



Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Teaching with Technology

Perspectives

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Statement of Purpose

Perspectives in Covenant Education is a journal regulated and published quarterly, in November, February, May, and August by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

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Perspectives in Covenant Education will publish any article written by a teacher, parent, or friend of Protestant Reformed education, provided the article is in harmony with the stated purpose of the magazine. The journal will publish articles whether theoretical or practical. All manuscripts must be signed and all authors are solely responsible for the contents of their articles.

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Mr. Bergman, in the Math Room, with the Calculator

Tom Bergman

I sometimes worry if I use technology appropriately in my classroom, or if I let speedy technology replace careful study sometimes. If I were to be indicted on charges of “misusing technology in a Reformed classroom,” would I be able to defend myself against these charges? Every Reformed teacher should confront himself with a question like this: Is my use of technology in the classroom in harmony with my Reformed perspective on education?

Perhaps charges could be brought against me because I use calculators in my classes. I do use other technologies, too (including pencil sharpeners, erasers, whiteboards, and rubber doorstops), but the one glaring example is the calculator. Every student in every one of my math classes has a calculator, and I am a party to it. In fact, documented evidence shows that I have officially encouraged them to have calculators. I’ll admit to that.

But, I mean no harm. My intentions are that the calculators are to be used as tools. When we figure the time it takes a projectile to return to the ground, it is helpful to use a calculator to accelerate the calculations; I want the students to see the concept without getting too bogged down in the calculation. After we learn standard deviation without a calculator, it is helpful to use it for subsequent calculations so we can spend time focusing on the meaning and use of standard deviation as a statistic. And although I teach them to compute 90% of 450 without a calculator, I would allow them to use one for 87% of 76.44.

There are dangers involved in having ready access to a calculator at all times. Sometimes the calculation itself is the necessary skill; toiling through a multi-step problem is per se an activity worth doing. A greater danger of calculator overuse is the loss of math memory. Students’ knowledge of multiplication tables and other mental arithmetic gets downright rusty. Even worse is the notion that finally settles into their heads: “I can’t do that in my head! You cannot expect me to do that without a calculator. I’ll fail!” So they no longer try to do—in fact, it no longer occurs to them that they might be able to do—simple arithmetic in their heads. The result is that they have a weakened sense of how large, how small, or what kind of answer to expect from the calculator’s heartless liquid crystal

display. (Are we \$10 over? Are we \$90 short? Do we have even a faint idea that 87% of 76.44 is going to end up somewhere between 60 and 70? Shrug of the shoulders.)

Am I toeing the line? Am I courting too much risk by using calculators so much? More importantly, am I being consistent with my Reformed principles? My top two goals are: (1) to have the students come to a greater understanding of who their Father is by considering the mathematical universe and (2) to teach them the knowledge and skills required for life and work in the 21st century. I believe I can do both without pitching the calculators.

I'll be careful. I don't relish being hauled into "court" to defend my practices. We will continue to set aside the calculators when that is best and we will try harder to use them only when necessary. Having to defend my methods has made me even more eager to use calculators only as tools in their proper place.

Calculators are wonderful miniature computers, but they comprise just one example of today's many wonderful technologies. All of us who use calculators, computers, Power Point, online databases, web logs, and more should be on our guard for overuse or misuse. A daily dose of caution is in order to maintain the proper use of technology lest we hurt the same students we are trying to help.

FEATURE

And Power Was Given Them over the Fourth Part of the Earth

Gary Lanning

Rat fever in Tobago. Ebola in Gabon. Cholera in Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, and Congo. Datura (Jimson weed) poisoning in Russia. Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever in Georgia. E.coli 0157 in England. Fascioliasis in Vietnam. Yellow fever in Brazil. Rickettsiosis in Mexico. Bubonic plague, H1N1, and Salmonellosis in the United States. Disease outbreaks are legion. Everywhere. Every day. To be sure, some regions of

this world are hit harder than others. More than 98,000 cases of cholera with 4,228 deaths in just a ten-month period in Zimbabwe. Nearly one million deaths from malaria per year among young children in sub-Saharan Africa. Sometimes war exacerbates the disease problem. Sometimes greedy dictators seem to simply not care. Whatever the case, no region of this world is exempt from the running of the pale horse.

But this article is not about emerging infectious diseases. Rather it is about internet technology in the classroom. The goal of this article is to illustrate how the internet can be used as a powerful tool in the instruction of our children concerning world affairs. We, in America, are often unaware of the misery that much of the world faces each day. Surely Christians in other lands suffer from disease outbreaks along with unbelievers. The internet can be used to call attention to the plight of these people. My hope is that this makes our prayers more meaningful when we pray for those believers in far off lands who we do not know but who our Father in heaven does know.

The study of disease is a part of the Anatomy & Physiology class that I teach. Among my students, familiarity with communicable diseases is limited for the most part to the common cold and the flu. Most of my students are unfamiliar with the diseases mentioned in the opening paragraph even though some of them are widespread, chronic, and deadly in various parts of the world. In addition, no longer are these diseases confined to far away places. International food trade and every day, around the globe, air travel makes people in every land susceptible to diseases that for many of us were once only known from looking at pictures in *National Geographic*. Internet technology in the classroom can give our students a much richer awareness of global events.

In order to accomplish this, I give my students a year-long assignment in which they need to report on various disease outbreaks around the world. Becoming aware of these disease outbreaks was once a difficult and time-consuming task. Not so today. I subscribe to a free e-mail service called ProMED-Mail. This service alerts me each day by e-mail to any disease outbreaks anywhere in the world. Some days I get five to six alerts, while other days I will get only one or two. In addition, this service keeps me updated as to the progress and increasing or decreasing severity of the outbreak. Each alert is accompanied by a detailed account of the location and circumstances surrounding the outbreak. Often a detailed description of the disease is included as well. This description may include the name of the causal pathogen, the insect or arachnid vector if there is one, and a description of the disease symptoms as well as mortality and morbidity rates. Often other miscellaneous interesting information is included. Finally, numerous links to related alerts are included and all alerts are archived and can be searched for by date, disease, or country. (By the way, I limit my alerts to human diseases. Animal and plant disease alerts are also available.)

Every two or three weeks I collect the alerts that I think will be beneficial for

my students. I forward six of these to a Hotmail account that the students in my class can access either at school or at home. Working with a partner they have two weeks to accomplish the following:

- 1) Read the e-mail alerts.
- 2) Write a one-page report describing each disease. These reports must include the causal organism, vector, symptoms, and treatment. Usually I require one or two sources in addition to the e-mail alert. The best sites to search are those maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization.
- 3) Write a one-paragraph description of the location and circumstances surrounding each disease outbreak.
- 4) Print and color a map of the country in which the outbreak occurred. The map of this country must be in the context of the larger geographic area in which it is located. This is to ensure that students get an idea of where in the world this country is located. Students must indicate on the map the disease or diseases which have occurred in that country. Over the course of the year some countries accumulate many diseases.

These reports and maps are then bound in a folder so that students get a feel for the number of different diseases occurring in diverse locations around the globe.

E-mail, topic search, map search, and print. All accomplished with the aid of the internet. Without this technology an assignment such as this would simply not be possible. Despite the dangers of the internet, with proper supervision and safeguards, it is a vital tool in education today and can be used to enhance student's awareness of the working out of God's sovereign plan in time and place.

FEATURE

Ye Olde Technology Balderdash

Choose the correct description. Each of the three former workroom machines have a true description and a false description. Can you determine which one is correct? Do the

veteran teachers remember? Have the rookies ever heard of such contraptions? Of course, the reader will understand that no teacher who knows enough about these three machines could allow his or her name under a title that begins with the words “Ye Olde.” We apologize for the omission.

Spirit Duplicator

A) The spirit duplicator was the first business machine to require only one master sheet. This specially-coated master sheet was inserted onto the ink drum, which came with its own tachometer lest anyone crank it at a rate greater than 90 revolutions per minute. The major drawback of the spirit duplicator was that once the master was on the drum, the workroom had to be completely dark. When the lights were turned on again, the master sheet would be chemically erased and ready for reuse. The coated masters were so expensive that at least one of our schools limited its faculty members to three sheets per semester.

B) The spirit duplicator relied on a double-sheeted master. The user would type on it, creating a waxy imprint where each character struck. The stamped image would undergo a reaction with a clear fluid that smelled something like alcohol. Unfortunately, mistakes on the master had to be scratched off with a knife. Master copies were available for reuse, although they lost some of their legibility over the years. Just ask a teacher who tried to use the masters for a decade or more.

Mimeograph

A) The mimeograph, or ditto machine, operated much like the duplicator. Both had handy mechanical counters for the number of copies. Both used a master sheet from the typewriter. One different aspect about the mimeograph was that the typewriter would strike holes for the master rather than leave only imprints. This throwback to the days of punchcards actually allowed for more copies and longer-lasting masters. Just ask a teacher who successfully kept the masters for a decade or more. Schools that had both a spirit duplicator and a ditto machine would use the former for small jobs and the latter for large jobs like two hundred copies or more.

B) The mimeograph had a specially patented cranking system. After the master sheet was in place, copies could be cranked out at a rate of 100 per minute. Because of a federal court decision in 1972, the mimeograph cranking system was engineered to favor left-handed people. In *Athelstane v. Xerox*, it was argued that lefties’ opposable-digit capabilities had the same rights of expression as righties’. However, the decision was reversed soon after that, so the mimeograph still stands as the only major business machine to be geared toward lefties.

Thermofax

A) Although it was the first of these machines to require electricity, the thermofax was the final phase of the mimeograph/duplicator technology before photocopiers hit the scene. For most books that had black or very dark type,

a thermal scanner (a very thin but stiff sheet) inserted between the pages of a book would send electrical impulses into the facsimile part of the machine. One drawback was that the scanning sheet could only distinguish between dark and light. Another drawback was that the heat from the thermal scanner caused book bindings to wear out too quickly. One big advantage of the thermofax was that it could produce virtually unlimited copies from one page. But the main advantage was that the thermofax machine was smaller and less expensive; therefore, each classroom teacher could have his own.

B) The thermofax was an improvement on the spirit duplicator and ditto machine. In fact, it was 3M's first photocopying system. It was handy for making transparencies, but the darkness setting was capricious and difficult to adjust. One huge drawback was that in order to copy a page out of a book, that page would have to be torn out so it could be inserted into the thermofax. Over the years, this technology has traversed all the way from teacher workrooms to tattoo parlors.

Contribution

The Spiritual Capacity of Covenant Children

Marvin Kamps

This is the content of an address given to the faculty of Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School in Walker, Michigan on September 2, 2009 for the beginning of their school year this fall.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory...But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?

even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth...But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned... For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.
(I Corinthians 2: 7, 9-14, 16)

After having read from I Corinthians 2:7-16, allow me to call your attention to some points in particular. The apostle speaks of the things that God has ordained for our glory in verse 7. In addition the apostle declares that the natural man, or child, cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. These things in Christ Jesus, the natural man regards as foolishness, nor can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.

In contrast to that natural man who is blind and thus walking in darkness is the elect Church of believers. Therefore the apostle spoke of "our glory" (verse 7), "revealed unto us" (verse 10). Note especially the "But we" of verse 16. This is a contrast among men established by the Spirit of Christ, who searches the deep things of God, which Spirit we have received.

The apostle is writing to correct the error of factionalism in the church at Corinth. As you well know, in Corinth at that time one man boasted of Peter, another of Apollos, another of Paul, and still another of Christ. Paul wrote to correct that error. The saints had to learn that they owed the knowledge of their salvation and their union with Christ Jesus to the Spirit of God, not to the mere human instruments employed by the Spirit for the preaching of the gospel. All glory and thanksgiving must be given to God. Human preachers are only a means unto the foreordained end: the knowledge of our salvation in Christ Jesus and the glory which "eye hath not seen" that has been prepared for us. Therefore the apostle in the next chapter writes to the Church, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours [as means or instruments]...And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's (I Cor. 3:21, 23).

I wish to draw from this passage specific instruction that relates to your task and calling as Christian school teachers.

Undoubtedly, as you anticipate the members of the particular classes that you will be teaching, you look forward to having children with considerable natural abilities. You want quick learners, children who are mentally bright. You hope for children who have pleasant dispositions and thus children who will be compliant and obedient. You hope they come from homes where the parents are cooperative and who properly discipline their children and who send their children to

school with the proper night's rest, clean clothes, and the training to be polite to fellow students and to the teacher.

It has been my experience that teachers, especially inexperienced teachers, may be apprehensive as to their abilities and qualifications for preparing these students to live a Christian and specifically Reformed life in the world. I have dealt with young teachers so overwhelmed by what they regarded as their calling, they were brought to tears of despair. But their fear was unfounded; we must be conscientious without taking upon ourselves the impossible. As teacher you cannot bring the children to salvation; you cannot give them love and devotion to Christ Jesus. Even though all the children must be instructed in the glorious truths of God's revelation in time and history, the whole of the Christian school curriculum, nonetheless the ability to see, to lay hold of, and to enjoy the goodness and wisdom of God revealed is not yours to give.

As teachers you must be mindful every day that the covenant children sent to the Christian school by believing parents have "the mind of Christ." That is the one expression in the passage to which I want to draw your attention. In verse sixteen the apostle writes, "But we have the mind of Christ." Of whom was the apostle speaking—of the apostles only? Of the apostles and consciously believing, adult saints in Corinth? You would, no doubt, readily acknowledge that the statement is applicable to the apostles and adult believers. However, may we properly apply the apostle's words to the young children and to infants in Corinth as well? It is our confession that the text includes the little children and infants. Those little children had the mind of Christ. The apostle spoke of the congregation as one organic whole. The covenant people of Corinth were all redeemed and sanctified in Christ. The children as well had the mind of Christ. Children, too, have received of God—as elect children—the life which is covenant life with God in Christ Jesus. The life given to little children in regeneration by the Spirit of Christ Jesus is the life God lives in himself and into which we are drawn by the Spirit. We must not be misled into thinking that this life is the life of mere outward morality and one of humanistic self-improvement and social endeavor. Nor is it a life of intellectual excellence and intellectual pursuit for personal satisfaction. That too would be humanistic. Rather, the life given of God in regeneration is the life of covenant communion with God Jehovah (John 17:3). Having received that life by the indwelling of the Spirit, they have the capacity to receive, to learn, to love and cherish heavenly and spiritual realities, which are displayed in the curriculum of the Christian school.

The importance of this truth for us is that we must view our children as able to see, understand, and grasp "spiritual things," that is, the things "that are freely given to us of God" (verse 12). A Christian school teacher, to be truly a teacher of covenant children in the Christian school, has to reckon with, keep in mind, and labor out of the conviction that the little children of the classroom have the mind of Christ. That is that the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ dwells in them. By virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit they do have the mind of Christ. This implies and guarantees that they are able to receive spiritual things, or truths. They have the capacity, or power, to grasp and understand, according to their

maturity, the spiritual things of the Kingdom of Heaven. To have the mind of Christ means that one is regenerated and sanctified in Christ Jesus. One has received spiritually eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a new understanding, or mind.

The teacher that imagines that all the children by nature have the capacity to receive the truth of the Kingdom of Heaven has an entirely unbiblical view of the children. A godly teacher that imagines that he or she must assume the responsibility to provide this “capacity” to receive the things given freely by God assumes far too much and takes on a responsibility one cannot fulfill; but the blessed reality is that we must know that God has already provided that mind of Christ to the children. The Christian school teacher’s labor is one of faith. We may not see the fruit upon our labors immediately, whether as teachers or as covenant parents. The fruit may manifest itself ten years later; but so what! God will bless your work to the spiritual maturity of your students.

To contend that the little children “have the mind of Christ” does not mean that they have a developed “mind of Christ.” It does not mean that the little children are not immature in their faith and undeveloped in this capacity to receive the things of the Kingdom. By sending these children to your classroom, the parents are acknowledging that immaturity. They are saying, “The mind of Christ in these covenant children must be informed, instructed, and through your instruction disciplined and developed.

Your instruction of these covenant children concerns the material of the Christian school curriculum. The school classroom is not to be a catechism classroom. Your sphere of instruction relates to the physical universe in the light of sacred Scripture. The history of nations, their culture, and its leaders must be taught in the light of God’s revelation of His sovereign decree. How could one teach biology or zoology without speaking of God’s creative acts, without considering God’s purpose will all God’s creatures, and without instructing the children that all the plants and animals are instruments and means to the accomplishment of God’s purpose? When you teach music, that most wonderful gift for the comforting and inspiring of the hearts of God’s people, then music will have to be taught as given by the Majestic Musician of Glory. Music can be perverted and corrupted into the service of sin and unbelief, as we all recognize; but it was God-given for our edification and comfort and inspiration for the glory of God’s name. So also mathematics must be taught from the viewpoint of the fact that God is a God of order. It would be insisted upon in mathematics, as a system of calculation, was created by the infinite God. The Christian school teacher would teach concerning planet Earth, the sun, and the moon that they all interact according to time and boundaries that God has established. He sets the limits of days, weeks, and seasons; and He does all this with a view to the care of His church. Our God is a speaking, communicating God of friendship in Himself and with others. The teacher who teaches language, or speech, or grammar must not overlook the source of this marvelous gift unto men nor the purpose for which it was given. The great goodness and grace of our God is revealed to us in the godly speech of our children in the covenant family and in their prayers that we are privileged to hear. Let the scintillating beauty of the virtues of our glorious

God be seen through your instruction into the realities of His creation. That is your privilege as teachers!

Consequently, the calling and privilege of the Christian school teacher is to develop the understanding, comprehension, and capacity for joy of the covenant child of God before the revelation of God in the physical universe. You must teach him to stand in awe—to have a sense of wonderment—before the realities of God’s goodness, wisdom, knowledge, and gracious care.

All this concerns the development of the child. It is not the calling of the teacher to create something in the child or give something no man can give. Please, dear teachers, do not assume a responsibility that is not yours. Only God can give—and God has given—the mind of Christ to your students. Speaking of old and young in the church at Corinth, the apostle says, “But we have the mind of Christ.” The children of the church of Christ are your students, children sent from covenant families and by believing parents.

We must be ever on our guard to be mindful of this spiritual reality. This is a spiritual reality that can easily be forgotten, if not privately and publicly denied. For although our children have the mind of Christ, they still have corrupt natures. They are sinful children in and of themselves. They can and will sin against you and fellow classmates and thus against God. In addition, the godly teacher also is imperfect and sinful by nature. Do not teachers sin against their students and against their parents? Afraid so, you answer.

Then ever be mindful of what is, indeed, ours in principle. Pray with the children and for the children as God’s children entrusted to your care. Labor humbly in a forgiving spirit!

Rejoice with the children that they are God’s children! Do not question that! Serve the redeemed of the Lord with gratitude, for all things are theirs; they belong to Christ, and Christ is God’s.

Answers to Ye Olde Technology Balderdash

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Spirit Duplicator, B; Mimeograph, A; Thermofax, B.

On Curriculum Planning for the English Language Arts

Suzanne Looyenga

In his article “Some Thoughts on a Christian Approach to Teaching Literature” from the *Literature Studies Guide* published by the Protestant Reformed Teachers’ Institute (1971; reprinted 1996), Mr. James Huizinga makes several astute observations about teaching literature that should be revisited.

In his introduction, my senior colleague Mr. Huizinga chastises himself, a teacher in his early career at the time, for sometimes having “pluck[ed] the dainties of Babylon for the children of God,” which I take to mean that he had chosen writings simply because they were beautiful and pleasurable to the senses, rather than those which were useful for teaching children of God’s covenant. I can identify with this as well. For one who is enamored of literature, as most teachers of literature are, well-crafted form and the turn of a phrase can bring such delight as to render us insensitive to its ideology and goals. We must, as Huizinga says, realize that “the bulk of what we call literature has been laid at the feet of the master builder, the Prince of Darkness...as part of his design to thwart the purpose of the most high God” (12). Satan loves it when our love for language surpasses our love for the One Who created it as His means of drawing His people into covenant fellowship with Himself. Mr. Huizinga writes that because of this danger “it seems to me imperative that each Protestant Reformed teacher of literature have a clear understanding of the role that literature can and must play in the classroom, and that we teachers as a group make it our business to work toward carefully articulating Christian principles which include a justification of literature, objectives, and methods.”

In order to accomplish this, he proposes two foundational principles for teaching literature: being highly selective as a teacher when choosing the literature to be studied in the classroom, and coming to the task with goals for the classroom that center around the Word of God and the historic faith of Reformed Christianity. He argues for this proactive approach to literature lest literature itself determines our goals for teaching it, and the lack of good literary material coupled with the absence of principled guidance for students would render the teaching of literature to be “at best ineffective, and at worst, dangerous”(13).

It is interesting to note that more than twenty years before Wiggins and McTighe brought to the forefront of curriculum planning their ideas about “Backward Planning” in their well-known book *Understanding by Design* (1998),

Christian school teachers such as Mr. Huizinga were well aware of the sound pedagogy of “begin[ning] with clear objectives and proceed[ing] systematically to realize them” (Huizinga, 13), but also to begin by building those objectives upon *sound biblical principles*. Wiggins and McTighe would call these the “enduring understandings” and “essential questions” that guide all curriculum decisions for choosing content, learning tasks, and assessments to determine whether these goals are being met.

The Michigan Curriculum Standards for the English Language Arts (ELA) are very much objectives-based, and have also been framed around “enduring understandings” and “essential questions.” Although classroom assessments are primarily teacher-prepared, the final assessment of classroom learning comes by way of the Michigan Merit Exam given in a student’s junior year of high school. As a private Christian school in the State of Michigan, Covenant Christian High School is not presently bound by the Michigan Merit curriculum, but our students, like other students in this state, qualify for college financial aid on the basis of their performance on the exit exam, which tests important core skills and content knowledge students should have for the business and professional working environments of our day as determined by educational research.

In the excitement of being involved in the curriculum changes that are sweeping our country in an era of great technological and societal change, we must not forget the principles that guided our school’s beginning—those enduring understandings that are found in the Word of God and in our beautiful confessions—and we must shape curriculum around them, for it is worldview that ultimately shapes a school’s curriculum.

This understanding *is* critical, because what our state is advocating at present is a movement toward a national curriculum along with other states, and that curriculum has principles around which the *what* and *how* of learning are being fashioned. In the post-WWII period, Ralph W. Tyler (1949), prominent in the world of education as a technicist, wrote in *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*: “Education is a process of changing the behavior patterns of people. This is using behavior in the broad sense to include thinking and feeling as well as overt action. When education is viewed in this way, it is clear that educational objectives, then, represent the kinds of changes in behavior that an educational institution seeks to bring about in its students” (6).

His fellow Chicagoan, Benjamin Bloom, published his own book, *A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, in the mid-1950s. It categorized thinking into pyramid levels beginning at the bottom with its “lowest” forms (knowledge, then comprehension) to its “highest” form—evaluation or “critical thinking.” In the chapter of his enlightening book on OBE, “Outcome-Based Education Explained,” Oregon’s Representative Ron Sunseri quotes Bloom’s own definition of critical thinking: “formulating subjective judgment as the end product resulting in personal values/opinions with no real right or wrong answer.” In other words, says Sunseri, Bloom’s goal is “moral relativism—no absolute truth” (Sunseri, 14-15).

According to Representative Sunseri, Objective-Based Education proposes even more than the Mastery Learning advanced by Professor Bloom, which expe-

rienced such a miserable failure in Chicago's schools that it was abandoned in 1982. It is intended to lead toward a restructuring of society, and has many proponents in the educational establishment of our country. Its intention, he asserts, is "to shape what kids will be like, and not what they need to know" (46).

Sunseri seems to be correct in his analysis. Notice these words in the introductory part of the Michigan ELA section of the curriculum:

The ultimate goal for all English language arts learners is personal, social, occupational, and civic literacy. Literacy goes beyond the ability to read and write at basic levels. Literate individuals understand the different functions of English language arts for personal, social, and political purposes (e.g. for personal enjoyment and interest; for communicating with and understanding others; for accomplishing goals; understanding others' perspectives; shaping opinions and attitudes, and controlling behaviors. (Michigan Curriculum Framework, 1996)

The introduction goes on to describe the attributes of "the contributing citizen, the literate individual" and it becomes clear that the lens through which a student views literature is all-important: "Ideas, experiences, and cultural perspectives we discover in texts help us *shape our vision of the world*" (emphasis added).

Mr. Huizinga's warning has been sounded more recently by others in the field of Reformed Christian education. In *12 Affirmations: Reformed Schooling for the 21st Century*, Vryhof et al call for a serious look at the school's stated mission in light of the Word of God by each new generation of parents, teachers, and students. They quote Jeannie Oakes, author of *Keeping Track*, noting that

We seldom think very much about where practices came from originally and to what problems in school they were first seen as solutions. We rarely question the *view of the world* (emphasis added) on which practices were based—what humans are like, what society is like, or even what schools are for. We almost never reflect critically about the beliefs we hold about them or about the manifest and latent consequences that result from them. And I think this uncritical and unreflective attitude gets us into trouble. It permits us to act in ways contrary to our intention. In short, it can lead us, and more important, our students down a disastrous road despite our best purposes (24).

The great objective of Protestant Reformed Christian education is true knowledge, not the successful blend of content and skills that leads to business and professional success, nor to personal fulfillment, nor to job security, nor even to become influential as godly citizens in this world, but to heaven and eternal life in the blessed fulfillment of God's covenant with us, his children. We must reiterate our mission to educate our covenant children to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). This can only be done by opening to them God's revelation of himself in his Word and in every area of his creation, and then working backward from that point to design authentic, relevant learning and assessment that mirrors our goal for our children to know God in this world and enjoy him forever in the next.

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Book Review

Children and Youth Literature

Brenda Dykstra

The House in the Night (2009 Caldecott Award), by Susan Marie Swanson; illus. by Beth Krommes. Houghton Mifflin, 2008. Recommended ages: 3-6.

How does light in a house make a home? This is the question explored using drawings all in simple, stark black and a few illuminated yellow items. Swanson names things such as a key, a bed, a book, a light, even the moon to create a soothing, poetic bedtime book for the child.

Response: Modern drawings and poetic comfort make this book interesting; had I read the question above prior to reading—"How does light in the house make a home?"—I personally, a predominantly left-brained person, may have been more intrigued. Certainly, the simple words and interesting drawings will draw a young child, and undoubtedly the illustrations are artistry friendly and fairly innocent.

I did, however, upon second and third read-through catch an underlying message of the author seeking to comfort the young child that order does exist in the world or universe. It's likely that this simple text is quite safe for the very small child, but to an older child, discussion opportunities certainly exist as to how the worldly objects can not console. Our comfort as God's children must be acquired in the night from our Light, our heavenly Father.

My Mother is Mine, by Marion Dane Bauer; illus. by Peter Elwell. Simon and Schuster Books. Recommended ages: 2-4.

Such joy for the young child enfolds on each page as each is full page illustration of a different animal and its mother. Text by Bauer is simple and short, poetic prose, leading the young reader into the excellent, pastel illustrations by Elwell. How does a mother owl show love? What about a coyote, monkey, or tiger mother? Join the little girl in the end as she draws connections about her own special mother.

Response: For no particular reason except the photos did I pull this book off the library shelf, but its rhyme and words are meaningful as well to a child who so intimately knows his own mother. The author is also the author of a Newbery novel, written for older children, but this story is definitely worth a look by a Christian parent. Certainly we can see Creation's splendor as the maternal instinct of an animal cares for young; so, too, has God endowed mothers with wisdom for their own particular children. Such treasures!

Thank You, Brother Bear, by Hans Baumann; illus. by Eric Carle. Scholastic, Inc, 1985. Recommended ages: 7-9.

How the story unfolds as the youngest of three brothers, Chip, needs to find medicine for his very sick younger sister Bright Sun! But how does one so small cross the wild river, the wide swamp, the high mountain, and the cold, deep lake without help or even his strong brothers Strong Bow and Shining Spear, who are out hunting? Chip then meets three friends—Brother Bear, Brother Beaver, and Brother Moose. Will Chip ever return, and will Sister Bright Sun survive?

Response: The illustrations initiated selection of this text as Eric Carle is an award-winning illustrator for his brilliant collages and unique die-cuts; both he and author Baumann were awarded Blue Ribbon Illustrator/Author awards.

The text is an Indian legend with the unique names and nature setting; the subtle message, therefore, is that man needs to be one with nature, and all are brothers as we fight the struggles of life. Though a young child will likely not catch this message, it still ought to be addressed. God's children do not unite with nature and animals, but rather seek the Lord Jehovah's strength to meet our daily needs.

Though I found the illustrations quite striking, I hesitate to highly recommend the text except for possibly a grade school study of legends or otherwise.

Bud, Not Buddy (2000 Newbery Medal winner), by Christopher Paul Curtis; 178 pages. Recommended ages: 9-13.

The ten-year-old African-American orphan named Bud Caldwell escapes the wasp-infested garage of his foster family, the Amoses, following their son Teddy's lies about their fighting, beating Bud up, and stuffing a pencil up his nose. The 1936 Depression-wracked Michigan confronts escapee Bud with some serious challenges as he runs away, though he manages to safely arrive at the Hoover side of Flint, where so many attempt to jump the train to get away. (Bud even loses his friend Bugs this way.) But Bud has one valuable suitcase of goodies from his beloved mother containing the flyer of famous Herman E. Calloway and some dated rocks. Using his "Bud Caldwell's Rules for Having a Funner Life and Making Yourself a Better Liar," he manages somehow to weasel his way to visit the famous Calloway, band leader of the Dusky Devastators of the Great Depression, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Famous Calloway then makes an exciting discovery about Bud through searching that suitcase. What will the reader discover to be inside that suitcase? Will Bud finally find family or some connections to his history? Just what were those treasures his mother was trying desperately for him hang on to? And how does Calloway fit in?

Response: This is one exciting tale that most children will be able to connect with and enjoy. The humor is just outstanding, and it's very clear the criterion for a Newbery was met in this vivid, first-person tale of Bud. His character is so very alive and so humorous in his antics. The encounters of Bud will leave kids just smiling and laughing. And the setting is easy to relate for those who know Michigan quite well. The Great Depression certainly comes more alive through this tale.

Some issues certainly must be dealt with, too, as Bud is a perpetual liar. Is lying ever permissible for the child of God? Bud makes it to Grand Rapids and to meet the famous Calloway partially because of constant lies to others. This issue ought to be discussed. The element of slang present in this book stands out, too, though this is clearly a part of the setting and character.

Though issues are present, students and adults alike will enjoy the writing and literary work of C. P. Curtis. This novel would especially be enjoyable for those readers who are struggling to find a joy in reading—each antic of Bud will leave a smile.

The history of the Great Depression is enough to truly recommend this novel to a history teacher or even a middle grades teacher. Smile on!

Invincible Louisa (1934 Newbery winner, for comparison), by Cornelia Meigs Little, Brown and Company; 180 pages.

Join the author as she sketches the biography of the author of a most loved novel, *Little Women*; she paints her Louisa May Alcott character as a determined feisty woman in New England United States during the 1830's and pre-Civil War. Louisa May Alcott bases her tale of *Little Women* on the story of her own idealis-

tic family—her own 3 sisters Anna, Elizabeth, and May. And how can Alcott not share unforgettable, high spirited Jo of the story when Jo is really herself? Join her on her life tale, though it includes many trials, too, as her teacher and intellectual father Bronson moved many, many times from Boston to Philadelphia and all over. Will Louisa explore discovering life's fulfillment and calling in teaching, Civil War nursing for the Union side, or even a solitary writer? Such decision for this invincible character!

Response: This biographical sketch clearly draws the history of an author worthy of note as Louisa May Alcott is a strong, interesting character. The book fulfills criteria of a Newbery in its organized plot and defined characters. I did, however, find it rather difficult to see how a young reader may relate to the many, many historical names and dates which author Meigs frequently introduces. But the author does reference a strong family faith in God, though Quaker, and this was comfortingly encouraging and not controversial.

I'd certainly recommend this novel for the child who takes a strong liking to *Little Women*. It'd be a novel worth considering shelving in a middle school or history teacher's classroom. Come and accompany the spirited author Louisa May Alcott on her life's journey so similar to the novel's main characters!

Book Review

John Adams

Lois Kregel

John Adams, by David McCullough. Simon and Schuster; 2007

Unless you have an interest in history, you might shy away from reading a biography, especially one as lengthy as this. Once you begin, however, you will find that it is as easy as reading a story. The only difficulty that I found was in keeping the sequence of events in the right chronological order, since there are a number of flashbacks.

John Adams was our second president, but that was only a small part of the influence he had on the beginning of our country as a nation. His story is fascinating, from his early history, his marriage to Abigail Smith, his development as a statesman and patriarch, to his rise to the presidency for a four year term. The story spans the period from the days before his marriage to his death on July 4, 1826. He and Thomas Jefferson died the same day.

He studied law at Harvard, but in the course of his life he would have little opportunity to practice it. He was extremely well read, not only in English, but also in Latin and Greek, as was Abigail. He was inclined to be stout, standing only five feet seven inches; I was surprised to read that this was the average in those days.

No doubt you recall how England sought to recoup its losses from the French and Indian War by taxing many items in the colonies. First there was the Stamp Act, by which all documents were taxed. This included newspapers, deeds, diplomas, pamphlets, bills, bonds, all legal documents, ships' papers, even playing cards, some as much as ten pounds. This raised such a furor that the Act was repealed a year later, in the spring of 1776.

Then there was relief until 1768, when England imposed another round of taxes, this time of paper, tea, paint, and glass. The colonists were irate, and England sent troops to keep order. This further inflamed the people. John Adams took the positions that the colonies had the right to make their own laws. It was much the same sentiment that was to be written in the Declaration of Independence later, the God-given right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

As the story opens, Adams and a companion are on their way from Braintree, Massachusetts, to Philadelphia, by horseback, a journey of about 400 miles. They were to stop at Washington's headquarters in Cambridge on the way. The trip would take fifteen days; today we count the time in hours. This was representative of the slow pace of the country at that time. Communication was equally slow; letters took a long time. The two men were on their way to attend the Second Continental Congress, which began in early 1776.

An interesting story is told about Adams in Philadelphia. He was in the habit of trying many different churches, of which there were not so many in Braintree. One Sunday he went to a Roman Catholic church, where he noted that the music, bells, candles, and gold and silver were "so calculated to take in mankind" that he wondered that the Reformation had ever succeeded.

A lot of wrangling and disagreement went on at that Second Continental Congress. Some were bitterly opposed to severing our ties with the mother country, not from any principal reason, but for the practical consideration that independence could never succeed. In spite of all the opposition, the Congress finally adopted the Declaration of Independence, authored by Thomas Jefferson, on July 4, 1776. It was the beginning of a new era for the colonies, and there was no turning back, although winning the war seemed impossible.

Many names are familiar; we have heard them all before, many times. Now, however, they come alive. There were sides to the character of Adams, his wife Abigail, Jefferson, Hamilton, Washington, Franklin, and other that I, and no doubt you, never saw before. There was bitterness, disagreement, backbiting, at

this time and later that you don't read in history books, even among these patriots who, no doubt, loved their country. I suppose that today we have a similar situation, except that it appears that our elected officials are more often motivated by greed than by love of country.

And we should love our country: not "my country, good or evil" but as the place where God has placed us, as His people. I well remember a sermon preached by one of our seminary professors the Sunday after 9/11, in which he said he was grieved because he loved his country.

Much is told about the years after the Declaration was signed. There was the ongoing war; Washington's poorly equipped army could plat at best a hit-and-run wart, with but few victories. Then, in a surprise move, the French West Indies fleet moved up to the Chesapeake Bay, and Cornwallis, trapped between Washington in Virginia and the French to the south, surrendered. It was an unexpected end to the war.

The story does not end here. The book is not even half finished. All of the subsequent history of the new United States must still be told, and John Adams played a large part in it. He made numerous trips to Europe. In those days it was by sailing vessel, and it was a long, hazardous voyage. The first time was to Paris, right after the Second Continental Congress, in winter, and he took John Quincy Adams, his son, with him. Franklin was there, Arthur Lee, Jefferson part of the time. Adams often grew impatient with them, and with the French. He was there to negotiate a loan, and needed little time for pleasure.

All but one of his trips was make without Abigail. They spent more of their married life apart than together, and it was hard on her.

What about our beginning as a nation? "Conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," the Declaration says. We cannot escape the fact that it was also conceived in rebellion. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft," God told Saul. We may sympathize with the colonists, but we cannot say they were right. What then?

Surely God was guiding this country for one reason, His church. While the colonists were fighting for freedom, God was busy making a place for many immigrants to establish a foothold, so that His church might develop and grow. We can see the pattern in our own forefathers.

The author does not voice these ideas, of course, but neither does he tell the story with an apparent bias. He sees the warts of those early patriots.

So read the book. It is well documented, with many pages of notes and bibliography. It may tempt you to visit the east coast and see some of the landmarks, if you have not already. And it ought to reassure you that God guides his church, and will continue to guide her.

Coincidences, Chaos, and All That Math Jazz

Tom Bergman

Coincidences, Chaos, and All That Math Jazz: Making Light of Weighty Ideas, by Edward B. Burger and Michael Starbird. 2005; W. W. Norton & Company; 276 pages.

For a book written by college mathematics professors, this thought-provoking book is surprisingly understandable. There may be a few places where someone without a mathematics background might get slowed down. But at its best, *Coincidences, Chaos, and All That Math Jazz* presents some fascinating insights and captivating explanations for any teacher or parent.

The authors break down their discussion into four parts. Part 1 is the section that focuses on coincidences and chaos. Part 2 explores unimaginably large numbers and some of their surprising uses. Part 3 investigates beautiful patterns, fractals, and topology. They saved the mind-boggling stuff for last. Part 4 ponders the fourth dimension and infinity.

Part 4 is interesting, but parts 2 and 3 are better. In Part 2, the authors do an excellent job of describing public-key cryptography, how our electronic personal and financial information can be transmitted securely. Even better is the discussion in Part 3 of fractals and topology. A reader who goes into it without the slightest notion of what these are will leave with a basic but stable grasp of these not-so-wild ideas. Topping them all, “Understanding Uncertainty” (Part 1) is the most understandable presentation of chaos and uncertainty that I have seen in a while.

Burger and Starbird do not write from a Christian perspective, but their unenlightened amazement is instructive. Their analysis of commonly misperceived “coincidences” and their suggestion of a “synergy” between nature and number are neither too difficult nor too surprising for a reader who knows the infinite One, the Maker of us all.

The jokes get old before the book is half-finished, but that’s no reason to forego reading this. Teachers should consider having students read parts 1 and 2, if not all of it.

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