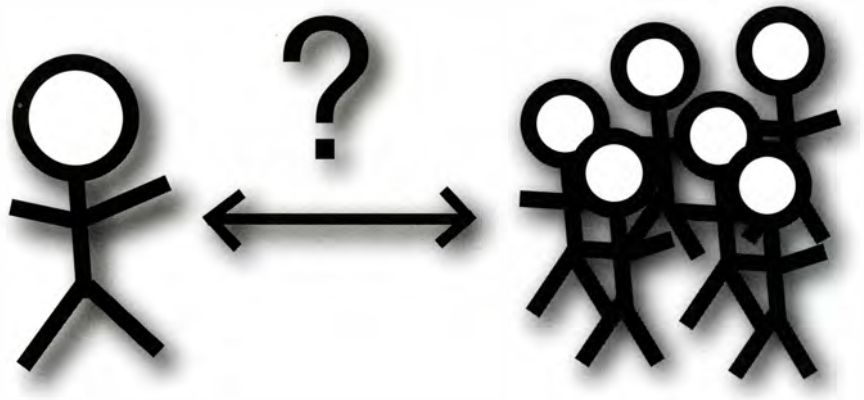
# CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS JOURNAL

Quarterly journal for Christian day school educators

Vol 35. No.4 April 1996

**Lorna VanGilst**
**Editorial**



# Enlarging the Fold

When Luis first came to our junior high, where I taught English, we wondered how he would fit in. He wasn't "one of us." He had a Spanish name, and ours were mostly Dutch. His father styled hair, whereas most of the fathers raised almonds or dairy cows. And Luis went to a different church than did the rest of us. Fortunately, Luis was soft-spoken and he could draw beautiful sketches. He got along, but he never got "in."

All the years I taught in that junior high, I wished we could attract more students from "the outside." That would have made Luis's life easier. And it would have forced the rest of us to articulate more clearly what we meant by covenantal Christian education.

We believed that children of believing parents as well as the parents themselves are members of the kingdom of God, and we viewed the whole Christian community as nurturers of these children. But we often assumed that every child and every parent understood that perspective. After all, our supporting churches upheld that position. Belonging to a supporting church and helping the parents keep up the property and pay for Christian school tuition—those were our visible ways of expressing Christian community outside the classroom.

I no longer teach in that school, but today nearly a third of the families in that school affiliate with evangelical churches other than the supporting churches. These families don't necessarily understand the meaning of covenantal Christian education. They just know the teachers handle discipline and students' personal problems with a different kind of commitment. Their children often come into the school unprepared for the academic challenges of a school community with a long tradition of parental support. In fact, many of them seek entrance into a Christian school precisely because they are discontent with public schools.

Do these families fit in? For the most part, they do, although it may take longer for them to assimilate. The parents work hard, though, to support the school, mostly through volunteer work, even though they are not permitted to serve on the school board. Their children develop friendships at about the same rate as students from supporting churches. From a student point of view, a new student's particular church membership doesn't make much difference, as long as the new kid acts decent on the bus, in the halls, or in the classroom.

On several occasions the board has been accused of too freely welcoming newcomers, people who have no notion of a covenantal perspective. It's all right for kids to play with any other neighbor kids on the block after school and on weekends, say the objectors, but don't put just anybody's kids in the same classrooms with ours.

For the most part, though, it has been good to open the doors to evangelicals and welcome them—even if it's not as easy to tell who is solidly "covenantal." This shift in student population encourages teachers to be more explicit in articulating their perspective, to enable kingdom citizens to replenish the whole of creation in service to God. This shift requires teachers to express more clearly that covenantal Christian education is not merely a preparation for entry into the job market, but an equipping of kingdom citizens to serve in the new creation.

# Let the Church Be Church and the School Be School

**Robert C. De Vries**

*Robert C. De Vries is professor of church education at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

James Smart laid out the issue pretty clearly in *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, written in 1954. He observed that a child who attended church school regularly for a year would receive a maximum of eight hundred minutes of teaching—roughly equivalent to less than three days in school. If you would ask someone to teach a year's worth of geography, English literature, or mathematics to a student in less than three days, a revolt would ensue. Yet the church gives this task to their Church School teachers.

Why do I raise the issue of Church School for day school teachers? The answer is not far from you. Christian school teachers are expected to compensate for what the church should be doing, namely, teaching the language of faith to their members. Without getting deeply into the issue of the relationship between home, church, and Christian school, most readers would probably agree that parents are the primary agents for the Christian nurture of their children. Parents function within the context of the church—the broader "family" of God. The Christian school is a third agent, which complements and supports parents in providing a Christian perspective to their children's learning.

For generations this model has worked fairly well, especially in tightly knit ethnic communities. Cultural, religious and social values were homogeneous. Each participant involved in the nurturing of the child approached his or her task with similar values, mission, and vision.

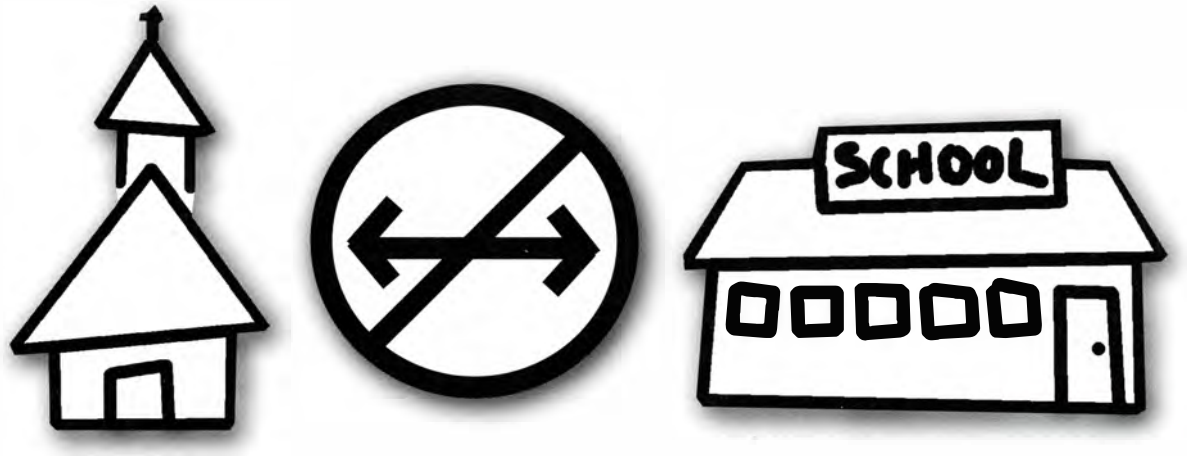
Shifting cultural patterns have significantly affected this process in North America. Parents, churches, and schools, while viewing themselves as transformers of culture, must also recognize that they are products of that culture. While we are called to redeem society, we must recognize that we are society.

Without rehearsing the litany of cultural changes occurring within North America, I want to remind you of at least three:

1. *Developed countries have redefined "family."* Prior to the sixties, the word family generally meant a dual-parent-plus-children relationship involving significant contact with extended family, especially grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The word family today refers to a wide variety of situations including a single parent with children, blended families, foster parents, and even same-sex parents. We are only ignoring reality if we assume that Christian schools are not affected to some degree by this shift. Historically the schools looked to the family as the primary source of support, both visionary and financial. Schools were "parent-controlled." But where have all the parents gone?

2. *The medium of communication has shifted.* Following the invention of the printing press, developed cultures communicated primarily through printed media. Books, articles, and written stories were the primary means of communication. In the last thirty years, however, a major cultural shift has moved us from printed media to the visual media. *Dancing in the Dark* (Schultze, et al.) and *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Babin) are two books that support this claim. Functional illiteracy is on the rise in North America. I heard one conference speaker claim that only twenty percent of the American population read for pleasure. Of that twenty percent, ninety percent are women. On the other hand, communication via electronic and visual media (television, film, drama, dance, computers) is becoming the predominant mode of communication. The issue raised by Babin is how the Christian community can engage in "stereo catechesis"—that is, how can we continue to communicate the language of faith through visual media? How can the school continue to bring the Christian perspective to bear on the arts, literature, and sciences while recognizing and adapting to a new cultural form of communication?

3. *The church in North America has shifted from a learning center to a therapy, personal growth center.* In the past thirty years, the rise of individualism (see Bellah, et al. *Habits of the Heart*) has served as the catalyst for the church to become consumer oriented. Self-help groups abound. Sermons have shifted from teaching to pastoral care. A non-negotiable element of the worship service seems to be the mutual greeting rather than the reading of the law. Now, this may




be an excessive reaction to many excellent shifts occurring in ministry. But the bottom line is that our children are not learning the language of faith. They may love the Lord. They may be able to speak more openly about their faith. They may wish to engage in service projects. But can they, as Peter directs, "always give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (I Peter 3:15)?

So where does this leave us? Let me say a word to each of the three responsible parties engaged in the spiritual nurture of children—parents, the church, and the Christian school.

Parents must recognize that they have the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture of their children. Studies have indicated that fewer parents talk about their faith at home, pray with their children on a regular basis, or speak directly to their children about spiritual matters. Hectic life-styles and insidious individualism have driven families apart, especially on this most crucial issue. All parents must "home-school" their children. They must remember that they are the primary teachers (or "general contractors") for their children's spiritual and cultural education. Parents cannot avoid the obvious conclusion: priority of importance translates into priority of time. Parents must schedule time for the spiritual nurture of children. Daily and weekly worship times are a must. I would suggest that parents use vacation time purposefully to focus on spiritual matters through participating in joint service projects or intentional reflections on experiences while traveling. Parents must remember they are priests to their children.

Churches must remember that their function is primarily to help people see God from where they stand within this world. Not only must they help people, including children, focus on God, but they must also provide people the language that they can use to speak about God and his Word. We can learn many other languages rapidly (e.g., computer jargon); why can we not intentionally teach our children (and adults) words like "incarnation" and "atonement?" In a recent conversation with a prospective student, I asked, "What does 'atonement' mean?" This prospective student couldn't answer the question even though raised in the Christian Reformed Church, a product of Church School classes and Christian schools. The church must teach the language of faith.

The Christian school must help students see the world from where they stand in their relationship to God. Some readers may still remember the concept "cultural mandate." The mandate still holds. This is God's world. Christ reigns over all. We must equip our children with discerning minds so that they can see the face of God where ever they look in this world. They must be able to see God's face in history, the arts, the sciences, music, and games. But God's face is not always very evident. Christian teachers have a tough job. And at least according to some, we are not doing a very good job. Recently two teachers from the Midwest conducted a seminar at Calvin College to report on research conducted in conjunction with their graduate programs. The bottom line was that while we talked well about the integration of faith and learning, the closer we get to the actual classroom, the less it really happens. We know the theory, but we do not do it very well.

The army that goes to battle makes certain that all its troops are coordinated around a central battle plan. The family, church, and school cry out for that coordination. Let the family take control. Parents must be responsible for both the spiritual and cultural education of their children. Let the church nurture them into the broader family of God—the Body of Christ. And while doing that, let them make certain they know the language of faith. Can they speak with precision about the historic Christian faith? Let the school be school. Let teachers focus primarily on discerning the face of God in society. Let them help students search the arts, sciences, and literature to see that "our God reigns."


# Helping the Hurting: Pupils, Parents, Peers, and Professionals

**Daniel R. Vander Ark**

*Daniel R. Vander Ark, a former teacher and principal, is now Director of Support Services for Christian Schools International in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Seismic tremors in our society have shaken up the role of a Christian teacher. You can no longer simply teach content and skills—as if you ever could! And it can be difficult to know what your students are feeling. One child who smiles at you may be hiding the beating he got this morning, while the one sitting next to him may be smiling because she is going to Bermuda over Christmas. One child who looks thin may be wishing to fill out, while the next thin one feels fat and starves herself. One child who constantly lingers by your desk may be missing love anyplace else, while the other one lingering there is a cheater who is getting a glimpse at the test for tomorrow.

You know that you are called to care for each of these children, especially the hurting ones. God calls you to respond, as he did. As you seek to help hurting children, you have obligations to four groups: pupils, parents, peers, and professionals.

**Pupils**

To begin with, you owe your kids compassion. When you see hurt, you need to respond with thoughtful help. Pity is not enough; in some cases, it might even be wrong. What a child needs may be correction or warning: "Sally, you may think you can make it without work, but let me tell you a story about somebody who thought the same thing at your age." Compassion is not pity.

Compassion includes empathy, the ability to walk within the corridors of a child's mind and feel her hurt: to imagine what it must be like to always wear clothes that look either secondhand or very unfashionable, to come home from school and have to make dinner for three siblings, to see your father only every other weekend, to get slapped so hard that the other parent starts to cry.

Compassion is also doing something. For the girl with acne who tells you that she worries she will never get a date, it may mean suggesting that she or her parents call a doctor. For the young boy who flinches when you touch his shoulder, it will mean some investigation or a referral to see whether he is being beaten.

Second, to help hurting kids you need to respect confidentiality. Sometimes hurting kids risk social death by revealing their mental or physical sores. When you hear, by accident or by probing, the details of pain, your obligations to respect a confidence are crucial. Respecting a confidence, however, doesn't necessarily mean that you should promise absolute confidentiality or keep the details of hurt from all others. But it does mean that you should not drop the juicy details around the faculty room, church foyer, or coffee shop.

You must be careful with confidences. If you overhear Jennifer in grade 3 saying to her friends, "My dad gets so angry when he drinks at night," you should arrange to talk

*This article is an adaptation of a chapter from **Helping the Hurting**, available from CSI, ($6.00 for member school teachers). See a review of the book in this issue.*

privately to Jennifer and provide a way for her to talk to someone in your school who might help. If Sam tells you he's going to get beat up across the street after school and says, "Don't tell anybody," you need to say, "Sam, I'm sorry. I can't keep quiet. I care about you. I've got to go to somebody who might be able to help you. Trust me to handle it well." You need to answer this question: "Will it be better for this person if I tell someone else or if I keep it between the two of us?" When in doubt, find a trusted colleague, a counselor, or the principal, share the problem without the names, and ask for guidance in answering your question.

Third, you have an obligation of correction to your pupils. That may seem out of place when kids are hurting. You may say, "Wait a minute! The last thing kids need in the middle of loneliness or injury is correction." Tamika will not be better off if your only response to her wearing sexually provocative clothing is to think privately, "She'll learn soon enough that's pretty dumb; some boy is going to go too far with her." Tamika needs guidance: yours. She needs a teacher who cares enough to correct. If you see a boy with bruises on his face after noon hour, you have to probe sensitively to discover how it happened and correct the culprits—perhaps even the boy with the bruises.

Finally, you must have commitment to your hurting students. Commitment can be difficult because you have a big load to carry already: many students, a growing list of student problems, and other obligations to family, church, and community. On the other hand, you were trained for it. You have learned about sacrifice from Jesus, from your parents, and from others. Ask somebody you love to hold you accountable. Stick with a hurting child through the whole year, and pass the baton of commitment to your colleague who will run with the commitment next year. When you have spent twenty minutes after school with Heather and have called her single mother ten times already and it's only Christmas, keep doing it in January. If you have talked to Clayton about his rude and crude language seventy times seven, go a mile more in the hope that God will surely keep his promises to his children.

**Parents**

You and your students' parents have to work together, but sometimes the partnership is difficult to maintain. Some parents of hurting kids are glad when you take over their child's life because they won't or can't. Some teachers think they know it all; in education, they are the experts and parents aren't.

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A significant barrier to good communication between you and parents is fear, on both sides. Parents may be scared to call you about their hurting child. They may worry that you will think less of them. They may worry that you will start rumors, doubt them, or blame them. As a teacher, you may worry about calling a parent because you think you will get blamed, so you sugarcoat the details or postpone the call to avoid controversy. When parents ask you, "How's it going with Marta in your class?" you may worry that you have analyzed a hurt wrongly and respond with a vague "There are ups and downs but no big problems." All of us need to heed John's simple statement: "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

A great place to start is to build trust early, in the summertime or at the beginning of the school year. Teachers need to call or meet the students' parents or at least communicate in writing. Find a way to build trust: "I'm your helper. I need to know something about Roger or Rhonda so that I can teach well."

If you do establish trust, you can more easily be honest. Psychologists with much experience with Christian school children assert that teachers must be completely honest with parents. In honest communication, you need to forthrightly state what you have noticed, being as specific as possible, with dates and details. You ought to avoid any language that makes judgments. You ought to elicit parents' response: "Could you think about it and call me back tomorrow with an idea about how we can work together to help?"

The older the child, the greater the temptation for parents to ignore a child's hurt or be resigned to the damage of it. And the older the child, the greater the temptation for teachers to react the same way. Sometimes students' physical size or confident attitude deludes us into thinking they don't need us. Parents and teachers of high school students must avoid the tendency to hide in the rooms of ignorance and apathy while teenagers are playing in the funhouse of hurts: alcohol, pornography, sex, or drugs.

Finally, you must avoid the temptation to play favorites, to be inconsistent, and to back away from good communication after being criticized by a parent. If you hesitate calling the wealthy parents of a troubled teenager because you fear the school will lose money or they will think ill of you, resist the temptation to hide. Will the young person be better off if you say nothing? If you call Linda's parents because they have always been cooperative and have told you

how much they appreciate you but don't call Tom's mother because she is single and "has enough grief to handle without my adding to it," will Tom be better off? Care for the hurting kids by communicating with their parents consistently and early, before they call you.

**Peers**

Your colleagues can be allies or antagonists. You may barely know some of your colleagues in a large school. But you can't easily help the hurting kids in your school when you go it alone. In a Christian school, which claims to be a community of Christ-followers, the faculty needs to lean not only on the Master but also on fellow believers in supporting the hurting. When a boy in your class says that he and his sister overheard their parents talking about getting a divorce, what do you say to your colleague who teaches his sister? What do you say in the faculty room when one teacher complains that the new boy in grade 7 is "already doing nothing and he's only been here three days"?

In a Christian community, you can't walk alone. You need to confide in people who know teaching well, who know the students well, and whose wisdom may complement your own. Their wisdom may even be better than yours because you see the students through teary, cynical, or angry eyes that may blur your vision and your response. Start with your colleague by saying: "Am I seeing this correctly? Help me out. What am I missing? If you were in my shoes, what would you do?"

Talk straight, and for the right reasons. Acknowledge the fact that you know too little to help well. Ask for a commitment to confidentiality when the facts you tell could be harmful if circulated. Pray together for God to give both of you discernment. Decide whether you ought to call a team meeting if the child's hurt might affect other teachers' work with the child or if you two desire more advice before you act. Draw in the principal, who may have understanding about the family or community that will benefit you and the child. There's no room in a Christian school for the slogan "My classroom is my castle." If that's the motto in your school, the hurting children won't find healing there.

Talking to colleagues will help you to be vulnerable in your weakness, transparent in your walk with God, more careful in observing hurts, and stronger in helping the hurting. You will find it easier to avoid delicious rumors, whining self-pity, and carping criticism. You will find that the Lord gives strength through colleagues; that strength will help you as you work with hurting kids.

**Professionals**

Like all of you, Christian professionals have good and bad days, have a good education and training, love the Lord, and seek to serve children. But they have a different area of expertise and a different role that you ought to affirm in helping the hurting.

Let's start with the most immediate helper in many schools, the school counselor. If your school employs a person whose job is to help children with significant social, emotional, or physical problems, go to him or her for advice quickly. Ask the counselor questions like these: Should I call the parents about this? What should I do to help? Should you call this child in? Listen to the counselor's advice, and go back again after you have followed the advice and watched some more.

If your school does not have a professional counselor or social worker, you need to confide in your principal about what you observe so that you can decide together the best means of helping. The principal may advise calling the parents to suggest that the parents bring their child to a counselor. The principal may know of a professional counselor who has agreed to give advice to teachers in your school.

Another ally in helping the hurting in Christian schools is the child's pastor. Pastors often have considerable knowledge about families, especially families that have experienced pain: employment problems, marital difficulties, sibling embarrassments or estrangements, or family histories that children cannot slough off. Most parents of children who have physical ailments would not hesitate to call the pastor to ask for the church's prayers on behalf of their child. But when the child's hurt is mental or social or emotional, many parents want to keep the pain a secret, somehow believing that a broken arm is something we could not have avoided but anorexia or shyness or uncontrolled anger is. You can help communicate the worth of the Christian community by encouraging parents, counselors, and your principal to draw in the child's pastor. Get Christian professionals and pastors into your school for lunch or after school chats to learn and lean on God together.

To sum up, use all of the resources you can find to help the hurting. Remember the pupils, their parents, your peers, and professionals. While society quakes, standing on the Rock that never shakes, you may be the stillpoint in the storm, with long arms to help the hurting.

# Harmony and Denominational Diversity: Are They Compatible?

**James C. Marsh**

*James C. Marsh is headmaster at Westminster Christian Academy in St. Louis, Missouri.*

Christian schools in the Christian Schools International (CSI) community have a distinctive commitment to a philosophy of Christian education that is driven by God's Word, focused on the biblical mandate given to parents, and dependent on the relationship between home, church, and school. Thus, CSI schools are covenantal, parent-owned schools that look to the church for a strong commitment of support.

While the validity of this philosophy is as important to the Christian community as ever, its application is affected by forces of change occurring in CSI schools and communities. As CSI schools approach a new century of service, it is critical that they clearly understand and effectively respond to these changes.

For many years, CSI school communities enjoyed a universal understanding of covenant theology and its implications for Christian schooling. School boards and administrators had little responsibility for articulating the mission, the philosophy, and the vision for Christian education; parents literally grew up knowing and understanding the purpose and practice of Christian education from the influence of their home and church.

Historically, CSI schools have held a number of important links to the home and church that were foundational to the character and success of these schools:

- Theological/philosophical link: Nearly all constituents of CSI schools came from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), a denomination with a unique, long-standing commitment to Christian education. Covenant philosophy and its implications for Christian schooling were articulated by pastors in the CRC and adopted by parents. It was assumed that Christian Reformed parents would send their children to Christian schools.
- Ethnic link: When I went to Pine Street Christian School in Passaic, New Jersey—at that time part of the Eastern Christian Schools Association—I was unique because my last name is not Dutch. I rather liked that novel distinction and said little about the fact that my mother's maiden name was Vande Vrede and that three of my four grandparents were born in the Netherlands. Despite my feeble attempt to be unconventional, the ethnic influence of being Dutch was undeniably important to the strength of the Christian schools I attended.
- Financial link: The CRC's commitment to providing for the Christian education of covenant youth was more than a philosophical/theoretical model. The church basically guaranteed that all the covenant youth in the church would have the opportunity to attend the local Christian school. Programs like "Booster Clubs" were established to assist parents in providing a Christian education for their children. The fact that my parents paid their Christian school tuition to Northside Christian Reformed Church speaks to the strength of the relationship of the church and school.

During the past generation, the nature of the home/church/school relationship has changed. I do not have scientific data and surveys to

support my position, but I believe most of us with life-long experience in Reformed Christian schooling will agree the CSI schools today look different than they did twenty-five years ago. My conviction is based on personal observation and anecdotal evidence gathered from twenty-five years of experience in teaching and administering CSI schools, from conversations with colleagues, and from my involvement with CSI.

**CSI Schools Today**

As we approach the turn of the century, many CSI schools are affected by some if not all of the following dynamics:

- Vision for denominational diversity: Nearly all CSI schools look beyond the CRC for students and supporters. As a result, most CSI schools have a denominationally diverse student body. In many CSI school communities, the percentage of non-CRC families is increasing, in many cases by design.
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- Expanding denominational base: Other Reformed denominations, most notably the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), have become actively involved in the Christian school movement. However, while growing in number and influence, most schools established by PCA communities do not have the heritage, the theological/philosophical understanding, or the financial support of the traditional CSI schools. Take our school, for example: Although 43% of our 580 students come from Reformed denominations (PCA, CRC, or the Evangelical Presbyterian Church), we have 130 different churches represented in our student body. Many of our families are new to Christian education and have limited experience with covenant theology and the Reformed philosophy of Christian education.
- Decreasing ethnic influence: The ethnic pull is not as strong as it used to be. CSI schools no longer contain early all Dutch students, and students who are Dutch are not as closely linked to their heritage. I can see this effect in my family. I grew up with grandparents who spoke Dutch and attended a church that had a Dutch service. My wife emigrated to the United States from Holland when she was two years old. We are Dutch. Yet, because of the mobility of our society and the fact that our children have not grown up with their grandparents and are not a part of a Dutch community, we find that we have to work at transmitting our heritage to our children.
- Changing financial support structure: Not all Christian schools receive the financial support and backing from the churches that they did in the past. Everything from Internal Revenue Service rulings to the fact that Christian families in our churches look to educational options other than Christian schools have affected the financial tie between the church and school. Church communities new to Christian schooling are not likely to have a commitment to the home/church/school philosophy strong enough to motivate a financial commitment to the Christian school.

> "A Christian school reaching out to a diverse church community must initiate positive steps that will draw the church community into the school community."

**Areas of Tension**

The many changes that have occurred in CSI schools during the last generation have had major impact. There are many benefits to expanding the denominational base of our Christian schools, thus opening our doors to more Christian families whose children will benefit from a Christian education from a covenantal perspective. CSI schools are known for their commitment to quality Christian education. Certainly we honor God when we invite other Christians to commit themselves to our cause. However, we must recognize that certain tensions can and do arise when these schools expand the number and influence of constituents from other perspectives. Change is bound to stir the waters and create irritations.

When parents from non-Reformed churches become actively involved in the school—working in parent organizations, serving on committees, faithfully giving money to the school—some might desire the opportunity to serve in leadership capacities possibly as board members or teachers. If the school excludes non-Reformed constituents from full participation in the leadership of the school, misunderstanding and bad feelings might arise. There is a danger that whole congregations may become somewhat alienated from the school if members do not feel they are fully welcomed to participate in the life of the school.

Competition between the school and church often surfaces when families from church communities new to Christian schooling become active in the school. Many churches have for-

mal, developed youth programs, sometimes led by a youth pastor who is a member of the ministerial staff. These church youth programs often seek to involve students beyond Sunday evening youth meetings. Competition for the time of students can crop up if Christian school activities conflict with the youth program of the church. If the church youth program is designed primarily to meet the needs of public school students, Christian school students may feel they are not part of the group or ministry. Public and Christian school cliques sometimes form and polarize, to the detriment of the youth program. Also, during times when so many ministries are seeking financial support from the Christian community, some members tend to see the Christian school as yet another institution taking funds away from the church.

Sometimes conflict occurs regarding the expectations the Christian school and church have for each other. The Christian school would like the pastor to promote Christian education from the pulpit and encourage all members to give regularly to the Christian school. The Christian school would like the church to give the mandate for Christian education to parents. During the CSI International Conference on Christian Education held in Toronto (1992), pastors firmly stated they find it very difficult to present the Christian school mandate to today's congregations; changing demographics, financial considerations, and cultural factors have caused Christian schools to become an educational option rather than a mandate. On the other hand, the church might say to the Christian school, "We would like you to provide covenant youth with an education, but please do not take over every phase of the life of the Christian family, monopolizing their time and usurping the church's authority in spiritual areas."

With many congregations and constituents new to Christian education, disparity sometimes arises between the understanding of and commitment to the foundational principles of Reformed Christian schooling. Some families simply do not understand the biblical mandate to be a call for Christian education as it relates to covenant children. Some families have never heard of the home/church/school partnership. Some constituents view the Christian school as a private school, a luxury. Others see the Christian school as a safe haven.

**Decreasing the Tension**

After recognizing that tensions will and do exist between the church and school communities, we must prayerfully and sincerely seek avenues to minimize and resolve these tensions. The strength of Reformed Christian education lies within the context of the home/church/school relationship. We must not allow ourselves to become separate islands "doing our own thing." A commitment to work together to fulfill God's directive for the body of Christ outlined in I Corinthians 12 is crucial to the strength and vitality of Christian education.

A Christian school reaching out to a diverse church community must initiate positive steps that will draw the church community into the school community. Our school has initiated the following ways to build bridges between school and church:

- **Get to know each other:** pray with and for each other; hold annual youth pastor luncheons and forums; include youth pastors in the life of the school (as chapel speakers, chaperons, small group leaders, coaches).
- **Be sensitive to each other:** plan calendars with each other in mind; demonstrate respect for weekday church meetings and Sundays.
- **Establish unique programs to link the church and school:** community service programs in which students serve the church community; cosponsorship of special youth programs (concerts, speakers, mission trips); invitation to the church community to participate in special events (such as a Christian College Fair).
- **Establish close lines of communication:** newsletters for pastors, published by the school; regular mailings to all pastors in the community with information about the school; brochures and position papers regarding the mission and philosophy of Christian education.
- **Include church leaders in the decision-making process of the school:** require a pastor recommendation for admissions; include pastors in the discipline and counseling of students; team with pastors when dealing with difficult family situations.
- **Provide opportunities for church involvement in appropriate areas of the school program:** membership on key standing and ad-hoc committees; inclusion in study and prayer groups.

As we approach a new century of service, CSI schools must take a leadership role in building strong bridges between the school, the church, and the home. The promise of Ecclesiastes 4:12 must characterize our school communities: ". . . a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

# "Coming Apart"

**David Koning**

*David Koning teaches grades seven and eight math and science at East Christian School in Kalamazoo, Michigan.*

*And Jesus said to them, "Come . . . apart . . . and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had not leisure so much as to eat." Mark 6:31 KJV*

The heat wave in early May sent the thoughts of students and staff at Heartside Christian School forward to the glorious lazy pace of summer vacation, now looming. Friday arrived, hot, humid, and on schedule. It traveled quickly past noon hour. However, the afternoon slogged along like traffic at rush hour. Sweating students and teachers alike were eager to be someplace else, but the afternoon just crawled. The students struggled to settle down and approached last period of their afternoon routines with an eye to the freedom of the weekend. The teachers attempted to finish off the week with some semblance of purpose while plotting their own Friday escape.

Diana Springer, beads of sweat beginning to accumulate about her eyebrows, escaped from the copy machine room with only moments to spare, her rare prep period nearly over. Her stack of freshly printed seventh grade math tests, "hot off the press," slumped in her hands, already limp from the humidity. As she hustled off to her room she nearly ran into fifth grade teacher Harold De Wit carrying a bucket of water from the janitor's room.

"Doing the infamous De Wit's Friday Demonstration Derby?" Diana asked.

"Yep." Harold replied. "Surface tension is today's topic and we're gonna have fun learning about it, too! Besides, I'm going to soak my feet in some coooool water while I teach . . . to relieve my "surface tension." Harold's eyes twinkled. "Oops!" Harold sloshed some of the water onto the floor just as principal Al Feenstra turned the corner with a trio of visitors. "Gotta go . . . don't want to get involved in one of Feenstra's promotional tours."

"I don't have time for that, either!" Diana agreed. With that the two teachers veered off in opposite directions and slipped into their rooms, the voice of the principal echoing down the hall.

"Welcome to Heartside Christian School!" Diana heard the principal warmly greet the Burns family, Grace, Paul, and second grader Stephanie, who had just arrived for a grand tour of the school. They were moving to town from out east and were looking for a school. "Let's start down this hall." They strolled off toward the art room.

Back in her room, Diana frantically stapled math test papers together as she waited for her seventh graders to return from P.E. "Friday afternoon tests . . . stupid idea!" she chided herself. She looked at the clock and knew she'd be hearing the energy-charged voices of the seventh grade test takers coming from the gym all too soon. She quickly drilled the last staples home with a vengeance. "Why didn't I think of something fun and easy for Friday . . . like Harold?"

Through her open door, Diana heard a fifth grader ask Mr. De Wit what the water was for . . ..

"De Wit's having fun . . . and I can't find the protractors!" The math teacher shuffled through her desk drawer searching for the tools her students would need for the test. As she looked, she pictured Harold walking to the front of his room with an empty glass and pitcher of water . . . slowly pouring water into the glass, right to the brim, . . . and dropping pennies, one at a time, ever so gently into the water . . . counting out loud . . . "seventeen, . . . eighteen…." Diana heard the fifth graders counting along as Harold dropped pennies into the glass of water.

Finding what she needed, Diana counted to make sure she had enough rulers and protractors for everyone: "… Nineteen, twenty. Ahhhh! What next?!" Someone had bent one of the metal protractors and put it back in the box. "I've had just enough!" She stormed off to the supply room, passing her math students in the hall returning from P.E. Diana knew she really should be in the room with her class, . . . especially this class!

"I'll be right back!" she barked at Tony, strolling down the hall, leading the pack. "Be ready to take the test when I get back!" She dashed past the sweating, chatty kids, sped down the hall, spied the principal and . . . proceeded as professionally as possible to find a replacement protractor.

"Actually, Heartside Christian is known in the district for its innovative methods in many areas of education." Diana overheard part of the principal's "spiel" as she came out of the store room clutching the protractor.

"Al Feenstra always lays it on heavy about the merits of the school," she thought. Enrollment was rising after several years of decline, and she knew he wanted to keep it that way.

"Oh! This is our seventh grade math teacher, Mrs. Diana Springer." Al caught her before she could zoom past him and get back to class. "Diana, this is Grace Burns and her husband Paul. Have a minute?"

She thought to herself. "No! I gotta get back to my room before those kids tear it apart." But, she knew that in Al's mind P.R. took precedence over the sweating seventh graders waiting for a math test, so she lied. "Sure, Al, . . . a minute." The principal then proceeded to go on and on about the plans for the computer lab expansion and Diana's role on the planning committee. The brief chat over (it seemed like hours to her!), Diana anxiously returned to her room.

When she passed Harold's room she heard him ask the class, "Should I stop?" He had dropped penny after penny into the glass of water without a spill! He paused.

"No!!" The wound-up fifth graders shouted. So he calmly slipped another penny over the rim. Diana really would rather have watched the science demonstration, but . . . that wouldn't be prudent.

So . . . back in her room, with only a few hairs out of place, Diana tried to settle the students who were still arguing about the flag football game they had played in P.E.

"Can't we take the test on Monday?" someone quipped when she finally had almost everyone's attention. Several students thought that was a great idea.

"It's too hot! Look! I'm dripping sweat on my desk," Becky whined.

"Try not to drip on your test," Diana said less than kindly, as she passed out the tests and tools. Neither Diana nor the students were thrilled about the Friday test, but at least there wouldn't be any weekend homework—for the students.

While they were taking the test, Diana mentally ran down her list of things to do before Monday: grade the math tests, average grades, report cards—due Wednesday, put up the careers bulletin board. "Maybe I can do that Saturday morning," she thought. "No, Allison's last soccer game is at ten o'clock. I'll do it Saturday afternoon. What else?" She listed more than she knew she had time for. . . . Pick up supplies for tonight's soup supper at church for the Youth-In-Action group . . . leader's meeting afterward. Brent's orthodontist appointment is right after school. Prayer group meets at our house Sunday evening. The clean, unfolded laundry is all over the couch. . . .

Diana sighed. She remembered her chat with Randy last week. Randy, friend, colleague, and resident cynic, told her that the board was considering giving the teachers a couple of days off to prepare report cards. He grinned at her. "You know, a records day, like the big school systems."

"Really?" Diana, the desperate, fell for the ruse.

"Yep," he said, "it's called the weekend." Randy's crack was mildly amusing then, but now with all this work staring her in the face, it just made her mad!

"Not funny, Randy," she muttered to herself, not caring if any of the test takers heard her.

"The top of the water is shaking like jello," a fifth grade voice chirped from across the hall. "I don't think it'll take one more penny!"

"Why don't we ever get to do anything fun?" Rick muttered as he struggled with his protractor. The excitement in Harold's room distracted the test takers, but it was too hot for Diana to close the door. Harold's class and many of Diana's students, as well, waited for the next penny to drop, hoping the water would spill. Diana waited for 3:15, hoping that nothing else would add to the growing stress she felt.

"I don't get this one, Ms. Springer." Diana looked up. It was Eddie. "You didn't tell us this stuff was gonna be on the test!" he accused.

Diana's chin caved in from the growing pressure as frustration and fatigue worked its way to the surface. Her bottom lip began to quiver. She rubbed her chin and attempted to hold herself together just long enough to get through this one question, this one last class. Diana bit her lip. She clenched her fist beneath her desk.

Out in the hall, principal Al Feenstra was in rare form as his small tour group walked past Diana's room. He was extolling the merits of Heartside Christian School. They stopped. Al spoke loudly enough for Diana to overhear the familiar discourse. He explained that the dedicated staff spends hours during noon hour, and in meetings before and after school, on various committees to plan and implement this project and that program for the kids.

"We like to think of Christian education like this." She pictured the principal forming a triangle with his fingers, his hands out in front of him. "You have the school, the home, and the church all working together." He paused. With emotion, he gently put his arm around little Stephanie and continued, " . . . for these little ones, our covenant children."

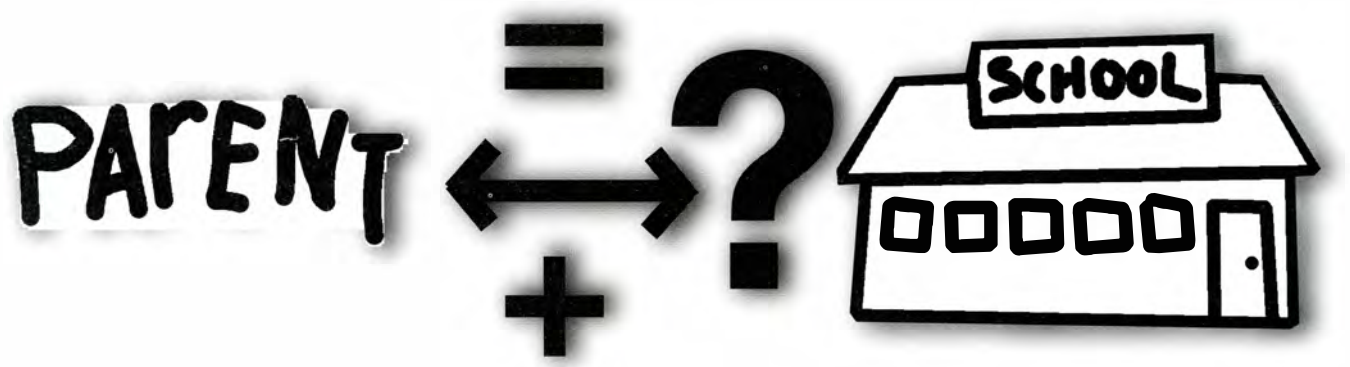
"Oh brother!" Diana mumbled.

"Huh?" Eddie was still puzzled.

Diana looked at the figure on Eddie's paper. She sighed. Diana knew she needed to work all weekend to catch up, but all she could think of was the tyranny of "the triangle."

Mercifully, the final bell rang. The test was over and the students streamed out of the building, happy to be released from their labors. Diana packed up her things. She locked her classroom door and waved good-bye to Harold who was cleaning up a watery mess in his room. She ambled past the principal who was holding the Burns' signed registration form, obviously pleased with his public relations coup.

She walked out to the parking lot and got into her car. It had been a tough week and the weekend didn't look any better. She rested her head on the steering wheel and cried. The rest of the world rushed past Diana—coming apart.




# A New Face for the Old PTO?

**Hendrik Sliekers**

*Hendrik Sliekers is Director of Library Services at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.*

It usually goes by the name of PTO. Almost every Christian school has one. Some are very successful. Others are more or less surviving. Parent Teachers Organizations are permanent fixtures on the Christian school landscape. Do they deserve our support or should we abolish them?

With all due respect to some flourishing PTO's, I ask whether or not there is a better way to channel the enthusiasm of parents to become more involved in the activities and mission of the school where they send their children for at least twelve years accompanied by a substantial tuition check.

Perhaps what parents need and would enjoy is not so much a "one society fits all" type of organization in which parents of pre-schoolers and seniors try to find an elusive common ground as much as a type of fellowship in which parents and teachers share a mutual interest in the lives of one or two particular classes in which their children will spend their entire school career.

Would not any group of parents be more interested to share with each other the educational, social, emotional, and physical development of their children with teachers they know rather than be entertained at various times by a speaker who may not be relevant to their particular interests? In the local Christian school, all parents' interests are indeed local, as embodied in the child who gets on the bus in the morning.

If we were to attempt to put a new face on the old PTO, one might start with a new name. Class Support Groups would be a modest proposal to get the venture off the ground. The name implies mutual support for the students, parents, and teachers of any particular class destined eventually for a specific high school graduation year. A pre-schooler, for example, starting in September 1996 would graduate from high school in the year 2010. Thus starts Class Support Group 2010.

Membership, in addition to teachers and parents, would also include foster parents and legal guardians of the students.

Now comes the main part of the enterprise. What would be the purpose of each group? Rather than being different from the larger all inclusive PTO, each group could be more specific in several areas. Here are just a few initial suggestions:

- Become acquainted with each other as parents and as friends who will relate, via their children, for about twelve or fourteen years, to the same teachers, classmates, problems, blessings, events, homework, games, activities, joys, and sorrows.
- Support each other with appropriate action in any given situation for the benefit of the school, staff, and students.

The role of the teacher in this venture is no less significant than the role of the parents. Rather than eying each other cautiously from opposite sides of the desk, teacher and parents can develop a sense of camaraderie that aims to promote the success of the child's education. Developing the art of conversing with each other is in itself a most noble objective.

- Sponsor speakers, films, panel discussion, or other events to either highlight or promote a common concern relevant to the specific year or age group of the children. These concerns will continually change as the children mature. There is a wide gap between choosing that first lunch box and choosing the right outfit for the senior prom.
- Consult with and offer concrete support to the school administration and teaching staff regarding any area where a considered and constructive response by the Class Support Group would be appropriate and welcome.

Any organization needs some form of structure through which to maintain itself. A formal structure with elected officers (chairperson, secretary, treasurer) may not be required, but at least a few competent coordinators to plan the agenda and to schedule meetings would be essential.

Minimal dues or a regular free-will offering at all meetings could well be sufficient to meet any financial need.

Any Class Support Group, if not the acceptance of the very concept itself, will need the approval, blessing,

advice, direction, and cooperation of both the school board and the administration to be successful. With careful and prayerful planning tempered by realistic expectations, Class Support Groups may well become the most credible instruments to give new life and meaning to the idea of "parent-controlled" schools.

Parents who have up to five children in school may well raise eyebrows at this proposition. Is it not asking a little too much of them to attend five meetings or more per year, one for each class? Of course. However, the strength and purpose of each group lies in the support parents and teachers provide each other and the fellowship established among parents who have children in a particular class rather than in the frequency of individual Class Support Group meetings. I suspect that parents will soon discover just where they need or can provide the anticipated support.

Finally, should we abolish the PTO? No, that would be drawing the wrong conclusion. A need still remains for a larger unit to write the agenda for the big projects that the small informal Class Support Groups cannot handle or that should be delegated to the school administrators. Some day, perhaps, the PTO as we know it may become obsolete. For the time being, let us use it until we have established and tested a better option.

# Helping Homeschoolers Adjust to the Classroom

**Rhonda Rhea**

*Rhonda Rhea, a freelance writer, resides with her family in Florissant, Missouri.*

Loosening my white-knuckled grip on the steering wheel, I was reminded that sending my children off to Christian school for the first time was anything but stress-free. I suffered the usual parental "letting-go" anxieties. But coupled with those were the apprehensions of enrolling children who had known nothing other than homeschool all of their lives.

I know, as Christians we don't actually worry—we get concerned. So my number one concern (okay, worry) was helping them fit into their new classes as painlessly as possible without their being psychologically marred for life. Tutoring them at home had proven very rewarding, but the birth of our fifth little one had me worrying about the time I would be able to invest in their schooling, and that worry led to the decision to enroll them in Christian school.

I discovered that I was not unique in experiencing the apprehensions of initiating previously homeschooled children into the classroom. With the upswing in homeschooling and the varied and changing needs of families, the transitions back and forth from homeschool to classroom are sure to increase—and I think we already have enough "transition-ees" to form yet one more type of support group with yet one more new formula.

My true support, however, has come from the One who gives grace that masters any anxiety. I was able to stand back and watch in awe as the

Lord gave me that grace to ease the worry and gave the teachers, my husband, and me wisdom in aiding our children in their adjustments. It was an incredible relief to discover that there are specific ways parents and teachers can help to smooth out the transition for homeschoolers.

**Academic acclimatization**

As with any transferring student, the school needs to determine the student's abilities. Many homeschooled students have standardized achievement test scores available. Some Christian schools have tests specifically designed for determining whether a student will be able to perform academically without excessive outside work. Those tests are usually pulled right from the school's curriculum and needn't be an additional purchase.

Don't be too quick to assess a border-line student as poor on the basis of just one test, however. The likelihood of the student having studied page-for-page the same materials as the balance of the class is, of course, quite small. Making additional assignments and allowing a reasonable adjustment period might very well bring progress in line with that of classmates. Parents of the homeschooled student have expressed an obvious desire to take an active role in the education of their child. If additional work at home will fill in any gaps, you can count on parental participation almost one hundred percent of the time. Additionally, if the student scores exceptionally well, your challenge will be to keep him or her challenged.

Homeschoolers generally work at their own pace at home, working at a project until they grasp the concept, however long that may be, then moving on to the next project. Teachers should take into consideration that the speed of the homeschooled student might be different from the speed of a child who has spent his or her schooltime in a traditional classroom. A recently homeschooled student will be adjusting to working on your schedule rather than on his or her own. It's helpful to take extra care demonstrating what is expected and exercising patience. The student may need several weeks to adjust to the pace of whole class instruction. Be careful not to let speed cloud your assessment of the student's abilities. A very bright homeschooler might be quite slow before adapting to the classroom. That child may be adapting additionally to more lecture and less one-on-one tutorial.

The student may need several weeks to adjust to the pace of whole class instruction.

**Social assimilation**

You may find that many of the concerns regarding socialization of a homeschooled student are unwarranted. While homeschooled children's social skills are almost invariably questioned, these children have usually spent their school hours modeling their behavior after adults rather than after peers. You may even find them more socially mature than the average child in their age groups.

Still, homeschooled students may need to sharpen their friend-making skills. While brothers, sisters, parents, and church situations offer teaching in social behavior, homeschooled children have had the same friends since they were infants. Reaching out to a new person may be a relatively new concept.

The social adjustments from homeschool to Christian school, however, vary as greatly as the personalities and temperaments of children. You may find some homeschoolers who are overwhelmed with so great a number of people in a classroom. Others may be so excited about the prospect of all the new classmates that they want to talk all the time.

Even from the same gene pool, I experienced both extremes from two of my children. One tended to be a "loner" for the first few weeks, but the "socialite" of the family dove in with great enthusiasm and became attached to new friends (and the phone, I might add) within days.

We can expect some apprehension on the part of any homeschooled child in a new classroom. This child is not merely changing schools. This child is adjusting to a completely new way of life. The new people, new place, new schedule, and new way of thinking are all enough to overwhelm even the most secure child.

At the time the child enters school, educators should make a point of going over procedures for lunch, bathroom breaks, recess, or other routines. It's very easy to assume that the homeschooled student should already know the rules and accepted behavior for a traditional classroom. But that's not always the case. You may find your homeschooler having more difficulty sitting correctly in a chair, for instance. If you can establish some of the accepted behaviors as you go, it might be less overwhelming than rattling off a huge list of do's and don'ts in the midst of already so great a number of adjustments.

Point out other desired behaviors as you observe successes and infractions. It's helpful to approach the corrections from a positive angle. My children's new teachers more than once gave them gentle nudges in the right

direction concerning raising hands, lining up for lunch, and other procedures the rest of the class had already accepted as part of classroom life.

The homeschool class often takes less than half the time of the average school day. You may observe the homeschooled student having more difficulty maintaining a consistent energy level for the entire day. Merely knowing that you might expect that dip in energy will help you better relate to the child, understand what's happening, and chalk it up to one more adjustment.

**Spiritual augmentation**

Assigning control of much of a child's education to another person, particularly regarding spiritual instruction, is especially difficult for homeschooling parents. Try to understand the parents' disquietude and maintain open communication with the parents and with the student. Parents will become much more comfortable as they realize your great love for Christ and your commitment to making God's word the basis of every learning experience. Communicate that you are there to assist the parents, not to take their place.

Perhaps more than your average number of communications through notes, calls, and meetings will be necessary for parents who are giving up homeschooling. Communicate love to them, especially your love and devotion to their child. If you show the parents that for you, teaching is not merely a paycheck, but that you are committed to the success of their child, you will win them over. Encourage them with information concerning the major struggles and even the smallest progressions. Encouraging notes from my children's teachers during our transition time were medicine for my spirit. One such note merely read: "Jordan is doing very well. I really enjoy having him in class." Another that touched my heart read simply: "You are great parents!" When my youngest son was promoted to the advanced reading group after his first month in class, his teacher sent a considerate note advising me of his progress and celebrating that progress with me.

Pray for your student, understanding his or her need for special grace in the major adaptations required. Letting the child know that you are praying for him or her is a tremendous encouragement as well and might be the first clue of your sincere concern for the child's well-being and spiritual health.

Let the parents know that you are praying for their child, too. It's so much easier to place paramount guidance for our children's education in the hands of a teacher who loves the student enough to place each struggle and victory in the hands of the Lord.

Patience, patience, patience is a key in a change of this type. It's certainly appropriate to pray for yourself as an educator in this situation as well, asking for a special dose of that patience, along with some extra sensitivity and wisdom.

As we surrender each relationship to the Lord, he proves more than able again and again to provide for each need—for teachers, parents, and students alike. My personal worries as a parent over the academic acclimatization, social assimilation, and spiritual augmentation of our children were squelched by an immense portion of God's grace. My children are happy, well-adjusted school kids. My husband and I are well-adjusted former homeschooling parents, despite my white-knuckled beginning. Even the teachers have survived—and we have all been educated.

# Preparing for the Classroom

**Tips for Educators**

*Personally invite the child to join your class. As with any new student, work to help the child feel welcome as quickly as possible.

*If the family is not already in the habit, encourage parents to start getting up earlier several days before their scheduled day to begin school. Bedtime may need to be re-scheduled to an earlier hour as well.

*Help your new student to embrace this new school as his or her school. Helping to develop school spirit is important for inspiring that needed sense of belonging and pride. Point out special characteristics of your school.

*Convince parents of your respect for their commitment to their child's education, taking care not to put down homeschooling. Parents should be free to focus their attention on helping their child fit in rather than defending their choices for that child.

*If the child is beginning mid-year, encourage parents to begin school on a day that is light on academics but heavy on activity and socialization. (This was suggested for my children and became an important "get to know you" time.)

*Suggest that if parents are not already doing so, they begin to time the student's work at home before they start to attend the classroom.

*Pair up a homeschooler with a buddy who already knows the Christian school ropes. Sometimes it happens naturally, but be ready to step in and help.

*If possible, plan a little time with the student, advising him or her what to expect as well as gently presenting what you will expect as teacher. A visit in the home is ideal, if at all workable.

*Read a good book or two on the subject of homeschooling. Become aware of the parents' motives and the advantages of being taught in the loving environment of home, to help you better understand the family and their transition.

# All-Girls Schools Do We Need Them?

**Liz Nanninga**

*Liz Nanninga resides with her family in Barrhead, Alberta.*

Edmonton's first all-girls alternative junior high school opened September 1995. The Nellie McClung Girls School believes that student marks of teenage girls will improve dramatically, for poor self-esteem leads girls to underperform in a mixed-class setting.

Educators are divided as to the validity and benefits of all-girls schools.

All-girls school proponents allege that poor self-esteem in adolescent girls arises primarily from a competitive environment with boys, and they say girls are hindered because teachers give more attention to boys.

A 1990 poll commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of 2,400 girls and 600 boys found that 60% of elementary school girls and 67% of elementary school boys were happy with themselves, but that figure dropped to 29% in girls and 46% in boys by the time they reached high school.

American University professors Myra and David Sadker, contributing authors to the report, say, "Adolescence is the tightening of a corset, tied to the education system . . . in which expectations for achievement are lower for girls than for boys." Their research shows that boys call out in class eight times more than do girls, that teachers hold contests in which all-boy teams compete against all-girl teams, and that teachers encourage boys to win by saying they should not let a "bunch of girls" beat them.

Critics of all-girls schools hold that the forces behind such schools are simply being politically correct by insisting on gender equity by way of single-sex classes. They claim that prevention of poor self-esteem is better than intervention, and they believe that competition is the way of life.

Janet Parshall, assistant to the president of Concerned Women of America, says, "The engine of our democracy runs on the fuel of competition. Competition is healthy in class."

Others disclaim the poor self-esteem report as nonsense. Diane Ravich, a senior research scholar at New York University, speaks out: "Part of the drumbeat for gender equity is based on the idea that girls are burdened by low self-esteem, but it's demonstrably untrue. I've seen studies showing Korean students had low self-esteem but the highest grades." And if it's true that teachers call on boys more often than girls, she says, " . . . it's not clear that this helps boys at all. While boys get higher scores in math and science, the girls get higher scores in reading and writing."

Psychology Professor Jacquelynne Eccles from the University of Michigan admits that perhaps "the biggest gender difference is that boys get yelled at more than girls."

Educators aren't the only ones divided over the claims of all-girls schools. Girls are too.

Cynthia Mahood, a junior majoring in biochemistry, says she broke out of her shy shell that she carried with her through high school only after she attended the all-female Mills College in Oakland, California.

Grade six girls at Edmonton's Oliver Elementary where the all-girls school occupies a wing, had comments that ranged from "You don't need an all-girls school if you're secure and confident" to "There'd be too many girls in an all-girls school."

Andrea Nelson, who attends the Nellie McClung Girls School and who says that boys were disruptive in her former classes, confesses, "I didn't want to come here, but my mom said you're coming and that's that." She added, "But I'd probably go back to a co-ed senior high. I don't want to spend the rest of my life thinking you can go through life without boys."

Parents who send their daughters to all-girls schools find it a welcome remedy to the belief that co-ed education hinders girls. For me, the question arises, Why?

As a parent of an all-girl family, I am ready to "go to bat" for the co-ed schools. I believe that teenage girls should not be sheltered by resorting to an all-girls school. And I am convinced that gender equity, in the true sense, is to live and work with the opposite sex in everyday situations.

I am not alone. Eighty percent of all-girl families I contacted, who send their daughters to the co-ed school in Neerlandia, Alberta, expressed concern that their girls grow up in normal, healthy relationships with boys. These parents look to the co-ed school for support in the male role models they provide by way of teachers and peers. Bev Kippers says, "My girls need the interaction with males other than their dad." And Carol Elgersma, mother of four girls, ages two to fourteen, says, "Our girls don't have brothers, just their dad. It's good for them to learn at school that girls and boys can be friends, not just boyfriend /girlfriend."

These all-girl parents also believe that a healthy self-esteem starts at home and can be nurtured at school. Janet Parshall agrees: "Self-esteem is caught, not taught. Good teachers know how to bring that out."

Self-esteem is encouraged in girls who attend Neerlandia primarily by the attitude of Christian junior high teachers (all of whom are male) who treat girls as equal individual intellectuals, who don't give preference to boys with respect to classroom activi-

ties, and who give conscious effort in skill development to girls as well as boys. As a result, junior high girls at Neerlandia are very academically focused and, in general, do better than the boys.

The essence in nurturing girls' self-esteem, at home and at school, lies in the belief in God, who unconditionally loves each of us, and whose love is not dependent on our accomplishments. Ultimately, our daughters' self-esteem is based on who they are, not on what they do.

Ralph Helder, principal of Neerlandia School (K through grade ten), says, "There's no doubt that grade eight for junior high girls is tough in terms of self-esteem and relationships to peers. However, it's important that the teacher foster self-esteem in those girls by rejecting any 'guff' from the boys: no put-downs, no bullying, no belittling. And that goes the other way too, from girls to guys."

Neerlandia's junior high teachers maintain the welfare of both sexes by giving everyone the attention they deserve. Bert Van Niejenhuis points out that in his classroom the rules are the same for boys and girls alike. Dick De Vries says he gives help where it's needed without acknowledging whether that person is male or female.

Christian schools especially have a significant part in dispelling low self-esteem in teenage girls by encouraging individual uniqueness rather than pitting the sexes against each other. That uniqueness is based on the recognition that each student is fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.

Christian teachers teach with the work of God as their foundation, and that foundation sits on the fact that we have been created equally as males and females. That leads to an education where submission to each other and service for one another provides the basis of classroom conduct. And it echoes a truth taught in the Christian home: Each member lives for the others, and all live for God.

If we practiced this truth at home and at school, then there might not be a need for educators to start all-girls schools and for parents to send their daughters there.

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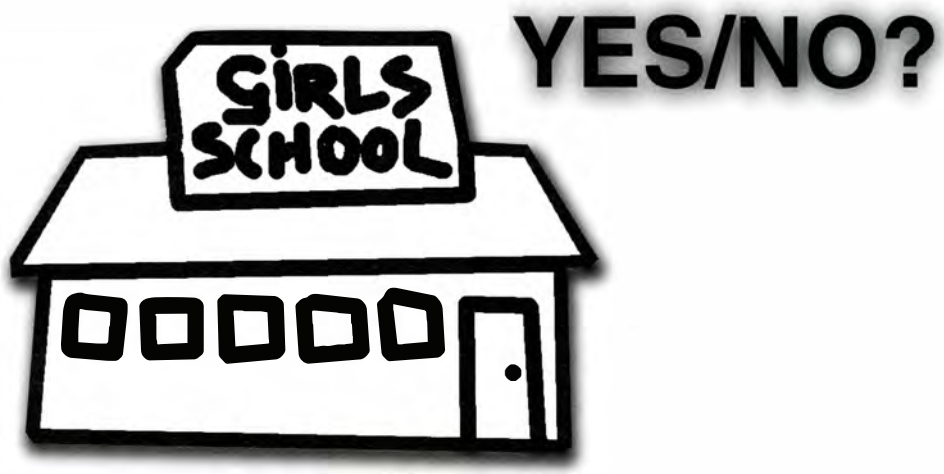

# QUERY Q?

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**Denver, CO 80210**

*I recognize an increase in student cheating in my Christian school. I have mentioned this at faculty meetings, but the other teachers mostly deny that it is happening or claim it isn't happening in their classes. I've watched teachers even leave the classroom while supposedly monitoring a test. They claim they trust their students and imply that I do not, but I know that cheating is going on while they are gone. Others correct tests while the students are blatantly copying answers. By not saying or doing anything, we educators, I believe, are condoning a growing trend that is creeping into our Christian schools. What do you think? What can I do?*

I would agree that cheating is becoming more and more common. Educational psychologist Fred Schab surveyed high school students across America and found that between 1969 and 1989 cheating on tests had doubled and that copying work had also greatly increased. Similar surveys with college students show alarming results as well. Even more disturbing was the fact that teachers who knew cheating was occurring were reluctant to stop it. Somehow we think or believe that our covenant children would not succumb to temptation, and that our teachers would not condone it. Students, parents, teachers, and the general public tenaciously embrace the concept that winning at all costs is worth it. Sadly, many Christians have agreed with that philosophy, fearing that otherwise they will lose out on something the world has to offer.

Whenever we have to solve a problem, we have to get at the root of it. Cheating is a product of pressure, and we as teachers may be part of the cause, not because we assign homework and tests, but because we haven't always assessed the students' expectations and fears. Many parents value a letter grade over competence; therefore, students will cheat to compensate for poor memory or study skills and to gain favor with adults.

Weak teachers may even fail to expose the cheating for fear of repercussions from the parents. Thus the cycle continues.

Students in the surveys also said that the schools made it easy to cheat. We as educators can control the testing environment by placement of the furniture and ourselves in the room. We can watch for movements that indicate the presence of cheat notes. We can punish the cheaters if caught. But probably more importantly, we can create an atmosphere that values honesty and the importance of evaluation; fortunately, we are allowed to teach Christian values.

"Cheating is habit-forming," says Jay Mulkey, president of the non-profit Character Education Institute in San Antonio, Texas. "Students who cheat in class may well cheat in their jobs or on their spouses."

Personally, I find that statement somewhat extreme, but I do believe if cheating goes undetected and undisciplined, our next generation will experience detrimental repercussions.

Initially you asked not only what I think, but what you can do. Interestingly, students that were surveyed indicated that they knew exactly in which classes they could get away with cheating. Therefore, if you are unable to convince your colleagues, at least you can set the standards in your own classroom. Maybe an anonymous survey of students' cheating in your school would allow all staff to know what the current practices are and if any more concern is necessary. Ironically, kids are quite honest on surveys when their identity remains unknown and grades are not an issue. If you should decide to go this route, do so with tact. The results may prove or disprove your point. Either way, the knowledge should be used to better the school and the students.

As Christian teachers we have an obligation to make certain that we are providing education that is intellectual as well as moral.

*I realize that in public schools teachers have to be parents, too; but that seems to be true also in our Christian schools. I teach in a large urban area on the east coast. Maybe erosion is more severe here, but where are the Christian parents? Should I have to do their job?*

Our Christian schools seem to follow the trends of the public schools, just not with the same severity. Thus we always "look" good to the public

because there are fewer drugs, less sexual activity, and less violence, at least less apparent abuse of these social ills.

A study conducted by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development showed that in a group of twenty-seven prominent scholars, educators, physicians, psychologists, theologians, former and current public officials, and others, "nearly half of American adolescents age 10 to 14 years old are at high or moderate risk of seriously damaging their life chances through harmful behavior." The study also indicated that young adolescents have become more vulnerable in recent years because of the dramatic increase of the time they spend without adult supervision. The percentage of families with only one parent or with two parents who work out of the home has soared from about 40% in 1970 to almost 70% twenty years later.

Christian parents are also caught up in this trend. They aren't always there for their kids, so the Christian school teacher feels the burden. Divorce is tearing students apart; exhausted, single parents look to the family of God for financial and emotional help. Many other parents are working two jobs and working late hours to give their kids a better life; little do they realize that being too busy isn't the answer.

After our last parent conferences, many teachers shook their heads in dismay; so many kids seem to have no chance unless we step in as allies of the Christian family. We can shake our fingers at self-centered action, lack of commitment, or misplaced values and say it isn't our job; however, if the parents don't accept the responsibility and we don't either, who will? We've been spoiled in Christian education. We're supposed to be able to teach, not parent. As church members, many of us took an oath at the time of the baptism of these children to help bring up these covenant youth in the way of the Lord, but perhaps we didn't really expect to honor that promise.

I don't have all the answers to these difficult situations facing Christian families and teachers, but I do know that if we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem.

The recommended answer from the Carnegie Council is to provide the adolescents with close relationships with dependable adults and to instill in them the belief that they have opportunities in this society. Yes, we are being called on to do more than teach our subject area or coach a sport, or do other extra curricular activities; we are being asked to be part of an extended family, the family of God. The extra time and energy and emotional involvement expand the teacher's role. Perhaps additional college preparation or parental education would alleviate the burden; but until such education occurs, these young people need somebody.

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love," I am probably not the teacher kids today need, especially in our Christian schools. Does the situation seem unfair? Were we trained in these special areas? These questions don't really matter. The job has to be done, and we are in a position to make a difference.

*You may think this question is a set-up or that I am baiting you, but I wonder more and more if students today have no bladder control. I remember a time when it was inappropriate to ask a teacher if you could use the restroom during class. This now seems to be a common occurrence. My colleagues think I am unreasonable not to allow students to leave my class for this purpose, but I think by the time they are in high school, they should be able to master this small bodily function. Am I expecting too much; and if so, why could students control that need twenty years ago?*

Assuming your question is legitimate, I will try to answer it. Admittedly, at first I thought you were joking. However, I have taught many years, and I do remember how few times, years ago, students asked to use the restroom. I always assumed that, except for an emergency, the student would not ask, so I readily permitted the privilege. I have not really experienced this practice to be a major interruption or an abused privilege, but I will concede that more kids do ask today.

If students seem to be going more often than seems reasonable, perhaps you need to do some sleuthing. It is important to be sensitive to student's personal habits, but the only culprit that could increase the need during the day might be the consumption of soda pop, water, and other beverages. Some schools allow students to consume these products during the school day, even in classes, which more than likely would result in full bladders eventually. If that is not true in your school, you might discover other interesting activities going on in the bathrooms. Young kids enjoy running water, rolling paper, or playing with the soap, but older students find restrooms fascinating for meeting places, quick smokes, escapism, or the rarer but very real problems of today, bulimic regurgitation, attempted suicide, masturbation, or even drug exchanges.

The possibility also exists that the students who are practicing this habit regularly feel bored, pressured, unmotivated, or unable to do the assigned work. Be certain that you begin class activities promptly, and generate an atmosphere of interest and success. Teaching today demands a certain amount of entertaining and activity not expected years ago. Today's youth want to be involved and challenged or they will seek their own excitement, sometimes in very inappropriate ways.

So even though initially I questioned the validity of your query, I have concluded that you have indeed made teachers aware of a neglected area that could be indicative of other behaviors in the classroom and school that might be far more serious than surmised. Subtly, routines change and often go unsupervised until some hassle or injury draws attention. I hope you will not discover any menacing reason for the "bathroom trips."

**Jeff Fennema**
**THINKING THIRTEEN**

# Neighbor in San Antonio: Long Distance Collaboration

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

Last fall I hooked up online with a teacher from San Antonio, Texas. We were both members of an e-mail listserve that matches teachers who develop units on the same classroom novels. Norma Sturdivant, a reading teacher from Kirby Junior High School, sent a message to the listserve and its participants requesting a match for Lois Lowry's novel *The Giver.* I responded to her request, not knowing where it would lead nor what a valuable learning experience this activity would provide for my students and me.

We hashed out our ideas through a few weeks of e-mail. After our brainstorming on the net concluded, we agreed to a "serendipitous exploration" with our collaboration of Lowry's novel. Norma's classes began reading *The Giver* a week before ours. A few of her students then constructed e-mail messages to us in which they shared some thoughts and ideas about the novel's community. We replied with our own thoughts and predications, and the "techno-swap-meet" between the two communities of readers was well under way.

During this time Norma and I traded ideas. She had developed writing assignments based on recurring themes in the novel. I used literary activities to explore various facets of the story. We received samples of their work, and we sent back our own selected pieces. We both agreed to a "Sameness Day" celebration (one of the novel's key themes) to conclude our reading of *The Giver.* Norma videotaped the Kirby version of the ceremony, and I videotaped our own. These videos granted each of us a peek at our immediate differences: Kirby's student body is one-third Hispanic, one-third African American, and one-third white; ours is mostly white.

This furnished us with a natural transition into our letter-writing unit. Our students became pen pals with each other, and the first wave of letters prompted some penetrating discussions. One of my students was puzzled with how anyone could like the San Antonio Spurs or the Dallas Cowboys—after all, "doesn't everyone like the Bulls and the Bears?" A group of students raised questions about Kirby's dress code, which prohibits dickies, since dickies are clothing associated with gang activity, a real life situation quite foreign to our students. One of my students even received a letter that asked, "Why is everyone at your school white and have blond hair?" Hmmm. Here we talked about what the word multicultural meant. The students then took the conversation full circle back to *The Giver*, in which they further explored the concept of sameness found in the novel's community.

> "Who is your neighbor?"

With much of the focus on our differences, we discovered that we have much in common as well. Those specially juxtaposed attributes that make adolescents so unique (silly and serious, inquisitive and apathetic, compassionate and rebellious) are not limited to the Chicagoland area. Rather, my students posit, "They're kinda a lot like us."

Middle school teachers know the wealth of benefits that accompany collaboration in their own schools. The team approach offers an exciting edge in teaching new or existing units. Not only does it sharpen the educators' endeavors, the students also profit from the combined efforts as well. Long distance collaboration propels both the educators and students into a journey of the unknown. There one finds great treasures waiting to be discovered.

Norma Sturdivant and I discovered many exciting elements attributed to this long distance collaboration: we collected new ideas from each other; we honed our Internet skills; we shared our students' work; we met each other's students through letters and video. Yet the most valuable aspect of this venture was the students' experiential discovery to the answer of Christ's question, "Who is your neighbor?" We have neighbors in San Antonio, and "they're kinda a lot like us." And so the global community grows.

# Turning Loss into Gain:
## Crohn's Disease and Learning Assistance

**Betty Klassen**
**IDEA BANK**

*Betty Klassen is a learning assistant at Abbotsford Christian School, Heritage Campus, in Abbotsford, British Columbia.*

Tim had been absent for over a month and had been hospitalized for much of that time. He showed up for a few hours on January 24. His slight frame looked gaunt while his face appeared very puffy. Medication-induced, I told myself. He and I left the classroom for a learning assistance session in the alcove off the hall.

We corrected some math, practiced a few multiplication facts, and looked at the pictures in *The Chalkbox Kid*, a book I thought would interest him because he enjoyed art. After a page of "paired reading," he made a modest attempt at solo reading. His energy seemed to wane, so we laid academics aside and talked.

With a new spurt of energy he told me about his hospital stay and his discharge on the condition that he had learned to insert the feeding tube into his nose himself. My interest and questions kept him talking until the bell rang.

"That is a fascinating story, Tim. Would you like to write about it?"

"Sure!"

That brief exchange initiated lesson plans for an integrated Language Arts-Art unit that extended for just over a month of daily learning assistance input.

First, Tim told his story to the tape recorder, prompted by my questions when necessary. Then we listened to the first sentence and he proceeded to write. Naturally, this writing included spelling practice of high use vocabulary as well as challenging words like *Crohn's, emergency,* and *prednisone.*

The following day he reread the previous day's writing, listened to the next sentence, and continued writing. Each day's lesson included reading, listening, spelling, and writing. Each change of location—home, medical office, hospital—provided opportunity for art homework: drawing a picture.

Being from a farming family, Tim belonged to the local 4-H club, and he used his experience as the basis for an "extemporaneous" speech on Crohn's disease, for which he won the blue ribbon in his category. When his classroom teacher heard about his success, she gave him an opportunity to address the class on his unique topic. Then notes for his speech provided additional detail for writing.

Tim's story has been submitted to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada, which is planning to publish children's literature supplying information about the disease.

**Excerpts from TIM'S STORY**

"Mom, I'm full!"

"Try to finish your toast, Tim."

"But I'm really full."

"At least finish your orange juice and your milk."

I gulped it down and left the table. I brushed my teeth and combed my hair. I picked up my schoolbag, grabbed my jacket, and dashed out to catch the school bus. This went on day after day, week after week. Every day I had a stomach ache, especially when I drank milk. My stomach ache just wouldn't go away. Stomach ache after breakfast, stomach ache after lunch at school, stomach ache after supper. It just got worse and worse. . . .

While I was in the hospital they decided to keep me there and find out why I was getting these stomach aches. They took me for a barium test. I had to drink this stuff that looked like a milk shake but tasted gross. I barfed it up, so the test didn't work. Then they put a tube in my nose that went to my stomach. They put the medicine down the tube so I didn't need to drink it. The test worked but it didn't say I had Crohn's or that I didn't have Crohn's. Crohn's is a disease that makes your intestine swell up. So when you eat, you feel full but you aren't full. . . .

Soon the doctor decided I couldn't go any longer without food. Good, I thought, now I can eat and drink, because I was getting really hungry. Then the doctor walked in with a tube.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Your feeding tube."

"My what?" I asked. "Is it going to hurt?"

"Well, maybe a little."

Well, it killed. Can you imagine getting a tube down your nose, throat, and into your stomach? I felt like Pinocchio. . . . At night they fed me a special kind of food through the tube attached to a bag that hung on a pole. A pump made it run through a certain amount at a time.

One day we went to Children's Hospital and talked to a specialist. The next week we went back to do a test where they put a tube up my bum. It had a little camera and tweezers to take some tissue. They looked at the tissue through a microscope and saw

that I had Crohn's.

I was actually happy I had Crohn's. No more tests. Now I could start eating again. The doctors don't know what causes it, or how to cure it, but they know how to control it. . . .

Before I went home from the hospital, they taught me to put the feeding tube in my nose. They said I could go home as soon as I learned to do it myself. It didn't hurt as much if you put it in yourself. It made me sneeze when I put it in. It helped to drink water while I put it down. Then I taped the hose to my nose so it wouldn't come back out. Next I put the syringe on the end of the hose and pushed some air through the hose. I listened with the stethoscope for a gurgling sound right under the ribs. Then I knew it was in the right spot.

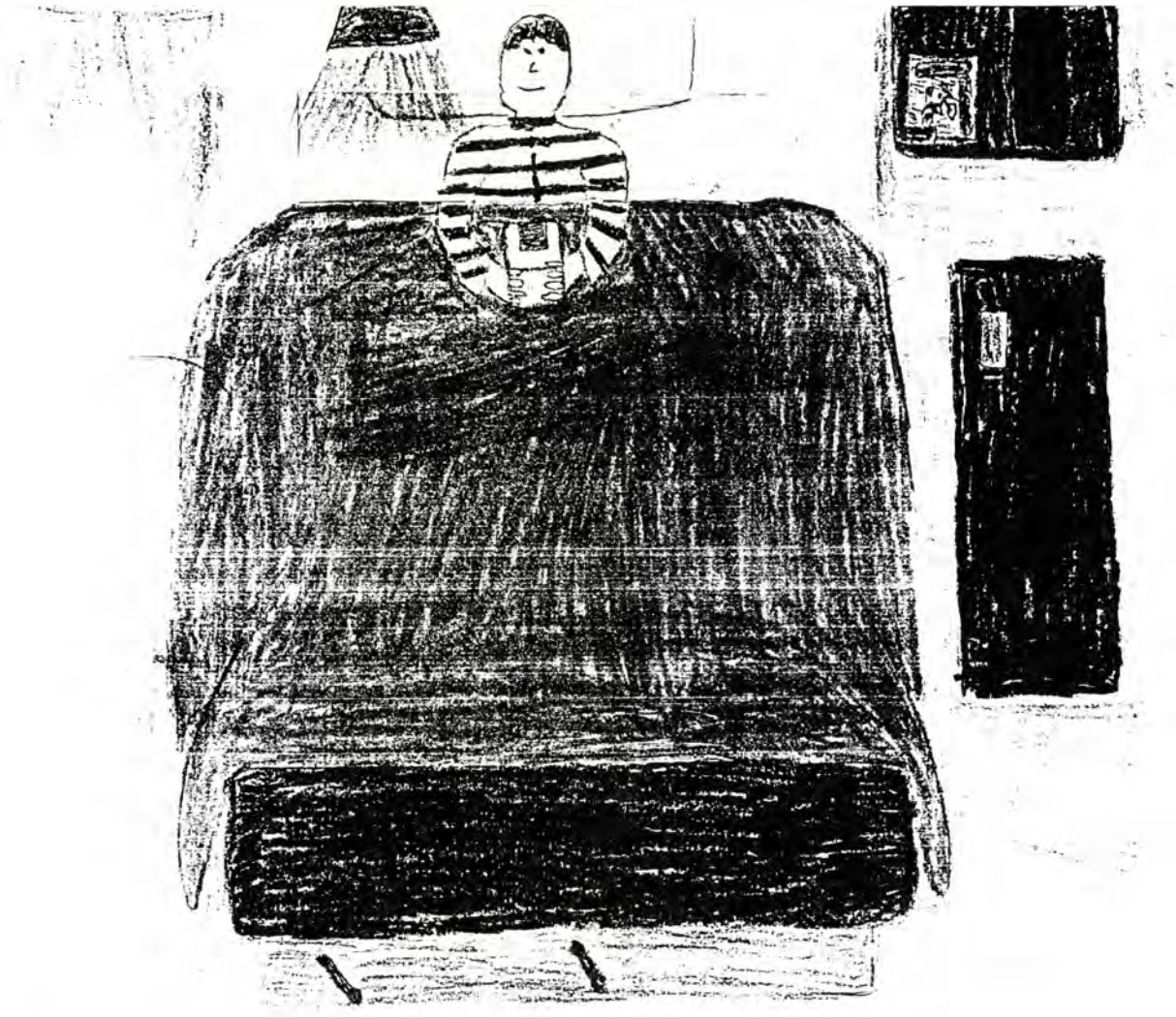
At first the only regular food I could have was jello, popsicles, and juice. When I came back from Children's they said I could try potatoes, white bread, and plain soup made with noodles and water. Then I could have carrots, turkey, and chicken, but I had to take the skin off the chicken. Later, I tried different foods slowly.

I went to Children's Hospital for a checkup on Valentine's Day. The doctor said I didn't have to tube feed anymore and I could eat anything that didn't upset my stomach.

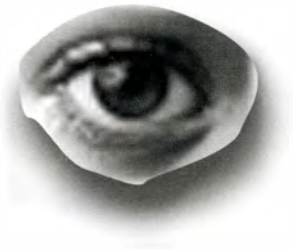
At first I took eight prednisone pills every day. Then I went down to four every other day. I took a tablespoon of liquid iron in the morning, after school, and at night. I took folic acid every other day.

Now I swallow a sulfasalazine once in the morning and once at night. I will have to take the sulfasalazine for the rest of my life. My medicine has really helped and I'm feeling a lot better.

It isn't so bad having Crohn's. You can still go to school and play. But the next time somebody says they have a stomach ache, just remember: It can happen to anyone, anytime, and the pain is real.



**Stefan Ulstein**
**MEDIA EYE**



# Wartime Cartoons as Propaganda

*Stefan Ulstein teaches media and English courses at Bellevue Christian Junior High and High School in Bellevue, Washington.*

Modern students find it hard to understand the total mobilization of the U.S. population during World War II. Their parents tell stories of a country fragmented and ruptured over Vietnam, and their own wars are limited skirmishes like those in Haiti and Somalia. Many modern students are unaware of Bosnia's existence and few can find it on a map. They are almost completely ignorant of the names of the combatants.

In World War II, every American knew the names of Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo. They followed the war's progress on maps and in newspapers and newsreels. They wrote and received letters from brothers, uncles, and fathers. The social dynamic of the 1940s was drastically different from today's. It is hard for most students to understand the way an entire culture was mobilized around a war.

One way to illustrate the cultural milieu of the 1940s is to study the cartoons of the times. Disney and Warner Brothers, like all Hollywood studios, were commandeered for the war effort and began cranking out propaganda films. By propaganda, I mean films that were meant to teach specific lessons and instill specific, politically correct attitudes. Cartoons were like television shows today in their power to shape attitudes. Most modern students have seen them on television, but not on the big screen between the two halves of a double feature.

The first wartime cartoons were aimed at the home front. In-jokes about rationed gas and butter, the shortage of nylon stockings, and the mobilization of women for the factory work force were presented in a lighthearted (and appallingly sexist) way that was designed to get everyone on board the war effort. Viewers took their cues from the behavior of their favorite cartoon characters and from the omnipresent voice-over that was often the essence of "proper" American thought.

In "Draft Board Daffy," Daffy Duck begins by reading the banner headlines; "Major Frontal Assault on Enemy Rear." Elated, he prances around the house singing patriotic songs, miming machine gun duels, and impersonating war heroes. Then he gets a phone call telling him that the draft board representative is coming over. Immediately Daffy panics and goes through ruse after ruse to keep the Porky/Elmer draft man away. The point is clear. In the early days of the war American forces lost every battle to the Japanese. As the Philippines, Wake, Guam, and Midway fell to the Imperial forces, Americans died or were captured. The cartoon is an attempt to downplay the well-known dangers of military service.

In some cartoons, the war effort is a subtext or add-on. In "Super Rabbit" Bugs Bunny is turned into a super hero by eating special carrots. He travels to Texas where a brutish cowboy and his horse are engaged in a major rabbit hunt. After the usual hijinks, Bugs enters a phone booth, emerging in the dress blue uniform of a United States Marine. Humming "The Halls of Montezuma," he marches off at shoulder arms, winking to the camera and saying, "Sorry, but now I have something important to do."

More political is "Fifth Column Mouse." An isolationist mouse stands at the window downplaying the danger of the cat. "He'll never get in here," the isolationist laughs. Then the cat bursts in and the other mice scatter. The cat captures the isolationist, but instead of eating him, convinces the mouse that he's not really a bad fellow. The isolationist, now an appeaser and collaborator, spreads this evangel to the other mice.

Now the cat is the pampered despot. The music suggests intrigue and the mice slave away, not completely happy with their new situation. One rebel, while giving the cat a manicure, attempts to de-claw him.

Eventually the truth becomes clear and the mice rally to re-arm themselves. To the strains of the popular wartime song "We Did It Before, We'll Do It Again," they stamp out little helmets and build a sort of mechanical bulldog out of scraps and a barrel. They attack and drive the hunnish cat from their midst.

Other cartoons make light of "gremlins" that plagued the success of bombing missions, and the later car-

toons ridicule the Axis leaders through broad caricature. The parody sometimes transcends the political to become racist, which is another valuable component of studying wartime cartoons. Propaganda, even in the service of the most noble ideals, can turn around and bite the hand that created it. The vicious anti-Asian stereotypes of wartime cartoons surely helped fuel the hysteria that landed 110,000 American citizens in "relocation camps" on the West Coast.

Warner Brothers' "Wartime Cartoons" is widely available in video outlets. It can be used as a complement to a study of World War II or as a unit in a mass communications class.


**Photo: Jay Westdahl**

# Helping the Hurting

Daniel R. Vander Ark
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Schools International, 1995
99 pages, softcover, $7.50 ($6.00 CSI members)

**Reviewed by Gerard Fondse, former high school English teacher, assistant professor of English, Calvin College.**

In Helping the Hurting, Vander Ark states clearly what many have known for a long time while others have tried to deny: ". . . the pathology of pain [in students] is extensive" (13). In this wonderfully practical, easily digested handbook for Christian school teachers, the reality of hurting students is shoved out of the closet and into the hallway.

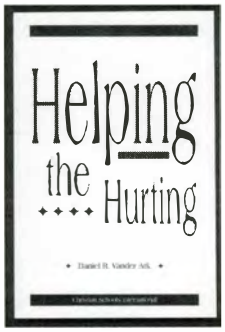
Vander Ark, a former English teacher and Christian high school administrator, shares a good deal of the practical and learned skills of recognition that he accumulated in his tenure in the trenches. He skillfully sets the stage with four short chapters of philosophy; these provide the foundation for the fifth chapter, a treatment of eleven types of struggles faced by students.

In the opening chapters, he first describes modern school children: "You have to know your students in order to effectively communicate knowledge and attitudes to them" (13). Then he asserts his definition of a teacher's role: a teacher must believe that she or he is "an instrument for change in these students' lives," willing to be a "servant to the learner" (16) rather than merely a dispenser of knowledge. At the end of the second chapter is a list of ten of the most clearly stated principles that should guide a Christian teacher.

The third chapter serves as a set of parameters for the teacher who wants to be helpful; these five "R's" include the expected admonitions to recognize and respond, but also advise the teacher to keep careful notes (record) and to seek guidance (refer) from others—counselors or administrators—frequently. These two principles, probably most often neglected by the teacher who seeks to help the hurting, are two themes that Vander Ark comes back to again and again throughout this book. Clearly, he views teaching in the Christian school as a team effort.

In the fourth chapter, he again reminds teachers of their obligation to hold themselves accountable; they must remember their clients (both students and parents), their peers, and other trained professional support staff like school counselors and Christian counselors within the community. Again, it is clear to the reader that the teacher who views his or her role in isolation from the surroundings has no place in a Christian school.

The fifth (and longest) chapter details eleven distinct difficulties or struggles faced by students and thus by their teachers. These categories are current, honest, and realistic, ranging from struggles over body shapes and sizes to doing battle with substance abuse. It is clear that Vander Ark has done his homework; time after time he refers to advice he has received from a professional counselor about a particular problem, or he includes the results of a current study done on the particular situation that he is addressing. He deals with each of these categories in a frank, honest demeanor, always emphasizing care in observation, empathy in interaction, precision in recording events, and an urge to actually respond—even if to begin with the seeking of advice from an administrator or colleague, or the placing of a telephone call. Each of the eleven struggles begins with an anecdote, continues with a description of the causes, lists symptoms in clinical, recognizable terms, and then offers suggested responses; each also concludes with some closure to the anecdote of introduction. Throughout, Vander Ark consistently encourages the teacher to remain rooted in a Christ-like response, mixing both compassion and discipline.




And this is the quality that sets this book apart: its tone is not fuzzy but focused. It trusts no empty platitudes but, instead, provides a clear application of a confident Reformed faith; repeatedly, Vander Ark cites the familiar Heidelberg Catechism answer when seeking to define the posture of a Christian teacher: "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." And it is this confident humility that will mold the Christian teacher.

After the "Preface," Vander Ark includes a two-page poem written by Charles C. Finn, "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying." Twenty years ago, a girl in one of my classes, deeply troubled and the victim of abuse, gave me that poem. I still have that handwritten copy; I was pleased to see its inclusion in this book. The last line reads, "Don't be fooled by me. At least not by the face I wear." This is the message Vander Ark wants to communicate; the skills needed to reach behind these masks are contained in this book.

A closing suggestion is appropriate. Christian school administrators can easily make this book the focus of an inservice for their staffs, preferably an orientation session at the beginning of a new year. It would be sure to stimulate discussion, reaction, and change.

# *Commemorative*

**Elva McAllaster**

Small as a dinner mint, it lies here in my hand,
Unclasped, now, from day's pendant duty.
Light glints from my initials, from a date engraved
By ceremonial donors.

How many themes and term papers huddle here,
Compressed behind that tiny crystal?
How many committee sessions, chapel talks,
Club meetings, discussions with young hopes
Does it contain?

How many student faces?
Shirley, Mary, Carol, Tom, Dan, Jim;
The hundreds.
How many aspirations (mine and theirs)?
Throngs. Multitudes.

Tell me three years have passed, or six,
I could believe you. This small octagon
Asserts a twenty-five. Incredible.

So much of penitence. I've fumbled so.
So much of privilege
(Thank You, oh thank You, Christ my Lord)
Since first a compass deep inside me
Pointed here.

Its clasp is trefoil, symbol of the Three-in-One
To Whom I now give back the sadness and the joys
Of these new-measured years.

I turn it slowly, hold it to my ear.
In softest sound it whispers "ticka-tick"
To mark the moments Grace still gives;
Will give.