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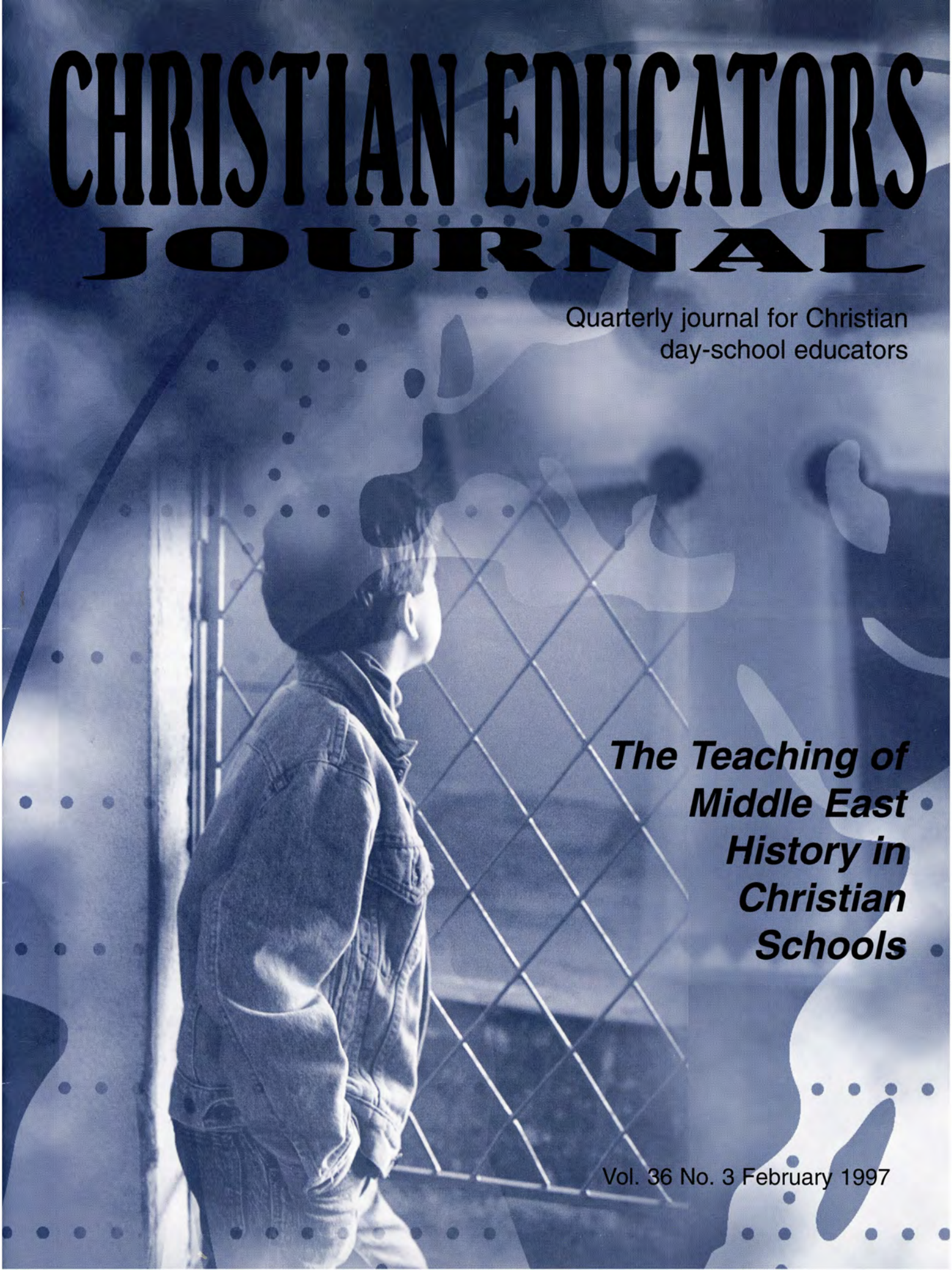

The Teaching of Middle East History in Christian Schools

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EDITORIAL

Time Present and Time Past

Lorna Van Gilst

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past . . .
"Burnt Norton"
by T.S. Eliot

Time defines culture, perhaps more than any other factor. My culture demands that I start class at 8:00; if I walk in at 8:11 my students will have left. My friends in Ukraine might be stranded on a street corner at 8:11, waiting for a bus that hasn't arrived. They walk into class whenever they arrive. My friends from certain other cultures might wander in at 8:40 after visiting outside with an acquaintance on the street—for them, 8:00 means any time until 9:00.

School and mass media seem obsessed with time—always, there is the deadline. We plan to the day, to the minute, to the second. We slice the hour into pre-scheduled chunks so we can meet the demands of communicating information.

Try timing a thirty-minute television newscast. The mind absorbs ideas only twelve to fifteen words long, so news writers keep the sentences short and direct. Normally, only sports and weather extend beyond two minutes in length, and even the five-minute stories are broken into tolerable two-minute "bytes" lest viewers switch channels in the meanwhile. Commercials present fifteen- or thirty-second mini-dramas highlighting human needs. The old two-minute commercial of the 1970s would seem like a drag today. Public Broadcasting's "Jim Lehrer News Hour" has its regular viewers, but many people find the ten-minute stories simply too long for their level of concentration. Even on "Public News," the interviewer breaks off the discussion midstream with a judicious "Thank you; we have to leave it at that," and the conclusion is left hanging. We are a generation on the go, and many of us lack the ten minutes of "sit" for an in-depth story.

Newspaper readers have only a slightly longer record. They tolerate sentences as long as nineteen to twenty-three words, but they want short paragraphs. Most readers quit after three or four column-inches of text unless the paragraphs are broken into small segments with subheads that guide readers through the text.

On international flights when newspapers are offered gratis as passengers board the airplane, *USA Today* quickly runs out while the "grayer" *New York Times* remains plentiful, perhaps in part because an airplane is not the ideal place to concentrate on lengthy articles.

Although we have more information, we are less likely than our parents to read all the way through a long document or to sit attentively through an hour-long speech. We marvel today at the dull gray blocks of print in old-time books and magazines. Times are different—not necessarily better, but certainly different.

I do not advocate going back. We are socialized to live with movement and color and other graphic effects that enhance our ability to take in the message more quickly. Those are gifts of God. We need to develop them and direct them toward thoughtful response, just as concise, well-written text can do.

But more than ever before, we need to guard against fragmentation in our lives and in our students' lives. Shorter is not always better. Occasionally in CEJ we run a very long article, longer than our maximum 1200 words on a two-page spread. You'll find one in this issue, on teaching Middle East history. To cut the article would be to damage the integrity and to ignore the historical background that influences today's reality.

Writer Wendell Berry says that today we have more information and more ignorance than we've ever had before. Perhaps our abundance strangles us. I am not advocating that we return to the long blocks of print or speech that were once common. I doubt that people took in ideas any faster than we do now; they probably learned to tune out more quickly. I am advocating, however, that we help readers and listeners focus and connect, that we bring the bytes together for sustained thought. Our role as teachers is to help our students sort out the information and build the connections, seeking not only the "what" but also the "so what" in the time we have.

The Teaching of Middle East History in Christian Schools

Bassam M. Madany

Bassam M. Madany, former Arabic broadcast minister for the Back to God Hour, has been teaching Middle East history at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois. The past two years he has also introduced Middle East history to junior high students at Calvin Christian School in South Holland, Illinois.

Since the fall of the Soviet Empire, the United States is perceived as the only remaining superpower. This burden has involved the U.S. in major and minor conflicts on three continents. In Operation Desert Storm for the liberation of Kuwait, 500,000 men and women of the U.S. armed forces were transported to Saudi Arabia in the greatest airlift in history. Later on, the Somali tragedy brought the U.S. to the shores of East Africa where it played a major role in an attempt to end the starvation of thousands of Somalis. Since 1995, our brave men and women, together with their NATO allies, are working hard at bringing peace to strife-torn Bosnia.

What is quite revealing about these post-cold war military involvements in far away lands is that Kuwait, Somalia, and Bosnia (to a certain extent) are part and parcel of the Muslim world. These events point to the fact that throughout the nineties as well as in the early part of the twenty-first century, the world of Islam deserves our special attention. We must be prepared to face the challenges of this new state of affairs. Thus it becomes necessary that our educational institutions include courses on Islam and specifically on the Middle East in their curriculum. This is especially the case in our Christian schools since, by their very nature, they base their educational system on a theistic world view. This allows the student to properly understand a major part of our world that has never jettisoned its own brand of theism. In other words, boys and girls, young men and women, who have a Christian commitment and who attend Christian institutions of education, are better equipped to understand the world of Islam.

Having made these preliminary remarks, I would like to mention certain historical facts which indicate that Americans have been involved in the life of the peoples of the Middle East for a very long time. Today, we need to rediscover this forgotten part of our history. As we delve into the subject, we face the singular fact that this relationship did not begin in a political or commercial way, but as a direct result of the foreign mission work of New England Congregationalists and the various Presbyterian denominations. According to a study of original documents covering a little more than a century, Joseph A. Grabill, author of *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East,* demonstrates how missionary influence on American foreign policy in the area began in 1810 and ended in 1927.

> **"The World of Islam deserves our special attention. Thus it becomes necessary that our educational institutions include courses on Islam and specifically on the Middle East in their curriculum..."**

At this point, I would like to add a personal note. My formative years were greatly influenced by the presence of American missionaries in Syria and Lebanon. I was born in Seleucia, the port city of Antioch. My father was the Presbyterian pastor and mission school principal in that town. He loved to regale us with accounts of the four years he spent as a conscript in the Ottoman (Turkish) army in World War I and the humanitarian role played by American missionaries. Even though the United States had entered the war against Germany and its allies, it did not declare war on the Ottomans, primarily because of the presence and work of American missionaries throughout many regions of the Ottoman Empire and their advice, well received by the State Department.

As a result of the excellent reputation American missionaries had and their concern for the minorities living within Ottoman territories, they were enabled to assist in relief work among thousands of refugees, both Armenian and Nestorian, whose lives had been shattered on account of the massacres perpetrated against them by the Turkish authorities. After the war, American missionaries were involved in the diplomatic negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference that dealt with the future of the Ottoman Empire.

James L. Barton, secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (representing Congregationalist churches), and his

counterparts, representing the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board, had direct access to President Woodrow Wilson and his secretary of state, Robert Lansing. Mr. Wilson, son of a Presbyterian minister and a former president of Princeton University, was an internationalist. He conceived the idea of a lasting peace through the organization of the League of Nations. He became the hero of the many nationalities living within the Middle East by promulgating the principle of self-determination.

This principle gave hope to Armenians, Arabs, and Kurds that the end of the Ottoman rule meant independence. Unfortunately, because of the persistent opposition of the Republican senators under the leadership of Henry Cabot Lodge, the United States did not join the League of Nations. Furthermore, on account of the ill health of President Wilson and the secret treaties of the Allies regarding the Ottoman lands, the United States did not get officially involved in the final political settlements regarding the Ottoman provinces in the Middle East. France and Great Britain enlarged their empires by taking control of several territories in the area, with the blessings of the League of Nations.

Growing up in Syria and Lebanon during the thirties and forties, I was quite aware of the American presence. But this presence had been primarily missionary, philanthropic, and educational. It had a direct impact upon the lives of the various ethnic groups living in the area. America was regarded as an impartial and beneficent nation. The word "American" elicited the feeling of gratitude among the common people and came to be synonymous with integrity, compassion, and benevolence. Thus, prior to World War II, the United States had accumulated a great reserve of good will among the peoples of the Middle East thanks to the presence and work of American missionaries.

What happened then that, since the end of that war, we notice a deterioration in the special relationship between the United States and the majority of the nations of the Middle East? One of the factors that led to the loss of the good image America had built over the years was the waning of the missionary influence with regard to the foreign policy of the United States. As Professor Grabill put it at the conclusion of his study:

> The influence of American Protestant missionaries on Asian nationalism and on United States diplomacy had declined after the First World War and nonecclesiastical forces had become powerful. Higher education and philanthropy were no longer dominated by churchmen, and economic concerns challenged the hold by missionaries and educators on American relations with the Near East. The cold war pushed strategic aims of the United states government to a place of prominence.

"...This is especially the case in our Christian schools since, by their very nature, they base their educational system on a theistic world view."

How are we to describe this new phase of United States foreign policy toward the Middle East? After examining many sources, I have arrived at the conclusion that after the Wilsonian era, this policy became primarily *reactive* to the events rather than proceeding from a well-thought and balanced approach to the conditions and needs of the nations of the area. Having lost or downgraded the input of resident American missionaries, philanthropists, and educationalists, the State Department embarked on a policy that was to be conditioned by new economic concerns, the cold war, and the birth of the State of Israel, all subsumed under the theme of United States national interests.

In a historic meeting between President Roosevelt and King Saud, which took place during World War II on an American destroyer in the Suez Canal, strong links were forged between the U.S.A. and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The oil discovered in eastern Arabia in the thirties was not developed until the late forties. As oil consumption was increasing at a fast rate in the United States, American oil companies engaged in the exploitation of the gigantic oil reserves of the desert kingdom. One of the greatest projects undertaken by ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) was the TAPLINE (Trans Arabian Pipeline). This great engineering feat brought Saudi crude oil from the northeastern part of Arabia to a terminal on the Mediterranean between Sidon and Tyre in Lebanon.

Thousands of Americans began arriving in Saudi Arabia to work with the various projects of ARAMCO. The heartland of Islam had never been peopled with so many non-Muslims in its entire fourteen-hundred-year history! This new state of affairs affected not only the desert kingdom, but equally the United States. From then on, oil and the oil-rich Middle Eastern nations were to assume a very promi-

nent place in the conduct of the foreign policy of America.

An equally important factor in the post-World War II/U.S. Middle Eastern relations is the beginning of the cold war between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. and its Western allies. Stalin pressured Turkey to give up two eastern provinces he wanted annexed to the U.S.S.R. He also came to the aid of Greek leftist insurgents who were bent on bringing Greece within the Soviet-dominated lands of eastern Europe. Faced with this aggressive posture, and having forced the Soviet army to pull out of northern Iran, President Truman promulgated the doctrine that came to be known by his name. He drew a line in the sand and made it known that no Soviet aggression would be tolerated in any Middle Eastern country. Working together with Western European allies, Mr. Truman fostered the organization of regional pacts meant to keep communism out of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as the Baghdad Pact and the Central Treaty Organization. Thus, from the beginning of the cold war until the fall of the Soviet Empire, it was the determined foreign policy of both Republican and Democratic presidents to work at the containment of the Soviet Empire within the lands it had conquered or brought within its sphere of influence in the days immediately following the end of World War II.

This attempt to keep the Soviet Union outside the Middle East was very difficult as several newly independent states in the area adopted socialistic idealogies and became radically anti-American. Many Arabs felt betrayed by America as they perceived that America had lost its early idealism and fairness and had become a powerful supporter of the Jewish state.

This historical background brings us to the heart of our subject: the United States' foreign policy toward the nations of the area since 1946. In all fairness, we must recognize that most of the problems of the area originally stemmed from the policies of the European powers vis-a-vis the Ottoman Empire. After centuries of decline, the Ottoman Turks were about to lose all their territories in the Middle East. During World War I, the British and the French concluded secret treaties concerning the Arab territories of the empire. Added to that, the British made a solemn promise to the young Zionist movement that they regarded with favor the birth of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This was known as the Balfour Declaration of 1917. And in order to hasten the early demise of the Ottomans, the British promised independence to the Arabs should they join the Allies in their fight against the Turks.

These contradictory treaties, declarations, and promises tied the hands of the United States administration, which had hoped to bring about a new era at the conclusion of the Great War through its stated policy of self-determination for the people of the Middle East. As noted earlier, President Wilson's preoccupation with the founding of the League of Nations did not allow him to get actually involved in the final settlement of the future of the Ottoman territories of the area. Military might came to dictate a new world order. Britain and France divided the spoils of the war, with the former getting Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq while France got Syria and Lebanon.

It must be noted that while the impact of the American expatriate community in the area had been weakened, nevertheless, they continued to call for a fair and just U.S. policy toward the nations of the Middle East. Quite early, they saw the dangers that surrounded the implementation of the Balfour Declaration. They spoke and wrote about the subject with clarity and conviction.

The Arab population of Palestine felt doubly betrayed. They had hoped for independence, but the British became their rulers, with the blessing of the League of Nations. Then they were expected to make room for Jewish immigrants from Europe. During the British presence in Palestine, which lasted thirty years, Palestinian Arabs rose up several times in protest but could not prevail against the might of the British Empire. Prior to the beginning of World War II, the British issued a White Paper, which restricted the flow of Jewish immigration of Palestine. However, the problem was not solved; it simply became dormant between 1939 and 1945.

Soon after the Allies defeated Nazi Germany, the world came to realize with horror the terrible things Hitler had done to the Jewish population of occupied Europe. As the news of the Holocaust spread throughout Europe and the Americas, a great sympathy arose on behalf of the remnant of the Jewish people who were assembled in various refugee camps in the liberated areas of Europe. The Jewish lobby in the United States worked hard on President Truman and convinced him to request the British government to admit 100,000 Jewish refugees to Palestine, whose Jewish population had climbed during the British Mandate from around 20,000 to 500,000 by 1945.

The successor to the League of Nations, the United Nations Organization, sent a fact-finding delegation to Palestine to investigate the future of the land. Finally, a recommendation was made to the effect that there should be two states in Palestine: one Jewish and the other Arab. The Jewish Agency (which had been a semi-official organization looking after the welfare of the Palestinian Jews) accepted the Partition Plan, but the Arabs rejected it. They believed that they were not responsible for the disaster that befell the Jewish population of Europe. Thus, they were not prepared to offer Palestine as a solution to the homelessness of the Jews.

Americans with strong ties to Middle Eastern countries were very sympathetic to the Arab cause. They believed that justice would be violated should the Jewish problem be solved at the expense of the Arabs who had lived in Palestine for centuries. One of the most eloquent defenders of the Arab side was a former president of the American University of Beirut, Bayard Dodge. I quote from a recently

published book by Robert D. Kaplan, *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite:*

> In 1948, at the age of sixty, Bayard Dodge retired to Princeton, New Jersey. That April Dodge published an article in *Reader's Digest* about the Palestine crisis, entitled "Must There Be War in the Middle East?" This six-thousand-word article, while forgotten and obscure, is the definitive statement of American Arabists on the birth of Israel. Though he cautioned, "Not all Jews are Zionists and not all Zionists are extremists," for Dodge the Zionist movement was a tragedy of which little good could come. Dodge was not anti-Semitic. He chided his fellow Christians for behaving "in such a way" as to make the Jews' sense of "homelessness . . . more acute." Years and decades of strife would, Dodge knew, follow the birth of a Jewish state. As a result, wrote Dodge, "All the work done by our philanthropic nonprofit American agencies in the Arab world--our Near East Foundation, our missions, our YMCA and YWCA, and our Boston Jesuit College in Baghdad, our colleges in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus--would be threatened with complete frustration and collapse (80).

Nothing could stop the growing support for the Zionist cause in Palestine. While the Near East Affairs section of the State Department was not for the partition of the land, President Truman instructed the U.S. delegation at the U.N. to vote in favor of the Partition Plan. Since the British could no longer maintain law and order in Palestine, they declared that they would finish their evacuation of the Holy Land by May 15, 1948. That date signaled two other major events: the Declaration of Independence of Israel and the invasion of Palestine by several Arab armies.

It must be noted that while the U.S.A. voted for the Partition Plan, it was the U.S.S.R., through its proxy Czechoslovakia, who supplied arms to the nascent Jewish state. By mid-summer, the Haganah, which became the Israeli Defense Force (I.D.F.), stopped the Arab armies and annexed new areas of Palestine. However, Egyptian forces did manage to occupy the Gaza strip while Transjordan took East Jerusalem as well as those areas known in the Bible as Judea and Samaria. Prince Abdullah annexed them to his eastern realm and became king of the new Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The first Arab-Israeli war had a cataclysmic impact on the Arab nations of the Middle East. Having recently won their independence from foreign rule, they perceived the birth of the Jewish state as a new and worse type of colonialism. One result was the radicalization and militarization of the Arab world: first, the coup of 1949 in Syria, followed by the 1952 coup in Egypt, and in the late fifties, the bloody coup that toppled the Iraqi monarchy. The latter event took place during a tumultuous atmosphere in the area complicated by the raging first Lebanese civil war. This brought the U.S. Marines to Beirut. However, the most important event during the fifties was the October 1956 war between Israel and Egypt, which brought the direct intervention of the U.S.A.. President Eisenhower put pressure on Israel to relinquish immediately the Gaza Strip and the Sinai, which the Israeli forces had conquered in a lightning campaign.

This policy of the U.S. President was welcomed by the Arabs as a sign of fairness and justice to their cause. For a relatively brief period, America did not look as one-sided in its relationship with the nations of the Middle East. By forcing an Israeli retreat from occupied areas, the U.S. administration began to reclaim some of the lost credit among the Arabs. Unfortunately, no lasting solution was found for the Palestinian refugees who were living under terrible conditions in camps within Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon.

The ties between the hero of the Egyptian revolution and his Soviet friends were getting stronger. In April 1967 Colonel Nasser was fed information by the U.S.S.R. about an alleged Israeli plan to attack Syria. This led him to request the U.N. peace-keeping force in the Sinai to leave the buffer zone separating the Egyptians from the Israeli forces. For a period of three weeks, Nasser instructed his propaganda machine to go into high gear in denouncing Israel and threatening to throw every Zionist Jew into the Mediterranean. On June 6, the world awoke to the news that Israel had attacked Egypt and destroyed its entire air force in the early hours of that Monday morning. After a lightning thrust toward the Suez Canal, the I.D.F. pushed the Jordanians out of East Jerusalem and conquered the entire West Bank. In the final three days of the war, the might of the Israeli Army was marshalled against the Syrians ending with the occupation of the Golan Heights.

The third Arab-Israeli war turned out to be more traumatic than the war of 1948. This *hazima* or routing of the combined Arab armies by Israel was more than could be borne. It affected the entire Arab world from the Gulf to the Atlantic. The leaders of the Middle Eastern Arab countries rallied around Colonel Nasser, claiming that the U.S.A. and Britain were involved in this war effort in order to explain to their bewildered peoples the reason for that crushing defeat.

The U.N. issued Resolution No. 242 requesting Israel to relinquish all territories acquired by force and allow the refugees to return to their homes. Israel refused. Six more years of tension were followed by the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. President Anwar Sadat was true to his promise to liberate the Sinai. By surprising the Israelis on their most holy day, he managed to destroy the Bar Lev Line on the East

Bank of the canal and to push the Israelis back. President Nixon came to the aid of the Israelis by authorizing a massive air-lift of arms to Israel. The war ended with a stalemate. Thanks to the shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger, Israel left the Sinai and a peace treaty was signed between Egypt and the Jewish state.

The rest belongs to contemporaneous history. There is no need to give a detailed chronology of the eighties and the first half of the nineties. Suffice it to say that after the disastrous invasion of south Lebanon by the Israelis, the Shi'ites were radicalized. With help from Iran and with the tacit approval of Syria, the Shi'ite Hizbullah began to launch rocket attacks against northern Israel, which has continued into the present with some terrible consequences for the Lebanese.

On the positive side, the successive American administrations worked hard for some accommodation between Israel and the P.L.O. At present, Yasser Arafat controls the Gaza Strip as well as several cities in the West Bank. The negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians reached a new milestone on September 28, 1995, with the signing of a new agreement promising more self-rule to the Arab population. The future is still fraught with many dangers because of the illegal presence of Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Furthermore, owing to the rise and spread of Islamic Fundamentalism, certain radical groups such as HAMAS (acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement) are working for the destruction of any arrangement between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In closing, I venture this hypothesis. Had the United States administration during the Nixon era acted as resolutely and courageously as in the Eisenhower days, by pushing for an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, a lasting and workable peace might have resulted. With some alterations in the boundaries separating Israel from Arab territories within Palestine, a return to the *status quo ante* of June 1967 could have laid the foundations for a viable Palestinian Arab state and for a lasting peace with Israel.

While hoping against hope that a *modus vivendi* between Arabs and Israelis will become a reality, I cannot deny certain serious forebodings about the future. Radical Islam poses a great danger to the world order and especially to Israel. Suicide bombings within Israel are signs of the deep-seated malaise that festers among the Arabs of Palestine.

Looking into the early decades of the twenty-first century, I believe both Palestinians and Israelis must face the real challenges of dwindling water resources and a veritable population explosion among the Arabs. This condition calls for a serious reflection not only among those charged with charting U.S. foreign policy, but equally among Americans in general, and educators in particular. As Christian teachers, we have the responsibility to implant in the minds of the young generation the biblical principles of justice, fairness, and evenhandedness. Such principles ought to be guiding our foreign policy makers, both in the executive and legislative branches of our national government. It is only by holding firm to such ideals that America will be able to play a positive and constructive role in the complex world of tomorrow. ■

This article is based on a lecture given by the Reverend Bassam M. Madany on October 26, 1995, at the Christian Educators Association Convention, held at Century Center in South Bend, Indiana.

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Coaching and Motivation—a Christian Perspective

Bob Topp

Bob Topp, a teacher and coach at Annapolis Area Christian School, has twelve years of athletic administration experience in Christian schools.

I.E.T.—*Leader Effectiveness Training* by Dr. Thomas Gordon. *Maximum Leadership* by Farkas and DeBacker. *Managing for Excellence* by Bradford and Cohen. *The Five Pillars of Total Quality Management* by Bill Creech. Titles such as these show the interest the business world has in the topic of motivation. *The One Minute Manager* series by Blanchard and Johnson is one of the most popular series on motivation. Peter Drucker and Tom Peters are two of the most famous authors today on the topic. Business leaders devour such books so they can motivate their people to perform well. Athletic coaches also need to study motivation because they, like business leaders, want their charges to do what the leader wants because *they* want to do so.

The self-motivated athlete still exists but is a rare find. The pure joy of sport still exists but is not enough to get each athlete maximizing his or her potential skill. The inspirational pre-game pep talk still exists but has a very limited lifespan of effectiveness. Most coaches preach commitment to self-improvement but find little. Since young people have so many outlets for activity and entertainment, wholesome and otherwise, they sample from a large smorgasbord, committing wholly to nothing. This causes some coaches to throw their hands up in frustration. They press many "buttons" but find none that get the desired results. "Shall I tell a joke, throw a chair, sing a song, scream a threat, or what?" some may wonder privately. What methods of motivation are effective and yet appropriate? To the Christian school coach, the answers are found in the biblical models for motivation and group dynamics. Motivational coaching needs to be viewed as a leadership function of Christian community.

Psychologists tell us that we all have three basic psychological needs: to affiliate, to achieve, and to be affirmed. To affiliate is not just to join a group but to feel a strong sense of belonging and loyalty. This is why both inner-city gangs and successful athletic teams have strong cohesiveness. They stick together and support each other in any circumstance. Every member makes every other member feel included, important, and accountable. To achieve brings the satisfaction of having met goals and doing one's best. To be affirmed is to know the satisfaction of being encouraged and cared for, not just for one's accomplishments but for simply being oneself.

That's how the Christian school coach needs to motivate each athlete individually. Each athlete is a part of that cohesive group and a part of the family of God. The coach sets up a relationship with the player based on loyalty for loyalty (affiliation), playing time for good skill and effort (the opportunity to achieve), and encouragement for consistent effort (the chance to be affirmed). This is good coaching and good Christian living. We owe the mirroring of God's love to each person in any group we lead. That love should be unconditional. The second stringer should sense the coach's personal concern and interest just as much as the best players do. Notice that personal concern does not necessarily parallel each athlete's playing time.

Showing God's love to our athletes does not need to compromise the call to strive for excellence. Rather, doing so helps us see why striving for excellence is worthwhile. Christians in athletics seek to show God's love to each other because of each believer's personal relationship with the Father. Not only does he love us perfectly and unconditionally, but he calls his children to strive for excellence. Colossians 3:23-24 link these ideas together:

> Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (NIV)

Colossians 3:17 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 echo this idea. Malachi 1:13 illustrates God's dis-

pleasure when we offer less than our best.

Athletes in Christian schools have been confronted with and hopefully have accepted the gospel message. Using the young Christian's love for God is not only acceptable, but it can and should be the highest level of motivation available. Since Jesus is the Lord of every part of our lives, including our athletic lives, we use his example and guidance as motivation for our athletic performance.

Because of the foundational position of each person's relationship with God and the call to strive for excellence, Christian school athletes must be directed toward the best possible performance before using athletics as a vehicle for witnessing. Just as credibility and the right to be heard are won in friendship evangelism, being able to compete somewhat evenly with local non-Christian schools earns the right to be heard and noticed as God's witnesses. Being noticed by a watching world as distinctive is important, but yet it happens as a by-product of a life lived (and a team operated) in a Christ-honoring way. Our "vertical" (God-to-person) relationship comes before and affects our "horizontal" (person-to-person) relationships.

Gary Smalley, a Christian seminar leader and author of numerous books on relationships and family life, notes that one of the worst things a parent can do is to close a child's spirit. Similarly, the athlete who feels that the coach was inconsistent, unwilling to keep promises, embarrassing him or her, or uncaring will have a closed spirit. Opening a closed spirit will require a soft, caring tone and a willingness to listen and, perhaps, apologize. When a coach reaches out to try to open an athlete's closed spirit, the relationship often deepens.

The coach's relationship with the team collectively should be patterned after Jesus' methods of group leadership. He shows us examples of goal-setting and developing an organization. His long-range goal was to redeem a lost world. He organized twelve men and gave them short-term goals, to be his witnesses in the local region first, then branching out farther and farther. The apostles believed in the long-range goal with their highest level of commitment and fervency. So, to meet these goals, each man believed in and understood his role.

Goal-setting gives a team or group a sense of shared purpose, one of the most important aspects of building team motivation and cohesiveness. If each person is excited about achieving the first winning season in school history or repeating as league champions, that excitement is contagious. If the goals are realistic and well thought out, they will be embraced.

Nehemiah's dream of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem was not shared with King Artaxerxes until it was well thought out. Defining roles helps each team member to see his or her contribution to the "body." Everyone should recognize his or her own role, the role of others, one's own limitations, and the need to avoid doing it all. If the tall rebounder thinks he needs to dribble the ball up court as well, he has trouble with these points. That's why Paul discussed a foot not trying to be a hand and an ear not trying to be an eye in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. So, an athlete who knows that he or she will start most games or be the first substitute off the bench or just go in for a minute or two understands that role and can progress from there.

Jesus concerned himself with interpersonal relationships over ritual, tra-

dition, and task. He urges his disciples to be people-oriented also. Part of a dynamic, cohesive, motivated team is personal care, bonding, and encouragement among teammates. It is a seed planted by God but watered by the coach. The coach's command should echo Jesus' in John 15:12—"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

The daily atmosphere that the coach sets is the foundation. However, many teams also use secret pals, secret team handshakes or slaps in the school hallways, and team slogans such as "Together!" or "Team!" or "Refuse to lose!" or the more distinctive "Glorify!" or "All for him!" Post-practice meetings in which each person is asked to state something about a teammate that they appreciate can be a bonding experience as well.

We must focus on what we should do to coach in a distinctively Christ-like way, but we must also consider some should-nots.

We have discussed the need for both a people orientation and a striving for excellence. In other words, coaches need to keep people and task orientations in balance because Christ calls us to high standards in both. To tip too far to the people side is to shortchange the value of competition, of winning, of the sport, and of striving for excellence. It is to say, "I don't care what happens; let's just have fun together." This is an abdication of responsibility. It is to label athletics as merely recreational and not educational. It decreases what we learn about ourselves, our potential, and what God can teach us through athletics. To tip too far to the task-oriented side is to alienate the players in our charge for the sake of fleeting success.

In the professional ranks as well as in high-profile college athletics, a coach's callousness, born of high-task, low-people orientation has come to be expected. Verbal attacks and insults have been used to motivate players by getting them angry with or fearful of the coach. At the scholastic level, certainly in the Christian setting, players ought not to be used or verbally abused. The Christian coach may seek to stir emotions but must not cross the line into the compromising of any athlete's dignity and worth as a child of God.

Some coaches use yelling at referees as a motivational tool. If the team is lethargic, they try to get the team united and excited about being mad at the referee and the "terrible" calls. Some coaches will go so far as to earn penalties (technical foul, yellow card, even getting thrown out of the game) to fire up the players' emotions. When we consider our relationship with officials as a relationship with God-ordained authority within a game, we must view this tactic as a should-not. The short-term benefit is not worth the long-term negatives learned by the players, such as "Referees all stink (or have it in for our team)," "We lose games because of bad calls," and worst of all, "We have every right to blast the referees without restraint when we don't like a call." We can find other motivational gimmicks that don't compromise our Christian testimony.

Revenge is another sensitive topic for those who seek to coach in a Christ-like way. 1 Samuel 24 tells a story that puts revenge in the proper perspective. In the midst of Saul's pursuit of David, David found Saul alone in a cave. He could have killed Saul on the spot and called it self-defense. Yet David chose only to cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Then he showed the cut-off piece to Saul to indicate that, rather than seek harmful revenge, he was simply making a point. When our athletes are defeated soundly or wronged by opponents who might act inappropriately, how should we tell them to respond? Certainly not by returning with dirty or violent play. Rather, by using the situation that upsets us to motivate us to play harder, we make a point just as David did by cutting off a corner of Saul's robe.

Some coaches use motivational gimmicks when an extra impetus is needed. These are not wrong as long as they are not deceptive or demeaning, but with gimmicks as well as with motivational coaching in general, we must remember to be sincere. Teenagers see through insincerity easily. Externally, athletes should see the coach's sincere desire to promote high levels of achievement and affirmation. Internally, the coach must sincerely desire to teach and model Jesus' lordship over our athletic lives. What an exciting calling!

Christian Education in Eastern Europe: Are We Really Helping?

John W. McNeill

John W. McNeill is an education and leadership consultant for Youth With A Mission. For the past ten years he and his wife have been offering leadership training in Eastern Europe, since 1990 in the former U.S.S.R. The McNeills make their home in Dunham, Quebec.

In the missionary maelstrom of Eastern Europe, hundreds of Christian education and training programs have been established in a few years' time. Unfortunately, the model generally being followed is to transplant Western curriculum, including institutional forms, with numerous denominational variations.

Few people seem to be asking whether Western approaches are appropriate, for example, in Russia. In fact one prominent Western leader in the former U.S.S.R. told me that it was a waste of time for me to pose such questions. "Give them Western curriculum and methods—that is what they want!"

Eastern Europeans are going through a period of generational change. Skills that were useful in the time of persecution are no longer appropriate. The old ways do not always work well in an environment of freedom. Nor have enough of the present leaders been exposed to the kinds of openness and personal sharing essential to the effectiveness of an apprenticeship or mentoring approach to train a new generation of leaders. Too few appropriate mentors are available. Given these problems, the new, Western-sponsored Christian educational institutions being established in Eastern Europe could serve as seedbeds for new approaches to Christian education with a focus on character training, later to be decentralized and reproduced on site in local communities.

What is available in Eastern Europe?

Formal institutions include a variety of colleges, Bible schools, and seminaries that have the goal of training Christians for some level of leadership. They are characterized by a central location to which students travel in order to study. The obvious disadvantage of such a training system is that it removes the student geographically from the very context in which he or she is expected to serve. Such institutions often tend to attract theoreticians as teachers, people who are more effective in an academic atmosphere than in practice. The institution can easily drift further and further from the real everyday needs of the local church and school.

Youth With A Mission (YWAM) tries to combine evangelism training and social work (Lack et al. 1985). The result includes a variety of possibilities for practical work offered to the young people who enter this mission for short- or long-term training and involvement. The approach taken by YWAM resembles apprenticeship but suffers from some problems. First of all, YWAM's method appears to have been arrived at intuitively rather than deliberately. As a result, the initial vision has not always been effectively transmitted to the next generation of workers and leaders. In fact, a tendency toward anti-intellectualism in the mission may have, at times, hindered the thinking through and teaching of a clear model for discipleship of believers. More recently YWAM has improved its conceptual grasp of its intuitive strengths in order to be able to teach them more effectively.

Theological Education by Extension (TEE) has powerful inherent advantages as an educational method. Students can be involved in daily life and take their training in small doses. This allows them to bring real problems into the classroom discussions, helping to make theory practical. The close contact of teachers with local practitioners potentially will result in a curriculum responsive to local needs. Unfortunately, TEE has not always fulfilled its potential (Hill 1988).

The widespread version of TEE in Eastern Europe is known under the acronym BEE and began with the concept of providing selected Christian literature in the various languages of the region, taught through translators. A profound lack of comprehension for local issues, needs, and personal feelings often accompanied this approach. Western teachers, who usually did not understand the language, and whose only contact with the local people was mediated by a translator, were in no position to teach by sharing their lives with the class or to be mentors. As a result, this approach became a poor man's version of a centralized formal institution, wasting the potential advantages of the TEE model.

Another drawback is that BEE often uses teaching materials with multiple choice questions that are a genuine insult to any intelligent person. Westerners who are accustomed to multiple choice tests can be insensitive to the banality of the questions in the teaching material they use. They also are often unaware of the intellec-

tual level of their students, grossly underestimating their abilities. Accepting critical input from the students could contribute to necessary improvements (Freire 1992). Instructors could elicit student ideas, both in deciding what needs to be taught and in selecting the best methods to use in teaching and evaluation.

Mentoring as an alternative method

Character development was in the forefront of Paul's message to Timothy about Christian education. 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:6-9 address the New Testament equivalent of modern graduates of higher Christian education. Most of Paul's references relate to good character and its resulting behavior, whereas only one potential intellectual outcome is mentioned: the ability to teach. Paul's work to train Timothy resembled what we today call mentoring or apprenticeship rather than a formal professor-university-student relationship. Modern Christian education should be attempting to reach the same goals as Paul did. This is especially true in Eastern Europe where the situation is complicated by the churches' desperate shortage of trained believers and the limited financial and educational resources available.

A proposal to progressively decentralize and "deschool" Christian training is, of course, a threat to many traditional faculty members. They see a practice-based proposal as a threat to institutions seeking or desiring to maintain accreditation. However, a carefully planned alternative approach to Christian education can attract the interest of accreditation agencies desiring to introduce alternatives into the mainstream.

The use of improved and culturally appropriate TEE materials may be a great help for future-oriented Christian education efforts in the former U.S.S.R. Mature believers can incorporate new converts into their daily life activities, thus involving them in practical learning experiences, similar to the approach taken by YWAM. TEE materials and other texts might be used in this context to help provide intellectual input, allowing students to remain in their local area. The result would be a generation of believers in the former U.S.S.R. who have been trained in the way of godly intellectual life and who know how to train others.

Our present Christian training methods tend to emphasize one ingredient in the mixture needed to effectively train believers—intellectual development—while perhaps assuming that elements like character development will occur elsewhere. But because character growth is a vital priority in Christian maturity, its development cannot merely be left to chance.

Mere intellectual training is not enough. Encounter with the living God, practice in working with people, and personal sharing in a relationship with a leadership mentor are vital parts of a leader's training. These elements of curriculum are more likely to be available in the local church than in the classroom. The model suggested here for Christian training resembles a three-legged stool: character development, the local church or mission-at-work environment, and a mentor relationship in which the growth processes can be carefully and personally digested. This stool is the base.

Eastern Europe must face questions of costs and the long-term survival of institutions funded by the West. In the foreseeable future Eastern Europe will no longer be the mission fund-raising sensation that it was, and political developments there already are resulting in some closed doors. If the Christian educational efforts begun with Western financial help have not found a way to survive by local means, they will not survive at all.

Christian education must be developed based on a strategy that is biblical, effective, and sustainable through local resources. Otherwise a dependency on Western support will grow, leading to a painful cold-turkey withdrawal, which might leave Christians in Eastern Europe worse off than they were to begin with. The resources presently available could, instead, be used to train a generation of new converts in the mentoring approach to Christian training. Thus prepared, such trainees can pass on their skills in their local communities in an effective and inexpensive way. ■

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Never on Sunday

Pete Post

Pete Post teaches and coaches special education students at Elim Christian School in Palos Heights, Illinois.

> *"But, why can't we go to the state games?"*
> *"My mom says we should be able to go!"*
> *"What's the big deal about Sunday anyway?"*
> *"This stinks!"*

As my athletes responded to my explanation of why we wouldn't be going to the State Special Olympics Track & Field Meet at Illinois State University—because the main part of the competition would be taking place on Sunday—a twinge of personal regret bounced into memory. I could easily identify with that hurt since, as a youngster, competing in the all-Star Little League game for my hometown of Broadview was denied by my Christian Reformed "doctrine" and "strict" parents. I could remember sneaking out from Sabbath naptime to ride my bike down to the ball field, hiding out behind the outfield fence and crying as John Phillips took my rightful place, made an error, and struck out two times. If only I were a Catholic.

Playing baseball had been such fun before religion seemed to get in the way. It had been so tough for me to mumble ". . . because it's against my religion" when the manager inquired why I would be unavailable for the big game. At least I could take some solace in the fact that mine wasn't the only "goofy" faith that forbade such fun. There was also Charlie Malk, an Orthodox Jew, and Lester Taylor, a Seventh Day Adventist. We really had a good team as long as we didn't have to play on Wednesdays, Saturdays, or Sundays. Unfortunately those dreaded schedulers of games had no respect for the "religious" kids on the teams—obviously they were fans of the team from Maywood.

Yes, I could understand what my runners were feeling and saying. And, truthfully, my explanations seemed inadequate to me as well. Yet I had come to understand something about taking a stand for "my religion" and had made a commitment that I would not coach on Sunday. My commitment really didn't have as much to do with that "dreaded" fourth commandment as I probably was leading my athletes to believe. How could I explain that it wasn't so much the "rule" as the "dedication" that mattered to me? How could I let them in on something that the Lord had done in my life? If only I had our Savior's knack for a great parable. But the words weren't coming easily.

> *"Do you let your kids play on Sunday, Mr. Post?"*

Ouch! That question really hurt. I had tried my best to avoid the conflict that bruised my youthful enthusiasm for a church that squelched certain athletic endeavors. My own four children went to a Christian school, so I could be fairly confident there'd be no problem with school sports. We found a community soccer program that had all Saturday games, except for the Opening Parade Day. We could always pray for the Lord to intercede with foul weather or a plague of bees. Perhaps the schedulers of games could find redemption in not scheduling my kid for a Sabbath game. But I could only duck the question so long and eventually had to face the Sunday conflict at home when my super-sport third son followed in the spikes of his first-baseman father and entered Little League.

Now, there are few things in life that I enjoy more than watching my children compete on the athletic field. I have even fulfilled a goal of playing on the church softball team with my sons. I was always willing to help coach although I would not take the manager position because of my commitment to coaching four sports at Elim and also because I did not want to jeopardize my fatherly relationship with my kids by taking on the role of head coach. I pride myself in knowledge of the game, so when the manager gave me a copy of the Little League rules, I read it from cover to cover. I was amazed to discover the following in the "laws" according to the Little League, Rule XV under "Regulations":

> The playing of games on Sunday is contrary to Little league policy. When necessity exists, permission may be obtained on approval of the District Administrator.

Where was this rule when I was a kid, and why were there four Sunday games on my son Luke's schedule? Luke's manager attempted to get me straight. "We love Sunday games, Mr. Post." He said. "It's the one day we can get all the parents out to watch. Everybody's too busy during the week nowadays—who gets

even Saturdays off anymore?"

Luke looked to me and asked, "I can play, can't I, dad? The team needs me." His lip quivered and my heart sank. "Yes, you can play, son. I love to watch you play and, you know, I even think God enjoys the games. But I also think we have to give God his due—and we don't let baseball games interfere with worship services. Okay?"

The deal was struck. But you never know when God will take you a step further like Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac. A few weeks later, it happened.

"Dad, we have a game far away on Sunday. We have to leave at 10:00. I can't go to church."

"I'm sorry, son. Remember, we don't miss church for baseball games. I'll get you to the game as soon as I can."

"But that will be too late."

"I'm sorry, son."

Yet, our blessed Father also gives our children the resourcefulness and cunning of a young Jacob. On the Sunday morning of the dreaded Sunday game Luke went over to Grandpa's house. My parents attend a church with two morning services, one that starts at 8:30 a.m.

"Grandpa, can I come to church with you today?"

"Sure, Luke, but we leave in about five minutes to get our favorite seats. Will you be ready in time?"

Actually, Luke thought he was ready. Our own church doesn't adhere to much of a typical Sunday-dress code. But Luke wasn't about to protest Grandpa's code—not when he was so close to the Promised Land. Quickly he came home to don a tie and sweater—his allegiance to God and team would be preserved.

As a "fringe benefit" he endeared himself to the same culprits that had so viciously denied me my rightful spot in Little League lore. It was interesting for me to hear Luke referred to as "Preacher" at the Little League banquet and hear the manager joke that along with his trophy he should receive a Bible. How had this kid, who talked even less than I did as a child, managed to get a message across that he's not just an athlete but a Christian athlete?

"Couldn't we just go to church downstate, Mr. Post?"

"No, we weren't about to compromise on this one. Luke had gotten his message across in his way. But sometimes it also works when we stand firm. When I first started coaching basketball at Elim more than twenty years ago, the state tournament was held on a Saturday and Sunday. Three times we had won in our district tournament, and three times I had to explain that we would not be able to participate in the state games due to a religious conflict. When I talked to the people at the state games, they started to refer to me as "that coach from the religious school."

But God had some marvelous surprises in store for us as well. For some reason, and I'm sure it wasn't just Elim, the state tournament was changed to a Friday and a Saturday. We have gone on to win seven basketball state titles as well as one in softball (also a Friday/Saturday arrangement). The wonderful people at special Olympics have also made accommodations for our girls' basketball and volleyball teams by allowing them to play all their games on Saturday (when the tournaments have gone on to Sunday).

"Maybe someday the Track and Field Day will also change. I'm asking you (my athletes) to be patient and let others know that it can be a little different to play for Elim Christian."

"Okay—but . . . "

And I pray that God will give me (and you) the courage and strength to keep answering those "buts." It isn't always easy to be a Christian—I don't think it is supposed to be. It may have even been easier when it was all just black and white: no swimming on Sunday, no dances, no card playing, no alcohol. Yet I think our Lord really asks for very little. Just love him and others the best you can. And when you have a chance to prove that love, you do it. I'm not sure when I first learned the following little song, but it says very much very simply:

"Dare to be a Daniel.
Dare to stand alone.
Dare to have a purpose true.
Dare to make it known." ■

Building Blocks for Your School Library

Helen Hunter

Helen Hunter has been helping Christian schools build their libraries. For information on a Successful Living Book Fair or book table for your school, you can contact her at the following address:

Helen Hunter
1132 21st Street S.E.
Cedar Rapids, IA 52403

An excitement permeates the school where the library is a vital part of daily activities, where boys and girls read and talk about the books they read. That kind of excitement can happen in your school. Smart planning will help you find the best combination of events and promotions to make your school's library vibrate with energy.

Not every Christian school has a "real" librarian. Parent volunteers take responsibility for the libraries in the Christian schools in my community. The people who are responsible should love books, be avid readers themselves, and catch a vision for building and promoting reading within their Christian school.

Many Christian schools have no library book budget. Without one, there is no incentive to purchase books. So ask your administrators or leaders to give you a budget. No matter how small it is, you can buy wisely and make the money go a long way. Plan to spend it—all of it—every year.

Organize a committee to creatively brainstorm on the kids of events you could do in your school to promote reading. You might want to set a goal of four events in the coming school year. If you already have an up-and-running library, you might be brave enough to try for one each month. Ask your school administrator to approve a year-long calendar of events. Then you will not have to ask permission each time.

Some ideas that can quickly build up the volume of books to shelve are thes:

1. **Hold a book drive.** Ask students and families to dig through their homes and donate to the school books in good condition that are appropriate for your school library. Be specific about what you are looking for and about what you are not looking for. You might say something like this: "ABC Christian School is looking for books to be donated in the following series: *Little House on the Prairie, Mandie, Sarah's Journeys, Grandma's Attic."* You might ask for specific authors. Include fiction, nonfiction, reference—everything. Specify that books must be in good condition and that reference books must be no older than a certain number of years. You can decide whether you are willing to receive books that have been underlined or highlighted. Anything you decide not to keep can be sold in a school book sale or given to charitable organizations or your community's library book sale.
2. **Run an ad.** If you are brave, run an ad in your local newspaper or shopper. A simple two- or three-line ad will do the trick: WILL PICK UP used books to build library at ABC Christian School. Phone 000-0000 to arrange a time.
3. **Visit library sales.** Many large cities and even some small towns have annual library sales sponsored by Friends of the Library groups. Usually large tables are filled with books. School librarians and teachers know valuable books when they see them and can purchase books their students will read.
4. **Watch for book store sales.** Semi-annual sales in local book stores are important events to watch for. Many Christian book stores have become good promoters, offering their customers twenty-five percent off on certain days during their promotions.
5. **Ask.** Ask students and their parents to tell their churches what the school's need is and ask them to pray with you that God will provide for the need.

In the News

Keeping the needs of the school's library in front of school supporters regularly is crucial. You may want to *place a small weekly ad in your school newsletter.* Design it so that it is recognizable and will become familiar by style and location. Use the space to promote new titles desired for the library. *Monthly appearance in your school's newsletter is a must.* Use your space for book reviews. Give students the opportunity to write book reviews and be published. You might save a line or two to ask again for a new title that you would like for the school library. If more than one copy of a book is donated, you might exchange it for another book, or you may decide to have duplicates of some titles.

To encourage reading in general, hang posters around the school advertising new titles and series in your library or available from publishers. Make good use of the full-

page color ads in Christian publications. Mount them on colorful paper and display them in halls and classrooms.

Readers Clubs

Start with ten new books and a list of ten students who agree to read at least one book each month during the school year. When each finishes a book, he or she passes it on to the person whose name is next on the list. The person at the bottom of the list passes his or her books to the person at the top. Some readers might prefer a new book every two weeks. You could then include twenty people.

If your school has many readers, you might even have two or three clubs for each group. Offer incentives to students who read ten books, nine books, eight books, etc. Choose a broad range of material—fiction, nonfiction, devotional, self-help.

Once kids are involved, they will talk to other young people who did not sign up to be in the Readers Club. At the end of the year all of the books go into the school's library. Dog-eared and beat up? Probably. But think of them as well read.

"Book 'n Burger" Night

Plan a potluck or ask several people to prepare food. Let parents know that, if they attend, they will be asked to buy books to contribute to the school library. Have books available that the librarian wants to add to the library. Each family who attends should be encouraged to bring money and pick out something for the library. The bookseller should have inexpensive items for small children to purchase as well as videos and tape sets that could be donated by more than one family. Your school library could net two or three dozen books and other items in a single night without having to purchase with budgeted funds.

Plan also to make a book table available for personal browsing and purchasing after the library event, where the families could select other items for themselves. You may be able to receive a percentage of the sales from the distributor.

One school held a book event where eighteen people attended. The book sales totaled over $300. Many of those books were donated to the library immediately; the rest eventually ended up there. Fifteen percent of the sales ($45) was given back to the school in books of their choice.

Another good way to earn money for your library is to have a book table during your school's conferences when parents are in the school. Ask a bookstore or a distributor to bring books for the whole family and give the library fifteen percent of the sales.

The above are only a few ideas that have worked for Christian schools. A Christian bookstore representative or dealer in your area can help you arrange these and other events or projects to foster reading and increase library exposure. ■

The End of All Our Exploring

Randall J. Heeres

Randall J. Heeres teaches English at Northern Michigan Christian School in McBain, Michigan.

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

T.S. Eliot,
"Little Gidding,"
1.241-244

If your school is like Northern Michigan Christian School, you likely have discovered that the frenetic world of education too seldom lends itself to reflection on the essentials of the Christian school: its mission, its goals, and the achievement of these. Many of us have perhaps snatched a few philosophical moments between bites of bologna or hall duty; however, the laboratory set-up, the foothills of essays becoming a mountain range, the search for a replacement bulb for the overhead, and the inventory forms the front office needed last week tend to consume our days.

What we risk is to lose sight of why we are at work in a Christian school. We lose vision. Thanks to useful and worthy books and articles throughout the years by wise educators, we have the language to talk about Christian education, but we too often fail to apply the wisdom to our daily efforts.

At Northern Michigan Christian School we knew we had to find the vision again. We knew we had to rediscover our purpose, our true country. What did we have to do to be a better *Christian* school? What we learned—and are still learning—may serve as a model or as encouragement to others. We had to seek, humbly, and to see, clearly, again.

Several years ago, a few veteran teachers and our superintendent created a brief mission statement, stressing "discernment" and "discipleship," and proclaiming Northern Michigan Christian School a "Christ-centered learning community." An attractive banner in our main lobby proclaims the mission. Of course, we knew that merely stating a mission does not achieve it. In the years since, the school has focused on one aspect of the mission sentence each year. This plan was a good start, but it was not always enough to shape with clarity the life of the classrooms, halls, and playing fields. We needed time as an entire teaching staff to reconsider, evaluate, discuss, and reflect. On February 5, 1996, we made the time.

Our Liaison Committee (Amy Vredevoogd, Deborah Heeres, and John Monsma, a committee that plans monthly K-12 meetings at our school), Superintendent Peter Boonstra, and three additional veteran teachers (Marilyn Visser, David Westmaas, and Randall Heeres) began meeting in September 1995 to organize a worthwhile inservice day—if the school board would grant our request—that would sharpen our vision and clarify our direction. We knew we could build on the good that was already going on and that we could also build on the camaraderie among our teachers (some of whom have been around long enough now to read the Christian School International pension reports with interest and some of whom are still paying off college loans with interest.

The planning committee met regularly through the fall and early winter, gained approval from the school board, and determined the shape of the February 5 meeting. The planning team decided to investigate three ideas: teacher piety, pupil piety, and faith integration in curriculum and assessment. We believed that these were central to our needs and that other schools—or our own in another year—would see other vital concerns. By January, after the crush of the first semester, the committee had determined how the staff would prepare for February 5, what would occur that day, and, perhaps most important, what follow-up activities would assure continuous growth as Christian school teachers.

On Monday of the week before the inservice, each teacher received from the superintendent the first of six questions for reflection. By Saturday, the teachers had written brief answers to questions such as "Why is growth in personal piety important for teachers?" and "What are effective ways of modeling Christianity?" In addition, each teacher completed a short question sheet about pupil piety: what we had observed and how we might foster it.

Other preparation by teachers included reading our school's curriculum guide for one or more subject areas and writing a lesson plan for critique on February 5. This critique, done in small groups, would focus on teaching Christianly.

From 8:30 to 3:30 on February 5

our teaching staff explored its mission as evident in these three key areas. Dave Westermaas led a discussion on teacher piety, followed by small group discussion (groups had names like the Kuyper Krew and the Article 71s) and a summary session with the entire staff. We recognized that personal piety was vital, that we needed to be more contemplative, that we needed to be more accountable to one another in piety matters, and that we required the wisdom that can only come from walking with God. We considered ways to develop a reverent, worshipful, respectful, and humble response to God. We talked of many ways to develop habits of piety: prayer journals, time for devotions, spiritual goals, stories of our own faith walk. One outcome of February 5 is that, instead of staff devotions every Monday before school, we now use two Mondays a month to meet in prayer groups of four or five. These groups vary in their activities, but all promote desired accountability.

From 10:30 to noon, John Monsma led the staff in a discussion of pupil piety. Determining strategies for developing Christian piety that translates into action was our primary concern. We cited ineffective chapels, trite classroom prayers, and simplistic moralism as obstacles. However, we also noted some successes, such as the student-initiated weekly Bible studies in the high school. Our final list of forty-one ideas included interactive devotions, personal stories shared with students, student interviews with spiritual giants in their lives, K-12 piety portfolios, additional service opportunities, the need for fresh language in classroom prayers, teaching the absolute truths amid the relativistic culture, and varying the format of high school chapels.

The afternoon of February 5 sped by. Marilyn Visser and Amy Vredevoogd had organized our discussions on integrating faith and curriculum. For thirty minutes we discussed the disciplines as described in our curriculum guides, trying to determine how our Christian principles and perspective were evident in them. At one time or another, nearly all staff members have been involved in the writing of these guides, so we had considerable confidence. We did, however, find weaknesses, which we hope to eliminate in future revisions. In addition, each small group reflected on the best ways to apply a Christian perspective to daily and yearly planning: What is the role of Christian textbooks? Would a mentoring approach for teachers be helpful? How often should staff meetings focus on this concern?

For the next thirty minutes—which soon became forty-five and could easily have extended to sixty or more—the staff divided into grade levels: P-1, 2-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12. Members of these groups evaluated the Christian perspective in a lesson plan handout prepared by each teacher. Helpful debate and clarification followed on both academic and faith objectives. Inevitably, these discussions led to thinking about assessment: How do we teach Christianly and how do we assess Christianly?

The entire staff met once again, with each small group briefly reporting. Then the exhausting, challenging, invigorating, worthwhile day was over. However, follow-up activities required the staff to continue the process, the exploration, already begun.

Our March meeting continued our pupil piety discussion. As the 1995-96 school year ended, the high school staff was renewing discussions on chapel format and purpose, and teachers of all grade levels had stories to tell about glimpses of pupil piety at Northern Michigan Christian. The elementary school teachers were discussing the relationships between pupil piety and classroom and playground discipline. We remain excited about starting the piety portfolios, which encourage students to review and to reflect on their spiritual journey as they attend our school.

In April, the various grade levels again met to evaluate new lesson plans from each teacher. Our summer teachers' retreat pursued our three key ideas in the light of our 1995-96 theme, "developing gifts." Steve Vryhof and Mary Lynn Colisimo of Trinity Christian College led us to consider our tasks as a school community striving to be salt and light. How should a school day be organized? How should the Christian school curriculum look? What could be done to make the Christian school more effective for all its students and for its community? In addition, in February 1997 we hope to have a second teacher-initiated inservice to explore additional ways to make our mission affect each classroom, each student, each teacher, each day.

We learned much. We are still learning. We have not found all the answers to our questions or to the ones your school may be asking or may need to ask. Asking questions seems to lead to more questions.

What we learned most was that, as a Christian school moving toward its century mark, we needed to ask what we were and what we wanted to be. How is our Christian school vitally different from other schools? Is it? What do we need to keep and what do we need to discard? How can we best nurture young citizens of the kingdom of God? How can we effectively aid students in developing their gifts, their whole being, for service to God?

The inservice on February 5, 1996, and the follow-up meetings improved our focus as teachers. Our camaraderie and enthusiasm—and some misgivings perhaps—coalesced into a meaningful time of renewal and reflection.

If all continues to go well during our exploration, we should continue to find our mission at the core, the heart, of what we do as teachers. In that way we shall know our mission, truly, for the first time.

An Open Letter to Principals, School Boards, and Teachers

Jennifer and Brian Huseland

Jennifer and Brian Huseland teach and administer at Winner Christian School in Winner, South Dakota.

Dear Principals, School Boards, and Teachers,

This is an open letter from two people who applied for work at many Christian schools recently enough to remember the process well. There are several points that we would like to suggest in order to make the application process better and the follow-up more encouraging.

First of all, scan your applications for questions that may be illegal to ask, such as requesting height and weight or asking for Social Security numbers, privileged information until employed. None asked what our race was, but if we are required to send a picture when we apply, doesn't it become obvious?

Also, check the grammar and punctuation on your applications. Many statements ended with question marks, and questions ended with periods; for example: "State your philosophy of education?"

Have somebody on your faculty or board fill out the application every other year or so, and take note of how long it takes to complete. It may be nice to think that a prospective teacher has applied only to your school and thus has nothing better to do than spend two or three hours filling out your application. However, in reality, he or she has to apply at many places. Thus, a lengthy application is discouraging, even if all your questions are great. Think about narrowing your questions down to a few key ones and sorting out from there whom to call for interviews. Check the format. Try writing or typing the information requested into the space provided. Sometimes the latter is the proverbial "needle's eye," and fitting in all the information is impossible.

Regarding the follow-up, letters of rejection are understandable. They are necessary; only one applicant will be chosen for a given position. However, try to help the applicant. We received many letters that said we would be great teachers, that we seemed to have many talents, but we were not hired. A rejection is still a rejection—and if there is a particular reason for it, please be honest and specific. Should the applicants work on clarifying their perspective? Do they need to make a more professional appearance? Or is it just that they don't seem to fit with the rest of your staff? Even though it may be harder to take, in the long run honesty will help applicants be better teachers if they are informed of the reasons behind the decision. We realize that such a response takes more time. We don't mean for you to send an explanatory response to all applicants, just with the people you interview once or twice.

If applicants have visited your school and interviewed with you, a letter of rejection seems cold and impersonal. Because of the personal connection we had had, a phone call would have been more courteous. We know that phone calls may be more difficult, but phoning is more appropriate for the second round of interviews.

Several schools told us they would be praying for us. Don't say this unless you truly intend to pray for the applicants—and that means more than a vague hope that they and all teachers find work somewhere.

We enjoyed the interviews that we had. It was valuable to put a face on a school and get to know the people a little more personally. We appreciated knowing about finances and salary before we had to uncomfortably ask. We also appreciated those who told us the interviewing/hiring schedule and decision date. Try to stay on that schedule. We received one "rejection" letter more than three months after our interviews, thanking us for our interest in the school. We had heard two months earlier already who had filled the position.

Thank you for listening. We laughed and cried a lot over your schools. Having been in the applicant's position, surely you can relate, but for most of you it was quite a while ago. Try to look at the interview procedure from the applicants' side again and remember the personal side. Some efforts in this regard, with a sense of professional courtesy even to the inexperienced, may make the whole process less tedious and better than it has been.

–Jennifer and Brian Huseland

Use Your Gift IDEA BANK

Faith Funk

Faith Funk is a learning assistant at Abbotsford Christian School, Heritage Campus, in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

We started the term with a blank bulletin board, and it was my job to put something on it—something educational and perhaps inspiring. As ideas for this assignment rolled around in my brain, one idea in particular kept coming back. I often had thought of my students as having both special needs and special abilities. A few of my students affirmed this belief. When asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" one of my students answered, "A farmer or a firefighter." Another answered, "A skating instructor." To my surprise, another wanted to give all her riches (when she acquired them) to the poor in India, and still another student simply wanted to be *herself* when she grew up.

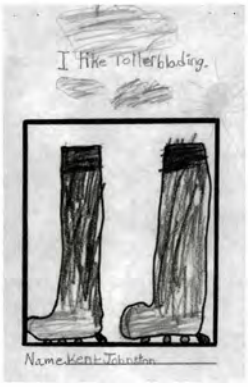
Putting the Pieces Together

I decided that the bulletin board would resemble a patchwork quilt and that both students and teachers involved with learning assistance would contribute to the quilt. Each participant completed a paper "quilt block" on which he or she wrote, "I am good at . . ." or "I like. . . ." They drew pictures on each block and signed their names at the bottom. I assembled the quilt on the bulletin board, alternating the student blocks with blocks of colorful construction paper. The caption on the quilt was this Bible verse: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

I didn't realize how rewarding, yet stretching, this activity would be for the teachers, including myself. Along with encouragement and enthusiasm came comments like these: "It's hard to know what to write." "People are going to read this." "I don't want to brag." "Drawing is *not* my gift."

As the quilt came together over a period of a few weeks, it was obvious that students found it interesting and exciting. Several students pointed out their own block, saying proudly, "There's mine." Some students visited the board each day to check up on the latest additions. I heard teachers talking with students about the meaning of the verse—especially about that big word, *administering.*

It was delightful to see the diversity of gifts represented on the board. Gifts included dancing, music, helping others, climbing trees, riding bike, doing chores, playing sports, caring for animals, babysitting, reading, writing poems, drawing, being funny, and—you guessed it—rollerblading!



QUERY

by Marlene Dorhout

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

Marlene Dorhout
Query Editor
325 E. Iliff Avenue
Denver, CO 80210

Q I have a student in my science class who complains about group projects. She is very bright and doesn't like working with other kids who, according to her, make her do all the work. I think it is important for her to learn to work with other students, but I somewhat understand that she could feel used at times. Cooperative learning is a valued teaching method that I plan to use frequently this year, and I don't want to excuse her from this experience. I could assign independent study material for her, but I would prefer not to. Do you have any suggestions?

A I agree that cooperative groups can provide valuable learning experiences. Certainly, like any other teaching method, cooperative learning should not be the sole pedagogical technique. When properly used and monitored, however, the method can challenge and stimulate all the members of the group.

Often "cooperation" falls apart, not just because of student apathy or refusal to work, but because the teacher did not clearly assign and define roles and expectations. I have seen teachers sitting at their desks, assuming that participation and learning are occurring when, in reality, the group is not accomplishing the goal. Teachers need to monitor, prod, question, or at least observe the process in order to place importance on the task.

It is true that sometimes the work is completed outside of school, so the teacher isn't totally aware of group participation. Even the teacher's best efforts to assure cooperation can be thwarted. However, if the roles of group members are varied and interdependent, no single student can take over or totally cop out. Your job is to set up roles that are by nature interdependent. If students select roles that they are interested in, they are more likely to invest themselves in the project.

You also need to consider your evaluation method. If you grade the project, you will need to decide whether to respect the individual input of each student, or to respect the level of cooperation. You may want to ask the group to write a self-assessment, telling how each member participated in the project.

Still, you need to consider that an exceptional student might need a particular kind of challenge. A year ago at Hinsdale Middle School in Illinois, a teacher from the Gifted Resource Center read a social studies essay written by one of her students. The following excerpts might help you understand the feelings of a gifted student in so-called cooperative learning groups. She also gives some excellent advice.

> The theory behind these group projects is that this teaches us how to work together, especially with people we wouldn't necessarily choose ourselves, and helps us learn cooperation and leadership. As these projects very often involve a class presentation, we will also improve our verbal skills and encourage creativity. Research is often needed, so we get to review those very necessary skills, too, right?
>
> Sorry. It just doesn't work that way, at least not in my experience in the everyday classroom. In fact, I have had very many miserable experiences with them. I've simply spent too much time and energy on trying to salvage projects and make peace among group members for the sake of a grade. Also because I am considered to be gifted and get good grades, I have had the very unpleasant and discouraging experience of realizing group members are perfectly content to leave me all the work.

The student explained that she ends up teaching the concepts, correcting mistakes, organizing the presenta-

tion, and basically using her weekend to polish the project because the other members of the group didn't follow through.

She recommends that basic techniques and procedures be taught with each assigned project. The selection of the leader, time allotments and group consensus for decisions, and consequences for individuals who don't follow through should be clearly understood. "Students should know they won't be blamed for others' incompetence, lack of interest, or lack of responsibility…". She contends that most group projects don't help the more or the less academically talented. "Cooperative learning and working together should mean just that."

As educators we know that all students are gifted in some way, but we have the privilege periodically to have an exceptional student whom the ordinary curriculum simply does not challenge. Perhaps as teachers we even have a fear that we cannot challenge that student, either. Putting her or him in an independent learning situation is isolation, but addressing the assignment as open-ended, allowing for in-depth study of a certain segment of the topic to be a part of the group presentation, is inclusion.

I suspect that because the cooperative group method has been around for many years and even is practiced at the college level, teachers and students are so familiar with the components that specifics necessary for success are assumed and not reiterated or monitored. Quite possibly also, too many teachers of the various subject areas are using this technique at the same time.

As educators we don't always know what is best for all kids. I appreciate your willingness to listen and care without simply labeling this intelligent girl as arrogant and uncooperative. I pray that you will patiently continue to seek answers for the appropriate teaching of the exceptional student, that you will help her discover that such talents can benefit self and community, and that both of you are thankful to God for the opportunity of learning together.

Excerpts from "Learning to Work in Groups" by Marie Becker from *Understanding Our Gifted,* Vol. 8, Issue 4, were reprinted with permission. To read her entire essay or other material about gifted students, contact Open Space Communications at 1-800-494-6178 or fax at 303-545-6505.

Q I work with teachers who complain all the time about their salaries. The school has offered to pay teachers more if they are willing to have bigger class sizes. Many teachers are willing to do this, but I feel that they are cheating the kids for their own benefit. I realize I am single and do not have to support a family, but I still think their actions are selfish. I either have to go along with their ideas against my better judgment, or I risk losing their friendship if I speak my mind. What should I do?

A I admire your concern for the students. Commitment endures the sacrifice, risk, and adventure required of service to a greater community. Obviously that commitment in certain colleagues seems to be lacking or limited to immediate families and is the source of your frustration and maybe even disappointment.

I can't tell you what to do; you have to do what you feel is right. Maybe, however, I can help you understand why those colleagues feel the way they do.

Peter Block, the author of *Stewardship,* calls today the age of self-interest. Immersed in such a culture, some teachers, too, have fallen prey to the theory of "entitlement," which rests on the belief that something is owed because of sacrifices made. Harder to understand, though, is sacrificing the education of children for self, wanting gain at the expense of others.

I am certain that the "family" issue is bigger than you realize. Many teachers are not financially able to afford the "things" for their children that they see other parents buying. It never sounds selfish to want the best for your family, so your colleagues genuinely feel that their spouses and kids are also entitled. That responsibility weighs heavily on their thinking and decision making.

Long gone are the days when we can be assured that we will be taken care of by our employer; that kind of loyalty doesn't seem to exist for the employer or the employee anymore. Yet, when we work for a Christian organization, we expect more; after all, we are the family of God and we should care for each other. However, that family also includes the children sitting in our classrooms.

Most of our Christian schools are private, supposedly parent owned and operated. Perhaps you can suggest an open forum so that parents are made aware of the financial difficulties in their school. Certainly they should own some of this problem if it affects their kids' education. Sufficient research is available to inform the constituency intelligently about the effects of larger classes. Such a suggestion will probably enable other reticent teachers to support alternative opinions also. With a skilled facilitator, Christian parents and teachers should be able to dialogue about this important issue and recommend a variety of solutions. I hope the parents are aware of the possible increased class size and the implications. Open discussion could prevent ill feelings, not just with staff members, but with the constituency and board as well.

Seldom is there only one side or one best answer for such a problem. Better understanding of all members of your Christian community could result by your working and praying together. ■

CONFUSED WORKS

by Ron Sjoerdsma

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

Bill Hamilton sat in a far corner of the computer lab. His face reflected the eerie light coming from his screen, the only light in the room. Outside, the afternoon grayness was turning to midwinter dusk. Over the twenty-some years Bill had taught math at Hillendale Christian Middle School, and the ten before at Hillendale Public High, he had survived numerous pedagogical approaches to mathematics. None, he thought, were so dramatic as the one he was facing now. Or maybe he was getting less adaptable with age. He figured that's what the rest of his interdisciplinary team thought.

Bill loved teaching math; he loved the simplicity spiced with complexities; he loved working problems at his overhead projector, watching puzzled faces brighten with understanding. During the changes of the past decades, he had stood with pen poised as students called out solutions in versions from New Math to Chicago Math. He could have fought this latest wave, which was so new it didn't have an identifying tag, but the other Hillendale math teachers had gone to a workshop early last summer and were convinced this was the way they had to go. Besides, the high school had already purchased the new books. Bill had to admit that he too had been seduced by all the beautifully designed teacher materials. This interactive, interdisciplinary, student-centered method that mixed the math strands through each other also seemed a logical approach when coupled with their interdisciplinary team approach. And on top of the new approach was his team's heavy emphasis on computer-generated final assessments.

At the thought of his team, Bill looked up from his screen; it must be time for the team meeting soon. He then realized how dark it was and was about to get up when Sara Voskamp waltzed into the room, flicking on the lights.

"Hi, Bill. You looked a little ghoulish sitting there in the dark." Sara could have brightened the room without turning on the lights, Bill thought. He wondered if he had ever had her energy; he certainly had no memory of such a time. "On the way over, I saw Kate and Jim talking to Peters in the office. I think they are trying to get some more software money out of her."

Bill sighed internally. A software conversation between Kate and Jim and their principal, Helene Peters, often led to some new piece that they were all supposed to incorporate into their teaching. Not that Bill thought computers were bad; they had their origins in mathematics after all. It was just that there was so little time for teaching as it was.

Sara continued, "I don't think I'm ready for anything new. I still haven't completely figured out this Works slide-show function. Isn't that what you've got here?" She pointed at his monitor.

"Yep. This is Missy Schmidt's final 'graphing and functions' project. She did well on the group investigations, but this individual work is pretty uneven."

"You think maybe she's getting too much help in her group?" Sara asked.

Bill thought about the question before he answered. He knew that Sara had very strong opinions about the positive value of group work—she preferred to call it cooperative learning. He really didn't want to tangle with that issue right now.

"She might be, or maybe she just needs to bounce her ideas off her peers, as you would say." ("Or maybe off me," he thought.) "I think her real problem here is that she had too much fun with the Works slide-show functions. Let me show you what she's done." Bill proceeded to turn the pages of Missy's project, showing color text and graphs illustrating the performance of the new car she had designed.

"This is so cool . . . sorry . . . beautiful. She did this all on her own? Look at the way she used little car icons in her graphs. Missy never does science lab reports that look this good."

"That's my point. It looks good, but many of her calculations are wrong, and she never justifies the tests she ran. For all I know, she just

made up some data without thinking about where it might come from."

"But you've got to give her some credit for her computer skills."

"Do I?" Bill grimaced. There was Sara again, looking at the redeemed rather than the fallen side of her students. She even joked about Sammy Grimes's roguish noises.

"I would. You must have something related to media integration or organization in the scoring rubric." That was the latest buzz word in the team. Since Kate Wells had revealed her method of scoring essays, Sara had insisted on scoring her students' science work with rubrics. She constantly wanted feedback from the group on her latest attempt. Bill preferred what he considered fairer and less messy evaluation methods.

"Well, I really hadn't thought much about it. But you're missing the point. Missy doesn't really know how to work with data—or at least this project doesn't tell me much about what she can do. And the real nightmare is that this is the first one I've looked at. What if all forty-seven eighth grade projects look like this? It's going to take me until spring break to get these done."

"That's why you need a rubric. And your kids need to know how you're going to judge their work." Bill was surprised that Sara continued to press this issue. He remembered not too many months ago when she was impressed by his many years of experience. And now he was too tired to fight her.

"Maybe you could help me figure this out." Bill surprised himself with what came out as a rather intimate request.

"I'm sure the team could figure this out in a minute. Where are Kate and Jim anyway?"

As if on cue, Jim answered, "Sorry we're late." He and Kate pulled up chairs to complete the circle around Bill's computer. "I hope you've got the whole week figured out. I've got to get home and fix dinner. Mae is out selling another house. Hey, maybe we could work real estate into our next unit."

"Come on, Jim; don't get us off track already. What took you guys so long anyway?" Again, Sara's reaction seemed very mature to Bill.

"It's amazing! Helene thought she could squeeze enough money out of the tech budget for us to buy Hyperstudio for the lab. Now our kids will be able to do really incredible projects."

Bill didn't know much about Hyperstudio, but he was suddenly thinking that if he had stayed at Hillendale Public, he'd be able to take early retirement.

Multimedia authoring is fast becoming a regular feature of many classrooms. Some of this authoring is being done by teachers who create multimedia presentations to enhance their teaching. From my experience, however, most authoring is being done by students in the form of multimedia reports or term papers for their teachers and their peers. In their new educational technology text, Mark and Cindy Grabe (1996) identify three types of multimedia projects: embellished documents, linear multimedia presentations (often called slide shows), and hypermedia.

Embellished documents are typical word-processed documents that have been enhanced with graphics and pictures at their simplest level and sounds and video at their most complex. Most Windows and Macintosh word-processing software can be easily embellished.

Slide shows are linear multimedia presentations that can be produced using relatively simple software like Claris Works 4.0 or KidPix Companion. These productions can take the place of traditional classroom projects that were done with poster board. The defining attribute of the slide show format is that it is linear in nature, meaning that one "slide" follows another in a predetermined order. Slide shows are typically projected on a large screen for the whole classroom.

Hypermedia projects are usually created on more sophisticated software like Hyperstudio, Digital Chisel, or Astound. They differ from embellished documents and slide shows in their organizational complexity. The user can choose a variety of pathways to engage the project's content.

Evaluation of all three types of multimedia requires more complexity than the typical paper and pencil assignment. Brunner (1996) suggests fifteen criteria within five categories that teachers could use to judge the most complex multimedia projects. Value is assigned to elements related to preparation, sources, organization, navigation, and media integration. Whatever criteria are used, teachers should make them known to students before they begin.

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Media Eye

Sherman Alexie

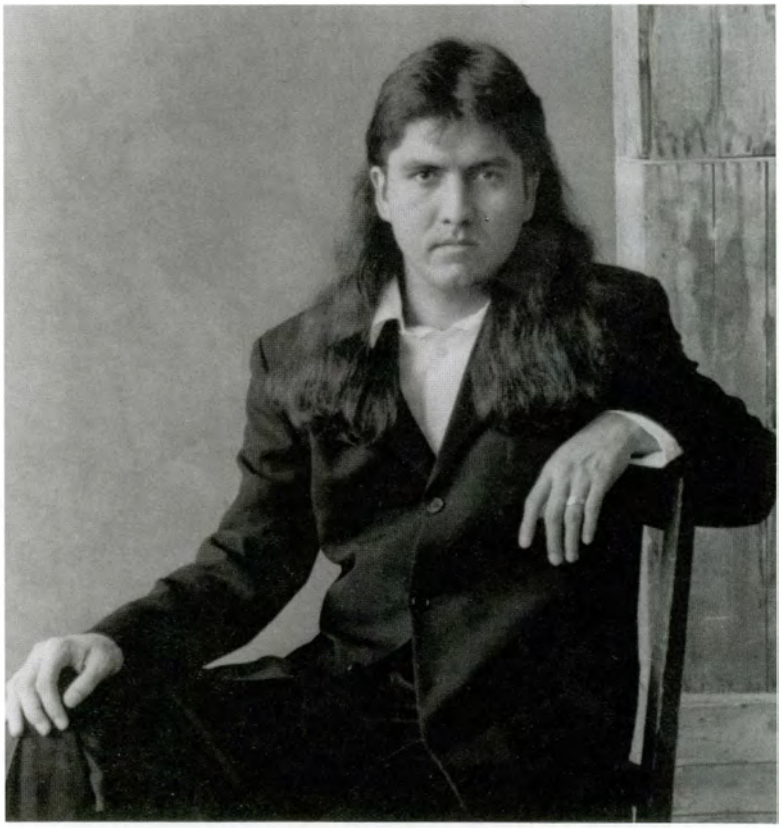
by Stefan Ulstein

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

When I visited the Little Bighorn Battleground (formerly called Custer Battleground), I was surprised to see a black-and-white photograph of some elderly Indian men who had fought in that battle. They looked to be in their seventies or eighties. What astonished me, though, was the date of the photo: 1948—the year I was born. I had never quite understood how recent the final defeat of the Indian nations was. The warriors who defeated Custer lived during my lifetime.

I had been reading Mary Crow Dog's memoir, *Lakota Woman*, and was thinking a great deal about the Indian country I was traveling through with my family. As I stood on a ridge overlooking the battlefield, I thought of my own distant relative who had died with Custer that day. Family lore describes him as a bigoted, cruel soldier who liked to brag about killing Indians. When he got on this tangent during a visit to the Canadian side of the family, he was taken outside and given the beating of his life by some folks who were less than enthusiastic about his genocidal vocation.

I looked over the gently curving Little Bighorn river, across the majestic plains to the mountains in the distance and remembered a passage I had just read in Mary Crow Dog's book. "This land," her grandfather told her with deep pain in his voice, "belonged to us when my father was a young man." For the first time in my life, I began to get a sense of what that meant. A defeat of such magnitude cannot be expressed in historical terms. It must also be expressed spiritually.



Sherman Alexie, author of Indian Killer
Atlantic Monthly Press
Photo Credit: Marion Ettlinger

Seattle writer Sherman Alexie is a Spokane-Coleville Indian whose novels, stories, and poems capture something of that spiritual legacy. His characters are Indians. Alexie does not particularly like the term Native Americans, which he sees as something of a contradiction, perhaps since the name *America* comes from a European Conquistador. It would be a bit like calling a Palestinian Arab a native Israeli. In a recent Seattle lecture he agreed with a panelist that First People was a

good term, but in his fiction people are just called Indians.

His first book-length work of fiction was a collection of interlocking narratives called the *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. It is about Indians who move on and off the reservation, trying to find a place in a society that has little use for them. He followed up with the brilliantly surreal *Reservation Blues*, which featured the blues legend Robert Johnson as a sort of Flying Dutchman of the American landscape. The novel explores the affinities and differences between two oppressed minorities, Indians and Blacks. Peopled with eccentric and unforgettable characters, *Reservation Blues* established Alexie as a major figure in current American fiction.

His latest and most troubling work is *Indian Killer*, the story of an Indian boy snatched from his fourteen-year-old mother and adopted by a wealthy white couple in the affluent Seattle suburb of Bellevue. John Smith is a passable student, a pretty good basketball player, and a dutiful son, but when he becomes an adult he walks out of his parents' lives and begins a descent into madness. He has no idea what tribe he is—"Indians always want to know what tribe you are"—so he says Navajo. He knows nothing about the Navajos, but they are a big tribe, unlike some of the tiny local bands like the Stilaquamish, Skagit, or Lummi. If someone asks him, "Do you know so-and-so?" he can say no without blowing his cover.

Alexie does not try to diagnose John Smith. He seems to be psychotic, but that is not what Alexie is interested in. He is after what drove John mad. He wants to explore the alienation that leads him into the internal hell of the serial killer.

John wants to kill the white man who is responsible for all the misery he sees. After he kills and scalps his first victim, a group of University of Washington students embark on a vendetta of their own, mostly beating up Skid Row Indians—harmless winos and bums.

In this volatile mix are two wannabe Indians, one a former cop who claims to be part Indian. Naturally he claims a small tribe that is nearly extinct and keeps sloppy records: "Every white guy who claims to be Indian says he's Stilaquamish." The other is a University of Washington professor who claims to know more about Indians than the Indians do. His nemesis is an angry Indian student who cannot make him see that nobody ever understood Indians by reading about them.

Alexie's work is full of humor and horror. The Indians that people his novels are cut off from their past, yet inextricably bonded to it. They are immersed in modern America, yet they are strangers at the gate. Alexie's love of Indian people shines through, as does his love of basketball, rock 'n' roll, and literature. His uneasy relationship with Catholicism is harder to pin down.

It would be a mistake to think that Sherman Alexie, or any other writer, speaks for all Indians. "I don't want to be *Indian du jour*," he remarked at a recent reading in Seattle. "I'm a writer, and I'm an Indian, but I'm a lot of other things, too." Yet, Sherman Alexie allows non-Indian readers to get a sense of the spiritual condition of a people who exist in spite of the nation they live in. It has been estimated that when the Puritans arrived at Plymouth Rock, the populations of England and what is now America were roughly equivalent: about four million people each. England now has about sixty million. One might surmise that there should be sixty million Indians. Or fifty million. Or forty. There are about two million today. What happened to them? What happens to those who survive? That's what Sherman Alexie's novels are all about.

Alexie's novels are rough and sometimes explicit. Several of my eleventh grade students have read them, however, and have been deeply moved. One Korean student felt a great affinity with Alexie's characters. "They went through something similar to what the Koreans experienced under the Japanese occupation," she told me. "Their language, history, and customs were deliberately destroyed, yet the people managed to survive. Now the young ones want to bring the culture back."■

Thinking 13

Jeff Fennema

Common Planning Time

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

Middle school students have a ready answer when you ask them the favorite part of their school day: P.E., science, lunch, the end. I cannot remember what spurred the conversation, but we shared some of these thoughts in class the other day.

My students' responses ran the gamut, so to speak. A large number mentioned their exploratory classes, citing the opportunity to choose something of interest rather than being forced into the academic labor camps (a.k.a. core classes). The more active students seemed to enjoy their P.E. classes, a chance to break free from the desks and tables that symbolize a nine-month state of captivity. A few mentioned a specific core class that appeals to their specific interests. And the conversation was not complete until at least one of the class members said the final bell was his favorite part of the school day.

A student then asked me, "What's your favorite part of the day?" I was pleasantly surprised with their concern. Another student bluntly retorted, "We're really not concerned. We just want you to say it's our class."

"It's eighth grade common planning time," I told them. The eighth grade teachers meet together during a scheduled class period each day. It is a deliberate and necessary time for us to touch base daily with each other, an integral function of the team concept.

At first my students seemed offended that they were not somehow included in my favorite part of the school day. One said, "Oh sure! That's when you get to talk about us!" Her friend added, "Yeah, so you can plan how to make our lives miserable." This mysterious and secretive meeting time seemed to pique their curiosity. As the good-natured beratement continued, another student from across the room suggested to his friends that this is the time when the eighth grade teachers get to break out the six-packs they have stored in the fridge.

"Sure," I joked. "But there are some other things I like about this time of the day. I admit, we do talk about you, to make sure things are going okay. If a couple of us are having problems with one of you, then we need to do something about it."

"Like what?" a student shot back.

"Well, sometimes we try to figure out different approaches in dealing with some of you. If something isn't working, we try something new." I was trying to make a point without being too specific.

"Like what?" Same challenge, different student. So much for the vague approach.

"Okay, I'll use Keith as an example." Keith had given me problems from day one. He had walked into eighth grade with a grudge and a fighter pilot's attitude. During the first few weeks he had split time between my classroom and the hallway. Although we try not to discuss discipline problems in front of the students, in this case, both teachers and students were aware of Keith's improvement. On a few occasions I had praised him in front of the class about his positive leadership.

"You all know that Keith and I had some problems with each other at the beginning of the year," I said. "I talked about it with the other teachers during our common planning time. Mr. Menning told me what he and Keith had done when they were having some problems." Mitch Menning, a first-year teacher, had asked Keith to set goals for himself for the rest of the year. Keith had constructed a contract in his own words, and both had signed it. Mitch had to pull out the contract a few weeks afterward to review it with Keith, but in general the contract idea had been successful. I explained to my class that Mr. Menning had shared this idea with me during our common planning time.

"And Mr. Huizinga gave me a lot of encouragement at the beginning of the year," I continued. Ken Huizinga, a thirty-year veteran, sensed that I was struggling with the transition from teaching seventh graders last year to now teaching eighth graders.

"I had been used to shy, quiet seventh graders who needed to be drawn out during the first weeks of school."

The wry grins appeared on the students' faces. "We didn't need that, did we?" one surmised.

"That's an understatement!" I responded. One of my colleagues who teaches seventh grade had sensed the oncoming storm during the first few minutes before the initial back-to-school bell rang in August. She later told me she had wondered how it was going to work to have three new eighth grade teachers and an eighth grade class ready to take charge of what was now "their middle school."

"The first two weeks of school really threw me off," I confessed to my class. "Mr. Huizinga talked me through it and gave me some really good advice. He also held me accountable when I messed up."

Ah, dirt! The eyes lit up. "Like when?" a future tabloid reporter inquired.

"Well," I responded, "that's the stuff that stays with the teachers." The objections and protests flew around the room.

"I knew it!" a young sleuth declared. She was ready to dig into this hidden conspiracy.

"But I can tell you this." Time to redirect their attention. "We do hold each other accountable, and we also encourage each other. As a matter of fact, we spend one planning period a week praying together.

Silence. Blank looks.

"We share prayer requests with each other. We ask God to help us; we ask forgiveness for when we blow it. We even pray for all of you. You know, Mr. Gibbons has some of the most beautiful prayers for you guys."

This seemed to strike them. Tim Gibbons, another first-year teacher, has one of the hugest hearts in education. He genuinely loves the students, and a few have viewed this as a license to push the limits with him.

"A couple of you have really tested him this year. I wish so much that you could hear some of his prayers." I intended giving not so much a guilt trip as an example of *pathos* made real.

"Anyhow, what were we talking about?" Sidetracked again. "Oh yeah, my favorite part of school. Um, we need to get through this story before the bell rings." Groans. The "teachable moment" had officially concluded.

We did not discuss other functions of our common planning time: integrating lessons, reviewing the past week, planning the next week, and conferencing with students. At best these would be quaint points of interest to the class. However, we did uncover an area of our teaching profession that usually remains invisible.

Maybe these students developed a greater appreciation for our commitment to them, or maybe it simply turned into telephone fodder that evening. Whatever the case, I was grateful they were so inquisitive about this "secret" time their teachers spend together. Now, if only I could make the rules of punctuation seem equally intriguing.

BOOK Review

by Steve J. Van Der Weele

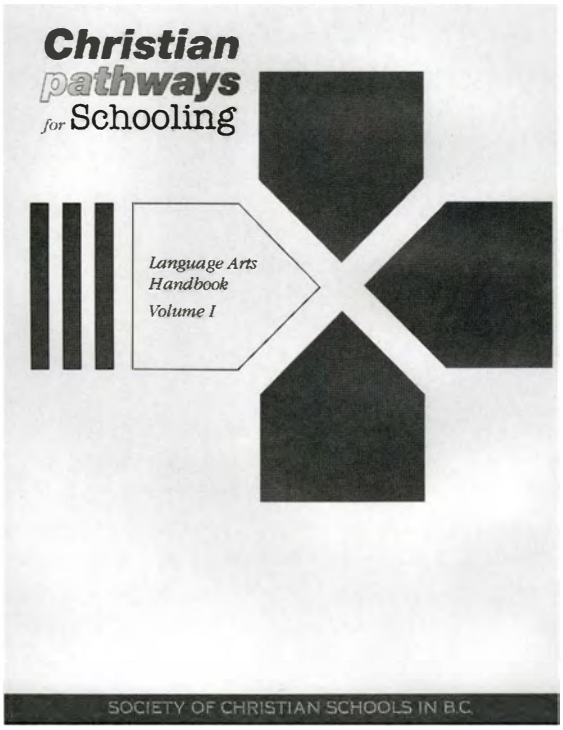
Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia, *Language Arts Handbook*, in two volumes, 2nd edition, 1996 SCS, B.C., 7600 Glover Road, V2Y 1Y1, Langley, B.C. 743 pp. $65.00 for American CSI schools, $80.00 CDN for Canadian CSI schools.

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, professor emeritus of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The foreword to this impressive publication alludes—and to remain discreet it can only allude—to the industriousness, tenacity, commitment, and idealism of a large group of committee members who decided in 1989 that the time had come for Christian teachers in Canada to provide a comprehensive guide for teaching the arts of reading and writing and for the over-all promotion of literacy. Five individuals served on the committee throughout the six years; nine more served for varying lengths of time. No fewer than eleven people were involved in the writing itself. Lloyd Den Boer is listed as editor. It is an understatement, therefore, to have the editors say, "Whoever finds this book helpful owes a debt of gratitude for the many hours these people have spent giving birth to this document."

The editors make another important acknowledgement. By a fortuitous circumstance, Dr. Robert Bruinsma, of King's College in Edmonton, was preparing for publication his *Language Arts in the Christian School* at the time the book was conceived. His book became the cornerstone of the committee's work; it set the direction for the concepts, strategies, assumptions, and information that has gone into this encyclopedia of language instruction.

The divisions for volume one (after a brief introduction) are designated as follows: Building a Language Learning Community, Emergent Reading and Writing, Language Across the Curriculum, and Reading. Volume two continues with these titles: Writing, Strategies and Activities, Assessment and Evaluation, and the Role of the Library/Resource Center.



The very first of these headings, "Building a Language-Learning Community," establishes the basic learning environment for the ensuing discourse. Classroom dynamics are to be communal rather than individualistic. The older formula that education has to do with "the private world of a man and a book" has given way to the belief that "when all in the community are supported by each other and held accountable for their own development," learning takes place more rapidly and meaningfully (5). Thus, the strategies, exercises, and pedagogical processes require that students work with each other in groups on a variety of tasks and projects. It is too late in the day to question the wisdom of this turn-about, though it makes people from a previous generation, like myself, wonder how the different sociology and the more authoritative educational structure have affected the final results of our training. Certainly, this publication is admirably appropriate for the pedagogical goals and processes that the educators who prepared this book envision for their students. And I am certain that if I were a beginning teacher, I would be grateful for the wealth of suggestions, strategies, and examples for my classroom. This compilation would improve my efficiency and hasten my pedagogical maturity. But even if I were an experienced teacher still in the classroom, I would appreciate the time-saving suggestions,

which capitalize so effectively on the child's own experiences. I would find lesson planning less onerous, and the numerous lists of resources would save me several summers of work.

What I would find even more relevant, ultimately, no matter the stage of my career, is the challenge of making the classroom awash in print. I would indeed wish to make the child feel at ease with print and writing conventions from his or her very first day at school. I would try to make reading and writing truly a joyful and rewarding experience. I would wish to help my students celebrate the great gift of language and exercise stewardship over it.

So, the classroom will become a literacy center, where children will be encouraged to read, to write, to speak, and—sometimes—to listen, at the appropriate grade level, although the grade levels are not specifically designated for the various activities. Controversies such as the phonics-versus-context debate are transcended, swept away in new patterns of creativity and discipline. Classroom newspapers, student journals, and individual writing folders are the order of the day. Spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary are taught in context. And always the student is required not to passively receive rules and information, but to respond, emulate, participate, evaluate, compose, and illustrate his or her own thoughts and ideas, no matter how deficient they may appear to an adult.

Two features especially caught my attention. First, the unit on poetry, which is well done, provides a fine catalog of poetic structures and devices that are within the student's ability to understand and emulate (the haiku, the couplet, acrostics, for example). This unit would be enhanced, however, with some attention to metaphors and similes, where the most creative use of language occurs. The unit seems incomplete without such treatment. To be sure, a segment is devoted to figurative language elsewhere (452-3), but it is done rather perfunctorily and is lacking in excitement. Second, the closing pages, assessing the use of the computer/word processor in the classroom, have the weight of wisdom behind them. Computer equipment must not be intrusive; it must be more than a glorified workbook, and it neither must nor can it replace the teacher. This equipment, however, is able to enhance the pedagogy of certain activities, depending on the training of the teacher and the adeptness of the student.

I offer several suggestions the editors may wish to consider for subsequent editions. I would ask them to use *sharing* in its strictest sense, in the dictionary sense, rather than in its trendy sense as a synonym for all other kinds of activities for which we already have perfectly respectable verbs*: discuss, report, inform, respond, demonstrate, tell.*

I would remind them, too, that ever since Arthur Quiller Couch's classical essay titled "On Jargon," that word has taken on a pejorative spin. College texts treat jargon as rhetorical dishonesty, evasion, obfuscation, character weakness even. The term *technical* or *professional* is more appropriate than the word *jargon* in a treatment of specialized vocabulary.

And is it fair to tell the students, just when they have discovered a delightful phrase (toe the line, for example), that they have succumbed to a cliché or over-used word? It is still fresh to them, and perhaps they should be allowed to enjoy it for a while.

I would appreciate more emphasis on the use of a dictionary than the work seems to call for. And *enunciation* should be part of any evaluation of an oral performance; it is not included. When Augustine answers *enunciation* three times to the question "What is the most important element in the art of speaking?" it seems right to pay some attention to this component. In this age of slovenliness in so many acts of behavior, students should be made accountable, as a courtesy to the community, in their speaking as much as in their spelling.

And surely the apt student will find some excitement in the use of transitional devices—those helpful clues that link new material to the old—the additives, the adversatives, the concessives, and the like. Skillful use of these clues indicates the stage of a writer's maturity.

The editors are prescient in acknowledging the major role of parents and peers in a child's education. That recognition is the educational news of the day—though teachers, of course, have known this to be true all along. Thus, the recommendation that parents read to their children at least twenty minutes a day remains enormously important and should constantly be brought to the attention of the parents. Unfortunately, the teacher often, by default, has to substitute for parents—a situation that provides special challenges. This publication will enable the teacher to make the most efficient use of time and resources toward accomplishing what, alas, parents and peers have left undone.

Frederick Buechner has this to say about the mystery and power of words: ". . . not even across great distances of time and space do [words] ever lose their capacity for becoming incarnate. . . . the reading of [words] is sacramental. . . . a library is as holy a place as any temple is holy because through words which are treasured in it the Word itself becomes flesh again and again and dwells among us and within us, full of grace and truth." ("The Speaking and Writing of Words," in *A Room Called Remember*, 181). These words describe the gift of language the writers of this volume also treasure as they launch this work.

I cannot conceive of a school committed to the aims as described above wanting to be without *Language Arts Handbook*, Vol. II, of the Christian Pathways for Schooling series of the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia.

Telling It True

Nancy J. Knol teaches eighth grade English and Bible at Creston Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I have been gone for several days now from school, and returning briefly today made me smile for a number of reasons. My husband often accuses me of having taught middle school for so long that I have trouble recognizing what he calls "middle school behavior" in myself. Having been absent and returning helped me see things a little more from his perspective. It was kind of like returning to a culture that you had left behind for a time.

I walked into a study hall and was immediately greeted with questions and comments. But they were more straightforward and intimate in nature than what I had been hearing mainly from adults for the past four days. Things like "Will your son be able to see?" "Did you miss me?" "Are you sad?" And then the audacious: "Did you get my book report graded?" "Can you explain this to me a minute?" Then there were those delightfully absurd reminders of the often thoughtless, pointless back roads that many of these precious people travel on the majority of the day.

There was Chuck making a crown of sorts for himself, with equations scribbled all over it. The stapler didn't work as he was trying to put it together, so he threw it to the floor and grinned at me with the comment, "This sometimes helps."

There was Allison, wandering down the hall with stickers on her forehead and both cheeks. She was urging her friend to wear some too.

And suddenly Nick came bounding up. I noticed he had a rather sizable, very round red bruise in the middle of his forehead. I touched it gingerly. "What's this? A skiing fall?"

He shook his head and mumbled, "Naw, I put the suction cup of that little ping pong net on my forehead during noon hour."

This is where I have chosen to land, at least for now. It's been eight years. It was never my plan to teach this age, and yet, having come here, I am pulled in. I love the direct confrontations. The impulsive, "without knowing why" behavior intrigues me, almost haunts me, as I recall roaming that territory myself some years back.

I tell my husband, "This is the place where I have found the most truth." There is no room here for pretend . They are still innocent enough to recognize pretense and vulnerable enough to find themselves dabbling in it. If you try to build walls of defense or safety, they will tear them down if they love you, and leave you to rot behind them if they hate you. There is little in between.

So often people ask me what grade I teach, and when I tell them, they usually sigh and shake their heads. "Such an awful age—how do you do it?" My answer is, more often than not, "I love this age. They keep me honest."

Tomorrow I will return. It will be like coming home. ▩

Can You Hug the Hurt Away?

Carol Westendorp is a grade four Christian school teacher from Dunnville, Ontario.

As I was waiting in line to offer my condolences to the family, a whole myriad of thought went through my head. I hadn't expected to be in this line in the first place. With only one hour for visitation before the funeral service began, I had figured I'd get to the church just on time to get a seat. I didn't have time to prepare; I needed to think about the emotions I was feeling and the words I was going to say. What do you say to a lady so suddenly a widow, or to her four children, for that matter? And not just any four children but four children I had taught? Why is it that adults are so often afraid to show their emotions? You can't wear your emotions on your sleeve, or let anyone see how you're feeling, so people say. But I was literally wearing my emotions all over my face! Standing in this line, waiting, waiting, waiting. The tears had already started.

As I looked beyond the row of people in front of me, I was trying to get a glimpse of the children. I knew that what I saw on their faces would greatly affect my face. But I had to be strong for them. Don't let them see your tears. Be strong. Be strong!

But the tears came anyway, no matter how much I willed them to go away. And my nose started to run. I was quickly becoming a mess. On, no. Be strong for the children!

And then, the most amazing thing happened. The line was slowly creeping forward, and suddenly, there I was, looking into the face of my little, precious grade four student. She looked into my eyes and I looked into hers. She seemed to be somewhat surprised to see me standing there. And yet, there we were, both so vulnerable, looking at each other, unsure, suddenly timed.

I reached out and gently placed my hand on her cheek, the same hand that desperately clutched a soggy tissue. And that's when we knew it would be all right. We embraced. I can still feel those small arms, holding me in that most precious of hugs. No, the pain of a sudden death would not quickly pass, but for that moment, my student hugged all of my hurt away. I had gone to be strong for her, but she was there to be strong for me.

Can a student and a teacher meet on such personal ground? I never had to deal with death so very close to one of my students before. No one can ever teach you how to deal with that. But I learned something so meaningful that day. I learned that we are all children of the Lord, and that we are all much closer to each other's lives than we may ever dare to admit. There are no distinctions between teacher and student at such a time as death. The bond between us is strong and deep, and we can be there for each other to hug the hurts away.

Thank you, God, for showing me such love through the eyes and arms of your precious children. ■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