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EDITORIAL

Playing Fair in the Classroom



Lorna VanGilst

The phone startled me from the book I was reading. One o'clock a.m. Who would call me at that hour on a holiday weekend? Was there some emergency? "Hello."

A vulgar burp erupted on the other end of the line. Then click, the phone went dead.

I knew that burp. I had heard it many times before, in my eighth grade classroom. Jim not only burped, he made vulgar remarks, he bloodied little kids' noses on the bus, he grabbed possessions, he taunted. Parents dreaded having their kids near Jim. "My son has been in the same section as Jim for six years," one mother complained, "and it's not fair. All the other kids suffer when the teacher is always dealing with Jim. It changes the whole nature of the class."

I couldn't deny her statement. Yet, I knew Jim's parents felt as helpless as the teachers to change his behavior. As a Christian parent who believed God's covenant included her children, Jim's mother believed her son had the right to be in our school; her other children behaved quite normally.

Daily I prayed for the patience and wisdom to reach Jim. I found that when he had no other peers to impress, he could actually be rather gentle for a few minutes. I knew there must be some deeper reason for his obnoxious behavior.

Underneath the facade of his tough bulliness was a crying spirit, one that I saw turn soft the minute he entered the room of his elderly buddy in the nursing home we visited regularly. There with his grandfather's old friend, Jim gentled. Those rare moments each Monday morning enabled me to keep loving Jim, a boy who made my teaching life so miserable at school.

Nevertheless, love does not delight in evil, and Jim's ongoing response was evil. We teachers also had a responsibility to serve the other students. Eventually Jim's parents removed him from our school and placed him in a special program. Had they not done so, we would have insisted that he be tutored privately, as we had done very successfully with another student.

God calls the Christian community to serve one another in love. But God also calls us to justice. Throughout the history of God's people, those who serve the Lord are welcomed into the fellowship. Throughout the history of God's people, from Cain on down to today, those who consistently resist the work of the Lord must live outside the camp. For the point of our work is not brilliant performance. The point of our work, yes, even our early school work, is service to God. Thus one who continually resists offering his or her work to the glory of God, or

who hinders the work of others, cannot remain in the covenantal Christian classroom.

Our concept of work lies at the heart of our response to our students' behavior. God calls us to be fruitful, to be stewardly with the gifts of the Creation. Thus, our work in the classroom must be fruitful for our students as well—that we might daily offer that work in service to God. When a student consistently hinders that work, for self or for others, we teachers have a responsibility to remedy the problem, lovingly but firmly.

If our goal is to get the Jims of our lives through school without losing our tempers, we may be only clanging cymbals who love our reputations more than the work of the kingdom. Certainly, the teaching life is more pleasant when we have only sweet-tempered, cooperative students. And love for each student goes a long way toward developing cooperation. But we must also have the courage to love the uncooperative student enough to separate that student when he or she resists the work of service to God.■

Christian Discipline— *Let's Get to the Heart of the Matter*

by Jack Fennema

Jack Fennema is a professor of education and Director of Graduate Education at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

The meeting took place after school. Two middle school teachers and I, the principal, were sitting in classroom desks facing each other. We had been discussing a certain male student for nearly an hour, and we were tired and frustrated, for we didn't know how next to respond to his chronic misbehavior. Finally one of us blurted out: "He really needs Jesus to get hold of him!" And there it was, a kind of bottom line answer to human behavior. The heart is, indeed, at the heart of the matter. And yet the heart is seldom mentioned in discussion about discipline.

The heart of both the *unifier* of and *direction-giver* to one's personality, "for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23, KJV). The Hebrew word for heart, *leb* or *lebab*, connotes the governing center for the whole person. Gordon Spykman writes:

More than 800 references to heart are woven into the fabric of biblical revelation. An overview of these passages reflects a clear pattern. They all point consistently toward a single and simple truth: The heart represents the unifying center of man's existence, the spiritual concentration point of our total selfhood, the inner reflective core which sets the direction for all of our life relationships. It is the wellspring of all our willing, thinking, feeling, acting, and every other life utterance. (218) The heart, then, has everything to do

with human conduct, and it needs to be a focal point in the discipline process. We consider specifically the two states of the heart: non-regenerate and regenerate.

1. *When children are born*, they have a sinful nature; they exist in a non-regenerate state (see Hoekema reference). The doctrine of original sin tells us that children sin because they are sinners; they don't become sinners because they sin. If this is true, then the children whom we teach in our elementary schools are guided, at least in part, by sinful hearts that are self-centered and rebellious.

This is not the entire picture, however. Added to this profile is the fact that the children of at least one parent who is a professing Christian are declared by God to be holy, or in this case, consecrated (1 Corinthians 7:14). To consecrate is to declare sacred. It is to be set apart or to be devoted to sacred purposes—the worship of and service to God. Children of believers are, therefore, consecrated members of the body of Christ, his church. And in that status or position they exist within the corporate temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16).

So to summarize, the moral condition and/or status of the young children many of us teach, they are sinful members of the household of faith. Or, stated slightly differently, they are consecrated members of the body of Christ who have sin-directed hearts. Providentially, this unique combination of moral traits works together quite effectively in the formative nurturing process of young children. Let me explain.

In the lives of young children there are two counteractive forces at work: a sinful heart and adult nurture. When a child is

born, adult nurture is predominant and the influence of the heart is quite limited. But as a child grows older, a reversal begins to take place: the influence of adults lessens and the heart's direction begins to evidence itself more. There comes a point in a child's life when the heart becomes the dominant directional force, replacing parents and teachers. That point differs with each child, but the ages between ten and fifteen are fertile years for this to take place in most children. Either at or before that time, a non-regenerate heart needs to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The child needs Jesus to get hold of him or her.

The nurturing of young children includes two key elements: instruction and correction. Christian instruction is important for many reasons, but the hearing of the Word, whether it be preached, taught, or read, is God's mediating instrument for the birth or regeneration to take place. Children need to have their hearts cultivated by exposure to the Word of God so that the seeds of regeneration planted by the Holy Spirit will find fertile receptivity later in life. Obviously, Christ-discipling education, whether found in the home, church, or school, is vital for this instructional portion of the nurturing process to take place. Consecrated children are to be provided this form of divinely-cultivating nurture.

But young children also need correction. Because they are so vulnerable to the shaping influence of the adults in their lives, and because developmentally they are very stimulus-response, reward-punishment oriented, behavior modification approaches to classroom management in the early elementary grades appears to have merit. Used wisely along with biblically-based instruction, both

reinforcement and punishment as defined by the behaviorist can be legitimately used by the Christian early-childhood teacher. Teachers of middle-grade students can continue these practices, but with, perhaps, a decrease in the use of reinforcement techniques and an increase both in verbal instruction and the imposition of logical consequences for bad choices.

2. *When children or young people are born again*, they are given a regenerate heart, one directed by the Spirit of Christ. Sin no longer has a place within one's heart, for the renewed heart has become the dwelling place, the temple, of the Holy Spirit. Regenerate persons are no longer dominated by sinful self-centeredness and rebellion. Rather, they genuinely desire to do the will of God and to please him. They become fruit-bearers of the Holy Spirit, and it is by fruit-bearing that the reality of regeneration can be known. A regenerated person is a changed person, a new creation. Regeneration is more than an outer veneer; it is a transformation from the inside out.

Regeneration is followed almost simultaneously by conversion in much the same way that water flows when a faucet is turned on. Conversion is a positive turning toward God, seeking perfect shalom in him, and a consequent turning away from the emptiness and meaninglessness of sin. Such a personal experience of saving faith in Jesus needs to be followed by a public acknowledgment of that faith within the body of believers. The consecrated member of the family of God has now become a professing member of the body of Christ.

When should we expect regeneration and conversion to take place? What is the age of understanding or discretion? As mentioned above, for a number of developmental and historical reasons, the age range of ten to fifteen appears to be a fertile time period for many young people. That is not to rule out, however, born-again experiences at a younger or older age.

To review where we are then, most of the young children whom we teach will

be in a non-regenerate state, but highly susceptible to the influence of adults in their lives. Middle school students, in turn, will be in a state of transition; some will still have non-regenerate hearts while others will be born again through the operation of the Holy Spirit. This same pattern will continue into high school with, perhaps, a larger number of students professing personal faith in Christ. But this leaves the teachers of older students in a bit of a dilemma, for some of their students will be directed by sin-dominated hearts while other students will be guided by Spirit-led hearts. This situation calls for discernment in the discipling of older children and adolescents.

Regenerate young persons will continue to sin, for the "old man" within them will still be active through "old tapes," habits, addictions, and the like. Certain scars of the past may still be sensitive and haunting for them. But there will be little premeditated sin, for a heart guided by the Holy Spirit seeks to be pleasing to God. So, yes, there should be fewer breaches of school rules. Yes, even professing Christians fall flat on their faces at times. But when regenerate young people sin, they can be approached with confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration—in other words, grace—for they have experienced and consequently do understand these concepts. The corrective discipline process for a born again individual differs from that for a person who has not yet surrendered his or her life to Christ and is still being guided by a sinful heart.

How should we deal with older non-regenerate students who break the rules? Probably with the instruction and correction meant for one who views the law more as a restraint than as a friend. Instruction must continue to be based on God's Word, which is penetratingly powerful. Such instruction should include presenting the law as a mirror, showing students what they look like next to God's holy desires. The way of grace needs to be explained; the challenge of commitment to Christ needs to be presented. But if there is no heart change, corrective consequences must be given. These consequences should be logically related to the misdeed if possible. They need to be painful enough to get the students' attention and to redirect them in the way they should be going. Such logical consequences can include various forms of progressive separation, withdrawal of privileges, and required restitution.

The primary goal of Christian nurture or discipline is to have children and young people willingly and progressively conform to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). This active image bearing, this conscious reflecting of the Godhead, comes only through regeneration, conversion, and sanctification. It is a matter of the heart. May all of our nurture, all of our discipline practices, be employed with that goal in mind.■

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- "Attention is called at this point to Abraham Kuyper's view of presupposed regeneration as a ground for the baptism of the infants of believing parents. It is to be presupposed, so he taught, that such children have usually been regenerated already before they are baptized, and that therefore their baptism is the seal of a grace presumed to be already present (see Smilde, *Eeuw van Strijd*, pp. 107, 114, 116-17). This understanding, however, was not accepted by most Reformed theologians. . . ."
- Spykman, G. J. 1992. *Reformational Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Characterizing Student Behavior

by Christopher A. Sink and Carol J. Stuen

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Educators have long complained about the gradual erosion of morality and integrity in young people. Reflecting the general deterioration of the family and societal trends that promote situation ethics, materialism, and self-centeredness, schools are witnessing an increase in classroom misconduct as well as more serious behavior problems. Far too many teachers can attest to the higher levels of violence and crime, suicide, pregnancy, and substance abuse among young people (Hansen 1993; Lickona 1993). Traditional discipline methods alone appear to have little positive effect on changing such destructive behavior. If public schools, in reaction to these troubling patterns, are instituting character (or moral) education programs, should Christian schools follow their lead? In our attempt to respond to this question, we first summarize and critique the movement in light of current research, and second, we reframe the process of character development from the perspective of Christian schools.

Character education in public schools

Since the publication of Thomas Lickona's (1991) seminal work on character education, the campaign has gained significant momentum. In response to the public outcry over the decline in morals of American youth, thousands of schools have embraced Lickona's ideas. At their heart, secular moral education programs are founded on an understanding of character that includes three interrelated components: moral feeling, moral knowing, and moral behavior (Ryan & Lickona 1992; Ryan 1993). The three components make up the life of right conduct in relation to self and in relation to others, exhibiting self-oriented (e.g., self-control and moderation) and others-oriented virtues (e.g., generosity and compassion). Most programs also promote such benevolent and consensual values as respect and tolerance for others, concern for the common good, fulfillment of family and community responsibilities, and belief in human dignity and justice (Mathers 1995; Stafford 1995). Through rules, discipline, "ethical" literature, and modeling by educators, children are taught to think and act according to seemingly universal values or ethical principles (Berreth & Scherer 1993).

While moral education in public schools is clearly needed, the efficacy of various large-scale projects is equivocal at best. For example, several studies found that values clarification and drug and sex education programs do not significantly affect student behavior. Didactic methods of instruction (codes, pledges, teacher exhortations) used in isolation, and attempts to enhance students' moral reasoning have not, as yet, led to more virtuous conduct. In summarizing nearly two decades of research in this area, Alan Lockwood (1993) gives

this bleak assessment: "Any program that intends to promote good behavior by teaching values rests on a shaky foundation" (74). Although James Lemming generally concurs, he and others (Lickona 1993; Wynne 1995) believe there are elements of character education that are potentially useful to schools and teachers (e.g., a fair and consistent discipline policy, public recognition of virtuous conduct, and instruction that encourages moral reasoning).

We contend that the lack of long-term behavior change is due, in part, to the inherent deficiencies in overall program design and guiding principles; specifically, contemporary approaches to moral development provide few, if any, absolute standards for children to gauge their thoughts, feelings, and actions. An ambivalence about the foundation of right conduct is widespread (see Delattre & Russell 1994). Teaching students, for example, that racism and sexism are morally wrong resonates little with those who hold alternative belief systems or who have different socio-cultural experiences. Some children will want to know why it is wrong to hate someone who has sexually assaulted them or why it is wrong to be biased against a group of people who enslaved their forebearers. Even if character education could convince all young people that certain behavior is morally wrong, how do we move from transforming beliefs to modifying actions?

Christian education is character education

Unlike secular education, where character development is one of many goals, the effective transmission of divine morals and values is central to the mission of Christian schools. As public schools debate the substance (e.g., what

morals and values should be taught) and the pedagogy of moral education, Christian schools can move ahead, knowing they are guided in their work by biblical standards and the Holy Spirit. Christian educators can discuss, for example, the importance of respecting human dignity from a scriptural perspective rather than some vague notion of tolerance that presumably reaches beyond cultural differences. We have the potential to go much further with students. However, if we want young persons to live more virtuously, educators must first elucidate the principle attributes of Christian conduct and, second, become more intentional and systematic about the formation of these characteristics.

While public schools must be content to teach generic principles of good behavior, Christian educators can help students with the development of godly "inner qualities." Swindoll & Klabunde (1993) advocate that school children should exhibit such transcendent qualities as genuineness, zeal for the Lord, commitment to preestablished biblical convictions, humility and wisdom under pressure, faithfulness to God and Jesus Christ regardless of feelings, and maintaining eternal priorities. In our view, these attributes along with piety (which is the foundation for virtue) are directly linked to the spiritual vitality of students. As children learn about, experience, and practice these essential characteristics, behavior in and out of class should become increasingly more Christlike.

After setting out the spiritual qualities for students to work toward, Christian educators need to develop and institute a comprehensive approach to moral education. The framework, established on God's Word and his plan of salvation, will not only instruct students on core

biblical principles and ethical behavior, but also encourage children to recognize and appreciate their relationship with God and understand his personal influence in their daily lives. It is from this realization that God is at work within them that a clearer understanding of obedience comes to fruition. Andrew Murray (as cited in Shelley 1988) underscores our view:

It is on hearing the voice [God's], that the power both to obey and believe depends. The chief thing is, not to know what God has said we must do, but that God Himself says it to us. It is not the law, and not the book, not the knowledge of what is right, that works obedience, but the personal influence of God and His living fellowship. It is only in the full presence of God that disobedience and unbelief become impossible. (236)

A systemic action plan should also discuss concrete ways educators, parents, and the community can work together to create more virtuous behavior. This, however, is an arduous process as Tim Stafford (1995) reminds us: "Character, as all the old moral tales assume, cannot be handed out like stickers. It comes through courage, sacrifice, and discipline" (39). Recent writers in character education have developed a variety of well-tested strategies to include in any school-wide plan. We briefly present several of the most useful recommendations adapted for a Christian context:

* Schools should adopt a coherent and fair discipline policy and encourage orderly classrooms and schools (Lemming 1993).

* Schools should expect not only teachers and staff but also older students to be exemplars (mentors) of these inner qualities and high moral standards. The school's mission statement should reflect these priorities.

* The hallways and classrooms should display ethical mottos and pictures of current Christian women and men who are role models for character development.

* Schools should provide occasions for students to practice the behavior associated with inner qualities; for example, classroom teachers can use group projects and collaborative (cooperative) learning, moral reflection, conflict resolution procedures (based on biblical principles), role plays, and simulations of moral dilemmas (Lickona 1993).

* Teachers and other school staff need to establish formal ways to recognize those students and groups who exhibit desirable inner qualities and prosocial behavior. Recognition can be in the form of awards assemblies and banquets, mention in the school (and community) newspaper, notes home to parents, "letters" for outstanding character development, and identification on bulletin boards of students making progress (Wynne 1995).

* Grading policies should reflect character formation, not just academic performance. Specific categories on the grade report could address such areas as effort toward character development, contributions to the moral climate of the school, and good sportsmanship.

* Beginning in the early grades and requiring more significant contributions of

time and energy in the higher grades, schools should provide students with opportunities for service learning (Howard 1993; Ryan 1993). This approach asks children to participate in systematic activities that result in real assistance to others in the community.

In hopes of curbing student immorality, public schools have turned to character education as a possible solution. Faced with similar problems, Christian educators, however, need not adopt the moral education programs promoted by their secular advocates. Instead, Christian schools can develop an action plan that best reflects the needs and concerns of their students and families. To promote long-term behavior change within a moral school climate, the plan must include (1) an intentional process by which educators can help students more fully understand, appreciate, and deepen their relationship with God, (2) elucidation of the "inner qualities" young persons should strive for, and (3) selected approaches from various character education programs that encourage virtuous conduct. ■

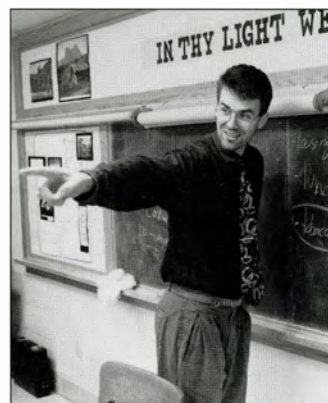
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Magnify Our Lord!

by Leslie Drahos

Leslie Drahos, her husband, and their three daughters live in Holland, Michigan.

God is the All Sufficient One. Do you believe that in your heart?

We loved our church family, were secure in godly friendships and deeply involved in ministry. We enjoyed our neighborhood and the beautiful weather and scenery of northern California. Perfect life, then . . .

Jessica's second grade teacher severely reprimanded her for trying to pray in school before eating her birthday goodies. The children in Jessica's class were teasing her, "Christians have cooties!" "If you love Jesus, we won't be your friends!"

Even though our family's life modeled love for Jesus through prayer and worship, as a mildly mentally retarded person, Jessica got the message from public school authorities and her peers that "Jesus is bad" and "praying is bad." No matter what we prayed or how hard we tried to explain the truth to Jessica, her mind was closed and her attitude toward Christianity became more and more hostile.

At our point of desperation, God made it clear we needed to find a school where Jessica could learn about the love God has for her. We earnestly yearned for our daughter's salvation when we started a country-wide search for a Christian inclusive education program. Of course, my desire was to find such a program in

a state that had a warm climate and favorable tax laws! I made over 240 phone calls across the United States, talking to Christian school associations and following up leads. Dead end. Dead end. Dead end. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

I asked, "Why God? Why aren't you showing me where to go?" Finally, I realized that, although I had agreed to move, I was not fully submitted to God's leading. I was looking for something within my "comfort" level. (Remember? Warm and financially appealing.) I prayed for forgiveness and truly submitted to God's leading.

The very next day I had an appointment with a special education director about Jessica's placement for the next year. I sat in the waiting room. And sat. And sat. I asked, "Okay, Lord, what are you trying to tell me? You have a reason for everything; why this forty-five-minute delay?" I clearly heard him say he had an answer for me! Where? No one was there. I looked on the end table and there were a bunch of magazines. I picked up "Exceptional Parent" and turned to an article on the Inclusive Games organized by the Christian Learning Center of Western Michigan. What was this? I jotted down the name, but there was no other information.

When I got home I began calling all over Michigan until I found the Christian Learning Center and spoke to "Bear" Berends. Amazing! Yes, there were a *number* of Christian schools that had

inclusive education programs. After several months of searching our country, God not only showed me one school, but several. God is so awesome in how he leads when we submit!

But Lord, Michigan is too cold! Then I met Barb Newman, learning center educator, and Bill Van Dyk, principal, of Zeeland Christian School. Suddenly, Michigan seemed like the warmest place I had ever been.

Barb flew to California to see Jessica at school. I remember clearly Barb's shock and sadness at how Jessica was treated on the playground—alone, isolated, teased, "preyed upon." God lovingly showed me that Zeeland Christian School was the answer to our prayers. He gave me a beautiful, godly friend in Barb Newman even before we moved.

Yet, being the frail human that I am, I wanted more confirmation. I prayed, "If this is truly the place for us, we need *scriptural* confirmation." Believing he would give it, I opened the Bible to Judges 6:14. "Judges? What could possibly be relevant in Judges?" I asked. Then I read:

"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

I almost fell over in awe. God's Word is truly a lamp unto my feet. It was clear that God was leading us to western Michigan and to Zeeland Christian. He was telling us that it was he that was sending us!

At the time it was unclear how profound the other part of that Scripture would become that says "save Israel out of Midian's hand." We enrolled Jessica and one of our other daughters, Elizabeth, at Zeeland Christian.

"Now, God, since you are sending us, will you also take care of all the details necessary for us to move?" In an amazing show of God's providence and sufficiency, our house was sold "by owner" in what can only be described as an abysmal market in California. Our closing was set so we could stay long enough to finish our ministry responsibilities at church and find a home to rent in Holland, Michigan. Many other major and minor details were orchestrated perfectly to allow us to arrive in Holland one week before school started, including sending people to help us unload the moving van on the hottest day of the year.

School started, and the blessings continued. It is very difficult for me to describe the joy it brought me as a mother to hear Jessica come home and say, "Mom! Three girls played with me on the playground today!"

Jessica's circle of friends has been incredible, calling her, inviting her to parties, supporting her in her special needs, but most of all, showing the love of Jesus through their actions. Jessica began to love her friends. The entire Christian Learning Center program at Zeeland Christian is designed to have each of us function within the body of Christ; it is truly amazing to watch the fruit when we love our neighbor as ourselves, even the ones with handicaps. God showed me how to love my daughter more, too.

Yet, in all the blessings, something strange began to manifest itself. Although Jessica was loved at school and at home, she began to really reject the name of Jesus. She would put her hands over her ears and make growling

noises when we prayed. She would say, "I hate Christians." Her whole countenance became "ugly" when we tried to pray with her or when we went into a church where the Holy Spirit was present among the members during worship.

One day I asked Barb if, perhaps, there was a "spiritual battle" of some sort going on within Jessica. We knew little about spiritual warfare, and if all truth be told, I would have preferred to ignore such thoughts. I was hoping Barb would say, "Oh, no. It is just part of her handicap." Instead, Barb suggested that some sort of spiritual battle was a possibility and thought we should make an appointment with the pastor of Barb's church.

On the afternoon of that appointment I began to learn the meaning of the scriptural confirmation God had given us:

"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

It was our prayer that Jessica would accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior, but it turns out that Jessica needed to be saved out of "Midian's" hand first.

Barb and I entered Pastor Paul's office and Jessica went to a playroom for a few minutes. We explained Jessica's handicap and her behavior when hearing the name of Jesus. Pastor Paul led us in prayer for discernment, and I went to get Jessica to join us. When Jessica got close to his office door, she started growling and clawing, and she refused to go inside. She had never acted that way toward anyone or any place before. I was a bit embarrassed at her behavior, and confused.

Pastor Paul suggested we go into the playroom with her where she might feel more comfortable. It was difficult getting her back to the playroom. She refused eye contact with any of us and made guttural noises that were very weird. We began praying for her. Our prayers sent Jessica across the room, as far away as

she could get, crouched in the corner. I had never heard anyone pray in tongues; Pastor Paul began praying very quietly in that Spirit language. Jessica, who was about thirty feet away and could not have humanly heard the change in "words," seemed to go berserk. We even heard a voice from her that was clearly not her own. When Pastor Paul stopped praying in the Spirit, Jessica calmed down significantly.

There clearly was a demon spirit controlling Jessica. When the Holy Spirit was present, the demon would angrily manifest itself through Jessica, trying to frighten us into not praying! I didn't know what to do except to trust the Lord for her. This experience was well beyond my understanding. I knew some of what the Bible says about spiritual battle, but I guess I didn't want to recognize the reality of the spiritual realm. As a result, God gave me a crash course. Pastor Paul asked if we could meet with some others who were more familiar with this type of spiritual battle than he. We readily agreed to meet in a few days.

Over those next few days God led me to many comforting Bible passages declaring that as Christians we already have the victory in spiritual battles because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. I learned about God's power and our right as his children to cast out demons in Jesus' name. Could knowing that Jesus had already won the victory relieve the fear? I began to understand that Satan uses fear as a way to keep us powerless, as a way to keep deceiving us. I prayed for an infilling of the Holy Spirit and thanked God for Christians who understand spiritual battle.

My husband, Chris, though skeptical, joined me, Barry and Barb Newman, Pastor Paul, and some other church members. Almost immediately upon entering the room with the people assembled, our little girl Jessica "disappeared." We began to hear and see her

violent reactions to the name of Jesus: roaring, clawing, and guttural noises. She refused to have any eye contact with us. Chris quickly began to understand that this was not his daughter. After two and a half hours of prayer, the demons were forced to leave by the authority and power of the name of Jesus.

Jessica had returned with a tired smile and great eye contact; she began talking to us in her normal fashion. Barb remembers Jessica praying as we stopped to have lunch!

I wasn't sure what had happened, only that I saw a tremendous difference in Jessica. The next couple of months were very trying for me. The Bible warns us that once an evil spirit is forced out, it will try to come back and will be able to reenter a life without Jesus. Because Jessica did not know Jesus, we prayed for a hedge around her. Then my husband had to leave for three weeks. While he was gone, on a few nights I was awakened by growling and would go and pray over Jessica. Satan was trying to scare me, and I had to continually ask God for his power to overcome.

God is so faithful. He protected Jessica and our entire family with the same kinds of forces Elisha could see in II Kings 6.

As a group, we prayed for Jessica two other times. Principal Bill Van Dyk joined us and took his place as the authority over Jessica while she is at Zeeland Christian. We began to see powerful changes in Jessica. She no longer put her hands over her ears at the name of Jesus. She sat with Barb Newman at school for devotions. She prayed at home before meals. But there was still a barrier, and we could feel it.

Satan is the father of lies. He lied big time to Jessica. One day Jessica told Barb that "I can't accept Jesus as my Savior because then the kids from my old school will come and beat up my cir-

cle of friends, you [Barb], and Mr. Van Dyk." Jessica believed that all the people she had come to love so much would be hurt.

When Jessica came home, I talked to her about this lie. I showed her in the Bible where it says that Jesus is "far above all powers," which included all the kids from her old school. She was still afraid to accept Jesus as her Savior. "Why, Jessica?"

She said, "I can't tell you why, Mom. It's a secret." Warning lights went on in my head. How many times have we heard that children are frightened into keeping "secrets" to hide some hideous behavior foisted on them by another.

After a quick prayer for wisdom, I reminded Jessica that ever since her birth her father and I loved her and cared for her, and we would continue to do so no matter what the "secret" revealed.

She sobbed and spurted out, "But if I accept Jesus, you and Dad will be thrown into a fire and burned up."

What an incredible, fear-invoking lie to a child. Satan had bound my child with fear, since he could not possess her. I bundled Jessica up and drove to the home of Barry and Barb. We prayed for her that the Holy Spirit would show her that Satan was trying to scare her with these horrible lies and that they were not true. We prayed for a way to physically show Jessica how important it was to have Jesus as her Savior to protect her from the devil who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (I Peter 5:8-9).

Awesome, wonderful Father! God showed Barb what to do. On February 29, 1996, there was a real cause for "leaping." Barb had a child's play set of the "full armor of God." She helped Jessica put on each of the pieces as she explained what they meant. After almost all of the pieces of armor were on, Barb held the helmet of salvation in her hand

and said, "Jessica, Jesus is saying, 'I love you.' What do you want to say to Jesus?"

Jessica, after saying "Hi" to Jesus, said, "I love Jesus." Barb handed her the helmet of salvation. That same day she proceeded to tell a boy in her class that she was a Christian.

Barb called me with the best news, the Good News. My daughter had received the greatest gift of all, Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

Since that time, I have watched Jessica declare her love for Jesus, tell her friends that she is now a Christian, ask to wear a cross, and cling to her Bible. She is a new creation. Her eyes sparkle and the smile she wears reflects the beauty of Jesus Christ.

Is there any doubt that Jesus can change any circumstance? Win any battle? We don't know the future here on earth, but we do know that our Lord's love for us is real. We can trust him to lead us to places of complete joy and spiritual growth, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

God saved Jessica. He sent us in strength to Zeeland Christian School. Now, instead of being preyed upon, Jessica is prayed for by us, by her circle of friends, by the teachers and administrators of Zeeland Christian School, and by many other Christian friends that know the power of God.■

WE DID TRY TO TEACH THEM *THAT*

by Joe Neff

Joe Neff, principal of Cedar Valley Christian School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is a doctoral student in Christian education at Dallas Theological Seminary.

"I wonder if we were of any use at all," Chips says in *Goodbye Mr. Chips*. "I mean, what did we teach the boys? How to parse a sentence in ancient Greek? Was that going to help them today? Was it?"

Certainly Christian schools often do an excellent job in helping students succeed in academics. But, the behavior of our students is often our strength as well. God has given us a way to develop positive behavior in students.

One of our students, Tracy, struggled deeply with appropriate behavior. As an angry eighth grader, she ran away from me. But, this volatile fourteen-year-old came back after a short dash into the parking lot. When I suspended her, she asked forgiveness, something she would not have done in her previous school. It took a lot of patience to work with Tracy. But we convinced her that we were on her side, and eventually she accepted the discipline that was necessary. By the time she graduated from high school, her temper still flared occasionally, but she had grown to be a positive, God-seeking young woman.

Renee, on the other hand, never gave a problem. In her thirteen years in school she led student groups, helped everyone

she could, and graduated with high honors. She gave so much, we wanted to give back by providing the special Advanced Placement classes that she wanted. We created an extra manager job for basketball so she could go on trips with us. Renee knew that we were trying to help her.

Why did these two young people succeed when others failed? Why do some children respond and others rebel? Parents, past educational experiences, ability, culture, peer relationships, and predispositions affect behavior. At school, we can help with these. But we control only one factor consistently: teachers.

Teachers make a difference in the behavior of students. A biblical relation-

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We won't look at
children as enemies,
but as treasured and
fragile heirlooms in
need of our support
and care.
”

ship between teacher and student encourages positive behavior in children. Colossians 3:21 gives us one of the most basic instructions about relationships

and children's behavior: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (NIV). Behavior improves as teachers—who assume the role of the parent at school—apply this truth in their relationships with students.

Both Tracy and Renee benefited from a concentrated effort to live the truth presented in Colossians. They were successes. Occasionally we are not successful in changing behavior. Even then, most of the students leave feeling positive toward God and his people. We attempt to prevent students from becoming "discouraged." It works.

A discouraged student become a disgruntled and disobedient student. The Greek term for "discouraged" is often translated as "losing heart" or "lacking courage or spirit." But its Old Testament use shows a stronger side: a burning anger. Cain's anger burns so much that he kills his brother. Potiphar's anger burns against Joseph enough to throw him into prison. Sometimes our students burn with anger. These are the discouraged students who, Cecil and Ann Mercer say, "act aggressively or avoid situations" because of tasks too difficult for them (viii).

You've seen these discouraged students. They cover their insecurity by showing off in class. They say, "I don't care about my grade," because they don't think they can make a good score. They write nasty notes about teachers because of their stuffed anger. They don't

do assignments, they hit, they cry, and they are quietly desperate because of losing heart, becoming discouraged.

To avoid this discouragement and resulting negative behaviors, Paul says in Colossians 3, "Do not embitter your children." The term is also translated as "not exasperate" or "provoke not." We can come up with a hundred actions that will embitter or exasperate children, such as comparing them to others and expecting too much. But the term has more to it than that.

In the Old Testament, the term for "embitter" is often used to mean "conspire against" or "engage in strife." In Deuteronomy 2:5 it means to "provoke to war." It is drawing a line in the dirt and daring the student to step over it. It is the teacher who sees the student as the enemy, looking for a skirmish in order to show superiority. "Do it or else . . ." typifies this teacher.

Two teachers can challenge students with the same difficult assignment and achieve different results. A teacher looking for a battle rarely has students who will accept the challenge—after all, how can they win? Occasionally, some students will step across the line and fight, but not win. Students give up when they believe a teacher is against them. They become discouraged. They complain. They act out their frustration.

Yet the other teacher who the students know is on their side can get students to do amazing things. The opposite of "not embitter" is to "make sweet." The opposite of "not exasperate" is to give courage. Courage to push on and sweetness to be kind are behaviors such a teacher draws from students. Such a teacher understands that when Paul says in Ephesians 6:4 to "bring them up," he means to nurture them, to be their advocate and their support.

Being an advocate and support does not mean all sugar and spice. In fact,

one of the blessings of convincing students you are on their side is seeing how much that approach helps them accept discipline. Discipline is most effective when positive relationships abound. Students more readily accept rules when they know that the teacher cheers for them.

Tracy came to us in eighth grade. She was like a car teetering on the edge of a cliff. One wrong move and she would be lost. A clear set of rules and commitment by the staff to help her—if she would do her part—kept her wheels on the ground. She avoided the cliff because, as she says, "The teachers cared about me."

In Renee's commencement address after all her years of exemplary behavior, she said that the distinctive trait of the school was the caring teachers. Why should she misbehave when so many were behind her?

According to Peter Benson, a school that gives a caring, encouraging environment is a key asset to children growing. Good behavior begins with students feeling as if someone is on their side. Good behavior results in students' learning.

How do we avoid bad behavior and encourage good? We begin by making a commitment that we won't look at children as enemies, but as treasured and fragile heirlooms in need of our support and care. When I walk into my classroom, am I a field general making battle plans or a tutor looking for ways to help my students succeed? Am I convinced of the value of each child in God's eyes? What do I see when I look at my students?

Second, I must make sure that the children in my class know that I care. I must convince them of my support and love. Ask Larry about his dog. Talk to Cindy at recess about her family's camping trip. Give a pat on the back or a note saying what a good job Joey is doing. Show up at a basketball game or hang out in the hall and visit. Find ways to establish a personal, positive relationship with each student. Then, when the challenges come and discipline is needed, these students are more likely to give their best.

Third, when a child does misbehave, begin the analysis with the questions, "Is she being exasperated?" or "Does he feel as if someone is on his side?" Too much expectation with too little support has a lot to do with bad behavior. An exasperated student may need expectations changed. Build a relationship so the student can tackle the difficulties in the future.

After asking what will help his students today, Chips says, "I suppose we did teach them something. How to behave to each other. Yes. We did try to teach them that." Students like Tracy and Renee have benefited from a focus on improving behavior. As teachers establish positive, supportive relationships with students, lives are changed. "Yes. We did try to teach them that." ■

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shaping student behavior THROUGH COMMUNITY

by Lloyd Den Boer

Lloyd Den Boer is principal of the Heritage Campus of Abbotsford Christian School in British Columbia.

Calm is shattered as a distraught middle school teacher bursts through the principal's office door. Before Ms. Lindhurst says a word, Mr. Dayton knows what to expect. Both have struggled with Ms. Lindhurst's painful burden for months. Lacking experience and confidence, she first failed to set adequate boundaries for behavior in her classroom. Later, when she saw chaos replacing learning, she corrected her course with more vigor than wisdom. The students then closed ranks against her. Her unscheduled visit now to the principal's office serves notice that her relationship with the class has broken down.

Now Mr. Dayton must intervene directly. Once he does, he finds that the class has congealed as a community that exists to exclude the teacher. Class leaders examine each decision the teacher makes for evidence of her incompetence and her arbitrary sense of justice. The students discuss these issues intensely within the classroom and without. A code of honor has formed, which demands that each student side with the class and against Ms. Lindhurst. The code discourages cooperation and sanctions belligerence and disrespect. In short, the students have a cause to advance, and that cause is consuming them and destroying their classroom.

Mr. Dayton has uncovered an example of the separated and dysfunctional student subcultures that Thomas Sergiovanni deplores in *Leadership for the School-house*. Student subcultures have always existed, not only in individual classrooms, but also generally, within whole schools. While these subcultures can be harmless, Sergiovanni believes that they are becoming more destructive.

In many of today's schools, the gap between the student subculture and the culture of the school itself has never been greater. Adults have never counted for less in the lives of the students they are supposed to be serving. And students are forced to turn more and more to themselves to get their needs met, to find connections, to belong, to find meaning. (60-61)

Sergiovanni suggests that whenever students are left to address their own needs for community, whenever the serving adults fail to generate a school culture that nurtures student belonging, student subcultures grow "wild."

Students do need a meaningful sense of community—not because they are too young to maintain themselves as self-directed individuals, but because all people are created to belong to communities. In *A Vision with a Task*, Stronks, Blomberg, and their collaborators claim

that community is at the heart of life:

A person is born to be cared for, born into a love relationship with other people. . . . We are not persons by individual right, but in virtue of our relation to one another. In this relationship, we image God. Only in community does the person appear in the first place, and only in community can the person continue to become. (107-08)

The importance of community is not always self-evident, even to educators in Christian schools. As Robert Bellah and his associates have shown in *Habits of the Heart*, North Americans are often oblivious to the foundational nature of human community. Our general culture's ingrained individualism impoverishes many areas in our lives, including the ways schools approach student behavior and discipline. In practice and in theory, many educators handle student behavior as if the students were a collection of individuals, each one motivated primarily by self-interest. These educators try to shape student behavior by dealing out punishments and rewards to individuals, producing good behavior on the barter system as it were.

However, as Etzioni points out, and experiences such as the one described at the opening of the article confirm, the influence of community is more powerful

than the influence of punishments or rewards. "Communities speak to us in moral voices," Etzioni says. "They lay claims on their members. Indeed, they are the most important sustaining source of moral voices other than the inner self" (31). The key is to construct a school community that welcomes, enfolds, and nurtures our students and their subcultures.

Stronks and Blomberg call this kind of community a "covenant community":

Its members pledge to love and serve each other without conditions. They love others because Jesus first loved them. God affirms persons and thereby frees them to affirm the worth of others. Thus a covenant community is the work of both God and humans. United as one people in Christ, human beings covenant to support each other in loving interaction, functioning as unique but interdependent members of the body of Christ. Members exercise their gifts in humility, gentleness, and patience, striving for the unity that the Spirit provides. (108)

The most important characteristic of covenant communities is that they are called to be. More important than how a covenant community should be organized, how the membership should think about itself, or how the leadership should shape the community's future is the simple but powerful fact that a community is a way of being, a set of relationships that makes the community members present for each other in mutual support.

The point of school community is the construction of a healthy community for

students. The tool that adults use to form this community is their invitation to students to belong. Adults create an atmosphere that invites students to belong to the school community, to embrace its commitments, to serve its members, and to share in its leadership. At its deepest level, this invitation to belong is an invitation to belong to Christ.

The effectiveness of the invitation to belong depends on its authenticity. For students who "do school well," the school's invitation rings true. Those who struggle in school, however, have a harder time trusting its sincerity. Such students are at risk for separating themselves from the school's community to construct their own sense of belonging within a dysfunctional student subculture. In *Discipline with Dignity*, Curwin and Mendler describe such students in this way:

They see themselves as losers and have ceased trying to gain acceptance in the the mainstream. Their self-message is, "Since I can't be recognized as anything other than a failure, I'll protect myself from feeling hurt. To do nothing is better than to try and fail. And to be recog-

nized as a troublemaker is better than being seen as stupid." (10)

More students may feel out of place in school than we think. In his 1995 journalistic study of high school culture, Ken Dryden concludes that the top few students monopolize most of a typical teacher's attention and time (275-76). If that is true, even students of average academic ability will feel devalued by the official school community. Students are more likely to trust that a school community belongs to them and they to it if their teachers reach out to all students, and if their school recognizes and celebrates many kinds of gifts.

Shaping student behavior through community is neither a sure-fire technique nor a quick fix. Instead it is a response to the Gospel's call to love one another as we have been loved. Love is the yeast that can leaven the whole lump.■

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Respect—the Key to Student Behavior

by Raymond Geerdes



Raymond A. Geerdes is counselor at Illiana Christian High School in South Holland, Illinois.

Student behavior is always a ripe topic for discussion, whether it be in a faculty meeting or over coffee in the faculty lounge. When I was “picking the brains” of some fellow faculty members concerning student behavior, one idea kept surfacing, namely, that much of student behavior is shaped by the presence or absence of respect—often as perceived by the student. Respect is something we all desire for ourselves and at the same time often have difficulty extending to others.

Scripture is replete with commands to love, honor, and respect others, as well as ourselves. Considerable energy has been expended in seeking to translate those scriptural principles into practical, everyday behavior. Instilling respect in our youth has been a joint venture on the part of the home, the church, and the school.

During the course of a school year discipline situations arise: stolen calculators and books, verbal and physical confrontations, character assassinations through gossip, and harassment. These all reflect a lack of respect for another's property, space, and feelings. On the

other hand, some students reach out to others and encourage them, those who are active, positive contributors in school programs.

One key to understanding and dealing with problematic behavior is noting its dependence on self-respect. Respect for self is built on the realization that we are children of God, that he created us, that he redeemed us and loves us. Therefore, who we are as children of God becomes the basis of respecting ourselves and others. (I see self-respect as something quite different from self-esteem, about which there is much debate in both the secular and religious press.)

With few exceptions, when discipline matters come to a head, an underlying spiritual problem already exists. The converse is also true. I remember a senior young man, big, athletic, genial, and mature in his faith, who quietly took under his wing a small, scared, socially isolated freshman boy. He brothered and protected him for the whole year. This senior was an outstanding example to the rest of the student body.

What factors contribute to an individual's lack of respect? First of all, there are individual experiences. It might be the home situation he or she grew up in; it might be difficult school experiences, whether with fellow students or with a

teacher. In any case, it is not just what happened (or didn't happen) to them. It is their perception and interpretation of those situations and events.

A second factor involves societal influence. In the nineties we have witnessed a continuation of the rush toward individualism. The emphasis is on “me first,” while we decry the collapse of our society's moral and ethical fiber. Much of today's popular music, with its message of self-indulgence and “live for the experience of the moment,” robs youth of the one anchor they have—who they are in Jesus Christ. In the name of freedom of expression, the media is rapidly erasing the standards of virtue and decency. How confusing it must be when relationships without commitment are to be expected. Whom do you trust? How difficult it is for students to respect authority when those in authority in their community emulate society at large.

A third factor contributing to the lack of respect is the growing independence many students have at a younger and younger age. Jobs take priority, so studies and school activities have to fit their work schedule. Some students do a remarkable balancing act of keeping their grades up, being involved in school activities, and holding down a job. The cost of this pace is less time spent with

the family. Less family interaction and the fact that more students are semi-independent economically results in fewer parental controls. Thus, parents have less opportunity to pass on and reinforce the values on which respect is built.

A fourth factor is the changing attitude toward the school on the part of parents and constituents. Gone are the days when the teacher was always right. That change may not be all bad, but today, too often the school and the teacher (or coach) are placed in a defensive position in discipline situations.

In the past, parents attended athletic events to cheer on their team. Today some attend to cheer on their son or daughter first and then the team. In addition, spectators voice loud, vehement criticisms of the officiating and angry critical comments about the coaching. These actions probably influence the students' concepts of respect on several levels.

Maturity also plays a role in student behavior. Faculty members need to "hang in there" with students, some of whom are making poor choices as they try to find their way. Students can sometimes be the best architects in building maturity in the student body. Often they are the ones students listen to as they share positive values and encourage respect for self and others.

A number of students participated in our school's 1995-96 chapels designed to explore the richness of Eph. 4:2-3, which reminds us, "Keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of love." One junior girl, a guest student for the year, shared the story of her untimely pregnancy and what she learned through her experience. She related that at the time she became pregnant, she could think only of herself and do what she wanted to do. The realization of the impact of her actions hit her when she saw the

pain in her father's eyes. She recognized that re-establishing trust and respect for herself and with her father would take time and involve much pain.

A senior girl shared her pain of being raised in a very dysfunctional family—few of the students were aware of her situation. Yet, she also shared that she was determined not to let this situation be a cop out. She worked to do well in school and be involved in school activities. She respected herself enough not to give in to the circumstances in which she was brought up. Her challenge to the students was to have that same respect for themselves, by God's grace, to overcome whatever difficulties were present in their lives. She also shared how important her faith was in helping her to accomplish what she did.

Both students left their marks on the student body. Student modeling—what better way to teach and encourage the concept of respect and maturity?

What a challenge also to faculty to be models of showing respect to students, to parents, to fellow faculty members. Students are quick to pick up the implications of off-the-cuff remarks, innuendoes, and criticisms. Positive comments and words of encouragement can be just as powerful. A fellow staff member related that recently a former student came back to see him and said, "Mr.—, you don't know how you changed my life. On my report card you checked the comment, 'Is an asset to the class,' and no one had ever said I was an asset to anything before. You changed my life."

So what can we do? Each school has approached student behavior with its own particular understanding and solutions. The following are some things that I believe have been helpful in shaping student behavior at our school:

-A planned, well-coordinated chapel program

-A caring staff

-A consistent exercise of discipline

-A Christian service program

Ours is a Bible course option for seniors. Those who elect to take it work at the Holland Home/Rest Haven or in special education classrooms for one hour a day for one semester. For many who have worked in the Holland Home/Rest Haven facility, their change in attitude and respect for the elderly has been remarkable. For some it has changed their relationship with their grandparents. Those who worked in special education have come away possessing greater sensitivity to children with special needs. For some it resulted in new career goals.

-Big brother/big sister programs for all freshman and transfer students

The program increases understanding of the needs of others, and it reinforces the idea that students have something to offer.

-A peer mediation program that places resolution of conflict on the shoulders of those involved

They, with the assistance of the mediation team, work out a mutually beneficial solution.

Student behavior is never static. The quest for understanding student behavior is also continuous. As an old saying goes, "As much as things change, they still remain the same." Every year we struggle with the same questions. Every year we are left with the same task—that of seeking ways to positively influence student behavior, for Christ's sake.■

Find Your Answer

Letter to a New Teacher

by Jerilyn Tyner

Jerilyn Tyner is a freelance writer and teacher of English and Spanish at Master's Touch Christian School in Arlington, Washington.

Dear Kay,

Your were in my room after school yesterday crying again, feeling down on yourself, hating your job and the kids who were making your life so miserable. You wanted to know, "How do you do it? How come the kids come to your class ready to learn and do what you tell them to do? You correct them when they're out of line, and they're okay with it. When I do it, I'm a creep."

I had no answer for you. You've made it through a whole year, struggling, but hanging in there. Still, you're no closer to finding fulfillment in your work than you were the first day of school. You say, "Maybe I'm just not cut out to be a high school teacher." Only your heart knows whether that is true. I don't. And I don't know how to tell you how to become a good teacher without implying that I, somehow, have become one and have all the answers. I don't.

I took all the required education courses in college, and I am still reading, taking classes, and continuing my education. Sometimes I feel like a dinosaur in this world of technology; sometimes I smile at the fads that come and go and at this year's major trend, which has a nineties name but looks suspiciously like something from the old-time one-room schoolhouse. I appreciate my training and I respect my profession, but degrees and certification can't produce a true teacher. It's a matter of the heart.

So, I'm not going to give you a theory to digest or a rubric to map out your way to teaching success. I'm just going to ask you about your heart.

The heart is a four-chambered pump—the center of the human machine. The teacher's heart has four chambers, too, intricately functioning together, pumping life into his or her labors.

Let's say the teacher we speak of is a woman, although the chambers are no different for a man. The first chamber is a love for herself. Although the teacher knows her own weaknesses and failures, she realizes that her value stems from the love of God himself, who has loved her so deeply that he sent his Son to die for her. In loving him back, she embraces his plan for her life and believes in her own worth. She doesn't have to make a loud noise about it, but she knows she is a wonderful person. Her students are fortunate to be in her class. She is teaching because she's a teacher. It wouldn't really make any difference if she were a mother, a nurse, a writer, or a landscaper—she'd still be teaching, because that's what she is. She breathes in and breathes out teaching.

The second chamber is a love for learning. Curiosity drives her to find out more. There's never enough time to learn everything she wants to know. She's continually amazed when she looks in the mirror to see that she's growing older because inside she feels like a wide-eyed Alice in Wonderland. Sometimes she cries, sometimes she laughs, sometimes she's angry; but mostly, she finds the world a delightful place.

The third chamber is a love for her subject. She is secretly convinced that

the information she has to share is the most interesting branch on the tree of knowledge. She knows the skills she can teach are going to make her students' lives more successful and happy. If some of the people who walk into her classroom don't share that opinion, it's all right, because she knows the secret and she's willing to be patient in coaxing them to accept it. Her greatest reward occurs when one of them finds out the secret, too.

Do you know the fourth chamber? The heart can't beat without it. It is love for her students. Those big, noisy guys with ripped jeans and scruffy beards. Those girls with odd-colored hair and suffering eyes. Their vulnerability makes her heart ache. This place, this classroom, has to be a safe place for them to discover their own voices, their own beauty, their own answers. She watches them walk out the door at the end of the day, and she knows that soon they will be leaving for the last time. Overwhelmed by the knowledge of the world they must conquer, she applies herself to the tasks at hand. She must prepare them!

The heart beats steadily, life flows through the veins, and something called education begins to happen. It isn't magic. It's a teacher's life and the essence of her service in the kingdom of God.

You, too, Kay, must find your own voice and your own beauty. Don't try to be like me or someone else; my way won't work for you. If you have the heart, you'll find the answer.

Your friend in room 411.■

The Subject and Object of Trees and Persons

by Clifford E. Bajema

What's to be my project
for this flourishing Douglas-fir tree,
this verdant, ever-green object;
majestic in sight of me?

Shred it up as shavings?
Shape it as two-by-fours?
Or sit beneath its shadings,
a worshipper who adores?

Has this huge, pineaceous tower
no value in my sight,
unless I act upon it
with my reconstructing power?

So it is I wonder, too,
of me and, worthy friend, of you?
With passive love can I enjoy you
and not employ love's act upon you?

I, the subject, prize you
as object.
Can I be subject to you
the subject?

Can I receive direction
you offer
before I proffer my own
correction?

Through Him, lying subject,
in me, living object,
I vow to be subject
to you the subject.

I will sit 'neath your wood
and value the good
of your teaching command
and your out-reaching hand.

I'll accept you, friend,
with joy receiving
the gift of you
as you stand.

Act thou your love upon me.
I yield to your higher bough.
It is now my object to be
your subject, and humbly bow.*

*Written for a special teacher.

*Clifford E. Bajema is pastor of Geneva
Campus Church in Madison, Wisconsin.*

What Effective Teachers Have in Common

by Anna M. Harrell

Anna M. Harrell is an English and secondary education major at Western Baptist College in Salem, Oregon.

Sam, a high school sophomore, sits alone. He taps his fingers and feet—nervous energy from drug abuse. He never talks in class, rarely turns in his homework, and seldom looks up from his desk. Mrs. Simons doesn't know how to help him. She doesn't even try anymore.

After observing this scenario every week for a semester, I wondered how I would ever be able to deal with kids like Sam. And I wondered why Mrs. Simons didn't try harder. Now I know she was unprepared.

The most important truth I have learned in college is that teacher education programs alone do not prepare effective teachers.

Yes, professors make many efforts to develop effective teachers by teaching college students to prepare proper lesson plans, to manage and discipline their classrooms, to use the right teaching strategies. But classes in lesson preparation and classroom management, while essential, do not sufficiently prepare education majors for effective teaching careers.

Effectiveness comes from the *relationships* teachers build with their students, not merely from the *lessons* they teach to their students. If teachers take the time to listen to, counsel, and encourage their students, they will become effective teachers, significantly influencing lives of their students.

How do I know?

In high school, I struggled. But no one knew it—I, an "A" student who had everything in order. But I hurt deeply. In my sophomore year, my mom died. I did

not know how I would go on without her. Before she died of cancer, we shared laughter, prayer, and deep talks. Now I couldn't share these things with any adult.

Adding to my hurt, my dad began dating another woman, a non-Christian. No longer did he seem to live with us—he spent weekends and evenings at her house. I felt lost and confused. I couldn't see how my dad could be married to Mom for more than thirty years, then get over her death in a few short months, how he could walk out on his Christianity, how he could neglect us.

Except for my sister, no one understood my feelings or even knew I ached—except Mr. Walter. In his first year of teaching, Mr. Walter taught five classes, coached basketball, and served as the athletic director. But he took the time to listen to what I *wasn't* saying. Somehow, he sensed my hurt and began talking to my sister and me during lunch and after school about our problems. A devout man of God, he counseled me about my emotions, helping me make some sense of my confusion. And he helped me to see that God still cared.

Mr. Walter initially approached me with the simple knowledge that I struggled. Carefully, he asked if he could do anything to help me, if he could adjust something in my assignments. Then he gently prodded until I opened my heart to him. He realized that it takes time to build relationships with students, and he freely gave that time to me. He went out of his way to make sure that I grew in Christ, and that I learned to deal with my feelings toward my dad.

Although he had never experienced the same situation, he understood my feelings, my hurt, my confusion. He also

encouraged me to dream. I shared my highest hopes and aspirations with Mr. Walter, and he encouraged me to strive to reach them. Now, three years after my high school graduation, I still write to him. I tell him what I am learning in college, what I am feeling, and how I am growing. Why? Because he took the time to cultivate my growth with his attention, listening, and understanding.

Like Mr. Walter, all effective teachers develop relationships with their students. Even in Christian schools, many students come from dysfunctional homes, broken families, and abusive situations. Many students struggle with feelings of hopelessness and confusion. Teachers simply cannot help heal their students' hurts through lesson plans and homework assignments. They can reach students only by building relationships with them.

Teachers must live up to their ideal, to the primary reason they decided to be teachers—touching the lives of their students. Effective teachers do this by

- *making an extra effort to talk to students one-on-one
- *sensing students' struggles
- *talking to them about their problems
- *offering them advice
- *listening to their spoken and unspoken messages
- *understanding their feelings
- *encouraging them to reach for their goals.

If Mr. Walter had not done these things for me, I probably would be bitter and angry at Dad. I certainly would not want to become a teacher. But my life changed because Mr. Walter took the time to listen. Now I dream of changing my students' lives in similar ways. ■

Tangled Web



by Ron Sjoerdsma

Ron Sjoerdsma teaches in the education department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Kate Wells, English teacher at Hillendale Christian Middle School, hesitated just outside Sara Voskamp's classroom. She was late for the eighth grade team meeting. Jim Sooterma would be annoyed; his eighth grade softball game against Hillendale Catholic was scheduled to begin at 4:30—if the rain held off. The threatening sky, visible through the double doors at the end of the hallway, matched Kate's mood exactly. She felt the vigor, the electricity, of the previous class period and the impending outpouring of negative reaction. Right after sixth hour, she had observed Missy Schmidt whispering excitedly to her locker partner.

The approaching storm, warily observed through the computer lab windows, had created just the right atmosphere for the spontaneous combustion that had just occurred. In all her eighteen years as an English teacher, with a few years in the middle as a media specialist, Kate had never experienced such unexpected energy from typically low energy students. She also had rarely found herself in a situation with such potential for negative feedback from her peers and from parents. Kate reflected on her own desire to have her children nurtured and sheltered in this Christian school. Had she violated parents' trust?

Standing just outside the view of the window in Sara's door, she remembered

a quote from a collaboration seminar a few years back when HCMS had switched to the team approach: "The best reflection is group reflection." Her team would have to know the whole story, and it would be better to hear it from her than from a student or parent. Her team would have to help her.

Just as Kate reached for the knob, the door opened. Sara, the team's science teacher, chirped, "Oh there you are. Jim wants to get started, and I said I'd see if you were on your way. You know how he gets on game days." Sara's knowing wink showed a maturity and confidence that belied her age and limited teaching experience.

"Sorry I'm late. I had a little 'situation' last hour." Kate looked at Jim, who seemed occupied with next week's calendar. She slipped into the remaining empty spot at a lab table. This was not going to be easy.

Bill Hamilton challenged her immediately, "You're going to have to tell us more than that. On the way over here I overheard several 'Mrs. Wells this and Mrs. Wells that.' So what's up?" Bill had taught math for thirty-five years, first at the local public high school and then at HCMS. "Did your Internet project blow up in your face? What happened?"

So Kate spilled the story slowly at first and then more quickly as the background thunder rumbled into a driving rainstorm that allowed Jim to relax. "I had this really cool idea—I told you about it last week. You all supported the idea of having our students write letters to World

War II holocaust victims. And the Holocaust Museum Internet site was a gold mine; they even have a writing contest coming up that some of my students are going to enter. I couldn't have been happier with the way the first few days went. My second and third hour immediately settled into researching for their letters—your idea, Bill, of giving them a list of things to include really worked well. Thanks. But sixth hour struggled from the beginning. The boys, well mostly Sammy and Derrick, wanted to explore baseball play-off stats, and the rest of the class seemed slow to connect with the assignment. Until today!"

Kate paused. She still wasn't sure whether she was thrilled or worried about what had just happened. Jim, wanting to speed things up, encouraged her to keep going. "Yeah, the Web sure has a lot of stuff. I made a couple of great transparencies of World War II pictures this week. So, Kate, what happened today?" Jim's question was punctuated by a thunder clap and a burst of rain. He shrugged, dialed the office from Sara's classroom phone, and canceled the game. He'd be home early tonight.

After the phone call, Kate continued. "As nearly as I can figure out, it started with Neal, who always seems to want Sammy's approval. He had connected to a site that questioned whether the holocaust had really happened. He got Sammy over to his terminal and they started exploring from there. I should have guessed that all was not necessarily well by the way Sammy suddenly lit

up. You all know how rare it is for Sammy to show excitement for anything remotely related to school.

"The next thing I knew it was 'Look at this, Mrs. Wells. Look at this!' I was taken by their enthusiasm and, I'll try to make this story short. I encouraged them to share with the rest of the class. What



'Look at this, Mrs. Wells. Look at this!'

reason had I to worry? We subscribe to SurfWatch. We're protected, right? Well not necessarily."

Kate could tell that Bill was beginning to feel uncomfortable. She remembered that he had taken a workshop last summer where students had downloaded some pretty awful stuff, and his imagination was probably inventing even worse material than she was about to describe. Bill was never one to court controversy; he always said math was a fascinating but safe subject.

Kate responded quickly to her intuition, "It wasn't sex, if that's what you're thinking. I'm not sure of all the links Sammy used, but before I knew it, I had white supremacy's 14 Words in blazing red on the large projection screen. I've got a copy of them here somewhere." Kate shuffled through her papers. "Here they are. 'We must secure the existence of

our people and a future for white children.' I think that page was connected to the New Jersey Skinheads page, and it just went downhill from there, especially the language—except that all my kids were getting angry, even Sammy, who wanted to write a 'real' letter to these crazies."

Noticing Bill's frown, she skipped the part about the Puke Page and decided to emphasize the positive. "Most of the class got involved discussing freedom of speech, whether these hate groups should be allowed to write, whether kids at Hillendale should be able to get at this stuff, why these people hate Jews, and how un-Christian these groups are even though they sometimes use Christian words. Even Sammy was actively engaged the whole time. I couldn't believe it."

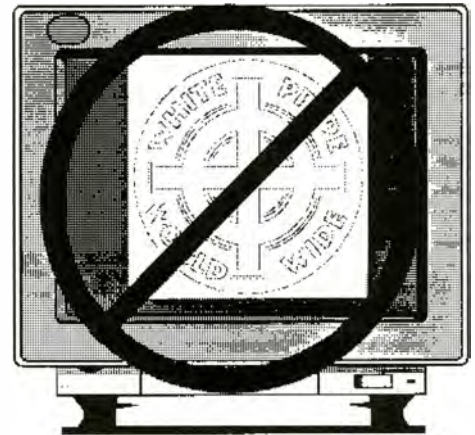
"So how did you end it? Aren't these kids going to want to keep digging into all this horrid stuff, whatever it is?" Bill didn't hide his worry.

"I didn't really end it. I said we'd talk about this some more on Monday. Of course, my second and third hour will have found out by that time and want to search for this stuff too, and I think that's okay. What do you think? Should I let Sammy and Neal and Derrick and probably others write their 'real' letters?"

Sara, who seemed a little distracted during Kate's story, now jumped at the chance to respond. "I think it's just great that you got the whole class involved. I'll bet it really raised Sammy's self-esteem, and he needs every boost he can get. I'd probably let him write the letter he wants to write. I mean, isn't the whole point to get kids enthusiastic about their own thinking and learning?"

Jim leaned forward from his relaxed, lean-back position. "Sure it is. But this could be dangerous stuff. Do we really want our Hillendale Christian kids dia-

loguing with skinheads? Maybe I should check this out over the weekend—I'd like to read these revisionist historians anyway and maybe connect them to my World War II lessons next week. Kate, could you give me some of the URLs?"



"Sorry, I didn't make bookmarks as we were jumping from one link to the next, but they shouldn't be too hard to find. I'm worried also about tangling with these people, but it's hard to argue with Sara's point about enthusiasm, and I really think our students have well-reasoned opinions to share."

"Wait, wait. We need to slow down," Bill interjected. "We wouldn't send our kids to R-rated movies just because we thought they might get excited about learning. I don't see how this is much different. What might parents have to say about this? At the very least you should run this by Helene."

"That's a good idea. I'll stop in her office before I go home." Kate grabbed at this common ground; besides, she always found Helene Peters, their building principal, to be helpful in tough situations. "What do the rest of you think? Is this the best way to proceed?"

"It's fine by me, but I'll still want to do a little exploring of my own. Sara?" Jim was clearly trying to wrap this up.

"It's okay, but I think we ought to talk about this some more. Should Bill and I also pick this up somehow next week?" Bill waved the idea away as Sara continued, "We haven't even talked about next week yet."

"Maybe we should meet early on Monday after Kate's had a chance to talk to Peters and I can do a little Net surfing tomorrow. Okay with you Bill?" Jim was pushing.

"You know I'm always here by seven anyway, and I'm set for Monday's classes. But this doesn't seem right to me. I'm not sure Helene will understand what Kate got into. I just don't know. I guess I can wait until Monday."

Kate worried about Bill's reaction. He just wasn't seeing the positive side. On the other hand, maybe there were just too many hazards to justify the risks, regardless of student enthusiasm. She glanced out the window and noticed a passerby forcing an umbrella up against the downpour. Maybe they were like umbrellas, trying to project their students from the rain of hatred, injustice, and other garbage. Christian education had to be much more than that, and she knew Helene would agree. The challenge was learning to swim without drowning. ■

Last summer, when the Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals struck down portions of the Communications Decency Act, Chief Judge Dolores K. Sloviter wrote:

When Congress decided that material unsuitable for minors was available on the Internet, it could have chosen to assist and support the development of technology that would enable parents, schools, and libraries to screen such material from their end. It did not do so, and thus did not follow the example available in the print media where nonobscene but indecent and patently offensive books and magazines abound. Those responsible for minors undertake the primary obligation to prevent their exposure to such material.

Internet-savvy educators are aware of the necessity for controlling student access to inappropriate material. A survey by the leading support media for school use of the Internet, Classroom Connect, suggests that Internet-connected schools are dealing with the inappropriate material by developing "acceptable use policies," filtered Internet connections, and classroom management strategies.

The most widely used filter is SurfWatch for both Macintosh and Windows, which is specifically designed to block access to sexually explicit materials on the Internet. Its weakness is that schools cannot customize the filter, although the company will customize for a fee. A Canadian company offers NannyNet (Windows only) that users completely customize by creating a dictionary of inappropriate words, phrases, and Internet site addresses. With the incredible increase in demand for filters, new software ads, most touting free trial versions, are regularly hitting schools' mailboxes.

Schools desiring help in guiding teachers and students in use of the Internet have many available resources. I find Wentworth's Classroom Connect and all its related media to be the most supportive of engaging and responsible Internet applications. Wentworth can be contacted via email: connect@wentworth.com or through their Internet URL: <http://www.classroom.net/>.

READER RESPONSE

Editor,

Congratulations on the fine issues of Christian Educators Journal which continue to challenge and inform. Each issue seems to have something for everyone, from those who continue to explore the far reaches of a Christian perspective in education to those who are concerned with improving their own educational practices. I hope that CEJ enjoys a wide and growing readership. I feel that it occupies an important niche in the Christian school community.

John Vandenhoeck, Education Coordinator, Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia.



QUERY

by Marlene Dorhout

Marlene Dorhout, teacher at Denver Christian Middle School, is on leave this year to work with Community Leadership.

*Address questions to
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I have taught for many years and have noticed a definite decline in the handwriting skills of my students. Other faculty members agree but simply resolve that handwriting is no longer taught as a necessary skill for the future. Is this true? Is it not important anymore? Will we one day have a generation unable to write anything by hand?

Anyone who has taught a number of years would admit that kids today have not acquired the handwriting skills that once seemed so important. I recall the repetitive exercises that consumed much of teachers' and students' time. Handwriting was the main mode of communication. Typing was reserved for formal papers.

Currently forty percent of the homes

in the United States have computers. Elementary students are learning the keyboard now instead of practicing cursive. That fact seems like a blessing to parents and teachers who hated the drudgery or inability of teaching legible handwriting. Teachers have little time to accomplish all the tasks required of them anyway; therefore, omitting the stress on an outdated skill seems expedient.

We are in a transition period. No one has a definite answer to the question of necessity for handwriting skills. Ironically, software has been developed to copy calligraphy and even one's personal signature. Many people still prefer handwritten notes to computer print-outs, and some authors still tout the medium of the message. I, too, admit an aversion to typed holiday letters. But maybe we just find it difficult to become computer literate.

Children are able to write and compose more easily and quickly at the computer; and we hope the thought process will be enhanced, rather than by-passed. We as educators still need to guide the communication process and to save items for future generations. No rough drafts, original manuscripts, love letters,

or personal notations will be part of our history unless we decide now to salvage the discarded, deleted material that is often erased for current trivia. No one will be able to trace an author by the hand-writing. Such a world sounds rather cold and impersonal. Handwriting has served us well over the years, and maybe will in the future, too. "Create a Card" may be a fad that dies because technology can't replace relationships. Some visual learners want to see love, sympathy, and apologies in the friend's own handwriting. Our world is not too small for word processing and personal handwriting at the same time, if we deem them both important enough.

I am a principal who is struggling with an ongoing problem of people's carelessness. I have confronted my staff and talked to students about the lack of respect for equipment, materials, the building, and even student property. Our lost and found department is full of expensive unclaimed sweaters, jackets, tennis shoes. Our hallways and classrooms show signs of ill-mannered students despite frequent requests that students pick up litter. Mild concern seems

to be overwhelmed by this generation's wasteful attitudes. I feel compelled to work at improvement but find that I am either bribing or punishing with "incentives." Any suggestions?

I am quite certain there are other administrators feeling frustrated with the "carelessness" of today's youth. Perhaps overindulgence breeds such irresponsibility; the allusion to expensive, unclaimed items in the lost and found box might cause us to conclude such. Regardless, students, not knowing the value of things, might misunderstand attacks from teachers and principal. Indifference, feigned or real, might be a defense; no one has concretely demonstrated the results of their irresponsibility at home or at school. Negative and positive "incentives" will work only temporarily.

Sometimes we teachers criticize parents who bail out their kids by buying another pair of tennis shoes or a ski jacket when they lose the original; yet, I've seen the school not require payment for damage or consequences for late work, forms, or lost papers because the student claimed it was an accident or it

wouldn't happen again. Certainly, as Christian educators we need to be forgiving and understanding, but we must not shirk our responsibility in teaching some of these most important lessons of stewardship. Our time, our talents, and our possessions are gifts to be used wisely. We, of all inhabitants upon this earth, have reason to value the resources we have. Preaching, nagging, rescuing, or bribing won't create good stewards. By providing an "out" or a new item for the carelessness, parents and teachers perpetuate the very behavior they say they want to eliminate.

Values are absorbed, not forced. Like it or not, we are the role models. I ask students to clean up the floor at the end of the day and to return dictionaries, thesauruses, and other books to the shelves. My own desk and its surroundings are not always very good examples to the students. Amazingly too, the faculty lounge often reveals our serious lack of responsibility. Dirty dishes, silverware, and coffee cups clutter the counter, waiting for the assigned duty person to put them in the dishwasher. We often joke about the culprits or the delinquents who conveniently forget

their week of cleanup. Expecting servanthood may require demonstrating it. These same faculty members are upset when students don't take the responsibility for tending to the cleanliness of the building.

I doubt that family income is the root of the student's problem. I remember when my son was an adolescent. He had friends from varying backgrounds, but a couple of boys from the neighborhood came from fairly affluent families. If they drank pop or had a bowl of ice cream in the family room, they always returned the dishes and/or trash to the kitchen. Other boys from his class at school would often leave the evidence of the snack wherever it was last consumed. They were all nice kids, but, in this case, the Christian school guys lacked the manners or values. The lack of training or modeling in their everyday environment can affect students' responses to carelessness. Kindly and firmly this expected behavior needs to be explained and demonstrated so that students and faculty members share in the rewards of discipleship toward one another. ■

Computers in the Classroom

Idea Bank

by Elizabeth Zylstra

Elizabeth Zylstra is a grade two teacher at Heritage Campus Abbotsford Christian School, in British Columbia.

My dream classroom would be one where each student has access to his or her own computer. A flick of a switch and the student's desk would rotate, whir, and swish . . . out pops a computer. Dream on. It sounds great but reality hits when we come back to earth and realize that we have only one or two computers in a classroom of twenty-five students.

In our school we have a class-size lab used by intermediate students, and two computers rotate throughout the primary classrooms. Teachers and students are interested and excited about the learning that can be generated with technology. One machine is a newer IBM with a CD Rom player that has Windows 95 on it. The other is an older Apple IIGs machine that was donated and is not as interactive as the IBM but still offers learning opportunities for our students.

We are building up our software inventory and have acquired a number of programs by looking for sales and choosing pieces that fit into our primary curriculum, reinforcing general reading, writing, and math skills or improving concepts that deal directly with our themes. Troll and Scholastic book orders sometime offer special deals.

Each computer is on a cart and has a split adapter and two headphones so that four students can work at once. Right now, most of the teachers are using computers as a center station through which all the students rotate during center time. The computers themselves are rotated through the primary

grades. Each grade one class uses them one week, then each grade two class, and then the rotation begins again. The grade level teachers are responsible for scheduling the computers among their classrooms during that week. Although we would like more computers, using this rotation system seems to make the best use of the ones that we have.

The Apple computer also has a video cable so it can be attached to a television set. This allows the whole class to see easily, instead of crowding around a smaller computer monitor. For example, the grade two children enjoyed learning about simple machines using a software program, one computer, and a television. The whole class helped "Wanda," a young girl who was animated on the screen, make decisions about using levers, pulleys, or inclined planes to move her peanut butter barrel up to the top of her factory. It really helped define some of the concepts that were being taught and created a wonderful visual. It was an opportunity for whole group instruction with the use of just one computer.

We have used the computers to draw, paint, write, and illustrate stories, to increase math and reading skills, and to learn more about theme concepts. Whatever the purpose, the computer offers an interactive and exciting way to implement goals that are important in the elementary school.

Be creative. Have fun. Don't be afraid to explore and make your available hardware and software work for you in your own classroom. ■



Pig by
Amanda Doerksen

Jeff Fennema teaches eighth grade language arts at Timothy Christian Middle School in Elmhurst, Illinois.

As a young teenager I witnessed a fellow student, very popular and highly respected, taking a swing at another student during an intense physical education competition. Many of us were stunned as we stood there watching the event unfold. Here was a student who loved the Lord and walked his talk, now doing the unthinkable. On another occasion, I was waiting for a ride home after school when I saw my teacher yell at and literally kick an annoying student out the door, sending the guy sobbing and limping on his way home. I stood there in shock.

Both of the above individuals did reconcile with those whom they offended. The classmate who had tried to land a punch gathered together the witnesses and apologized to us, his peers, as well. The angry teacher pulled me aside at school the next day and asked for my forgiveness also. Both understood that they had sinned against members of the Christian community, and both sought to rectify the broken harmony that had resulted.

Middle School Community

In the triad of home, church, and school, distinct communities exist, separate from each other in function, yet sharing many common principles. While the purposes of each remain separate, the three are united by similar tenets.

One area in which the three share direction is relationships. Christians are, of course, accountable to God. They are also accountable to each other. Harmonious living among believers is pleasing to the Lord (Psalm 133, Romans

15:5-7). When sin fractures our relationships, reconciliation becomes necessary to reestablish fellowship with one another, made possible only through Christ.

If students are not considered believers, is this idea of community then invalid? Whatever term the school association uses in describing their students (saved, regenerate, covenant children, unsaved, depraved), all can agree that these students are created in the image of God and therefore need harmonious relationships. Our response is to instruct our students not only about community, but in community as well.

The principles of community are vital, especially to middle school students. Students at this age begin to analyze and seek their own identity and their place in society. Friendships are crucial since peer awareness takes center stage in their lives. Reevaluating their relationships with parents, teachers, and friends makes this an exciting and confusing period in their lives. This distinct phase simply cries out for direction and guidance in building and maintaining community relationships.

Student-to-Teacher Accountability

Educators are placed in a position of authority over their students. The concept of authority has undergone erosion over the past few decades, and the classroom has not been exempt from the decay. As authority figures, teachers must hold students accountable for their behavior. Daily interaction with students provides an opportunity to guide them in their responses to those in authority. Students should ideally respect the teacher; at the very least the student should respect the position of authority held by the teacher. When this relationship is broken, teachers face a marvelous opportunity to guide the student through the restoration

process. Students will encounter authority throughout their lives. The skills taught and facilitated here will benefit them long past their time in the middle school community.

Of the three relationships explored here, this segment of the community generally gets most of our energy. Unfortunately we do not always provide positive encounters for the students. Some of us wish so much for our students to like us that we employ a type of camp atmosphere that blurs the authority structure. Others of us relish our positions of authority a bit too much, and we quickly descend from an authoritative to an authoritarian approach in our relationships. Neither method fosters true respect and serves only in hindering community-building.

Student-to-Student Accountability

Promoting shalom among students in the middle school seems like an impossible task. Yet, if we truly believe that Christian community must be modeled for our students, we cannot dismiss their accountability to each other for maintaining a healthy communal atmosphere. Ignoring hurtful, destructive speech and actions among students is the easy way out. Often teachers are tempted to look the other way until confrontations escalate into verbal or physical abuse. After all, we are not babysitters.

However, this cynical and negligent approach does not accurately reflect our function as middle school teachers. Christian teachers may view students as image bearers of God, but middle school students may not readily accept this view about themselves or others. We must establish an environment where respect for each other is the norm, not just in the classroom, but everywhere within the building and in locations of off-campus



activities. Speech and actions that deviate from this standard are simply unacceptable.

Of course the policy will be neglected at times throughout the year. Too often students resort to gossip, harassment, or even abuse after having been wronged by another. These responses provide teachers with the opportunity to function as agents of reconciliation. Instead of succumbing to the roles of referee or judge, we can facilitate and guide the process of scriptural confrontation (Matt. 18:15-17). Biblical confrontation and forgiveness are the first steps in restoring harmony. We can help our students see the wisdom and value of this process. Yes, reconciliation is more time consuming than making snap judgments. However, the meaning of shalom and community will become more real as a result.

Teacher-to-Student Accountability

Another weakness we may demonstrate is our accountability to students. We fail to realize community in its completeness when we conveniently omit or

arrogantly reject this complicated relationship. Teachers are placed in authority over their students. Yet, if we emphasize this relationship to the exclusion of the other, are we simply following a secular model of authority?

Teachers are sinners—even really good teachers. We all know this. When we have sinned against a student, we sometimes confess it to a colleague or, if feeling courageous, even to our principal. Though admirable, such confession does not complete the process given to us through Scripture. We are to humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness, even from students. Confession does not compromise our position of authority. Rather, it strengthens our role. When students see teachers who model what is right and good, their level of respect increases. When teachers ask for forgiveness, students see themselves as integral members of the community we promote.

We can encourage this relationship by being accessible to students. If students confront us concerning an issue in which they feel they have been wronged, what are our reactions? Are we outraged?

Contemptuous? Defensive? Do students even dare confront us? If not, could that be a result of brokenness in our relationships with students?

When we distance ourselves from our students, we miss many opportunities to encourage and facilitate community. This is not to suggest that we become best friends or pals with our students. Yet, if we simply hide behind our role of authority, neglecting our accountability to the students, we should expect incompleteness in our community relationships.

How Good and Pleasant

Psalms 133:1 states, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" This exclamation is not some overly optimistic fantasy. God has given us practical instructions to aspire toward this objective. Because of their captivity with relationships, middle school students need a model of Christian community presented and demonstrated for them. How important it becomes that we explore with them God's desire for these relationships. ■



Media Eye



by Stefan Ulstein

Moll Flanders Resonates

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

Although Robin Wright has a distinguished list of film credits, including "Forest Gump" and "Princess Bride," she had never been given the chance to carry a film on her own until she landed the title role in "Moll Flanders." The dearth of leading roles for women in Hollywood, and the subsequent lack of cinematic role models for young women, is an ongoing problem that won't be solved by the highly-paid Demi Moore's starring role in last summer's "Striptease."

In "Moll Flanders," Robin Wright has plenty to work with. Co-stars Morgan Freeman and Stockard Channing provide a powerful backup presence, and the script, by Pen Densham, provides Wright the opportunity to run a gamut of emotions and situations.

Pen Densham is widely respected in the film industry as a producer of such successful and disparate projects as "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves," and television's new "Outer Limits" series. When I spoke to him in Seattle recently, he made it clear that "Moll Flanders" was a project dear to his heart. He wanted to write something he could feel proud of, something his children could admire. He aspired to create a strong female character set in a world of moral dilemmas and choices, a woman who could rise above the hand she'd been dealt. As a new father, he wanted to create male characters who solved problems without resorting to violence.

Starting from that point, he read Daniel Defoe's "Moll Flanders" and was captivated by the power of the story and characterization. He was immediately drawn to the sub-title, "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders Who Was Born in Newgate and During a Life of Continued Variety for Threescore Years Besides Her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, Five Times a Wife, Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at Last Grew Rich, Lived Honest and Died a Penitent." Defoe's Byzantine plot was much too ornamented to be translated to the screen intact, so Densham drew selectively, added new characters, and cut others. His film is inspired by Defoe, but it is not in any way a "version" of it.

Aside from Moll, his most compelling characters are Mrs. Allworthy (Stockard Channing) and Hibble (Morgan Freeman.) Mrs. Allworthy runs a brothel, modeled after the famous Boodles Club of 18th century London, where well-heeled gentlemen luxuriated in the company of beautiful courtesans and discussed the issues of the day with their fellows. It was a decadent, opulent time where fabulous wealth and privilege rode on the backs of exploited workers, indentured servants, and slaves. Densham's script captures the irony of the so-called Age of Enlightenment, where democratic ideals and the benefits of an emerging industrial society are enjoyed by a few at the expense of many.

Into this milieu comes Moll Flanders. Born in Newgate prison to a mother

whose execution is postponed until after the birth (a practice still favored by some Middle East Oil Emirates), Moll is thrust into one oppressive situation after another. Out of work and in danger of starving, she takes a job cleaning Mrs. Allworthy's brothel and is slowly seduced into prostitution by the promise of easy money and gentlemanly attention. Densham's script allows us to see the internal logic of Moll's decision while knowing that it is the wrong one. The last resort of the poor has always been the selling of their bodies—women to prostitution, men to prize-fighting and soldiering—and nothing much has changed.

This fact was not lost on two of my students who attended an early screening of the film and interviewed Densham with me. They were deeply moved by the contemporary resonance of the issues Moll faces as she struggles to survive in a rapidly changing, morally shifting world.

"Moll Flanders" is rated PG-13 for brief partial nudity (she poses as an artist's model) and for the frank rendering of the world of prostitution. It is in no way a "faithful adaptation" of Daniel Defoe's novel, yet it is an ideal teaching vehicle for older teenagers who struggle with moral contradictions.

The great blind spot of modern "Family Values" proponents is their inability to see that not everyone begins with the same debts and credits. My own children are blessed with two parents who have been married a quarter century. Across the street lives their grandmother who continues to share their lives on a daily

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basis. Until his death six years ago, their grandfather was as much or more a male presence in their lives than I was. They have plenty to eat and good clothes to wear, and they attend a fine Christian school, where the teachers love them.

But what of kids born to criminals and drug addicts? The week before I wrote this article a twenty-year-old girl, who claims she did not know she was pregnant, delivered a baby in a McDonald's bathroom, wrapped it in a coat, and dumped it in a garbage can. The baby clings to life in an intensive care unit, its skull fractured from the drop into the metal bin.

I've taught kids whose Fetal Alcohol Syndrome renders them dangerously impulsive, unable to understand even immediate consequences. Every month it seems that another father walks out on one of my students, leaving a distraught mother and a nest of confused, angry siblings. And this is in a private Christian school where somebody cares enough to pay tuition. What happens to kids who are just left to fend for themselves? Three strikes and they're out? Run that one by Jesus Christ.

Next Friday I plan to visit a former student who is serving a mandatory two-year sentence for drug dealing. When he was my student several years ago, we developed a close friendship and he shared with me his attempt to find his birth father, whom he'd never met. He tracked him down and had a meeting where the "father" expressed a desire to begin a relationship. The following week

the man had moved and gotten an unlisted telephone number.

One of the emerging power groups in America is the so-called "Second Wives" lobby. These are women who want to limit their husbands' liability to the children of their first families. That was then, this is now, they claim. Let the kids from marriage number one fend for themselves.

Pen Densham's "Moll Flanders" addresses these kinds of issues. Can someone who has been kicked around all her life be held to the same standard as someone who has been given a chance? As North American Christianity turns more and more toward self-serving, inward-looking politics of Us vs. Them, "Moll Flanders" provides the opportunity to ask the kind of questions that cut to the radical nature of the Jesus who said, "Let he who is without sin throw the first stone." ■



