an important link in the educational process.

As the weeks went by, I found myself more and more emotionally engaged with the task of tutoring. At first, I came into the writing centers two afternoons a week, for two hours. The people and energy in these centers were like a special class in educational pedagogy, waiting for me alone. I never knew what to expect. Sometimes there was a hubbub of activity: the entire basketball team jostling for computer time, urgently requesting editorial assistance on term papers. On other occasions, I might find one lone student nervously revising a research paper, hovering like a medieval scribe over a manuscript, seeking advice on illuminations or the past tenses of verbs. The director, with a cheerful wave of her hand, put me to work one-on-one, nervous tutor matched with nervous student. And then, after several weeks of providing paramedic grammar "fixes," like many beginning teachers and other professionals in education, I had a wonderful epiphany that convinced me that I was doing worthwhile work. This was not just proofreading ESL students' papers. This was an intensified learning experience (valuable especially for those who work with English as Second Language students).

For me, the moment of epiphany came when Wei Chang, a petite, vivacious Chinese girl, came flying through the doorway to the table where I was idly flipping through a plump book on grammar and pontifical counsel on how to write a research paper. I was wondering if I could ever master this haystack of information and rules, much less convey the essence of it to a multicultural army of 18-year-olds dealing with the realities of a college education. Wei raced around the table to my seat and flung her arms around me. "I got a B+!" she shrieked, "the first B+ I ever got in my life!" I had helped her organize a brief paper on Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" and then had put the incident out of my mind, never expecting a response like this, nor any response at all. Many students, once they've achieved a decent grade, race on to other, happier matters. I never held my breath waiting for immediate feedback.

But this particular B+ brought a smile to my face. I genuinely shared the student's pleasure. And now I knew the importance of developing the student-tutor team mentality, a partnership for learning.

Not all tutoring efforts bring such obvious rewards. Another student dismally approached me with the news that her essay on a short story by James

Joyce, which we had discussed at great length, had warranted only a C. I looked at the essay, which was carelessly written, and I realized that I could only try to inspire this particular student. It would take a lot of work to get her to dig in and grapple with the material. I could not be her ghost-writer, and yet I had to be more than a generic cheerleader for better writing. In any event, she was disappointed and soon dropped out of the tutoring program. On the other hand, a burly Russian student, new to New York, laboriously revised all of his essays and stuck with our weekly sessions. He literally sweated over his papers.

The busy semesters that I have worked as a writing tutor have been the equivalent of student teaching. Now I do it for a salary, albeit a small one, but the advantages of working strictly as a volunteer are worth a comment. I really did feel like a student teacher. I was able to make mistakes and allow myself the luxury of finding out that I really did like this job. Like many a new teacher, I discovered the pleasure of being appreciated.

Another student, a young woman of Caribbean black heritage, brought in an essay that earned her a B. She was very proud of this grade since her previous efforts had earned only a series of C's. She had revised the "B" essay five times over several tutoring sessions. Her hard work paid off, and she was rightfully jaunty in her walk the day she arrived in the writing center with her graded paper in hand. By the

TUTORING TIPS

1) Tutoring is listening. A writing tutor must learn to listen carefully and try to ascertain what the student is really saying. I found that students often rush into the problem at hand, talking fast and expecting fast-food results, a quick fix. A savvy tutor will back up a little, get the facts, and slow down. Find out everything available about the assignment under discussion. Back up a little more. Look at the previous assignments. Try to discern patterns of writing that may indicate a direction for the tutoring. Ask the student to express in his or her own words what that pattern/problem may be, and then listen carefully. Listening skills essential to corporate or business success are equally important in the college classroom and tutoring center.

2) A writing tutor must be flexible. If a student is tired or seems distracted, listen to what bugs him or her. Perhaps conversation or prayer are more important than the dissection of sentences. Elicit opinions and feelings, and then listen. Pray. Go with the flow.

3) A writing tutor ideally should try to focus on the overall goals of the student rather than on how to write a perfect paper. It is more important to develop a sense of growth in one's work over time. I applaud the use of writing portfolios (now growing in popularity in college composition courses) to develop a cumulative record of growth. Try to link writing assignments to a student's spiritual concerns, professional interests, and career goals.

4) Sometimes a paper is, frankly, a mess. One should keep a sense of humor about doomed essays, and encourage the student to dump such disasters and start over, rather than laboriously and painfully try to rewrite. Objectively evaluate the material to see what is salvageable and what is not. Ask: What can we keep here? What do you think should be redone? What should we shred?

5) A writing tutor must help students focus on developing a main idea and a few supporting points rather than nit-picking individual sentences. (This is important!)

6) When a student is stumped, a tutor can help him or her make a "grocery list" of ideas to be covered in an essay or paper. List-making is less intimidating than formal outlining. (Students often hate to make outlines. The outline can even be constructed after the paper itself is written. Don't let the scaffolding hide the main idea.)

7) Use doodling, drawing, and decision trees to help visualize the sequence of ideas. A writing tutor can help a student visualize an essay by literally drawing a picture of it, in order to see it as a series of paragraphs and a sequence of ideas.

8) Tutors should encourage students to do library research and to read a newspaper daily. It is surprising how many students do not have the newspaper habit. Often the daily paper contains articles that will shine a bright light on a current writing assignment. TV usually will not give this kind of breadth and depth to reflective writing.

9) The tutor-student relationship is conversational, one-on-one. Ask the student to tell what the essay or paper should say. Ask him or her to explain what "needs" to be said. Ask again. Listen.

10) If you want to be an effective writing tutor, read the student's essay or paper aloud together, with the student. Take turns. Show how grammar and punctuation often become clearer—and more obvious—when the paper is read aloud. This is an easy, obvious, often overlooked pedagogical technique.

11) Tutors should always try to help students see writing assignments from a professional writer's viewpoint. Tell the student: Imagine your essay is going to be published. Who are the readers? What do they want to find out from this paper? If it is an essay, what is the title? What is the "hook" that will lure readers into continuing reading it? A journalist's or copywriter's approach to writing can make the assignment seem more intriguing, and sometimes easier and more fun to write. (For many years I ran a training program for beginning copywriters at a large publishing firm. Much of that methodology seems equally useful in helping students in college now.)

12) Realistically, writing tutors are often expected to simply proofread and edit students' papers. If this is the expectation, the tutor should ask the student to explain what is being done in the editing steps, to help the writer learn the concepts. For example, a tutor might add an "ed" to a past tense verb. If so, point out the correction to the student and ask why the "ed" is necessary.

end of the academic year, she was turning in "A" papers and she received an A for the course. Most recently, I have had the pleasure of helping her organize an essay for a graduate school application. Many students from the Caribbean countries come from French or British educational systems; like many ESL students, they seek and want the practical help offered by an American tutor willing to provide guidance in American English. A wise tutor does not denigrate a student's academic background, but demonstrates, one-on-one, the mainstream forms of communication and practical survival techniques for the American classroom.

Tutoring is very labor intensive. A tutor often serves as chaplain, confessor, therapist, coach, parent surrogate, sibling stand-in, teammate, counselor, proctor, hector, nurse, nanny, squad leader—and teacher. Tutoring as a job, unfortunately, is much lower on the educational pecking order than is the work of a classroom teacher or teaching assistant. In terms of job satisfaction, however, tutoring equals any position in the helping professions. My tutoring experience led to teaching assignments, and I could not have dealt with that responsibility without my boot camp experience in tutoring.

Tutoring is a needed role at all levels of education and can be a welcome form of service in a variety of Christian educational settings, not just college academic learning centers. If you would like to volunteer as a writing tutor, you might want to check out the possibilities in church-sponsored youth programs, your local high school, public library, church library, YMCA, community center, 4-H center, youth organizations (like PAL), or outreach centers, or in continuing education programs sponsored by any college in your community.

Even if you are presently teaching full time, after-hours tutoring one or two days or evenings a week can be rejuvenating and may give you new insights into your regular classroom job. Believe me, students appreciate your concern, your guidance, and your "street smarts." As a writing tutor, I have tried to emphasize students' strengths as writers. I suppose this should be self-evident, but it is easy to forget when the writer is in a panic mode. I think it is a good idea to look at the student's writing for other courses, not just English, and try to get a feel for the students' other academic skills. I recommend that you discuss with the student his or her previous courses and background in writing, including high school experiences in writing. Look at the whole student. Talk about his or her best work, in any and all courses. Search for and pull out the positive memories and build on them.

Readers will notice that I have said nothing about articles and prepositions. For ESL students, and perhaps for many native-born speakers of American English, these aspects of grammar are the very last aspects to be mastered. It takes five years to deal competently with academic discourse, and learning how to communicate is a lifelong job. As a writing tutor, I am delighted to affirm my students' small victories. Writing tutors are in a good position to monitor growth and change.

Useful Sources for Writing Tutors:

Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky. 1986. Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Lindemann, Erika. 1994. A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers, Third Ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Murray, Donald M. 1985. A Writer Teaches Writing, Second Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Tate, Gary, and Edward P. J. Corbett, eds. 1994. The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook, Third Ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Recently, a student came into the writing center with the confession that he had minimal skills in written English even though he was a business management major. He told me he dreamed of owning his own Brooklyn firm someday. This would be a challenge, since English was not his first language. I suggested that he keep a journal and try to write one paragraph each day. I gave him a small notebook to use as a journal. He appreciated the little booklet, but there was very little in it when he came in for his weekly tutoring session. "I don't know what to write about," he said sheepishly. However, he agreed to write at least one paragraph, while I looked over his shoulder.

"I have no ideas for writing," he said. He waited expectantly, hoping I would be able to provide an intellectual jump-start. I asked him about his work, his courses, his life. What might trigger the written word, the flow of ideas? He revealed that he was in the U. S. Air Force Reserve, in charge of basic training of a squad from Brooklyn. "What do you teach your new recruits?" I asked him.

"Oh, how to read maps, and how to parachute." He was matter-of-fact.

Incredulous, amazed, impressed, I asked: "You teach guys how to jump out of airplanes?!" He looked shyly down at his journal, pencil nervously clenched in a normally competent hand.

"Yes," he replied. "But it is nothing. It is boring." He looked up at me, and then at his paper. "This," he said, gesturing toward the penciled words, is much harder." And so it is.

This article is based on an essay previously published in The Terrier: The Alumni Magazine of St. Francis College, Brooklyn, N.Y., and the Newsletter of the National Tutoring Association.

All God's Children

Don Bultman

Don Bultman is principal of Oakdale Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Today is somewhat unusual—the school is filled with excited staff, students, and family. It is Grandparents/ Friends Day at Oakdale Christian School. As I walk the halls and shake hands with friends, I am reminded again of how wonderful and great our God is and how inclusive the family of God is.

We are blessed with a diverse student body representing many ethnic, religious, social, academic, and economic backgrounds. We have Asian, Hispanic, African, and Native Americans sitting alongside students of European descent sharing ideas and cultures with one another.

Thirty percent of our student body represents different minority ethnic cultures coming from twenty-four different churches. We benefit from the experiences that our students bring to school, and as a staff, we are challenged to expand into teaching styles that reach out and motivate students to use their academic, artistic, and personal skills to achieve in school.

Our diversity of students brings us a keener sense of our studies and how we have all contributed to the growth of our nation and are all called to glorify God. It widens our understanding moreso than books that do not take the opportunity to share the complete information about explorers, scientists, political leaders, and others of color who have added to the greatness of our country. It also helps in our discussions of how our country mistreated slaves and some immigrant groups of people.

Students know each other as classmates and friends, with no regard to the color of one's skin or type of clothing. They show mutual respect for each other as they play together, work in teams to solve problems, and sit next to each other singing in chapel. Each child is able to form judgments based on relationships with others instead of being dominantly influenced by stereotypes and discrimination.

Teachers have the opportunity to help mold students as Christ wants us to live and love our neighbors.

We can encourage each other as colleagues to be better informed so that we can incorporate material that will enhance our teaching, understanding of cultural and racial backgrounds, and assessment of attitudes and behaviors. In staff development meetings, take the opportunity to share with one another and challenge each other to be more inclusive in sharing the worth of all God's children. It is important to ask the following questions of ourselves:

Am I knowledgeable and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of students in my classroom and city?

Do I provide an atmosphere in class where different cultures are recognized, shared, and respected?

Do I attempt to use inclusive, culturally appropriate language and material which support ethnic and cultural groups?

Am I able to demonstrate non-traditional roles for people no matter what gender, race, culture, or physical handicap.

Am I willing in Christian love to correct biases, prejudices, stereotypical language, and the resulting behaviors?

Can I be more assertive in helping to create a more acceptable and loving community as God would have us to live?

If you have not done so, have a cultural celebration that highlights the background of your students or of different ethnic groups; bring in people of color as guest speakers; take the opportunities to have students do research in your subject area to replace information omitted in your textbooks; improve the reading literature in your media center and your professional library. We must also encourage Christian minority educators to join us in our schools and in our mission to equip all children to be servants of Jesus Christ in our contemporary society.

God calls us to bear each other's burdens and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Each of us must explore or create financial possibilities and maintain support groups for those in need and assist in making our schools totally inclusive. Thus, all families who desire a Christian education for their children will feel accepted, respected, and loved as God's children.

Let us hear anew the words of our Lord when he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

FAITH AND LEARNING IN THE *English* CLASSROOM

by Dale Brown

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

I teach literature and composition courses at a college that uses the word Christian to describe its mission. When I introduce myself as a professor at such a place, I can expect knowing looks. Everyone, after all, knows about those sorts of places. Schools with religious affiliations and Christian intentions feature rules and curfews, chapels and Bible classes, sermonizing and piety. This is the sort of place you send your child for protection from the worldliness of the secular institution. It is education with a Christian coating.

Those of us who have spent our careers swimming against that stereotype are rightly frustrated by the persistence of the noxious notion that Christian education is akin to summer church camp extended into an academic calendar. Nonetheless, we would do well to be ready with an answer to at least one of the good questions that sometimes drifts into this conversation: "Well, how is an English class in your Christian school different from the English class at Down Home University? Shakespeare is Shakespeare, and an adverb is an adverb, after all."

I like the question, because far too many so-called Christian institutions have fallen into the cultural stereotype. We provide chapel services and dormitory Bible studies, we offer Christian counseling and a code of Christian conduct, we pray before ball games and have an invocation and a benediction at all public events. But English is English and math is math.

We haven't done the job until we have given serious attention to the relevance of faith to the various disciplines taught; even the most pedestrian of our courses must be about the business of blending our faith and our learning. Trained for the most part in secular higher education, our professors are often the victims of their own graduate school notes and professional journals. Except for the devotional prayer at the beginning of class, our classes are often mirror images of the classes down the road at the state university.

It is not the chapel service that makes a school Christian. It is instead the consistent infusion of a Christian world view into the courses we teach. Without propagandizing or indoctrinating, we must bring the faith to bear on the subjects we present to students. Easy to say. But what does faith have to do with the nouns and verbs? How does faith find its way into a conversation about Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* or Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*?

In my literature classes I try to coerce students toward a serious encounter with important artists that will lead on toward a serious encounter with culture and self. To plunge into the poetry of Emily Dickinson or the fiction of Mark Twain is, I believe, to plunge into oneself. I build my approach to literature around what Robert Frost calls "ulteriority" –what we more often call metaphor. In literature, as in life, it is important to know our way around in metaphor. To learn to read for metaphor is to learn, finally, how to read one's life, and such reading leads to the theological notion of providence. In American Literature courses, for example, I encourage students through their reading to confront the value systems informing the American experiment. The risk of such an aim is, of course, that the class can become a shipwreck experience for some students. Nonetheless, we do our students no favor if we do not help them see that a commitment to Christ will sometimes put them in an antithetical position with regard to the prevailing culture.

I do not subscribe to any artificial grafting of religion on literature; rather, I submit that literature and religion share the same territory in their mutual attention to the central questions of life–alienation, fear, dehumanization, lostness, salvation, and the like. Thus I aim for a seamless interweaving of the issues of faith and the issues of my subject matter. Our artists are calling us to wakefulness. So does our faith. My courses are built on this principle of developing sight and insight. I do believe that a study of literature leads finally to a doing of justice as a reformed vision suggests, but I think the first step is as the sacramentalists have it–a moment of inspiration and insight.

Rhetoric and composition courses pose other problems. The challenge in such courses is to provide content that stimulates students to good writing while providing specific attention to a wide variety of writing glitches. I try to perform the latter service tutorially, and I address the content issue by treating the course as a general introduction to college. I do not try to separate the writing act from the speaking act or the reading act; rather, I offer the course as an invitation to thinking. Lately, I have been using an

autobiographical approach, asking students to treat their own lives and historical settings as texts for explication. I finally do move in the writing courses from the autobiographical focus to a social analysis that sets up a research project. I want students to see that a sharper apprehension of the territory of our own lives leads us toward a clearer analysis of the worlds in which we move.

I do try to help these first-year students toward a deeper appreciation for words. I want them to see that language is an aspect of human desire for knowing, a part of our reaching for God. Grammar, then, is simply our attempt to order the communication act. Essentially, however, language partakes of the divine business of naming and bringing order to our worlds. All of this leads, of course, to a discussion of the Word–the generative principle behind all that we do.

A recent change in my teaching derives from my increasing conviction that we must be about the business of helping students fill in the vowels and consonants between the academic material of the classroom and their daily lives. We continue to register surprise when we encounter instances of inhumanity on our own campus, almost as if we expected our students to become more humane as a result of reading in the human disciplines. We cannot expect such learning to occur as a matter of course. The suffering and turmoil they read about needs a human face. I am increasingly convinced of the need for relevance-making in the classroom. Consequently, I have developed a service dimension in each of my classes. My American Literature students, for example, are required to do one tutoring session each week in a local school that is largely Hispanic. The Calvin students tutor children both during and after school, helping with specific assignments and aiming to encourage young children in the educational process. The work in the elementary school then becomes a matter of conversation in the course that deals often with issues of race and poverty. The experience of many of my students is being greatly expanded through the service project. Their work on the outside project becomes the subject of a report at the end of the semester, but my deepest goal is to help them toward the realization that becoming more thoughtful people involves a doing as well as a being. I think of these service projects as internships that help students understand the why behind the what of my courses.

Experiences such as the service project provide opportunities for relationships with students. I hope that students who have studied with me will have a sense that I care about them; I am increasingly convinced that effective teaching has some sort of elusive but striking relational component. Furthermore, I hope they leave with a sense that something important, even transforming, can happen in an encounter with words. I am not particularly concerned that my students pick up some prescribed body of information or some theory of literary criticism. I target appreciation and discernment as my fundamental goals and have those occasional moments of elation when reason, faith, and imagination do indeed merge in marvelous ways.

Much of what I have said above relates to the issue of how my faith finds its way into the classroom. I have spoken of the natural affinities between religion and literature, of my approach to the issue via a blending of a reformed and a sacramentalist view. The subject gives me considerable pause because I try to keep in mind both sides of the phrase "Christian College." That is, I believe in the truth of the Christian creeds and try to bring my students to stand under that truth. Nonetheless, a college is an arena for searching, questioning, and stretching; we must, I believe, resist the urge merely to indoctrinate our students with our pet orthodoxies and notions of the Christian system. If we do not avoid the temptation to reduce our classrooms to propaganda centers, we are no better than those politically motivated professors of this or that whose work in secular institutions we rightly decry. The notion of Christianity as a closed system simply will not sustain a viable college. Truth is real, yes, but the search for it is never complete. Believing, we journey toward understanding.

Furthermore, the metaphor of integrating faith with learning is probably misleading, suggesting wrongly that the two exist in distinct categories and further suggesting that the process is something we do rather than something we are. My faith inescapably influences my teaching just as it inevitably directs the rest of my life. Whether I am making biblical allusions in the classroom, or talking about a Christian response to literature for some local church, or commenting in a committee meeting upon the public relations of our college with reference to our representation of Christ, I am naturally speaking out of my faith conviction. I want my students to have an appreciation for their own religious traditions, and I hope they develop an appreciation for a multiplicity of Christian voices; but the central business, it seems to me, is getting them to care about the call to righteousness in their own lives.

I want my students to grasp the insights of a Christian world view–that we are creatures of God's design moving in a universe that reflects both his moral vision and our own failure to apprehend that vision. I pray for them an understanding of God's action to free us from the death of our own sinfulness, a hold on the tragedy and the hope. (This is, I think, what we mean when we borrow C.S. Lewis' phrase "mere Christianity.") Such an ideal is not achieved through opening a class with prayer, although that might certainly help. But the Christian world view must explicitly infuse the class conversation. "Now what is a Christian response to all this?" is a question I find myself asking frequently.

I am grateful for a college that encourages me to teach out of my faith convictions with the aim of moving students toward a richer understanding of their own lives and toward a closer examination of their own faith commitments. Avoiding dogmatism and propagandizing, the teacher must help students toward a perception of the Word of God, a sensitivity to how that Word is registered in many and diverse places, and a desire to make the vision of the Word their own. With fear and trembling, the teacher boldly points the direction to truth, beauty, reality, and goodness, suggesting along the way that not all worlds are equally good and true.

We teach that none of us can escape the implications of sin, thus we must, as Harold Macmillan says, "know

when a man is talking rot." That is, genuine education is about sightedness and discernment. Sometimes Buechner's definition of the English teacher as "a professional corrupter of the young" sounds right to me. We try to loosen mental restraints, open doors, push toward enlightenment and truth.

All that is so much more than offering professional and technical training, of course. I want my students to be a blessing to the world, and I believe that involves more than literacy and a command of the facts. Together with our students, we discover resources that, through faith, reason, and imagination, might lead us to sort through the noise and distraction of our time with spiritual discernment.

When I teach "Feature Writing and Investigative Journalism," for example, I find myself frequently addressing the ethical issues that circulate in the journalism profession. I want my students in that class to think richly about how faith makes a certain demand on the stories they write, the perspective they bring to an interview, the attitude they have toward the reader/listener, and the ways in which they use language to persuade, inform, and move.

In my modernism courses, I make every attempt to take seriously the bleakness of the literature of this century. Such pessimism is not the last word, but is certainly a part of the reality serious Christians must confront. "In this world we will have trouble," we have been told, and the literature of these courses chronicles the trouble, the despair of the abyss of meaninglessness. We do get to "I have overcome the world." We don't merely say "yes" to Hemingway and Joyce and the others. We say "yes, but." I try to bring students to that insight by drawing out their resources of faith, by appealing to their knowledge of Scripture and their familiarity with Christian tradition. I also try to underscore the spiritual anxiety, the homesickness of modern literature as a way of registering the loss to which a Christian vision speaks. Surely that is something of what we mean by integrating faith and learning.

This developing of the Christian sensibility occurs as we come to a mutual understanding of God's universal truth, as we see that, as Hopkins says, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." We inform students, we shape them, we draw them out. We entertain, we preach, we pry into their prejudices and failings. And we try, with God's help, to move imaginations, stimulate minds, and awaken spirits. Colin Jager, one of my recent students, puts it this way: "Literature is important because it is fundamentally spiritual. Art is firmly bound to enchantment. We study literature because somewhere along the way we've been touched by a poem or a novel or a phrase that was somehow too exquisitely right to be ignored."

The profession of literature is uniquely joyful in that it so often pours forth from and flows back toward those wells of spirituality at the core of our lives. When I talk about an Emily Dickinson or a Henry David Thoreau, I can do so with the assurance that their central preoccupations have finally to do with how one ought to live. That is, in fact, what important literature does; it takes us where we haven't been and becomes, as Ezra Pound says, "a ball of fire we hold in our hands." That is the enchantment and the challenge I try to bring to the front of students' minds, and that encounter occurs in the arena of faith and learning.

Franz Kafka says, "A book should be an ice ax to break the sea frozen inside us." That's it. The classrooms into which I retreat with my students have to be seen for the dangerous and exhilarating places they are. Frightening stories will be told there, and those stories will open to us some of the potential for horror in our own stories. But faith must be there too. Faith that reminds us that here, too, is God.

And I must say that it is not just poetry. It is piety as well. Colleges and universities in this country that have long connected themselves to a Bible college or fundamentalist tradition have often defined the professorial role in a way closely linked to a pastoral or ministerial role. That is, a professor should be a model of Christian living to inspire similar living in students. The professor, in this view, offers counsel well beyond the confines of the classroom and course material. This expectation has, in some places, led to controversial rules, credal documents to be signed, pledges to be made, and the like–no drinking, no shorts, no this, no that.

The tradition at Calvin College has, in part I think, looked askance at such a notion of the professor. Maybe we have even looked with some disdain on our Bible college counterparts. We have tended to define the professorial role in terms more in consonance with the universities in which we were trained. Teach the material and be wary of the example/counselor business. It is, no doubt, a tenuous balance to strike. Nowadays at Calvin we hear more talk about community and the professorial role in fostering the spiritual enterprise of the place.

In his warning to teachers, I think James has it right. In that short preachment, James underscores our need for those whose wisdom licenses them to teach. The source of the wisdom, says James, is an absolute fear of God. (Job and the preacher of Ecclesiastes both like the idea, too.) The wise, James concludes, are those whose devotion to God leads on to acts of kindness, faith made complete by deeds. Virtue is the result of wisdom. And it is virtue that we are called to demonstrate in our classes. I believe finally that the integration of faith and learning is about living for our students a concrete example of the good life.

I have learned most from those teachers who befriended me, from the ones who modeled distinctively Christian lives in front of me. I almost shudder as I say it, because the weight of such responsibility can be overwhelming. But I believe a pivotal part of the conversation about faith and learning must circle on the professor's faith commitment.

I am humbled by the challenge to try to live the Christian life in front of my students, and that, I suspect, is the heart of the building of learning into faith and faith into learning. I too often fail at having the mind of Christ; I miss opportunities for compassion and service; I fall short of modeling Christ in all I do. Nonetheless, I get up every day and try it again. Our students will find faith only if they see it in our lives, not simply in our words.

Catching the Little Foxes

Rosalie B. Icenhower

Rosalie B. Icenhower is a retired school administrator and freelance writer from Bothell, Washington.

Solomon urges us to "catch . . . the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards."

What are some of the little foxes that plague the vineyards of Christian schools? I believe that some of the most persistent ones are doubt, discouragement, and dissatisfaction that come nipping and biting, injuring our effectiveness as educators.

The nagging fox of doubt comes when we begin to question the goodness of God in leading us. Each person on the staff has been led by our sovereign Lord under different circumstances. Remember that it was Satan who brought doubt into the Garden, and it is Satan who brings questions about our call to Christian education. We may doubt God's wisdom in placing us in our particular post. Recognize the source of the doubt; challenge his motives. Thank God for placing you where you are at present. Be satisfied that it is God who has made the appointment and that he will direct you when it is time for a change.

The stealthy fox of discouragement creeps in to bring a spirit of negativism. Our discouragement can begin to have a negative impact upon our students and fellow teachers if we allow it to take control.

There are seven places in the Bible where we are told, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." It is a human tendency to fear things we cannot control, and it is also a human tendency to become discouraged when things begin to go wrong. As we concentrate upon the problems, we often forget the positive things that are happening.

We can catch this fox by offering a kind word of praise to our colleagues and the support staff. Words of encouragement cause sparks to leap into others' lives and our own as well, igniting a fire of enthusiasm. The resulting innovation and creativity take care of discouragement and enliven the classroom.

The worst to come into our vineyard is the fox of dissatisfaction. This one manifests itself in grumbling, complaining, and backbiting. The children of Israel fell prey to this little fox soon after they left the land of slavery. They were dissatisfied with God's provision of manna in place of the leeks and garlic, and this led to a campaign against Moses. Their dissatisfaction basically stemmed from faulting God and from pride that told them that they were wiser than he.

We become like the Israelites when we get "public school-itis," thinking of the loads of supplies, the better computer systems, the greater departmental budgets, the fatter paychecks. Away with such foxes! Certainly, we may pray and work for larger budgets and better incomes, but we must also remember I Timothy 6:6, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." Jesus himself forewarns us, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. . . " (Luke 12:14).

To capture and destroy the little foxes of doubt, discouragement, and dissatisfaction, we must remember three things: who we are—sinners redeemed by the blood of Christ, what we are—God's workmanship created to do good works, why we are where we are—to teach children and young people by modeling the grace, love, and mercy of God in all we do and say.

Let's catch the little foxes before they spoil the vineyard!

A Thousand Points of Light: A Chris

Bette Van Dinther

Bette Van Dinther teaches English and debate at South Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

To set the record straight, George Bush did not coin the phrase "A Thousand Points of Light." He did nationalize it into a metaphor for charity and community volunteerism. Don't worry, he assured us, when the government does not provide for the needy; the thousand points of light will be their hope.

I wouldn't mind giving George credit for the metaphor, since I appreciate a politician who captures a concept in just five words; however, the metaphor was originally used to mean something even more profound than neighbors helping neighbors. W. H. Auden first used the phrase in the poem "September 1, 1939." Like Bush, he offered it as hope for humanity, but he was reaching deeper than volunteerism; he was reaching to the core of what makes us human, and to how literature exposes, or lights up, this core of humanity. Here are Auden's lines about the point of light:

> . . . Defenseless under the night
> Our world in stupor lies
> Yet, dotted everywhere
> Ironic points of light
> Flash out wherever the just
> Exchange their messages:
> May I, composed like them
> Of Eros and of dust,
> Beleaguered by the same
> Negation and despair
> Show an affirming flame.

According to Auden, the points of light are the best of what makes us human. The flashing of these lights is our communicating with each other, that is our story-telling—our literature—that we share with each other in our mutual attempts to understand our world and our lives. For Auden, therein lies the hope for humanity.

I believe that Auden's metaphor captures the Christian concept of the image of God within each human being. These flashing points of light, as Auden calls them, have become for me the foundation of a Christian philosophy of literature. The flashing lights are at the starting point of a Christian world view, and they ultimately determine a pedagogy of literature.

A Christian World View

First, a pedagogy of literature comes out of a world view, and the Christian world view should start with the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. While many people assume that our world is an awful, evil place and getting worse, Christ established a different, albeit more-difficult-to-believe, world view for his followers. In actuality we are living in God's world that has been reclaimed by Christ. Evil has ultimately been defeated, and God has empowered us through Christ to redeem his world.

Teachers need to be clear about this basic belief regarding the nature of the world. We must teach students that in spite of our fears, we are hopeful about our world and especially about their futures. Christ has rescued our world from the bleak, hopeless pessimism that evil tries to bury it in, and it is up to us to lay claim to the hopefulness. In the face of a scary world, we are to get up and get to work, reminding each other that this world is held safely and securely in the palm of God's hand. God wants us to say with the psalmist:

> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;
> he breaks the bow and shatters the spear,
> he burns the shields with fire.
> Be still, and know that I am God;
> I will be exalted among the nations,
> I will be exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:9-10)

And God wants us to pray as Jesus taught us to pray: "*Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" As Hendric Hart says in *Setting Our Sights by the Morning Star:*

> . . . evil has less staying power than grace. Sin lasts three generations but God shows love to thousands of generations of children whose parents love God. (66)

Calvin Seerveld says it this way:

> A believing knowledge of creation brings hope because creation, understood biblically, reveals the perversion and broken power of sin; inflation and unemployment in tandem is not an inevitability, racism is not ineradicable, campy art and mental breakdown among the saints are not necessary—we are not locked into evil because evil is a human responsibility from which one may be turned. (15)

A Philosophy of Literature

Literature is the medium for sharing world views with each other. It

an Philosophy of Teaching Literature

informs us, not only about the bad news and misfortunes of our world, but also about the truth about human nature and about the image of God in each of us. Literature teaches us about pain, anger, struggle, despair, and also about redemption, forgiveness, wonder, and victory. Through literature we identify, talk about, and ultimately celebrate what is important about being human, about what is false as well as what is true.

As a medium for communicating the truths about humanity, literature is somewhat of a holy thing. Teachers need to be careful how they share literature with students. What if they teach students to hate literature? Then how will these human beings communicate with us?

And what of the frightening evil around us? It is precisely in bleak times that we need our literature the most. From great literature we learn that we need not accept hopelessness, and that one of our defenses against hopelessness is our communication, that is, our literature. Percy Byssche Shelly writes in "A Defence of Poetry":

> But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and which obscures from us the wonder of our being. (790)

As evidence of the power of literature to give hope, Sven Birkerts writes about how Auden's metaphor affected him. In *An Artificial Wilderness: Essays on Twentieth Century Literature*, he states:

> Those points of light gradually become the object of my search. Literature was worth nothing if it could not help us make sense of our historical circumstances. . . . Many—most—[European authors] were bleak in outlook, but somehow the very fact of their writing assured me that we still move within the realm of meaning. (14)

Zora Neale Hurston echoes Auden's metaphor in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Her character Janie explains:

> When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks makes them hunt for one another. (86)

Another point about the nature of literature needs to be made. Literature, as with other forms of art, explores the truth about humanity intuitively rather than analytically. While there are many things about living that we know and understand analytically (like the eco-system, for example), the truth about being human, and about needing each other, and about hope are the things that literature teaches us intuitively, or imaginatively if you will. Calvin Seerveld explains this:

> Peculiar to art is a parable character, a metaphorical intensity, an elusive play in its artificial presentation of meaning apprehended. Art calls to our attention in capital cursive letter, as it were, what usually flits by in reality as fine print. There is a type of exploratory, uncovering, at-the-frontier element prevalent in art. . . . A film . . . tries to probe the preconscious world of man, locate with intense attention the meaning of such life, and express it in symbolically qualified images for others to read. (27)

Sven Birkerts explains it this way:

> Art (fiction included) came into being precisely because no accounting of the real facts, no matter how expertly done, could be enough. Long before Socrates, the perceptive understood that facts were facts, and that truth was what they meant. Meaning only begins when the contingent circumstances have been stripped away. And fiction moves in the realm of meaning—it is the afterlife of facts. (268)

From Philosophy to Pedagogy

This concept of intuitive understanding is important because our school systems historically are based on analytic philosophical foundations. The arts, however, lose their power when processed through academic analysis. A pedagogy of literature cannot be one that starts with or relies primarily on analysis. It often is. When a teacher says, "I have this list of fourteen elements of a short story and I use the list to study each story," that is a study focused on analysis. When a literature test focuses on material about the text rather than on the text, that is analysis, and when a test asks

for definitions of the theme, conflicts, mood, tone, and point-of-view of a story, that is analysis.

Analysis too easily undermines the value of literature. It demands that students be cautious and precise; something is either right or wrong, and wrong equals failure. Students cannot afford to be creative, speculative, or contemplative. In analysis, students search for the right answer, the only answer that will earn them an A or keep them from failure, and stories of humanity are not that simple, not that prescriptive.

Admittedly, analysis is one way for a mature reader to better explore a text; however, especially in high school where students are usually exposed for the first time to great literature, the text and the student's response to the text is what invites students and authors to communicate with each other. Authors do not usually intend that their work be dissected before it can be enjoyed, understood, or valued. More often, the opposite is true, especially when the audience is immature, skeptical, teenage readers; the author intends that the skill and craft be so subtle that it contributes silently to the story. Only after a reader has become involved in the story, by identifying with it or against it, or by questioning it, does the author intend that students might analyze the work for further insight. Somehow, our pedagogy needs to purposefully guard literature from analytic dissection that can steal the soul from the stories. It must be directed instead toward developing intuitive sensitivity and reader response.

Intuitive response skills, just like analytical reasoning skills, can be nurtured and developed. I believe, for example, that when children ask again and again to be told stories, they are craving that this intuitive sensitivity be nurtured. They sense, maybe only subconsciously, their potential for meaning and truth. It follows then that schools should recognize the relationship between stories and truth-seeking and should develop it. Calvin Seerveld writes that "imaginativity is a normal dimension of human life and can be exercised and strengthened if one becomes aware of its creaturely presence and fundamental importance" (150).

An intuitive, reader-responsive approach to teaching literature also fits with our knowledge about the nature of the learning process. Gloria Stronks and Doug Blomberg describe the learning process in terms of the *rhythm of learning*:

> We have described growth in knowledge (learning) as a three-fold rhythm. The first "beat" in this rhythm is immersion in experience; the second is by withdrawal from experience, a distanced focusing on it; the third is by return to experience in a purposeful response. (172)

In this context, literature is to be experienced, to be engaged in. It is not primarily an artifact; it is a vehicle for communication that invites students to participate in the story process. As Anne Ruggles Gere says in *Language and Reflection*,

> The goal in this way of teaching is not to impart a certain set of facts but to enable students to trust their own responses; to understand why they respond as they do; to respect the responses of others; to move beyond initial engagement to more sophisticated responses such as interpretation, evaluation, and . . . to a perception that a work of art is a human construct. (146)

Literature then is something that teachers give to students and invite them to participate in. The teacher helps students read the text, and then elicits their responses. As students respond and listen to their classmates, they come to understanding. Louise Rosenblatt captures the essence of this approach with these words: "the reader counts for at least as much as the book or poem itself" (Gere 51).

Students today desperately need hope, and literature is one place where they can find it. Through literature, students can discover that all human beings possess within them ironic points of light. The lights are sometimes dim, lonely, and muddied by sin, but they are striving to be cleaned off and polished and shined. Stories clear away the mud. Stories hold onto the truth about living and they light up the image of God in us. Stories encourage us to be hopeful and to participate in the reclamation of this terrible and wonderful, muddy and sparkling world.

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Misfiguring Education

Ken R. Badley

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We hear and read constantly that public education is in a crisis, frequently wondering how much of the criticism applies to Christian education. If either public or Christian education is in dire straights, it's partly because of how we talk about it. We all—parents and non-parents alike—have a stake in what happens in schools. Our concern and passion are ill-served, however, when we permit those distinctions necessary for thinking clearly about Christian education to grow into false polarities which, in their turn, lead us erroneously to pitch person against person, preference against preference, and theory against theory.

Four polarities illustrate the problem I am identifying here (I will name a few more at the end of the article). Consider **Memorization vs. Understanding Meaning**. This debate pits rote learning against understanding a text's meaning. Seen as the extremes of a continuum, the characterizations look mutually exclusive, incompatible and undesirable. The rote memorization that characterized education in the nineteenth century has spawned many jokes in our own time about what students replied to school inspectors' questions. Rightly so. In its meaningless extreme, memorization gives little to the student. The polar opposite characterization of the rote classroom typically involves discussing a work that some participants will not have read. Of the rest, most will not have seized the work's meaning or given it opportunity to seize them, thereby pooling their ignorance.

Ideally, one supposes students should both know their facts and understand how those facts relate to each other and to the larger world. Discussion of this ideal, however, often goes awry because of polarized terms. Most of us recognize the value of memorization. We may not amaze our friends at parties, but we do find those lines, verses, or facts we know both useful and pleasurable. Yet, we all know people who have memorized facts but understand little of significance. In our lucid moments, we know we need both, but the debate

fails to allow us both. So we wage a phony war.

Phonics vs. Whole Language obscures the variety of approaches to teaching language, and has become to many Christian parents a theological watershed issue. Whole language becomes the enemy of phonics and the final move in the so-called "dumbing down" of our children, while phonics teaching figures as the hallmark of some golden age. Yet, teachers can poorly teach phonics just as easily as whole language. And (I suspect) the ratio of great teaching to poor is about the same for phonics teaching as for any other subject or method. In fact, many whole language teachers go on record as users of phonics methods in their work with students, and many teachers who prefer a phonics approach to language use some methods disdainfully characterized (by whole language critics in other conversations) as whole language methods. If anything, this polarity shields some incompetent teachers from criticism they deserve; but they remain protected behind an approach many people consider divinely given.

As does *memorizing vs. understanding,* the *phonics vs. whole language* debate comes available only in polar terms. If you don't line up pedagogically and philosophically as clearly as some think you must on this question and on its polar terms, you may find yourself accused of lacking intelligence, courage, or faith.

Child-centered vs. Teacher-centered also closes down clear thought. Critics of education characterize *child-centered* as undirected, unplanned, goal-less, theologically ill-grounded games-playing. Elementary pupils often do wander and play. But observe some classrooms and you will see (with a few disasters) much teacher planning behind what may look like anarchy. The students in these classrooms may sometimes lack goals, but their teachers usually do not. On the other hand, extended scrutiny of classrooms where teachers talk and students listen will reveal enough teacher wandering and student unrest—and rest—to remind us that student-centered teaching methods alone have not made children feeble-minded. Content and intellectual rigor are neither strangers to child-centered teaching, nor always present in teacher-centered teaching.

Unfortunately, what we might call the psychological structure of the debate again obstructs lucid thought. We face a severely simplified choice: *child-centered, teacher-centered.* Once again, some people assume that the more conservative choice of the pair is the theologically-philosophically correct choice. Yet, good teaching involves a continuously-changing combination of teacher- and child-directedness. In good classrooms, teachers give information to students. In good classrooms, students also direct significant parts of their own learning. Thousands of teachers know that, but the debate's present contours rule out any chance of a both-and view.

Basic Subjects vs. Frills does more than its share of damage in Christian schools with their ongoing budget constraints. For certain, we find here an exquisitely symmetrical structure. The three R's remain unnegotiable. By definition, frill subjects are negotiable. When either budgets or schedules demand constraints, art, music, and physical education can be cut back. Science and social studies usually manage to sneak in as basics, despite starting with s instead of r. Why is the outcome of these discussions so predictable? Because the discussion's language rests on an underlying polarity, which we should abolish. *Basic vs. frill* strangles our thought; it prevents our seeing schools and teaching as we should.

No doubt my readers could add other polarities to the four I have just discussed. I have thought of several more myself that have the capability to reflect actual distinctions and thus move our educational discussions ahead, or, pushed to their polar extremes, to obstruct thought and obscure actual classroom reality:

critical thinking vs. content
content vs. process
abstract vs. concrete
theory vs. practice
feeling vs. reason
left brain vs. right brain
group work/co-operative learning vs. individual work.

We need to make distinctions to think clearly; please don't think I am saying anything different here. My complaint is rather that right distinctions can mutate into wrong polarities, which then deflect our vision from the fine shades of arguments and of educational situations. The time has come to pursue our Christian educational ideals unhindered by these misleading and simplistic, albeit perhaps comfortable, polarities. Success in educating today's children Christianly requires that we have the courage to abandon our polarized categories of thought.

Stefan Ulstein

Damn Yankees

Media Eye

Stefan Ulstein teaches at Bellevue Christian Junior and Senior High School in Bellevue, Washington.

Pharaoh's Army

Writer/director, producer, Robby Henson. Starring Chris Cooper, Patricia Clarkson, Kris Kristofferson, Richard Tyson, Robert Joy, Frank Clem, Huckleberry Fox, Will Lucas. Sinkhole Productions. CFP Distribution. No MPAA rating. Suitable for teenagers.

Damn Yankees

My first contact with white southerners came when I was in the navy. While I admired southern food, music, and storytelling, and made several good southern friends, I developed a prejudice against southerners as a group. They seemed unable to free themselves from the shackles of the past. Even the devout Christians seemed locked in the self-destructive grip of racism and intense hatred of Yankees. White southerners seemed schizophrenic to me at the time. They were among the most patriotic Americans I know, yet they harbored an almost seditious malice toward the federal government. As a Canadian immigrant from Washington State, I was not technically a damn Yankee in their eyes, but I wasn't a southerner either. Hence, I was one of "them."

With the distance of time, and a better grasp of American history, I can understand their unique world view a little better. The memories of war are always stronger and more bitter among the vanquished. Not only did the southern cause fail, but the war was fought on their soil. Victors can forgive and forget a bit more easily in the warm glow of their success.

Pharaoh's Army is a fine drama that could be a great help to teachers trying to explain the lingering bitterness of the Civil War to junior high and high school students. Unlike such epics as *Glory* and *Gettysburg*, it focuses on a very small incident. Yet that incident is rich with the nuances of history.

Pharaoh's Army is set in the Cumberland mountains of Kentucky. With the main Union force bogged down at the Cumberland Gap, Captain John Abston is dispatched with a ragtag group of four enlisted men to get food for the troops. This means that he will have to pillage the local farms.

Neither the captain nor his men have ever killed anyone. They have enlisted for a variety of reasons: the idealistic captain to free slaves, a Polish immigrant nicknamed Chicago to find something more exciting than making sausages. An angry young private named Rode seeks revenge for his brother who died in the war. The inept and comical Neely just seems to have stumbled into a bewildering nightmare. In short, it's a group much like the one I served with during Vietnam. Some things never change.

The great curse of the soldier's life is the realization that the people he is fighting aren't much different than he is. When they stumble upon a tiny farm run by Sarah Anders and her boy, the Yankees justify their theft of chickens and provisions by reminding Sarah that her husband is "illegally taking up arms against his country." Sarah has hidden the milk cow and a ham, hoping that the soldiers will just leave.

That's the plan, but it changes when one of the soldiers is injured in a freak accident. The captain decides that his man cannot be moved, and announces that they will stay until he recovers or dies.

Reminders of war are all around them. In this part of Kentucky some neighbors have sided with the Union, others with the Confederacy, and there

is, in the words of the local preacher, hell to pay. Graves are desecrated, parents of absent soldiers are murdered, farms are burned. It's a lot like modern Bosnia or Rwanda, except that Kentucky is not as overpopulated as those benighted lands.

The captain encourages Sarah's boy to begin plowing for the following year's corn crop, philosophically trying to put a bright face on the theft of their supplies. Missing his own farm, he even pitches in to help. As they all wait for the injured soldier to convalesce, they form an unlikely alliance based on their shared humanity.

But it can't last forever. The soldiers are mistrustful of the captain's fraternization with the "enemy" and a near mutiny erupts. Sarah and her boy find themselves haunted by guilt as they remember the absent husband and father who is suffering under the Yankee onslaught while they harbor Yankees under his roof. When the boy asks his mother whether the injured Yankee soldier will live or die, she replies, "Just remember that if he lives, he might be the one to shoot your pap."

Although it becomes clear early on that no good can come from this situation, *Pharaoh's Army* is never predictable. The script, by producer/director Robby Henson, retains its suspense right up to the final frames. All of the characters continue to grow and develop. *Pharaoh's Army* is a gem of heartfelt filmmaking.

A native of Kentucky, Robby Henson understands the way southern history and myth are entwined. He loves the Cumberland mountains of his home and evokes them beautifully and lovingly on the screen. The sense of time and location is palpable. It's a film that stays in the mind, the heart, and the senses long after the lights have come up.

As I watched Sarah Anders nurse her hatred for the Yankees who had looted her home and left her without sustenance, I began to understand something of the southern attitudes that had offended me as a young sailor. *Pharaoh's Army* is based on a true story, told to a folklorist by Sarah's boy, who went on to fight in the war, and who died about the time I was born. My southern shipmates were only a couple of generations removed from the savagery of the war. Their fathers and grandfathers had heard the stories first hand and passed them on.

What makes *Pharaoh's Army* a profound teaching tool is its ability to show all of the people involved as flawed victims, as well as willing perpetrators. When the captain tries to initiate a conversation with Sarah, she replies coldly, "We're not going to become friends, so let's just stay enemies." The captain replies, "Oh, I forgot. Your memory is better than mine." Perhaps it is, but she has more to remember. From her point of view, the Yankees are invaders. "You came up that creek to do wrong," she tells them. She only wants them to go home and to have her husband back. She owns no slaves. She betrays no knowledge of secession, let alone political views.

Popular war films present a scenario where one side is good, the other evil. That makes for entertaining cinema but lousy history. And worse theology. *Pharaoh's Army* shows us a world where even the best intentions are corrupted once the dogs of war are set loose.

Idea Bank
Elizabeth Zylstra

Apple Prints

Elizabeth Zylstra teaches grade two at Abbotsford Christian School, Heritage Campus, in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Turn your apple stamp into whatever your imagination creates. The grade two students at Heritage Christian School had fun creating many different objects from their apple prints.

Our September theme was apples. We talked about different products from apples, stories and legends about apples, and how to propagate apples through grafting and budding. We even had fun learning about fractions with apple slices. Is it really fair that one person got to eat 2/4 of an apple and another had 1/2?

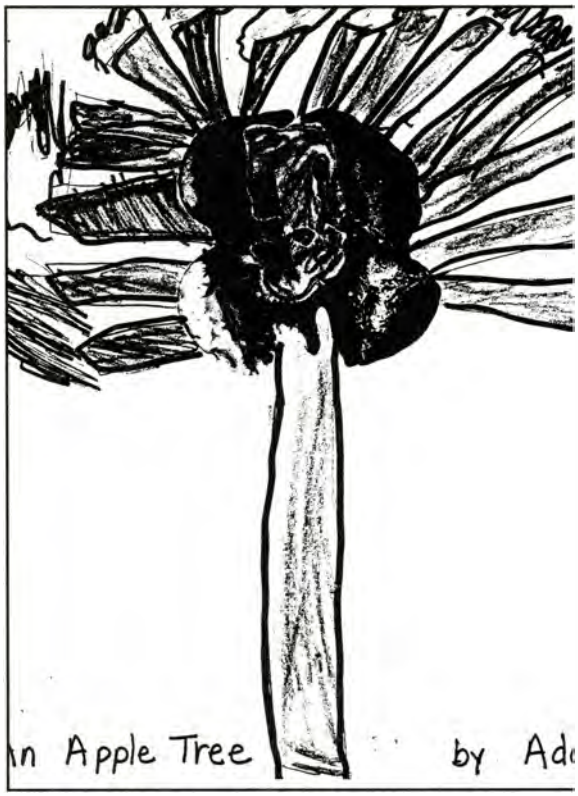
In art, we stamped a multicolored apple print on a piece of paper. Students then viewed their apple prints from all angles until they thought of something they could draw around the print. The directions were to create one thing from the apple print. The results were amazing. We had an apple car, an apple rocket, an apple bunny, an apple train, an apple butterfly, a couple of apple treehouses, and more. It was exciting to see the many different creations that grew out of one apple.

Printing method:

1. Arrange blobs of yellow, green, and red tempura paint in a circle on a paper plate.

2. Place the cut side of a halved apple in the middle of the colors so that you get some of each color on your apple.

3. Stamp the apple on a piece of paper. The resulting print will have sections of pure color and a blending of overlapped colors.



Homework

Thinking Thirteen
Jeff Fennema

Jeff Fennema is seventh grade language arts teacher at Lansing Christian School in Lansing, Illinois.

My seventh grade students thank me when I give them homework. It's true! Some students say, "All right!" A few muster up a celebratory cheer. Others actually reply, "Thank you, Mr. Fennema."

Are these responses sincere and heartfelt? Do these replies confirm a breakthrough in educational theory and a new understanding of the human psyche? Of course not! These students know that complaining will only add to their workload, and this is how they avoid any possibility of having it "piled on."

Middle school students despise homework, despite what we teachers try to do to make it interesting. We can dress it up as a project or explain how this will help them prepare for the real world. Much like cod liver oil, homework is something most students resist. Yet much like good ol' Mom, we continue to administer spoonful after healthy spoonful.

Opinions about homework vary among educators. Methods of homework vary as well. Homework can be found in the form of practice, preparation, and extension. Since middle school students are entering a unique transformational period in their lives, homework policies ought to reflect that knowledge and understanding. Traditional elementary or high school approaches to homework may not be appropriate at this age level.

Educators and parents alike perceive that homework is linked to academic achievement. Studies conducted on this correlation post results ranging anywhere from being inconclusive to showing a positive relationship between the two. Many educators have witnessed first-hand the link between homework and academic achievement, and they find homework to be a critical element in the learning process. Alec Fehl, junior high teacher from Los Angeles, speaks for many when we states, "Students may get the basic idea of a concept in class, but thought and practice must occur outside of school to become proficient. Homework is the single most important activity a student can participate in to truly understand and experience a concept."

A majority of educators, one might surmise, acknowledge the benefits of homework; however, many also struggle with the balance of schoolwork and extracurricular activities in their students' lives. We teachers sometimes display an almost arrogant attitude when we fail to understand that students really do possess lives full of interests and activities other than schoolwork. Dr. Liz Rudenga, education professor at Trinity Christian College (Illinois), says, "Teachers need to recognize that the child's entire life does not revolve around school. Activities such as sports, church functions, music lessons, chores around the house, and time to relax are also needed and should be encouraged." Mary Ann Alexeeff, junior high teacher from Antioch, California, concurs when she states, "I don't think that any student benefits from two or three hours of homework every night. What better formula for causing students to hate school or drop out?"

Homework as practice reinforces newly learned ideas or concepts in the classroom. This fits with the common belief that "practice makes perfect." For example, the math teacher may introduce the concept of adding and subtracting fractions during class. To demonstrate understanding and mastery, students are expected to perform this activity on their own through a set of math problems. This practicing of the newly-acquired skill usually translates into homework. Ideally, the student should practice this skill in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher. However, growing curriculum loads and higher student/teacher ratios obstruct the idyllic learning environment, and practice at home becomes a necessity.

Homework as preparation also becomes necessary under these condi-

Yuck!

tions. With limited class time, students are often required to read ahead or research a topic before it is introduced in class. For example, the math teacher may assign the pages dealing with adding and subtracting fractions to be read as homework. This type of background study promotes understanding, not achievement. Ideally the lesson then develops and builds upon the information collected through homework.

Homework as extension allows for a longer-term, more creative method of enhancement. The main idea here is that homework activities parallel what was previously learned in the classroom. For example, once students understand how to add and subtract fractions, the teacher may direct the students to use a cookie recipe as a half-batch or double-batch. If students share the cookies in class, it will soon become quite evident which students did not understand the concept!

Middle school students exist in a transitory state, moving from dependence to independence. Homework can become a valuable tool for them to learn responsibility and self-discipline. Much like owning a pet or working a paper route, homework has built-in consequences for substandard or negligent performance.

While middle school students benefit from the structure of homework, teachers would do well to view them as adolescents who are active and creative beings, who crave meaningful activities. Most middle school students really do recognize that homework is a necessary, if undesirable, part of their educational experience. Their active and creative natures, however, cause them to rebel against homework assignments that focus on passivity and lower order thinking skills. Extension activities appear to be the most meaningful for the students.

With the need to extend the curriculum and promote student responsibility, both teachers and students reap the benefits homework can provide. Homework is not on the way out, by any means; it will be around for quite a long time. Thoughtful assignments can and do enhance the learning experience in the middle school. Maybe it is time to stop administering that cod liver oil by the spoonful and use the more palatable capsules instead.

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Marlene Dorhout

QUERY

Marlene Dorhout teaches at Denver Christian Middle School in Denver, Colorado.

When I did my student teaching, the staff was so friendly and helpful to me. They gave me wonderful ideas and actual units to use in the classroom. Now I have my own teaching position in a different school, and I find the other teachers are not so willing to share. If I had not experienced such a different reaction previously, I might have thought I was the cause. Even though this school is a much smaller, Christian setting, it lacks the intimate, warm atmosphere I enjoyed in my student teaching. Can faculties vary so much from school to school, or do they treat student teachers differently than regular staff?

Faculties seem to acquire personalities somewhat like those of the various classes that you will teach over the years. No one likes to label classes, but teachers do realize they seem to keep a certain reputation throughout the grades. Any time you put a group of people together for a period of time, common characteristics evolve and leadership roles surface that create an atmosphere.

Perhaps some staff members cater to student teachers more because they recognize or remember the obvious need of this learning situation and enjoy a little limelight as they share some of their best materials and experience; also they may know that the student teacher will not be part of the immediate faculty following this internship, so their ideas will be carried on elsewhere but not in competition at the same school.

I concur with your assumption that this different response is not personal. I recall that my teaching positions in various schools required adjustment time because of the established practices of the staffs. The personality of the faculty often reflected the backgrounds of the teachers, combined with the locale and size of the school. Smaller schools didn't have as many teachers of the same grade or subject area to allow for sharing units or planning time. If you are the only new teacher on staff, you may seem out of step with the rest of the faculty members, who have learned the unspoken rules and expected etiquette. Since teachers' lives are very busy and structured, they are probably just carrying out their routines oblivious to your expectations of them. Perhaps you could approach a colleague by asking for an experienced opinion or another approach in handling some specific area of your teaching.

You are now another key ingredient in the mixture of this group of people. Even though you need to spend time listening to and learning about this new staff, little by little you can question and comment, to evoke more interest and understanding among faculty members. Colleagues working together in Christian schools need to demonstrate community effort, a skill expected from students and, I hope, practiced by their teachers.

I am a first-year teacher. I am excited about my profession but realize that in some areas of my life I wasn't really ready to teach. I find my old college self getting in the way. I am a Christian, but I did get into some bad habits that I thought I could easily break once I was on my own. I watch my language in the classroom very carefully, but I fear I might slip and blow it. I doubt the other teachers would approve or even try to understand. Other habits also seem to make me feel guilty, but luckily no one really knows but me. Other graduates with similar lifestyles have gone into teaching in Christian schools, and now I wonder how they have managed to control their behavior. Having the title of teacher doesn't automatically make me mature. What can I do?

The fact that you are concerned about your behavior and language, that you worry about the effect on others, tells me that there is growing maturity present already. Curbing bad habits is a difficult task for anyone. You obviously realize that hiding such acts doesn't erase them, and that as a role model for kids you have a responsibility in your life that didn't exist during the college years.

I admire your desire to change, not just put on a good image. Our sinful natures often pollute the truth about ourselves with insincerity and deceit. Maturity is a continuous development, and you are on the way by engaging in honest introspection and willingness to work toward improvement.

Many Christians, including teachers, pray that God will create in them a clean heart, but they are not willing to rid themselves of the secret sins that tease and aggravate. Even St. Augustine prayed, "God make me pure--but not yet." Recognizing the problem is just the first step; being willing to do something about it must follow, and it sounds as if you are trying.

Pray constantly for the courage to live by your moral convictions, to be more like Christ in and out of the classroom. Fortunately for us as Christians, God takes us as we are and makes us as we ought to be. That may take longer and be harder than we anticipated, but if we are seriously dissatisfied and willing to change, the results are worth the struggle.

I want to thank you for being willing to share a very realistic problem that possibly other young teachers have but don't dare to admit. Veteran teachers might recognize similar struggles in colleagues and possibly be more understanding and patient regarding the transition that some college graduates make upon entering the work place.

I have a student who has a negative attitude toward the Bible and God. I spoke to the parents, but they don't have a reason. They claim they attend church and have a Christian home. They somewhat imply it must be just my class, combined with normal adolescent rebellion, but I recognize a resentment or bitterness in the student that is not noticeable in the other students. I fear, however, that he could influence some kids; but more importantly, he prevents himself from growing spiritually. As a Christian school teacher I feel obligated to help him, but I don't know how. Can you suggest anything else to do or say?

I am pleased that you are genuinely concerned for this boy, not just for the other students in the class or yourself as the teacher. The parents seem to be of little help, and you do not mention the principal as a resource. I suspect you did not want to risk possible disciplinary action taken against this student.

I assume you are the Bible teacher or someone who has devotional time with the class. In order to establish a loving, Christian atmosphere you have to prevent this boy from making comments or gestures that offend or deteriorate the Christian values upheld by the school. But in so doing, you must be careful to allow this young man space to grow, to change his mind. So instead of reprimanding him for his thoughts and ideas, simply tell him that, when he expresses dislike for God and his Word, you and other students are hurt by that. If he doesn't agree with the basic beliefs of the school, he must at least be respectful of those who do share in those beliefs; he was admitted to the school because his parents, too, adhere to those same Christian values. A smile and a caring attitude may assure the student that it is acceptable to doubt, and your willingness to talk about that one-to-one any time other than during class may offer the personal attention he really craves.

If he seems hesitant to discuss this negative attitude, offer a referral to the school counselor as an option. Remind him of the confidentiality in the choice, which perhaps is necessary because of a family problem or other concern that even the parents aren't willing to share.

To some extent the parents are right in saying that this age experiences a decline in religious interest. Whether the role of parents, neglect of church programs, or increased exposure to the media is the cause, research hasn't conclusively determined. I believe adolescents struggling with their own identity scrutinize others more closely; reality sometimes saddens childlike fantasies. Parents, teachers, and the church aren't perfect. As these students grow, develop, and discover more about themselves, they need God more than ever. The challenge for us as educators is to show them how God is meaningful to their adolescent world. We Christians must work harder at helping kids make the transition from "mom and dad's" faith to their own personal relationship with God. What an exciting and challenging age to teach!