



Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Precious Principle:
In Loco Parentis

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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Group Work is Overrated

Tom Bergman

If you see a book with a big red “Q” on the cover, pick it up. I did, and I found it to be the most important secular book I have ever read in my teaching career. The book is called *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking*. I decided I couldn’t get my hands on the book soon enough when I heard a TED Talk by Susan Cain, the author of *Quiet*.¹ Her ideas about the symbiotic value of introverts and extroverts have tremendous significance for the classroom. Even though she doesn’t share our Reformed, Christian background, she makes a number of very perceptive observations about people like me and a large proportion of the students in our classrooms. One striking realization I’ve taken to heart is this: so-called “cooperative learning” is overrated.

Classroom collaboration is done in what we call “groups,” “small groups,” “teams,” or “pods.” Teachers might say, “Work in groups of three or four” or “Find a partner and work together.” Other teachers may organize students into predetermined groups or indicate that they ought to work together with the others at their table or in their pods. In any of these situations, the students are expected to think together, to talk out loud, to interact, to cooperate, and to learn that way.

Obviously, students are expected to learn. But this collaboration emphasizes certain other goals pertaining specifically to the collective nature of group work: that ideas will be produced and shared by means of “groupthink,” that each group member will take some initiative, and that the teamwork will affirm to some degree the adage “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Group work is designed to foster a learning atmosphere, with each member expected to take an active role. This is exactly the right kind of classroom atmosphere for some students some of the time. But group work is overrated.

The busy atmosphere and over-stimulation of group work is exactly what will

¹ http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts.html

stifle learning for some of the other students. They don't need to learn how to do group work. What they need is the opposite of group work.

But, if group work is so good and necessary, then these students should be encouraged to work on their people skills, rather than be allowed to study in a corner. Right? They should be prompted to develop their teamwork skills, rather than their individual skills. Right? They have to learn how to work well with others, rather than work alone. Right?

This is the United States of America. We live and work in a society where teams and teamwork are the heart and soul of our economy. Today's students need to be prepared for this kind of world. This is a country where one of the most popular books of the last century is *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Those who aren't should learn to be assertive, even charismatic, in social settings.

If we have invested too much in this way of thinking, what a misconception!

Consider an analogy with our non-athletic students. We don't push them to excel in sports. We don't demand that they practice until they become skilled in a sport or two; we don't expect them to turn themselves into strong, speedy, coordinated athletes. We don't even expect them to like sports. We candidly urge them to pursue their gifts in other areas, the gifts which God has given them.

Likewise, we should not expect introverts to turn themselves into extroverts. We should not expect introverts to enjoy pretending to be extroverted. Yet that is the message that we seem to be sending if we design too much of the classroom atmosphere around group work. In effect, we tell them, "You have to work this way. It's better for you. Let's put our heads together and the results will be better than if we each work quietly and alone. Don't be a loner."

When the "loner" stigma associated with not wanting to work in groups becomes part of our hidden curriculum, it is high time that we reassess our assumptions about what people are like and how they work. Does increased sociability make for a better life? Does putting heads together produce ideas and promote learning? For some of us, the answer is yes. For others of us, the answer is no and it will always be no.

Susan Cain points out that introversion is different than shyness. Introversion is an aspect of personality that functions better in solitude, not as flight from the social scene, but simply for better focus and concentration. Introverts concentrate better in solitude; extroverts thrive on social stimulation. Introverts need peace and quiet; extroverts need...group work. Solitude is the main comfort zone

for introverts; group settings are the preferred mode for extroverts.

Tagging students as introverts and extroverts is not so easy. Introversion and extroversion is a matter of degree. It's likely that we have some measure of both. But most people are more of one than the other. And with regard to the introverts, the more introverted a student is, the more he needs peace and quiet to accomplish his best learning. Excessive stimulation in group work will be detrimental.

Returning to the example of the non-athletic students, we must admit that while we don't push them to excel in sports, we do still teach them that there is value in some athletic activity. Our schools require physical education, and they do so with good reason. In a similar way, our classrooms ought to include some group work. Group work is not inherently flawed, just overrated. When group work for sake of group work is prized too highly, then the needs of the more introverted students are not being met and their learning is being hindered.

Cain's thesis has two aspects. Being extroverted is perfectly fine, but extroverts should recognize the contributions and preferences of introverts; being introverted is perfectly ordinary and not shameful, but introverts must recognize that extroverts and social learning are good and proper in their place, too.

There is no need to militate against all group work. Some group work is good because the goals of group work are valid—to a point. As long as the desire for sharing ideas and learning to take initiative does not undermine the other valid goals of education, then group work is entirely appropriate. Christians ought to recognize the beautiful diversity within the body of Christ. Christian teachers ought to recognize, even celebrate, the essential differences within the student body. Certainly we do not try to teach students to all be alike in every way. But we do teach them—even though they are all different—that they do have to work together on some things. Some things are more productively—more profitably—done in groups. Some activities require multiple hands. Some decisions are better reached by committee. We should not have such an over-developed fear of the progressivist roots of group work that we avoid it altogether.

Susan Cain would not say that because committees are groups, committees should be composed solely of extroverts. Nor would she say that a committee of all introverts would be any better. I suspect that she would insist on a mix of introverts and extroverts, all of whom recognize the value of having the other type on board. Even though Cain fails to point out the biblical basis for such a respect for other members of the body, she does have an insight that we would do

well to put to use. Let's have a balanced atmosphere in our classrooms. Let's have a mixture of group work and individual work.

Remember the enormous value of individual work. To foster deep thinking and learning, nothing beats a little solitude. Usually, introverts will be most productive and do their best work in the way of serious study alone, away from the distractions of social interaction. Introverts want to work mostly alone, not out of a desire to run away from societal pressure, but because their best thinking happens when they are left to themselves. After that time, they can come out of their corners and participate in discussions: formal or informal, personal or online.

As introverts thrive on solitude, so extroverts could benefit from some quiet time, too. We already expect that of them with respect to personal devotions. Not only do we all—introverts and extroverts—participate in church Bible studies (appropriately named “societies”) where we learn by group discussion, but also we take time for personal devotions, time to meditate alone with God's word. We need to make sure that all students see the value of some quiet, individual study and that the more introverted students get enough of it at home and in school.

For the sake of all the introverted members in your classroom, read *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. Interpret it from a Reformed perspective with the goal of adapting some of the author's ideas to maximize the learning that takes place in our schools.

In Loco Parentis— The Precious Principle of Reformed Education

Joel Minderhoud

[This was a speech given for the Covenant Christian High School Foundation. The message is very applicable to all of our schools.—Ed.]

Dear friends and supporters of Covenant Christian High School,

Psalm 145 gives the clear command for instruction in our covenant schools: “One generation shall praise thy works to another and shall declare thy mighty acts.” What an incredible calling we have—a calling to rear our children in the fear of God’s name. Our precious schools are a great asset to assist us in this calling.

Covenant Christian High School is truly a precious gift of God to parents interested in training their covenant children—God’s children—in the fear of his name. What is so special or precious about Covenant? What could I share with you, from a teacher’s perspective, about the preciousness of Covenant?

Should I talk awhile about how well behaved our students are?

Should I talk about the cooperation, diligence, and abilities of the faculty?

Is the preciousness of our school found in its academic programs?

Is the preciousness to be found in our excellent facilities, or our technological tools?

Is it found in the extra-curricular programs we offer?

Although all these things make Covenant a special place, they are not the real source of the preciousness of Covenant. From my perspective as a teacher, what makes Covenant uniquely precious is that the school is an extension of your covenant homes. We as teachers stand in the classroom in your place. We use the Latin term, “in loco parentis,” to describe this phenomenon. You as parents band together with like-minded Christian parents to undertake part of the calling you have to train up your children in the fear of God’s name. You, cooperatively, seek to fulfill the calling of Psalm 145—“one generation shall praise thy

works to another and shall declare thy mighty acts.” That’s what makes CCHS so precious—it is an out-growth of the covenant; it flows out of the covenant. For many of you, you may no longer have children in the school. Some perhaps have grandchildren in the school. But, whether you have physical blood ties to the students in the school or not, you still have a vested interest in the success of CCHS because you have a care and a love for the instruction of the children of the church—in the instruction of God’s children. Think about that—you established CCHS so that my children could be educated in the fear of God’s name; and I maintain CCHS so that your grandchildren may be educated in the fear of God’s name. That’s why we purposely do this work collectively—together in covenantal schools—so that truly no child, no covenant child, is left behind. That’s what makes CCHS so special—it is an extension of covenant homes. What a privilege we have to instruct our covenant children together in the mighty works of God. And to do so, with like-minded parents, who share the same goal, the same outlook on life, the same world-view and to do so with dedicated and qualified teachers who share that same perspective on life, is a great blessing—a very precious thing. And that’s the great preciousness of our school from my perspective. I get to see firsthand every day how this great concept of “in loco parentis” is faithfully executed. To us as teachers, there is little that is more precious than to be a part of this glorious and important work.

CCHS is precious because of its covenantal basis—that it has been established so that all the covenant children may be instructed in the fear of God’s name. But CCHS is also precious because of the distinctive instruction that occurs in that school.

I can see the work of training up our children in the fear of God’s name accomplished at Covenant Christian High School. The goal of our Christian education is to prepare the covenant seed to live their entire lives in covenant fellowship with God in all spheres of life; that is, to fear God and keep his commandments. This grand goal is accomplished in the way of showing the students the glorious works of God, teaching them to fear God, and in the way of faithful, loving discipline of the covenant young people, teaching them to obey his commands.

Showing the Glorious Works of God

As teachers we love to teach. And we love to teach, in part, because we love the wondrous works of God. All good covenantal instruction begins with a love for the wondrous works of God and a passion to share these works.

That's why we passionately show the covenant young people the marvelous things in the creation, such as the intricate and detailed structure of an atom, a particle so tiny that it takes 1,000,000 carbon atoms lined side by side to be as wide as a hair's breadth. These atoms are the foundational building block of all things and physicists claim that there is not a single industry in the 21st century that is not impacted by our understanding of the structure of this aspect of creation. Consider the immense power in the tiny nucleus of such an atom, a power so great that one tiny pellet of uranium contains the same amount of energy as released by the burning of one ton of coal. And these are just a few "facts" from a chemistry teacher; never mind the endless fascinating content from the other disciplines!

But as fascinating as this content is, its true value and meaning is only understood in light of God's word. And here, especially, our school has its particular value. In the course of a day your young people walk in and out of our classrooms learning these fascinating truths about what God has done. But as they go from classroom to classroom from day to day they hear these wondrous works in light of God's word. They are taught of God's providence whereby he upholds and governs all things. So "historical events" make sense as we see God executing his counsel. Mathematics and Art show the marvelous beauty of our God and his creation. In English courses our young people critique world-and-life views of the world as they are expressed in writings of various time periods and in different forms, while at other times learning to use the English language to communicate and understand what others are saying. In Choir and Band the students are shown how to use music in the service of God, and not as Jubal, in the service of sin and the excitement of sinful human passions. In all of these subject areas, and more, the students are not only exposed to the content, skills, and activities of the courses, but they learn to see these things in light of God's word. In this way the students are "shown the mighty works of God." The next generation is taught to stand in awe of (that is, to fear) the mighty God of heaven and earth.

As a teacher, there is nothing more precious than when a student learns some new material and actually is excited about the complexity of the material and the fact that they understand it. Despite what students sometimes say about school, my experience testifies to the fact that kids like to learn new things. There is an excitement in the air when they know that they are on the verge of learning something they have never learned before. Every year I experience that in Chemistry when students learn the newest details of the inner parts of the atom

and the placement of electrons in certain orbitals and some of the practical significance of such. But especially impressive is when the students recognize that the tiny electrons don't just move on their own accord, but that God directs each of the tiny electrons in their "apparently random" paths. I remind the students at such a time that although they might forget some of the tiny details of Chemistry, they must not forget what we learned today—how we talked about the way in which God governs even the movement of the electrons. It is on these regular occurrences that we, as teachers, have our most precious moments. We have the privilege of teaching God's children specifically, pointedly, about God's wondrous works. This is the blessing of our schools.

Faithful, loving discipline

We accomplish our goal of rearing the covenant young people to live in fellowship with God and with his people by our faithful and loving discipline of them, by which we teach them to keep God's commands.

Every teacher loves teaching—showing students the wondrous works of God. Teachers love to see and show God's wondrous works. But every teacher also loves the student. Though teachers could spend countless hours reading and learning for themselves about God's work in the creation (and that's part of what we do as we prepare for our classes), there would be something unsatisfying if the work ended there. This content has value because of the students with whom we share the content. Our students are precious because they are covenant children, those in whom the Spirit works; those in whom is a fertile heart; those who have the ears and eyes to hear and to see the wondrous works of God. These students then make CCHS precious.

It is for their sake that we share the wondrous works of God. They are the objects of our instruction, so we have a care and a love for them as God's children. That love manifests itself not only in that we share with them the wondrous works of God, but that we interact with them and discipline them. For this is a key component to what the Scriptures mean when they call us to "rear" or "nurture" the children in the fear of God.

So the classroom will have many opportunities for interactions and discipline. The classroom has students laughing with teacher and classmates, discussions about world-views and what things are right or wrong to do, explanations about spiritual matters, and discipline for student comments or behavior that is not befitting a Christian.

All of these interactions are a precious part of teaching. In these interactions students are “disciplined.” That discipline, of course, involves correction when they do wrong. But this discipline involves much more. It involves “directing and guiding” the student to make good decisions and embracing godly perspectives and biblical principles. Students are taught in every aspect of their schooling to “fear God and keep his commandments.” It is quite evident, I’m sure, that we involve ourselves in direct and overt forms of discipline, in the broad sense of the word. Sometimes it will be necessary to spend more personal time with a covenant young person working through various matters. But rather than speak of these direct and overt opportunities to discipline the students, I want to focus on less direct opportunities we have.

Some of our disciplining is done in quiet ways. In fact, many times our discipline manifests itself in the simple ways of keeping order in the classroom or a word of rebuke in class for inappropriate behavior or comments. Our disciplining, our nurturing the young people—as it happens in this sphere of their life—happens in ordinary daily ways, so that often times we, as teachers, are not so cognizant of it.

To illustrate this, consider one simple example. A former student stopped by once and expressed appreciation that I kept after him and his buddies during their senior year in Physics to do their best work and to stop goofing off. He recognized years later his nature to be lazy and goof off. The odd thing about it all was that I didn’t remember consciously making work of keeping after that student. This is one of those cases where we discipline them in quiet ways, not realizing we are doing it. This is an example of this kind of discipline that happens daily in our good Christian school.

In fact, there is much instruction in the school that is accomplished indirectly, as much of your instruction in the home is. How do your children learn to pray? They follow the model of your prayers and the prayers of their teachers and pastors. How do your children learn particular behaviors (how to drive a car) or preferences (liking or disliking of pea soup)? They imitate your behavior and preferences. How do your children learn a proper or improper emphasis on sports or on the pursuit of material things? They imitate you. Not only do the students imitate you, but they also imitate the teachers to some extent. For example, our excitement for the content we teach is contagious. Come to class pumped up about what you are going to teach, and the students respond similarly about the way they will learn. Even something as simple as the good order that

is demonstrated in the step-by-step procedure to solve a mathematical problem is a model for the student to follow. So if it is true that the young people follow the model of our behavior on such mundane matters, what then might be said of our attitudes, perspectives, work ethic, and more? How thankful we are then for faithful and godly teachers.

So then, whether we instruct and discipline the students in overt and direct ways or in the quiet and indirect ways, we rear and guide the students in the school day, on your behalf, so that they learn to fear God and keep his commandments.

As teachers then, we have a great blessing. It is a blessing and a privilege for us to teach. We must dig into the subject matter and the Scriptures to show the students the wondrous works of God. We must apply biblical principles to discipline the young people as they need to be disciplined. All of this requires us to look to God for strength and wisdom. All of this requires your prayers for a blessing upon us and our work. And in this way God blesses us—enriching our salvation. The work is difficult, especially as we realize our many shortcomings. Oh, how many weaknesses we as teachers have, of which I'm sure you are well aware. The work is not only difficult, but it is heavy – filled with much responsibility, as we labor with God's children. But, nevertheless, the work is rewarding. We personally grow.

But we also get to witness firsthand the spiritual growth of God's covenant children. This is a very rich blessing for us. For this we give thanks to God. For this we are indebted to you. Often times you thank us for laboring on your behalf. And we thank you for those expressions of appreciation and thankfulness. We need those encouragements, especially at some of the more difficult times we face. But today, on behalf of the teachers at Covenant Christian High School and on behalf of the teachers in all our schools, I say to you "Thank you." Thank you for your faithful work in the home. Our work is possible only because it is an extension of your work. And thank you for giving us, personally, the great privilege of teaching God's children his wondrous works. May God bless our labors and bring great fruit on it.

And God will bring fruit. Not only are we as teachers personally blessed in the work of teaching the covenant seed, but our young people and our churches are blessed by the establishment and maintenance of our good Christian schools. Though we acknowledge when we enroll our children that they are sinners, we must not forget that they are sinner-saints. The Holy Spirit does work in their

hearts so that they do bring forth great spiritual fruits. They grow in godliness, in love for one another, in meekness. They grow closer to God and to one another through their labors in our schools. Yes, the goal of our education—that they are prepared to live in covenant fellowship with God in every aspect of their life—truly is accomplished. Our churches too are blessed in that the young people grow to know the truth that has been reinforced in the home and the school. The young people grow and establish godly homes in which they in turn raise and train covenant young people to fear God and keep his commandments. So it is very evident that the students and the churches are blessed by our schools. And you, as covenant parents, are blessed, too. In the way of “in loco parentis”—this precious principle—you covenant parents will be blessed in fulfilling, in part, your calling to teach your children “the wondrous works of God.” How thankful we are for our precious school—it truly is a precious gift of God.

Contribution

Purposeful Thoughts

Rick Mingerink

Purpose: that sometimes frustrating little word that keeps us from doing what we sometimes want to do. I realize you won't find that definition in the dictionary (and I do write with tongue in cheek), but I think it is an accurate description of the word nonetheless.

I write this article in an attempt to urge all of us to take a look at the purpose of the good Christian school. It is profitable and healthy to have discussions with our spouses, family, and friends about the purpose, practices and principles of Reformed, Christian education. I hope this article helps stimulate such discussion.

What is the purpose of a Reformed, Christian School? I wonder what answers we would give to this question. Pause a moment and think what your answer might be....

Is the purpose of such a school to fill students' heads with facts and data? Is the purpose to prepare students for their future jobs as fathers, mothers, carpenters, nurses, salesmen, or budding artists? Is the purpose to shelter students from the world? Is the purpose of a Reformed, Christian school to facilitate lifelong relationships with fellow Christian boys and girls?...maybe with the hope that they will find a future mate in one of them? Is the purpose of the school to train future church members how to live a Christian life in that church? Is the purpose of the school to act as a community-strengthening organization?

I surmise that maybe some of the possibilities I mentioned above were part of your answer. I surmise this because I, too, thought of some of these when I asked myself the same question. Am I alone in my thinking?

Although I ask the question "What is the purpose of a Reformed, Christian School?" my answer, and your answer, too, are only accurate if they match the official answer our school constitutions provide us, which is based on solid principles. Our forefathers didn't leave this question for us to determine. If they did, each new generation may have its own unique answer. In my situation at Adams Christian School, the early founders established this school according to this single purpose: to provide primary education where instruction is based upon the infallible Word of God (ACS Constitution, art. II). I suspect many of the other good Christian schools have similar statements of purpose in their constitutions. I write this article holding to that assumption.

With that before us, a Reformed, Christian School operates in the capacity of "Christian School" in order to fulfill this action: instruct the enrolled children in the various spheres of life (hence the words "primary education") so that they know who they are, who they are in relation to these spheres of life, and who they are in relation to their God (hence the words "based upon the infallible Word of God"). This institution of education has no authority to do anything more and it should never settle for anything less.

Yet, I ask again, isn't one of the purposes of the Christian school to keep our children sheltered from the world? Isn't one of the purposes of the Christian school to prevent our students from singing songs of Arminian influence? Isn't one of the purposes of the Christian school to keep children in church, more specifically, a Protestant Reformed church? The answer to these is "No." A Reformed

school is an institution for primary education, where learning about God's creation and His precepts for every sphere of life is the task.

There are other principles at play here, too. I am referring to the biblical principles that govern our homes. The purpose of the home is to shelter children from the world. The purpose of the home is to teach children godly songs and passages from Scripture. The purpose of the home is to rear children in the knowledge of God so that when they are of an age of discretion they will confess their faith in a church that preaches this right knowledge of God. The purpose of the home is to make sure children befriend other godly children and become godly friends to others.

Let us not forget these principles. Nor let us place upon the Christian school a purpose that does not belong to her. As the school principal with an employed responsibility for the primary education of two hundred some students, I urge this for the sake of the good Christian school. As a parent with a personal responsibility for four little children at home, I urge this for the sake of the home. As a member of the church of Christ with a corporate responsibility for dozens more children in my congregation, I urge this for the sake of the church.

Yet, a Christian school indeed shelters children and a Christian school indeed helps foster godly friendships. A Christian school indeed teaches children how to live with each other in a God-glorifying manner. A Christian school does help prepare students for their future occupation. Yes, such schools do much more than what her stated purpose may indicate. This is plain to see. These, however, are always offshoots of fulfilling the one single purpose: to provide primary education in the light of God's Holy Word. The child rearing that is done should always be in the context of the curriculum.

For how can a school with such a purpose not teach her students about correct behavior when the story character in the reading lesson commits sinful behavior (or when the students themselves commit such behaviors)? How can a school with such a purpose not guide her students in the proper use of their language toward one another in grammar class when it is, in fact, God's Word that is shining through this subject?

Let us be reminded of the purpose of this Christian education. Let us be driven to use and maintain our schools out of a love and commitment for this one purpose. Let us do everything we can to make sure she holds true to that purpose alone...for when she does that, wonderful offshoots will be realized, as well. By God's grace, she can. By God's will, she will.

Principal's Corner

Jim Regnerus

I Have a Dream

“It is my dream for you that some day one of you will serve as a secretary on the cabinet of the President of the United States.”

The preceding was uttered back in my college days by one of my professors. He went on to expound how he felt we could have the most Christian influence and the best opportunity to redeem a fallen world in such a high position. While I do admit that Christians may have an influence on those around them (even though that is not our main calling), I do reject the mandate to redeem this world. I have never served on the President's cabinet, and to the best of my knowledge, neither has any other alum from that Christian college.

I was thinking about post-graduation goals for students as Trinity's first graduation drew nigh. Is it my dream that a Trinity graduate serve on a high post in the government, find a cure for homelessness, create world peace, or discover perpetual motion? What is my goal or dream for the graduates?

The goal is found in the constitution of our school. Article 3.d. states, “The training of the Covenant children in the school, as well as in the home and in the church, must serve to prepare them to follow their lifelong calling to reveal the glory of their God in a life lived from the principle of regeneration by grace.” The goal is graduates who go forth living normal, obedient, God-glorifying lives. They might obtain lofty positions, or make noteworthy contributions to science or technology, but those who do are not the only ones who have reached the goal. Those who in their “lifelong calling,” no matter how high or how humble that calling may be, reveal the glory of God have attained the goal. Covenant Christian High School, in their mission statement, similarly expresses the concept of ordinary, obedient lives when they use the language of “...as we show love for God above all and submit ourselves to glorifying His Name in our daily tasks.”

Daily tasks. Nothing super-human required. Regular, hard-working, diligent members of the church militant using all of their abilities and opportunities to seek God's glory.

I use language such as regular and ordinary in describing the goal for our graduates. I mean that only from a certain perspective. From a Biblical perspective, there is nothing regular and ordinary about the goal. Our constitution indicates, doesn't it, that this life of seeking God's glory is possible because we have been regenerated by grace. Nothing run-of-the-mill about that! Whether our graduates are housewives, electricians, beauticians, morticians, or whatever, may we ever be mindful of what a great wonder it is that God, by His grace, works salvation in the Covenant seed; and that they have a purpose like none other in living lives of thanksgiving!

We have a good goal.

I Wish I Had Thought of That

I enjoy a good cross country meet. Subsequent to a meet I was talking to the father of one of our runners, and he was telling me of a prior conversation that he in turn had had with some random bystander. The bystander had shared his delight in cross country meets, observing that, "Cross country meets are one of the few sports where everybody is cheering and nobody is booing."

I wish I had thought of that.

Indeed, the bystander's observation is correct. The support of the fans and coaches is 100% positive at a cross country meet. Nobody screams at referees, trash talking isn't heard because, well, what is there to trash talk about, and boos are pointless as there isn't anything to boo. Positively, you do witness individual athletes, teams, and fans encouraging one another in a friendly spirit of competition. It's a good environment.

As a Christian school, may we strive to maintain a positive experience and environment in all of our sporting activities.

On Laziness

There is a proverb that is credited to the people of the island of Cyprus that goes something like this: The lazy donkey always overloads himself.

When I first read the proverb, I didn't understand it as it seemed contradictory.

Why in the world would it be the lazy donkey who takes on the extra work of being overloaded?

On the second reading, I thought, well, maybe he just seems overloaded because he's lazy. Having shirked the responsibilities of regular work, the lazy donkey has become unaccustomed to work and the most ordinary of tasks overloads him. He just seems overloaded.

However, that explanation doesn't really follow the spirit of the proverb either because of the reflexive pronoun "himself." The proverb doesn't say the lazy donkey is overloaded because of what others have placed upon him; no, the lazy donkey always overloads himself. He is the one putting on the extra burden.

So how and why is that?

My understanding is that the lazy donkey overloads himself because he has no experience with work. While his body is lazy and his mind idle, Satan fills his mind with covetous and jealous thoughts. From his skewed perspective the lazy donkey imagines himself reaping the same earthly benefits as the industrious but without a proper understanding of the amount of work required. When the lazy donkey finally begins his quest, his inexperience with work truncates him. Without understanding that his imagination has far outgrown his actual abilities, the lazy donkey takes on more than he can handle and is soon overloaded.

Maybe you have known people who are always like that.

I say people who are always like that, but in all honesty, probably all of us have at some point in our life experienced our own lazy donkey situation. I know in my younger days I have. However, my point is not to dishearten all of us, but to encourage. We are not a lazy people. As Calvinists with a Puritan work ethic, we have a double dose of ambition.

What about, then, the times when it seems we are overloaded? What about the student who feels swamped with homework, the young mother who feels the demands of the household are beyond her abilities, or the father who has a growing sense of hopelessness as he struggles to meet the needs of his family? All lazy donkeys?

Of course not. In God's good providence, He rules over us in such a way that there are times when the Christian is overloaded and laziness is not necessarily the problem. Looking within ourselves and making ourselves work even harder is not per se the solution. The solution that Scripture gives is a drawing closer to our God. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee:" is what the psalmist teaches in Psalm 55:22. Jesus gives these comforting words in Matthew

11:28, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” That is the hard-working Christian’s comfort.

Pray that we be diligent laborers in all that we do. Pray that we may be counted among those who receive the Lord’s commendation found in Matthew 25:21, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Let’s keep the lazy donkey at bay.

Book Reviews

Children and Youth Literature

Brenda Dykstra

Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr books; *Flicka, Ricka, and Dicka* books by Maj Lindman. Albert Whitman and Co.: Morton Grove, IL; orig. 1935-1950’s. Recommended reading level: 1st grade–late 2nd grade. Read-aloud level: age 2–6 years.

Innocent, blonde triplet boys Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr and little girls Flicka, Ricka, and Dicka each go on childhood adventures in these separate series of Maj Lindman books. These picture books include a page with text and a facing page with bold, colorful, painted illustrations.

Will the three boys Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr be hurt by a big, angry bull? (*Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr on the Farm.*)

How do they fair when one falls into the ocean? Will their fun boat take them out to sea? (*Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr Learn to Swim*)

What magical adventures await on their rocking horse? (*Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr and the Magic Horse*).

The little girls Flicka, Ricka, and Dicka colorfully bring alive childhood adventures, too. Will the trio ever find the rightful home of the fun puppy they

discover? And what fun surprise will the three girls encounter along the way?
(*Flicka, Ricka, Dicka and the Little Dog*)

Their dear aunt helps the three girls bake a special cake for their mother's birthday. But what happens when they forget about it baking in the oven? Is Mother's birthday ruined? (*Flicka, Ricka, Dicka Bake a Cake*).

Swedish author and illustrator Maj Lindman's imagination in these books is noteworthy. The first books were written in the 1920's, and then were translated into English and brought to us in 1930's and later. These books are innocent, and young children will appreciate their comfort. Exciting plot line these books might not have, but nonetheless, kids really enjoy the simple story and excellent painted illustrations. Clearly these books are classic children's books as their purchase price is quite high, but public librarians give high accolades for the Lindman books so they are readily available for your viewing and enjoyment. And no questionable issues are at forefront in these are simple tales for the younger child. Oldies remain goodies—classics. Enjoy!

Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr and the Buttered Bread

Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr and the Gingerbread

Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr and the Red Shoes

Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr, and the Reindeer

Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr, and the Yellow Sled

**Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr Learn to Swim*

**Snipp, Snapp, and Snurr on the Farm*

Flicka, Ricka, Dicka and the Big Red Hen

**Flicka, Ricka, Dicka, and the Little Dog*

Flicka, Ricka, Dicka and the New Dotted Dresses

Flicka, Ricka, Dicka and the Three Kittens

Flicka, Ricka, Dicka and Their New Friend

**Flicka, Ricka, Dicka Bake a Cake*

(* Indicates Favorites)

Napoleon's Buttons

Tom Bergman

Napoleon's Buttons: 17 Molecules That Changed History by Penny Le Couteur and Jay Burreson. New York: Tarcher/Penguin Books, 2004; 384 pages.

If there were awards for cross-disciplinary books, *Napoleon's Buttons* would win for its absorbing blend of chemistry and history. Teaching across the curriculum is popular in learning theory today, but the fact that there is such a thing as a history of chemistry and a chemistry of history will come as no surprise to a Protestant Reformed teacher or parent. We confess that God's creation is an organic whole in its nature and its purpose. With that principle in mind, *Napoleon's Buttons* is an eye-opening journey through the history of man's understanding of molecules.

A book about glucose, cellulose, phenol, isoprene, protonsil red, and oleic acid, trinitrotoluene, and more is unlikely to strike people as gripping reading material. But this book is gripping; it shows how the discovery and development of materials such as rubber, refrigerants, Vitamin C, cotton, and explosives all have had an enormous impact in our lives. The authors Le Couteur and Burreson nicely bring out the stories behind the products and the science behind the molecules that make these products possible. Their accounts are a clever blend of curious histories and chemical explanations. Visit napoleonsbuttons.blogspot.com for a more in-depth preview.

To write such a book, the authors had to face the question of how much of the chemistry to explain. A chemistry teacher and a chemist by trade, Le Couteur and Burreson try to translate chemistry into language that any adult reader could understand. In my opinion, they have succeeded in explaining just the right amount in a way that a high school student could fathom. Even junior high students could benefit from reading the book, if they didn't spend time on diagrams that they couldn't understand yet. What makes *Napoleon's Buttons* so accessible

is that a reader does not actually have to understand everything about chemical bonds and reactions for the stories to make sense. While the book could be profitably read by skipping the equations and diagrams, they do make the book much more resonant.

In my mind, I picture an interested unbeliever reading *Napoleon's Buttons* with his mouth hanging halfway open in fascination. I picture a Christian reading the same book with his mouth all the way open and a smile breaking out on his face. Someone who knows the creator, who knows that to everything there is a purpose, who knows that God's will is done in heaven and earth, and who knows that all things work together for the good of the elect is someone who will appreciate a book like this one more deeply than someone who is merely fascinated. Even though *Napoleon's Buttons* was not written from a Christian perspective, our Protestant Reformed teachers and parents would do well to ponder God's hand at work in the history of these seventeen molecules that have changed our world.

Oh, if Le Couteur and Burreson had borrowed their thesis from the Belgic Confession of Faith, Articles 12 and 13!

We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures as it seemed good unto him, *giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; that he doth also still uphold and govern them by His eternal providence and infinite power for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God.*

We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, nor give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, *so that nothing happens in this world without His divine appointment...*

Perspectives in Covenant Education

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