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The Lutheran Educator

The WELS Education Journal

Forth

in your name, O Lord, I go
My daily labor to pursue.
Determined only you to know
In all I think or speak or do.

GRADUATION 1999

The Lutheran Educator

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ARTICLES

DEPARTMENTS

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Summer Renewal

Two recent notices posted online in a teacher's chat room caught my attention.

"How do I know if I'm doing a good job or not? The piles of correcting seem to be increasing and I'm becoming more tired as the year progresses. Is this what teaching is all about? When will I begin to get my life back?"

A first year teacher wrote this notice. Might this be a situation where idealism meets reality? Are these feelings only of the novice teacher? How often during the past school year did you experience similar thoughts? Or are your senses dulled to the various activities that have become routine in your life? Do you feel you "get your life back" when the academic year ends?

This is the second notice I saw:

"Help! I am suffering from burnout. When the school day is done, I only spend about 10-15 minutes picking up and preparing for the next day. I am scared. I love my job, but I am feeling so guilty because I know I should and need to spend more time on it. Can anyone give me suggestions to help me enjoy my job again or ways I can give it more effort?"

Much has been written on the topic of "burn-out." Whether or not one chooses to accept the term, many educators have felt a sense of physical or emotional exhaustion following the demands of a school year. A common reaction to that type of exhaustion is, "I want to get out." Have you experienced this feeling during the past school year? Were you able to support a colleague who may have been experiencing these feelings?

A variety of responses were offered to these online questions. These ranged from rearranging classroom furniture to taking a class to renew enthusiasm for the job. While I find these chat room discussions interesting, they don't offer the kind of encouragement Christian educators are privileged to share with one another. How often a word of spiritual encouragement is exactly what is needed but we hesitate to offer those words, assuming that everyone already knows that.

I joyfully anticipating summer vacation almost as much as the change of pace when it arrives. Realistically this change of routine brings with it a different set of demands on time and energy. The time away from your classroom should provide a time to reflect on the school year. This should include time spent in the Word. Yes, we've heard this admonition before but it bears repeating. While on-line conversations can provide educators food for thought, only the Word can provide the lasting encouragement we need to serve in our ministries.

CAL

Comparing Two Methods of Instruction: Traditional Grammar and the Writing Workshop

Part 2

Jane Price

OUR CONGREGATION just built a new Activity Center. This is a wonderful change from the little gym we outgrew. The change is a great benefit to the school and congregation, but there are limitations too. We needed to develop new rules concerning who can use the facility and when. Students are required to bring special shoes to be worn in the gym. A larger facility requires more maintenance. And what about the mortgage? Finally, our senior members lamented the loss of the beautiful hickory stand. Who can put a price tag on memories? There is always a cost in changing.

The sainted Professor Eric Sievert often repeated the old maxim: Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside. The debate about the value of a writing workshop approach over that of traditional grammar is not exactly new. I have presented the benefits and limitation of traditional grammar in a previous article (Price 1999). The Writing Workshop approach also has benefits and limitations to be weighed before making a change.

Benefits of a writing workshop approach

The writing workshop is an approach to teaching language skills with daily writing opportunities on both teacher-directed and self-chosen topics; this is also referred to as the process approach. At the beginning of the writing period, mini-lessons provide opportunity for the presentation of topics the teacher deems necessary for growth in writing skills. A five-step writing process is usually presented: 1) rehearsal or prewriting, jotting down many ideas before actually writing; 2) drafting, writing thoughts in sentence form; 3) revising or rewriting, reworking the writing so that it says exactly what the author wishes to communicate; 4) editing, making grammatical and mechanical corrections; and finally 5) publishing, putting the written work in a form ready for its intended audience. This

workshop approach would also include time for functional grammar instruction during the mini-lessons.

The writing workshop approach to language arts instruction most recently became popular in the early 1980s. After working in classrooms with elementary aged children, Thomas Newkirk (1988), Nancie Atwell (1987), Donald Graves (1985), and Lucy Calkins (1986) published books on the method in which children were given daily opportunities to write on subjects of their own choice. Grammar instruction was not set aside. Rather, teachers looked for subjects meaningful opportunities to instruct about functional grammar as they helped students with their own pieces of writing.

Nanci Atwell (1987) describes the environment needed for young writers to express themselves effectively. She lists seven principles to consider in providing a positive writing experience. 1) Children need to know adults who write. 2) Writing teachers need to take responsibility for their knowledge and teaching. 3) Writers need regular chunks of time. 4) Writers learn mechanics in process, from teachers who address errors as they occur within individual pieces of writing, where these rules and forms have meaning. 5) Writers need response. 6) Writers need to read. 7) Writers need their own topics.

Researchers agree that good writing results from opportunities where children are given choices. Joanne Golden (1980) emphasizes the importance of certain elements to foster good writing. She states that children need to be given opportunities to write for a variety of purposes: to articulate personal experiences, to sort out thinking, and to structure response. She also emphasizes that children should write for authentic audiences like their classmates, teachers, family, or community members.

Having an authentic audience galvanized the students at Trinity Lutheran School when they discussed the lack of an ice-skating facility near school. The teacher shared with them how people will write letters to their local government officials when they have an idea or grievance. The children were very excited to be given the opportunity to write to the director of the Kaukauna Recreation Department, requesting the consideration of flooding a rink in a nearby park for use by citizens on the north side of the community. The

teacher provided scaffolding by listing on the chalkboard students' ideas for rink use and discussing the power of language when a writer composes a paragraph with a topic sentence and supporting ideas. The letters that were written were lively, cheerful, and optimistic as the children conveyed their feelings about how great it would be if the recreation department provided a rink on the north side of town. This experience is certainly an example of a rich environment with plenty of opportunities for writing. In this case the letter writing project was a positive learning experience in language despite the fact that no new rink was flooded that year.

When students have chosen for themselves what they feel is important enough to put on paper, their investment in writing gives them the energy necessary to revise and edit that work, bringing it to a level that will communicate exactly what they want their audiences to know. Atwell (1985) writes:

> They're more apt to revise, so their writing will do what they intend it to, and more careful in editing and proofreading so readers will attend to their meanings, not their mistakes. They seldom lose pieces of writing; they talk about their writing with parents and friends; they spend much of their own time writing and thinking about their writing; they identify themselves as authors.

Students begin to wrestle with their own ideas, trying to find the right words that will express most exactly what they want to say. Canned application assignments at the end of a grammar lesson provide little motivation for such a personal effort. Atwell calls this a denial of the opportunity to struggle to discover and clarify what one thinks.

This learning does not happen without instruction and guidance. Sudol and Sudol (1991) found the mini–lessons taught at the beginning of the daily workshop to be valuable, calling them one of the most successful components of the workshop and an excellent way to teach skills needed by good writers. These five to ten minute sessions bring all the students together, focusing on one short topic, such as some procedure that will facilitate good order in the workshop. Another topic of the mini-lesson might present itself as the teacher reviews the writings of the students and notices a weakness in grammar, mechanics, or sentence structure. A short lesson can keep the students' attention without the standard and sometimes tedious worksheet or written assignment to assess student learning of the topic.

Certainly the teacher's role in language instruction is a vital one, but children also learn much from each other. One component in the writing workshop approach that addresses this opportunity for peer interaction is peer conferencing, an opportunity to share what one has written.

In "Whatta Ya Tryin' to Write," Dyson and Genishi (1982) report that writing is an interactive process in which children can serve as their own teachers: questioning, modeling, pro-

viding feedback and support for each other. Although the teacher's methods are important, the major conclusion of this study was that children's interactions had positive effects on their ability to write. Such opportunities are not generally provided for in the application assignments given at the end of traditional grammar lessons. Students write the assigned paragraph and hand it in, often without even rereading it to check for mistakes in grammar. In a traditional setting it would be unlikely that students would be given time to share their paragraphs, an activity that might even be considered cheating. Conversely, in a setting where children write and then share what was written with peers, feedback will motivate a child to correct or revise what was not clearly communicated.

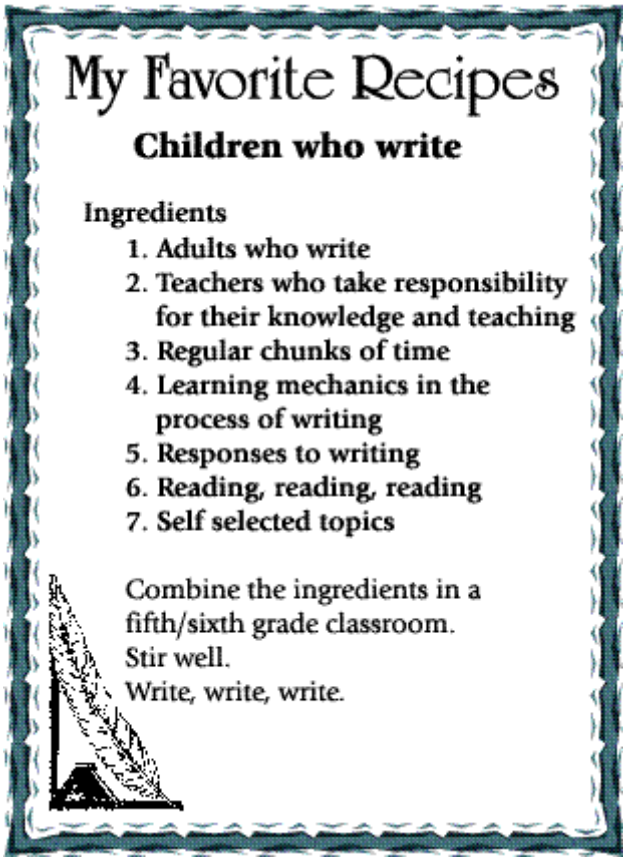
Donald Graves (1973) highlights the value of a writing workshop approach to language instruction. In his study he concludes that informal environments give greater choices to children so that they write more and in greater length than when specific assignments are given. Results from informal environments demonstrated that children do not need direct motivation or supervision in order to write.

Limitations of a writing workshop approach

Since its popular introduction in the 1980s, teaching of the writing process has been tested and examined by many educators. Some have found weaknesses in the approach, and studying these findings helps in establishing a well-balanced curriculum that includes grammar instruction and writing skills. Rodrigues (1985) warns that converts to writing who accept the process at its most shallow level may believe that, with encouragement, student writing will automatically improve. But because there is no single writing process, but rather different processes for different individuals, it is necessary to individualize. He states that research supports the challenging notion that the five-step writing process (rehearsal, draft, revise, edit, publish) does not accurately reflect the way writers write. The original model is linear, moving smoothly from one step to the next. After more recent examination, Rodrigues calls the model recursive, "wound back upon itself, more like a tangled string after a kitten had played with it." This idea has challenging implications for a serious writing teacher.

Peg Sudol, a fifth grade teacher at Ironwood Elementary in Tucson, Arizona, used the writing workshop approach in her classroom, diligently trying to follow the model set out by Calkins (1986). In her journal article, Sudol (1991) highlighted five persistent problems that frustrate the administrating of a writing workshop.

According to Calkins (1986), ownership is an important value to promote. Children value ownership when given choices of topics and genre. The first problem arises, according to Sudol and Sudol (1991), when teachers are required to teach certain writing topics, but children, given free choice, do not



want to write according to the required curriculum. Either the curriculum is not followed or the value of ownership is reduced.

A second problem noted by Sudol and Sudol (1991) are deadlines. The writing teacher will want to accommodate the difference in writing styles and speeds that are reflected in the students, but "without deadlines, the students procrastinated, fiddled around, and failed to make progress." They took a month to do what Sudol knew they could complete in two weeks, causing her to question the students' commitment to writing. Being off task was a time waster for many students. During peer conference times they might talk about everything but their writing. Some students would wander around the room, bothering others trying to work. Many times assigned deadlines were missed. Calkins (1986) encourages teachers to make assignments relevant enough to hold the students' concentration. Sudol confronted the problem by trying to establish routines and making writing assignments relevant by scheduling them in conjunction with some event in the community or school.

Conferencing with individual students was another challenge to Sudol. She found this individualized work with each student to be too slow, causing her to lag behind in reaching every pupil soon enough to affect student writing. The five to ten minutes she spent with her young writers was valuable, but simultaneous management of the others in the workshop was difficult. The plague of distraction and student off-task behavior while the teacher was working with only one student caused static and interference not conducive to writing.

The last problem Sudol and Sudol

(1991) noted was grading. As a teacher, she found it necessary to grade the student's writing in order to provide feedback to the parents on report cards. Grading was discouraged by Atwell (1985), yet Sudol felt that unmarked papers were not an accurate reflection of the real world.

After ten years of teaching the writing workshop approach, I agree with Sudol and Sudol. It takes skillful managing and constant energy to make the writing workshop approach work in a real classroom. The workshop method needs acceptance by all faculty members as a work in progress, with regular evaluation and adjustments. I have found no step-by-step teacher's edition to ease the challenge.

In summary, research indicates that teaching traditional grammar has practical value when students learn to use the power of language in sentence length, structure, and variety. Grammar study provides a common vocabulary for discussion of language and helps students to attend to the mechanics of writing. But isolated component instruction has little effect on producing good writing by students. The literature suggests that the writing workshop approach provides stronger opportunities for practicing meaningful writing, but this method can become stale or cumbersome without constant evaluation and adjustment to individuals by the teacher.

Despite the limitations, I have very positive feelings about teaching language arts using the writing workshop approach from twelve years of experience prior to teaching at Trinity Lutheran School.

Conducting the study

Acting on these strong feelings, I developed a master's research project that would compare the two methods of instruction. After approval by the Trinity Lutheran School Board, I randomly divided the fifth and sixth grade students into two groups for teaching grammar and writing skills by two methods: traditional textbook instruction (control group) and the writing workshop approach (experimental group). The division of the groups was made as equal as possible in regard to grade level and gender.

I assessed both grammar skills and writing abilities at the beginning of the study. Students were asked to write on a topic of their choice. The papers were checked to see how often simple or compound sentences, run-ons, and fragments occurred. The mean number of sentences written by both groups was five. Grammar subtests were administered to evaluate students' abilities to identify the following components of grammar: compound subjects, compound predicates, compound sentences, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and proper placement of commas. These components and the test items were taken from their grammar text, Silver Burdett and Ginn English, (1988 edition). The test results showed no significant difference between the two groups.

In the three weeks of the project,

Table 1
Post-test comparisons on writing and grammar skills

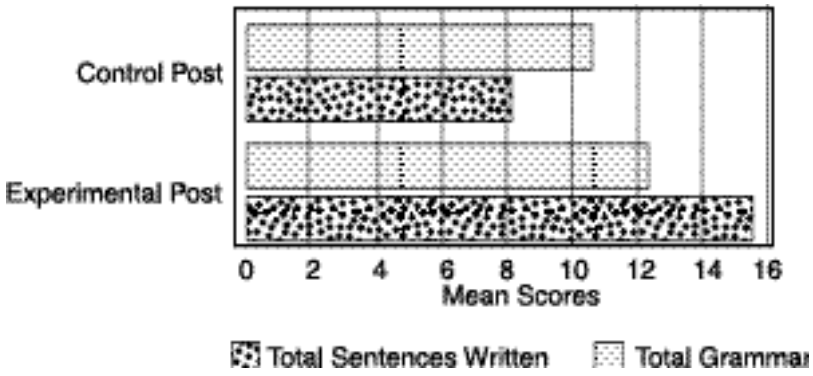
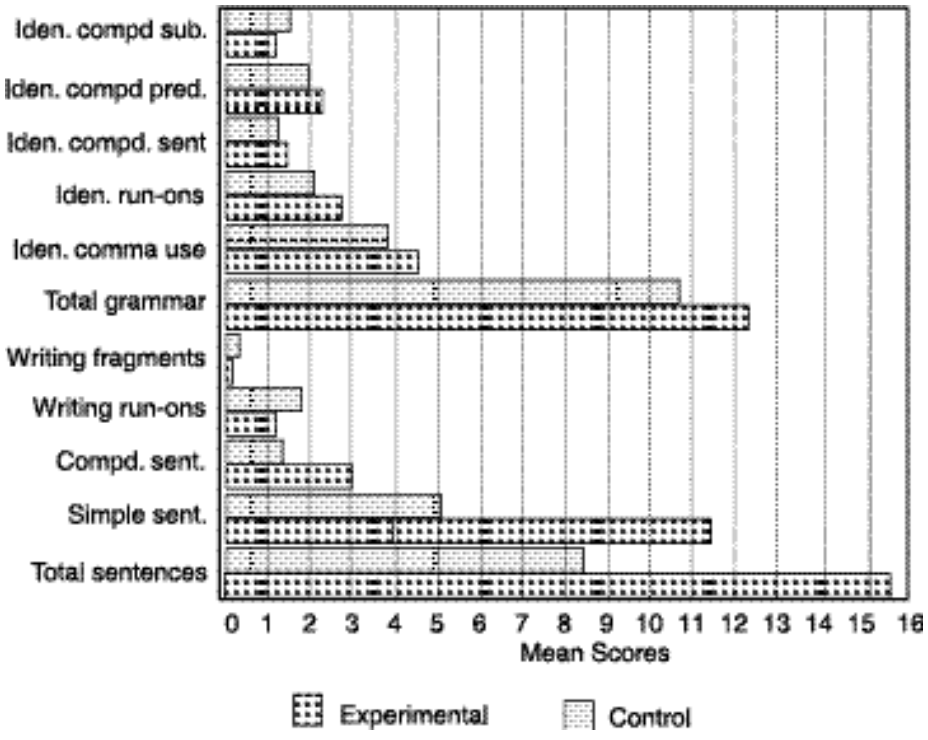


Table 2
Post test comparisons on specific writing and grammar skills



both groups were taught the two different components of the study: lessons in functional grammar and lessons in narrative writing. To cover the first component, students in the control group were presented thirty-minute lessons covering the prescribed topics listed above. Exercises from the book were assigned daily to reinforce the students' understanding of the concepts presented. While the control group finished their assigned practice, I presented the same grammar concepts in mini-lessons to the experimental group. These students had been writing during the thirty minutes of the control group's grammar instruction. Reviewing their self-selected writing topics provided me with examples to use in the next day's mini-lessons. The students enjoyed looking for errors in their own writings as presented in the mini-lessons; they quickly improved at identifying fragments and run-ons in their work. They were proud to have their sentences used as examples of compound subjects, predicates, or compound sentences. No daily exercises were assigned to reinforce the learning in the experimental group; instead, they were given time each day to write.

The second component of the project was the teaching of paragraph writing. The control group was presented lessons from the text on the topics of narrative paragraphs and writing a personal narrative. Another lesson instructed the children in the proper way to write a friendly letter, which also provided opportunity to apply the lessons about narrative paragraphs. The experimental group was also given opportunity to write narratives and friendly letters. The use of a scaffolding approach helped them to write a narrative about some particular memories in their childhood.

Results

After the three-week study was completed, differences in the control and experimental groups were compared in two ways: a pre and post test comparison for each group, and a post test comparison of both groups. Eleven skills were evaluated; the same subtests as used in the pretest. Significant differences were found in both comparisons among several subtests.

The control group demonstrated growth in eight of the eleven subtests. But in order to prove a hypothesis, growth must be mathematically calculated to show a difference that would be considered more than a chance difference. The control group demonstrated statistically significant growth in only five of the eleven subtests: identifying compound predicates, identifying proper comma use, writing more run-ons (not necessarily desirable), and growth in total grammar and total writing.

The experimental group demonstrated growth in nine of the eleven subtests and the scores demonstrated statistically significant growth in eight of the eleven subtests; gains in identifying predicates, run-ons, and proper use of commas were highly significant, as was total grammar growth. There was significant growth in writing skills areas: writ-

ing more compound sentences, and writing more simple sentences.

The second comparisons made were post test comparisons of control group to experimental group. Recognizing that an increase in the writing of run-ons and fragments is not a desirable outcome, the experimental group surpassed the control group, demonstrating growth in all areas except compound sentence identification. (See Tables 1 & 2.)

Five of the eleven subtests demonstrated significant differences (.05 level of significance) between the control and experimental groups. This was sufficient for allowing the rejection of the first hypothesis: Students who are taught language skills with a writing workshop approach will score at the same levels of language abilities on both standardized grammar tests and writing projects as students who are taught using only a traditional grammar approach. The results of the subtests comparisons certainly indicate that students who are taught language skills with a writing workshop approach did not score at the same levels of language abilities on both standardized grammar tests and writing projects as students who are taught using only a traditional grammar approach.

The tests demonstrate that the prescribed grammar skills were learned as well by both groups, but the writing workshop group made significant strides in application of those skills in their writing, producing more simple and compound sentences than the control group. This would support the second hypothesis that students who are taught language skills with a writing workshop approach score at higher levels of language abilities on both standardized grammar tests and writing projects as students who are taught using only a traditional grammar approach.

These results were not unanticipated after reviewing the literature. With only five weeks of working in a writing workshop environment, students were not only comfortable in their learning situation, as a group they preferred the workshop setting over the traditional instruction class. One would expect then that they would learn more and, with daily writing opportunities, apply more of what they learned. At the end of the study several from the group expressed disappointment at no longer being given time to write each day.

The school board and principal of Trinity Lutheran School were very interested in the growth that was demonstrated and supported my request to implement a writing workshop approach in the fifth and sixth grade classroom in the 1997-1998 school year.

Though the topic of a writing workshop approach to language arts instruction is not new in the field of education, it was new to the families of Trinity Lutheran. This study has helped all of us to see the value of such an approach. In a wider sense, it has broadened the perspective of these parents and their school board toward educational issues and has opened to them the door of research, introducing them

to its interesting possibilities and educational value. The use of a writing workshop approach in my classroom in the years to come will produce strong language skills in students and have powerful effects on the rest of their learning, on their abilities to serve their Lord, and certainly on this community as these children apply learning in their lives.

Communication is the most important skill we can train in children. Without it there would be no sharing of the gospel. Teaching children to write supports their overall skills in communicating. And helping them to use and understand proper grammar enhances that communicating.

We continued our efforts to secure an ice rink on the north side of Kaukauna a year after the study. As part of writing class, the children learned to write persuasive paragraphs. Some used the skill to write letters to the editor of the local paper and others wrote short speeches to be presented at the city council meeting. There were cheers in the classroom when one student brought the morning paper with the headline: North Side Gets Ice Rink. No one was prouder than their teacher who had watched her students grow and blossom in their communication skills.

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Can We Stop the Bleeding?

A Call to WELS Congregations to Address Teen Spiritual Losses

Michael J. Pfeifer

YOU AND I AND probably every called worker who ministers to children have had to deal with the cut finger or the scraped knee. Usually a band-aid or one of those handy ice packs and a few reassuring words handles the "crisis." I'm thankful that in my nearly twenty years of parish ministry our gracious God has spared me from ever having to handle a more serious situation, such as a child with a severed artery or a dismembered hand or foot. When I think of all the soccer, basketball, and wrestlings practices and competitions; all the Lutheran Pioneer campouts; the hundreds of students in Sunday school, Lutheran elementary school, high school, and confirmation classes—all the times that some tragic accident could have happened with any one of those children—I can't help but be grateful for the Lord's protecting hand. But there is another type of tragedy taking place in far too many of our 1,235 congregations: a spiritual hemorrhaging that no paramedics, no E.R. physicians, no human surgeons can stop. The massive bleeding occurring in many of our parishes is the loss each year of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of our high school, college, and young adult members in the WELS. Let's look first at some of the causes for this gaping wound. Then we'll examine some of the possible approaches—some "tried and true," some newer and innovative—that might be used in our efforts to "stop the bleeding."

This writer doesn't want to be labeled an alarmist, but it is surprising that more congregations and their members aren't expressing more concern about the state of the spiritual health of their 14–24 year old members. What's fueling our seemingly apathetic attitude about this problem? Is it that we aren't aware of the daily exodus of high school and college students from our WELS churches? Does the situation seem too overwhelming to us? Is the bleeding already so out-of-control

that we're walking away from it? While I'm not aware of any statistics on synod-wide teen retention in our WELS congregations, the "vital signs" we do have are certainly less than encouraging: During the years 1970-1993, our own WELS statistics indicate back door losses of about 188,737 members (WELS Commission on Evangelism 1995). These aren't souls who've transferred to another WELS congregation. These aren't members who the Lord has called home to Heaven. These are tens of thousands of former brothers and sisters in Christ who have become inactive, who have joined other church bodies, or who in some cases have flat-out left the church and, perhaps, their faith and their Savior. We can only wonder how many thousand of those 188,000 souls went out that proverbial back door during the ages of 13–21. A 1994 survey of 5,368 confirmands found that of those who still held membership in their congregation, 43 percent were deemed "inactive"—that is, they were no longer attending worship services, celebrating the Lord's supper, nor partici-

Why is the loss of so many 14-24 year olds so surprising to many of us?

When we step back a moment and take an honest look at what we do in aspects of our ministry, I believe we might find some things which almost "set us up" for the loss of souls we see around us! For instance,

Congregations with Lutheran elementary schools invest a great many full-time called staff and finances in working with children age 4–13. Most of us would agree that's commendable and is one of the strengths of our church body and of those congregations.

But what happens after that?

In a sense, aren't we "spiritually reaping" what we have "spiritually sown"? Let me just use the example of one of the congregations in which I was privileged to serve. We had seven full-time called servants and an operating budget of over $375,000 for the day-to-day, face-to-face ministry with the 140-160 children up to age 13.

But once graduation was over, those same children were then to be served on a minimal, part-time basis by one pastor with a youth ministry budget of under $100!

Check your congregation's monthly calendar! How many ministry activities allow your congregation's families to be together? Compare that with how many meetings and events separate the spouses, parents, and children of your church. Are we really "family friendly" in our ministry?

We say we're equipping our confirmation students for life-long service in the Lord's kingdom work. But are we? Are our confirmands just sitting around for two or three years, or are we already involving them as seventh and eighth graders in meaningful service? If they're already "plugged in" to the life of God's church before confirmation Sunday, they may be less likely to wander away from it after the rented white robe is returned.

pating in Bible class (WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship 1995). While more anecdotal than statistical, this comment deserves our attention:

> There's the sound of pounding feet outside our homes and churches these days—the sound of teenagers running away from the Christian beliefs that parents and the church have taught them.
>
> Some studies estimate that less than one-third of our students who are active Christians while they're in high school will still be active when they graduate from college. Christian churches everywhere are losing about two-thirds of their kids during and after high school.

There is another type of tragedy taking place in far too many of our 1,235 congregations: a spiritual hemorrhaging that no paramedics, no E.R. physicians, no human surgeons can stop.

> (WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship, Bible Study 1995, p. 1)

What's causing this staggering and saddening exodus of Christian teens and young adults?

Open wounds keep bleeding

Probably any person training to be a physician will be taught that before you start prescribing a cure for the patient, you have to assess the symptoms and determine the cause of the condition. It seems like plain common sense that when faced with a case of severe bleeding, any doctor worth his or her salary would quickly look for a deep cut or wound. Likewise, when faced with sizable losses of souls, particularly in our high school and young adult age groups, wouldn't we as shepherds of those souls use that same Spirit-given Christian common sense to try and determine what's leading to the severing of spiritual lifelines by hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of our young men and women?

If someone from your congregation hasn't been asking people why they've left or become inactive, maybe it's time to do so. Yes, it's true that the root cause of all spiritual decline and apathy is sin. But sometimes we like to toss that out as our easy, pat answer and look no further for other reasons. Perhaps some of the very things our congregations are doing, or failing to do, are contributing to the problem. There seldom are easy answers. The factors leading the 12-24 year olds in

congregations to go belly-up spiritually are going to be somewhat different from those affecting the young men and women in another region.

How can we stop the bleeding?

One of the first skills which paramedics learn is how to deal with cuts and wounds. Bumps, bruises, and even most broken bones are rarely life threatening. But deep gashes or open wounds with large blood loss can all too often be fatal. That's why closing gaping cuts or using pressure points to stop heavy bleeding is such a top priority for those providing first aid.

As a parallel, one of the soul-nurturing skills that our congregations (and we as servants called to care) need to develop is that of supplying "spiritual first-aid."

Right about now you might be getting ready to flip the page because you can smell it coming. "Here we go again," you're thinking to yourself, "He's either gonna lay on the guilt trip of just one more thing we all should be doing, or he's gonna tell us about some grand scheme for fixing the problem that he read in a book somewhere!"

Sorry to disappoint you, but there'll be no arm-twisting or guilt-inducing here. Nor will there be any grandiose ideas conjured up by some ivory-towered idealist who hasn't worked with teens or young adults in a real parish. What follows is simply a menu of options and opportunities for you, your staff, your congregation and its leaders to think over and talk about. These are not pie-in-the-sky theories; rather, they are efforts used in real congregations like yours and mine. If any of these examples help your congregation address its loss of young brothers and sisters, then praise the Lord.

- Get help! In your district you'll have available to you and your congregation the free services of a District Coordinator for Youth Ministry. He and his team are there to help you with such assistance such as consultations, workshops for youth leaders or those interested in youth ministry, and even a workshop on teen retention.
- Don't be afraid to ask for more help! It's not exactly a "911" call, but you can contact our Commission on Youth Discipleship for more resources and assistance, some of which are available in print; others of which are done in person. Call 414 256-3224 for information.
- Do you feel that your church is too small to have a viable youth ministry? Some congregations with fewer than 10 high school students "partner" with other WELS congregations in their area. One congregation organizes the first activity; a second congregation organizes the next event, and so on.
- Parents are key partners. All too

often we try to minister to high school students by yanking them away from the most spiritually influential people in their lives, whether that influence is for better or worse. On occasion, you can meet with parents as well as students. Listen to their concerns and use those as launching sites for spiritually nurturing not only the teens, but the entire family with the living Word!

- Don't hesitate to ask parents to be front-row participants in ministering to and with high school students and young adults.
- Consider asking parents and their high-school son or daughter
  - ❒ to be ushers or greeters together;
  - ❒ to serve the coffee and donuts for Bible class together;
  - ❒ to serve together for one year on whatever committee, board or team the parent is currently serving on;
  - ❒ to serve as teammates together in Sunday school or vacation Bible school.
- Start simple. Do a few things well. Then build on those things as the Lord blesses them.
- Let your 12-24 year olds know you care. How about an occasional phone call or answering machine message to your high school and young adult members? Or a quick note or postcard? Or maybe an e-mail? Since you're busy, perhaps this would be a ministry area which another member could take and run with.
- Involve young men and women in your ministry teams. Unless there's some regulation in your church's constitution or by-laws prohibiting it, why not ask a few sixteen-year-olds to sit in on or even serve on your evangelism and outreach committee or other such organizations? They have some great input to offer.

This list contains only a few of the ideas being utilized by congregations in our church body. From this writer's perspective, it's not so important whether you use "Idea A" or "Idea Z;" what matters is that you and your congregation do something in Christ's service to stop the bleeding. Our Savior's love for you and me would have kept him on his cross even if the nails in his hands wouldn't have. May our love for him and for our fellow members in the Body of Christ motivate us to dare to care!

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The Story of a Reader

Ramona M. Czer

Once upon a time a child was born, a baby girl who, as she grew, had more books in her crib than stuffed animals. Her mom and dad rarely worried about her tearing the pages of the numerous volumes within reach—she seemed to sense that these were lovely, important things and left them alone. By age two, she could hold the illustrated Grimms on her lap and turn the pages rapt and careful.

But wait—should we go back further yet to begin this story?

Once upon a time a young girl, newly plopped down in a junior high school three times the size of her middle school, read voraciously at lunchtime. She munched on baloney and cheese sandwiches and devoured Jane Austen novels at a long metal table and never felt particularly lonely or sorry for herself. She rather liked that half hour of solitude and exotic mind-food. It beat what most of her compatriots were doing—yelling, flirting, or throwing food. And she could always find time to chat with friends during classes. Reading taught her to deepen and find her values during a confusing time.

Two thousand miles away and a few years later, a young man landed himself in a high school Honors English class with a teacher who gave students a chance to read modern literature, in fact whatever they wanted to from a list she provided. He'd read before—sports magazines and novels about boy athletes—but little mind-expanding stuff like this. He dived in, found out he loved to read, and never looked back.

Eventually these two young people met in college, married after gradua-

tion, and combined as well their hefty book collections. On a limited income, they played house, had babies, and discovered that drinking coffee and meandering the aisles of Barnes and Noble was the perfect date.

But this isn't quite the beginning either. Perhaps we should go back further yet. Once upon a time, that girl's mother read to her children, books like *The Lost Princess of Oz*a chapter or so every night. Curled under covers, the girl heard how a peach pit could imprison a princess. The girl loved that book as her mother's wonderfully modulated voice wove its way through her sleepy imagination. She thought about how she was like that princess too: magically imprisoned inside a good story.

Her father also loved to read, books on technology, the military, magic—all things intricate and puzzling. She'd see him sitting in his crackly, black vinyl chair after a long day of work, fingering the pages intently, then suddenly looking up with shining eyes to say something like, "You want me to tell you how airplanes fly?"

So how do readers emerge? Luck, genetics, environment? Does the school and a child's teachers have much influence? I know my daughter Megan, that firstborn baby girl mentioned in the beginning, is one of the very few in her crowd of friends who is a reader. And what is a reader? My definition—someone who reads for pleasure, under her own volition. Megan has often been known to read 300 page books in a week or two (when it's not basketball season), and she rarely goes to bed or on a car ride without one. How did that happen? How does it happen that her three sisters are also readers, and even, it appears, her young brother, who at age six can't go to bed without a story. I'd like to take all the credit, but I suspect that would be way too simple. More probably, it's a combination of many and various influences, some of them coming at exactly the right time.

"There were books everywhere and you read to us at night," Megan explained to me when I asked her what she thought. She still remembers me reading *Peter Pan*and *The BFG*to both her and Erin, at age seven and five, though it took months for us work our way to the end. "I can still remember those books vividly," she said with a smile.

"But what about your teachers?" I asked her. "They must have been an influence." She thought about that for a minute and said, "Well, yes, two of them helped me think of myself as a reader." When her fourth grade teacher, Miss Bethel Hafermann, gave her a book to read outside of class—*A Wrinkle in Time*–she knew it was hard, but she understood most of it and loved the intricate plot and characters. She also felt proud that her teacher believed she could read it.

Then in seventh grade, Miss Lisa Stuebs challenged the whole class by the variety of books she made them read. Megan's favorite was *Johnny Tremain*,but she also enjoyed rediscovering *The BFG*and reading the biography of Amelia Earhart, *Snow Treasure*, and *The Lion, the Witch, and the*

Wardrobe.Though somewhat easy for her, these books helped her sense her teacher's excitement and commitment to reading, and again she remembers those books vividly and fondly.

The significance in those two influences Megan recounts may be when they happened more than anything else. I remember when I first thought of myself as a reader: in third and fourth grade when I couldn't get enough of Nancy Drew books. Morning to night I read them, outside under trees, on the bus, in-between classes, during classes if I could get away with it. When girls are nine or ten years old, they seem to be hungry to understand themselves, to find answers to the questions they have. Certain kinds of books can teach them far more than their parents or teachers can—partly because the girls themselves don't know what the questions are.

I believe that around seventh grade is another pivotal time for girls. That's how old I was when I had to move away from my friends, but even if I'd stayed put, I would have been searching for what it means to be a young woman, what were my values and priorities, whom did I want to become. It was a time of wild emotions and a need for solitude. Give a girl a book during this time, especially a good and deep book, and you'll help form her because everything matters so much. I'm thankful that Megan had two inspiring and thoughtful teachers at just these significant times to hand her books, believing that she too could be a reader. For boys, the timing may be slightly different. I think high school is when many young men finally decide that they want to understand themselves and the world around them better.

My firstborn daughter is now on the verge of graduating from high school. It's hard to believe—I remember just yesterday her first day of Kindergarten. Perhaps I remember it so vividly because I wrote about it in my journal:

8-26-86 Megan's first day of school began with thunder and lightening. It's been raining all morning. Meaningful? Will her school years be dramatic, should the world take note that she has emerged? She did sleep last night though she was sure she wouldn't and stood at the top of the stairs the next morning calling for my help, her arms full of her school basket and back pack—she worried about falling. Last night she also worried that the low red glow she saw in the sky was fire. Her intensity reminds me of myself at her age. School will be all she wants because she wants so much.

Several months later, I wrote:

4-28-87. Megan just pressed me to tell her what I'm writing. How can I explain that it's not important or interesting yet I do it and it fascinates me and it's secret? Someday she'll know when I give her her first blank book.

I think that's another reason my children are readers—they constantly saw a mother playing with words, writing in notebooks, composing at the keyboard, making up silly words to songs with their names in them. Writing and reading was a natural marriage partnership to them because a real person did it all of the time: their mom. When Megan was young, I began a journal of letters

to her, which I then gave to her on her sixteenth birthday to read, tacking on a bit of motherly advice for a teenager at the end. I also redid a list I had written for her special day in Kindergarten long ago.

The first list had been based on a favorite book of Megan's, Ten Good Things About Barney, a cat who died and deserved to be remembered specifically. I had noted down, when she was six, Ten Good Things About Megan. Well, ten years later, I wrote a similar list: Ten Good Things About Megan as a sixteen-year-old. Here's what I wrote:

You cry at movies.
You like boys because of their eyes and their inner spirit.
You awe me with your insight into what makes people "tick."
You get up every morning though it's raining, snowing, or worse, to deliver papers to people who sometimes don't appreciate you, and you never complain.
You're generous with gifts, always intent on finding "just the right thing."
You remember what it was like to be vulnerable and not "in," always supporting kids who have strokes against them.
You have an artistic mind-set and see the beautiful in the everyday.
You laugh at lot, not afraid of being "silly."
You study people with your mind and heart.
You read voraciously and cry over books.

I truly believe that Megan developed many of these special qualities because of the books she read. I believe she learned about people and gained empathy for them through encountering the different spirits of countless characters—good, bad, and far too complex to fit into those two categories. I believe she grew more courageous, sensitive, and firm in her convictions, able to be herself and to see with a unique artistic eye, partly because many of the characters she respected were also that way. Yes, you teachers aided her in this development too, and certainly God's spirit formed her in innumerable and subtle ways, but words are potent. And many words are immensely potent.

Once upon a time very soon a young woman will leave her parents' home to venture out on her own. She'll carry with her many things: a faith in the Lord Jesus, fond memories, her collections of angels and Star Wars memorabilia, paints and canvasses, a new computer, and several boxes of books. Most of the books are paperbacks, dog-eared and well-thumbed. They aren't worth much. Or are they? If she's anything like her parents, they may be her greatest treasures. If her hot eyes and dazed expression is any indication when she's reading them, she's trapped inside as surely as that enchanted princess was. And one day, God willing, her own children will curl up under covers and listen to her entrap them also with the magic of words.

A Descendent and Ancestor of Readers

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A Day in the Life of a One-room School

Mark Dewalt

WHAT DO YOU GET when you combine six inquisitive elementary age students, two tiny gerbils, one friendly teacher, a small school building, and a Monday in October? In rural Maine these are the ingredients for an interesting day in the life of a one-room school. Upon entrance to Caratunk School one immediately senses a calm mood and an inviting atmosphere. Many questions come to mind. What would these children do today? What books would they read? What do they like to talk about? What projects are they working on? And how does the teacher organize the day?

Caratunk School is located in Caratunk, Maine, a small village east of the Kennebec River and three miles west of Pleasant Pond. The village is about 15 miles north of Bingham and is surrounded by forest, lakes, and ponds. On this Monday in October the weather is beautiful, a mixture of sun and clouds with temperatures in the 60s. Most trees in the area have shed their leaves, but one can still see groups of maples adorned with their sunny golden leaves as well as clusters of oaks with their leaves crinkled and brown. The white clapboard school, which was built in 1948, serves five boys and one girl in grades three through six who are under the tutelage of Ms. Erika DiSilvestro. This school, unlike many Amish and Mennonite one-room schools, has electricity and other modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing, a refrigerator, a stove and a microwave oven. The school is one of two one-room schools in the Maine Administrative School District # 13. The structure is located near the end of a street appropriately

> *One gets the feeling that this is not a classroom but a community—a community of learners.*

named School Street and is just a half block down from the general store.

The school has a bank of windows that almost fill the south side of the building. The entrance to the school is on this side, while the playground is situated behind the building. The school has a large library, with each book color coded into one of eleven categories. For example, realistic fiction books will have a yellow dot on the spine of the book. Books about historical fiction are coded orange and non-fiction books are coded red. The school also has two computers and a piano. Student desks are arranged in three learning groups. A white dry-erase marker board is used extensively by the teacher to record key ideas and examples.

> *As the students read their booklets, one is struck by the quiet that pervades the room, even the two tiny gerbils are quietly nestled in the wood shavings in their cage basking in the sunlight.*

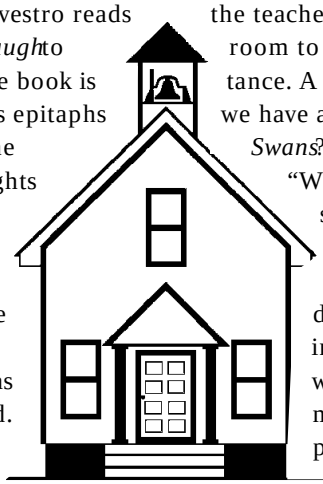
The student's day begins about 8:00 am with the first task being the completion of numerous housekeeping chores which are the responsibility of the students. Some of the chores include raising the flag, opening the blinds, watering the plants, and placing the chairs back on the floor. While involved in chores the students like to share stories from home, and the most prevalent topics on this October morning are the upcoming moose and deer hunting season or a new riffle. One student eagerly chatters about cleaning the carburetor on his dirt bike over the weekend. A quick review of current news or events is led by the teacher before spelling instruction.

Spelling instruction is individualized, as there is no textbook; in fact the only subject with a textbook is mathematics. Students select two words to add to their spelling list each day and practice these during this time. Students might select words from a current project, trade book, or words that they hear in conversation. Each student's list is unique and each will learn ten words per week. As in most schools, there will be a test on these words on Friday.

On some days the students select poetry to memorize from a list suggested by the teacher. On special occasions these poems will be recited for people in the village. A key activity each morning is oral and written language. The teacher leads this activity each morning immediately after spelling. The stu-

dents are instructed to edit a three to four sentence paragraph that the teacher has written on the board. The paragraph contains numerous spelling and usage errors.

At about 8:20 the discussion quickly moves to language arts and writing. With Halloween swiftly approaching, the students have been investigating gravestones in the area, and now the challenge is to write epitaphs for their own gravestones. Ms. DiSilvestro reads from the book *The Last Laugh* to generate student ideas. The book is a compilation of humorous epitaphs from around the world. The teacher reviews and highlights the rhythm and word play in several examples. The discussion easily flows back and forth between the students and teacher. Student questions and ideas are honored and addressed. Ms. DiSilvestro smoothly integrates science and social studies into this language arts lesson as the discussion progresses.



Before one realizes, it is already 9:25 and the younger students begin their individual work. They work on editing epitaphs written at home and also create new ones about themselves, someone they know, or a make-believe person. The fifth graders gather in the reading comer, an area with five or six large pillows in the southeast comer of the room. The teacher and students review the content and key vocabulary of the book *Shiloh* Mrs. DiSilvestro indicates what will be on the reading test to be given on Wednesday.

After this lesson the young scholars receive their reading assignment for the morning and are directed to take the next fifteen minutes to study their vocabulary words with a friend. The younger students gather at the table for their reading group. Books featuring the character Amelia Bedelia have and will again be the focus of the lesson. As the younger children read their books, the teacher occasionally scans the classroom to see if any students need assistance. A fifth grade student asks, "Do we have a copy of *Trumpet of the Swans*?" Another child responds, "We have two of them, let me show you where they should be."

By 10:00 the younger students are finishing their reading assignments. Once the work is completed, students may get a snack and go to the playground for morning recess. The swings seem to be the popular spot as students munch on crackers, cookies, or fruit. One fifth grader stays inside to work on his Morse code. He has a small flashlight bulb and one D battery connected by wires. He connects and disconnects the wire to send Morse code messages. One lucky student is chosen to walk up the street to pick up the mail at the general store. The 15 minutes of recess fly by and the students gather back inside for their science lesson.

The teacher explains the current project as students carefully page through the teacher prepared-booklets on trees.

She shows several of the reference materials that will be useful as students complete their booklets. One is a brand new book, which really captures the interest of the students. As the students read their booklets, one is struck by the quiet that pervades the room, even the two tiny gerbils are quietly nestled in the wood shavings in their cage basking in the sunlight. The low-pitched hum of the fluorescent light fixture is the only noticeable sound. The silence is refreshing. As students complete the individual reading, they progress into active use of the student booklet, reference materials, and conversations with the teacher. One gets the feeling that this is not a classroom but a community—a community of learners. It is a community that shares materials and engages in student-to-student conversation related to completing the projects at hand. It is a community raring to share ideas with the teacher and comfortable in asking her questions; it is a community that has a teacher eager to show each scholar how to discover things for him or herself. Wow! what was that? A strong gust of wind picks up leaves and pelts the south side of the building. For ten seconds all eyes and ears focus on this sudden occurrence and just as quickly the wind ceases and the leaves fall to their new resting-place. After a few comments the students return to the work at hand. As they continue to work the teacher moves from student to student giving individual attention as needed.

The current project requires materials collected at home and because some students did not bring the correct materials, they go outside to gather leaves for their projects. Each student must carefully trace each leaf and record the type of leaf, the type of vein structure, as well as the name of tree from which the leaf fell. The children use the reference books to help them record key information. The youngsters must also measure the length and width of each leaf and record that in their booklet. It is interesting to watch how carefully the younger students use a ruler to measure each leaf. An older student, who has easily identified the maple and oak leaves asks, “What are these yellow leaves? Is it an apple—no the apple tree still has most of its leaves and they are still green. Are they birch—poplar—ash?” The teacher, students, and even the observer share the reference books to solve this question. Students peer over the shoulder of another student as she pages through a new book on trees. The students study the pictures first, then they study the leaf again. Next they read the written information to see if they can find key information to help them identify the leaf One can almost see the students’ brains working as they process information, pose new thoughts or ideas based on the readings, and formulate new questions. The teacher asks the children questions that require them to focus more clearly. After many minutes of intense study of the books and scrutiny of the leaf, the students decide that the reference books are helpful only to a certain point. One student states, “We need to know the bark of the tree. If we know

which tree the leaf came from we can study the bark to find the answer." However the recent rains have hastened the fall of most leaves, and the children conclude that they must wait for spring to solve this mystery.

As one can see, this unit on leaves requires students to develop skills in a variety of areas. In addition to science skills, the completion of this project requires the student to develop observation skills, measurement skills, writing skills, reading skills, and oral language skills. By lunchtime most students have worked in all five of these areas.

Following lunch and the mid-day recess, students move into specific math instruction designed for three different groups. Students are assigned to groups by ability not age. The first group meets for about 30 minutes as the teacher gives direct instruction. After instruction students move to their individual desks to complete assignments from their textbooks or complete other work assigned by the teacher. As is the case in the morning, each student receives plenty of individual help as they work and the teacher continues to employ verbal and nonverbal positive reinforcement.

Once each group has received instruction and math is finished, students work on research projects and units in social studies for the final hour of the day. Because there are no textbooks, the teacher uses trade books and reference materials for the completion of project oriented instruction in these subjects. On this day, students are working on the topic of communications. One student is collecting information about symbols commonly used on the Internet; another scholar works on the various symbols that mean "no." Helen Keller and sign language is the topic for one individual, who hopes to be able to teach her classmates to finger spell the name of their school. Another child is learning about Pig Latin and its origins. As indicated earlier, one boy is researching the origin and use of Morse code. Once each student gathers their information, they will prepare an oral report for their classmates.

By 2:30 the school day ends. Students complete any housekeeping chores and collect materials for the walk or bike ride home. Some of the chores that are completed at the end of the day include lowering the flag, closing the blinds, and placing chairs on top of desks so it is easier to clean the floor. Ms. DiSilvestro, sends the children on their way with a reminder to complete their assignments and to bring some leaves for the next day.

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ChristLight ®: A First Look

Anna Endorf

Our synod has developed a new religion program for Lutheran elementary and Sunday schools. The synod has invested considerable time and effort in ChristLight. The curriculum was introduced in the schools in the fall of 1998. How is it doing? Who bought it and why? Do the teachers like it better than what they used in the past? What do the children think of this new curriculum? This research presents and early snapshot of ChristLight and its use in the Lutheran elementary schools.

Procedures

Fifty-one Lutheran elementary schools (approximately one out of seven) in the WELS were selected randomly for a mailed survey. Each school was given either two or three surveys depending on the number of teachers in the school. If there were more than three teachers, the principal received three surveys. The principals of the small schools were given instructions to have one lower grade (K-4) teacher and one upper grade (5-8) teacher (or himself) fill out the survey. The principals of the large schools were given the instructions to have a lower grade (K-3), and middle grade (4-6) and an upper grade (7-8) teacher fill out the survey. A total of 134 questionnaires were distributed in this way.

Two focus groups were also used in this study. The focus groups consisted of children in grades five through eight of a local Lutheran elementary school. Their teachers selected the thirteen children in the two focus groups. The author conducted the focus groups with a list of structured questions. The focus groups were videotaped and analyzed. Excerpts from the comments of the children are included in this article as pullout quotations.

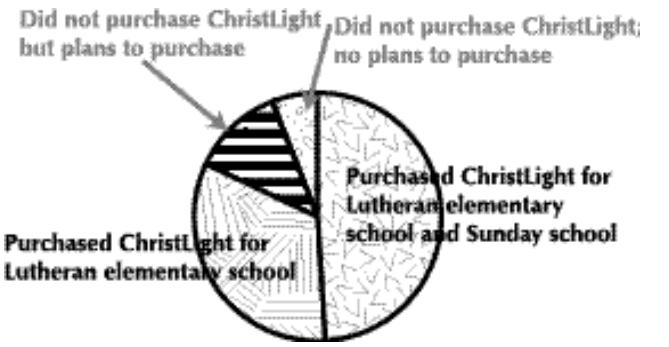
Ninety surveys were returned (67% of the 134 sent out). These returns represented 35 schools (69% of the schools surveyed). The results reported here need to be considered in light of this return rate. The data were analyzed with the computer program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

The average age of the responding teachers was 41 with an average of 15 years of teaching. Of the schools that returned the survey, 82% had purchased ChristLight.

Of the ninety responding teachers, 49% said their congregations had purchased ChristLight for both the Lutheran elementary school and the Sunday school. One out of three said their congregation had purchased ChristLight for the Lutheran elemen-

Graph 1
ChristLight Purchase



tary school but not the Sunday school. None in this survey indicated they had purchased it for the Sunday school but not the Lutheran elementary school. One out of six (17%) teachers said their congregation had not purchased ChristLight for either agency of Christian education. Two-thirds of these said their school was planning on purchasing ChristLight at some future time. (See Graph 1.)

As part of the introduction to ChristLight the committee responsible for introducing the new curriculum put on presentations, CLIP, around the synod. Out of the teachers surveyed, 90% had attended a CLIP presentation. There were sixty-nine teachers who went to a CLIP presentation whose congregations later purchased ChristLight and eleven teachers who went but whose congregations did not buy ChristLight.

> *[I don't like] questions which ask me how I feel because sometimes I don't feel.*

Several characteristics of ChristLight and the previous curriculum were compared. These included the arrangement of lessons, student material format, memory work, student activities, teaching activities, and artwork. The teachers, in those schools that had purchased ChristLight, were asked to rate the two curriculums as to whether they preferred the previous curriculum or ChristLight on each of these items. They could also indicate that they had no preference. Slightly more (37%) teachers preferred the previous curriculum more than ChristLight (24%) on the lesson arrangement; ChristLight has Old Testament one year, New Testament the other year and the lessons are taught in sequence rather than arranging them to fit the church year. Thirty-nine percent said they had no preference.

The format of the material in ChristLight (booklets) is quite different from the previous curriculum that had textbooks for the various levels. Here the division of opinion was more even. One out of six had no preference. The others pretty evenly split between those who favored the booklets and those

who favored the textbooks of the previous curriculum. The children in the focus groups preferred the booklet because it was easier to store in their desks and take home. The children agreed that it was a wise change.

When the teachers were asked whether they felt the memory work (treasures) requirements in ChristLight were too much, not enough, just about right, most teachers (58%) felt the memory work requirements seemed to be about right. The other 42% were divided equally between those who felt there was too much and those who felt there was not enough memory work. The children in the focus groups also felt the memory work was just about right.

The teachers were also asked to rate the student activities that are included in the ChristLight curriculum. The response there was overwhelming: three out of four teachers clearly preferred the ChristLight curriculum. The children in the fifth and sixth grade focus group also liked the idea that they did not have loose worksheets; they preferred having the booklet with the lesson and the activity. They could go back to it if they wanted and rethink the questions or share what they did with a younger brother or sister.

> *You get to apply this stuff to your life–these things might actually happen to you.*

Teachers also preferred the artwork in the ChristLight curriculum. One out of three had no preference between the ChristLight and the previous curriculum while nearly two out of three preferred the artwork in ChristLight.

Table 1
Reasons for Purchasing Christlight

Reason	Average rating
The emphasis on application	1.26
The suggestions for parent involvement	1.37
The extensive teachers manual	1.58
The many activities in ChristLight	1.58
Up-to-date materials	1.62
It is important to use up-to-date materials	1.70
The previous curriculum will no longer be available.	1.74
The student booklet	2.11
The art work in the student's booklet	2.38
Rating Scale:	1: very important
	2: somewhat important
	3: not important

The final two items on this portion of the survey were teaching to affective goal and the inclusion of an opening devotion. Teachers saw the inclusion of an opening devotion very favorably: two-thirds of the respondents preferred the arrangement in ChristLight; one third had no preference. Three out of four teachers who were using ChristLight

preferred the affective goal emphasis in ChristLight; one fourth felt there was no distinction between ChristLight and the previous curriculum.

The survey asked teachers in those schools (17%) that had not purchased ChristLight to rate a set of reasons for not purchasing ChristLight. There has been some concern that the cost of this curriculum was too high. Nine out of ten teachers in schools that did not purchase ChristLight believed the cost was somewhat important or very important as a factor in the decision not to purchase. More than half of these teachers however rated the desire to wait until the Old Testament was published as a very important reason for not purchasing. Some written comments for "other reason" included, "I teach grades 5-8, nothing written specifically for grades 5-8 together," "Lessons I previewed were lacking depth. Too easy,"

> *I'd like to ask [the writers] how they got all the time–whoever made these books must have been a real believer.*

"Calling of a new faculty member, and reorganizing the school."

Another reason was that the school still had previous material. This was very important to the schools. Out of the schools in the survey that did not purchase ChristLight, half of them gave as an important reason not to buy the fact that they still have previous materials.

The teachers of the schools that purchased ChristLight were asked what influenced them (their schools) to buy. The ratings are shown in Table 1.

> *This is more of a discussion among the whole class rather than just the teacher telling about it.*

Seven of the reasons were rated between somewhat important and very important. Only the last two, student booklet and art work, were rated between somewhat important and not important.

The children in the focus groups seemed to like the changes that were made to the seventh and eighth grade materials. They liked the idea that it was geared towards their lives and problems they might encounter. They liked the fact that it was preparing them for life. One of the girls did make the comment that it was very law-oriented and she would like to see more of the gospel in the program. The artwork was another item that the children responded to in the focus group. Both of the focus groups liked the artwork (for the most part).

A number of teachers included com-

ments on their surveys. Some comments discussed the reasons they purchased ChristLight: “I think it is important (artwork).” “I thought the artwork in 5-6 better than 1-2.” “The Bible is always up-to-date. Changing the textbook doesn't change the message so I cannot rate these choices.” [It is] “easier to use for my grade 1-4 combination because 1 and 2, 3 and 4 were on different cycles and it was a problem when we dropped a teacher and combined grades 1-4.” “These {reasons] don’t matter because we have no choice. If you could pick chocolate or vanilla, you have reasons. If you had only chocolate what would it matter?” While it is true that one out of three teachers gave as a very important reason for selecting ChristLight the future unavailability of the previous curriculum, I do not think that was a major factor. I think that people would look at the other benefits of the ChristLight.

Conclusions

It seems that teachers will improve ChristLight when they make it their own in their own classrooms. It will take time for people to feel comfortable with the curriculum. It may be that in a few years all teachers will see ChristLight as the obvious religion curriculum in their classrooms.

Of all the reasons people might give for using ChristLight, the most important is that it is a faithful presentation of God’s Word and the message of sin and grace found there. As children grow in grace, in wisdom, in sanctification, the real effects of ChristLight will be seen.

Anna Endorf is a student at Martin Luther College. She completed this study as part of a class project.

THE LUTHERAN EDUCATOR