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The Lutheran Educator

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Are You Listening?

Does the phrase sound familiar? You probably said this a couple of times already this year. You want your students to listen to you when you instruct them, give them directions and assignments, and describe the routines and rules in your classroom. The better your students are at listening, the less you will have to remind them to do so. Training young people to be good listeners is an important part of teaching.

There are also special times for good listening and there are particular persons to whom we are to listen very carefully.

Think back to a well-known Bible lesson—the woman from Phoenicia. She wanted Jesus to heal her daughter and Jesus implied she was a dog. But she didn't just hear "dogs"; she listened to every word Jesus spoke: "First let the children eat all they want…," Jesus said. She heard the word "first" and she knew there was a "second," and she knew she was that "second." Not only did that woman listen to and remember every word Jesus spoke. She also heard Jesus' words as he intended them, not as she might have thought they meant. She didn't hear his words about dogs as an insult; she heard his words as a promise of fulfillment. For the woman, every word Jesus spoke was life-giving and the intent and focus of Jesus' words was to covey God's love and forgiveness.

That's good listening.

Now check your own listening skills.

What are you hearing when you study that Bible lesson before you teach it to your students? Are you hearing that story so you can tell or discuss it with your students? That's good. Are you hearing that story so you can think of ways to present the lesson to capture the interest and attention of the students? That's good, too. Are you hearing that story so you can bring in important background details that enrich the story? That's good, too. Are you hearing that story so you can fit it into the ChristLight format? Even that is good.

But you haven't listened yet and you haven't listened like the woman from Phoenicia. You have to listen to God talking to *you*, telling *you* of his grace and his love. Every Bible lesson is first for you, for you to listen and learn, for you to understand and apply to yourself.

I think all of us can be better listeners, particular when God speaks to us through our pastors, our fellow teachers, our friends and family, and others, and, most directly, when he speaks to us in his Word. And we can listen better to what he says, not to what we think he says.

Of all the times in her life when that poor woman needed to listen, she did, by God's grace. We all pray for that same grace.

JRI

Helping Teachers Stress Reconciliation

John R. Schultz

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

The young lady was filled with despair. She had sinned grievously and expressed her hopelessness in a class journal. Her guilt caused her to feel that God hated her. She was referred to a spiritual counselor who told her that God placed this sin and all sins on his Son who paid for them in full. Her flickering faith began to glow in the reassurance that when Jesus died, God's anger was appeased. God didn't hate her, but was her Friend. She began to understand reconciliation.

Reconciliation speaks about a change in relationship, from enmity and anger to a condition of friendship. Sin caused an estrangement between mankind and God. The thick veil in the Old Testament temple portrayed the huge separation which sin caused between God and man. When the Lamb of God died, that veil was torn. Paul tells us that because God "was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" people's sins would not be counted against them. Instead of putting people's sin to their charge, God placed them on his Son who paid for them in full. On God's part, the debt of sin is removed. Though all people, by nature, are God's enemies, God, in Christ, has become their Friend.

God has given us the gospel to tell everyone in the world what he has done for them. The gospel is the proclamation that we have forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We are Jesus' ambassadors. He would have us tell our students again and again that his work on Calvary's cross cancels the debt of sin and makes God our Friend.

Reconciliation through the work of God's Son is a truth that stands whether man believes or not. Unbelief rejects what God has done in Christ. God-given faith clings to God's reconciliation through Christ and leads to a joyful response.

As a principal, you begin and end each day rejoicing that the awful burden of your sin is removed through the merits of Christ. In gladness you tell

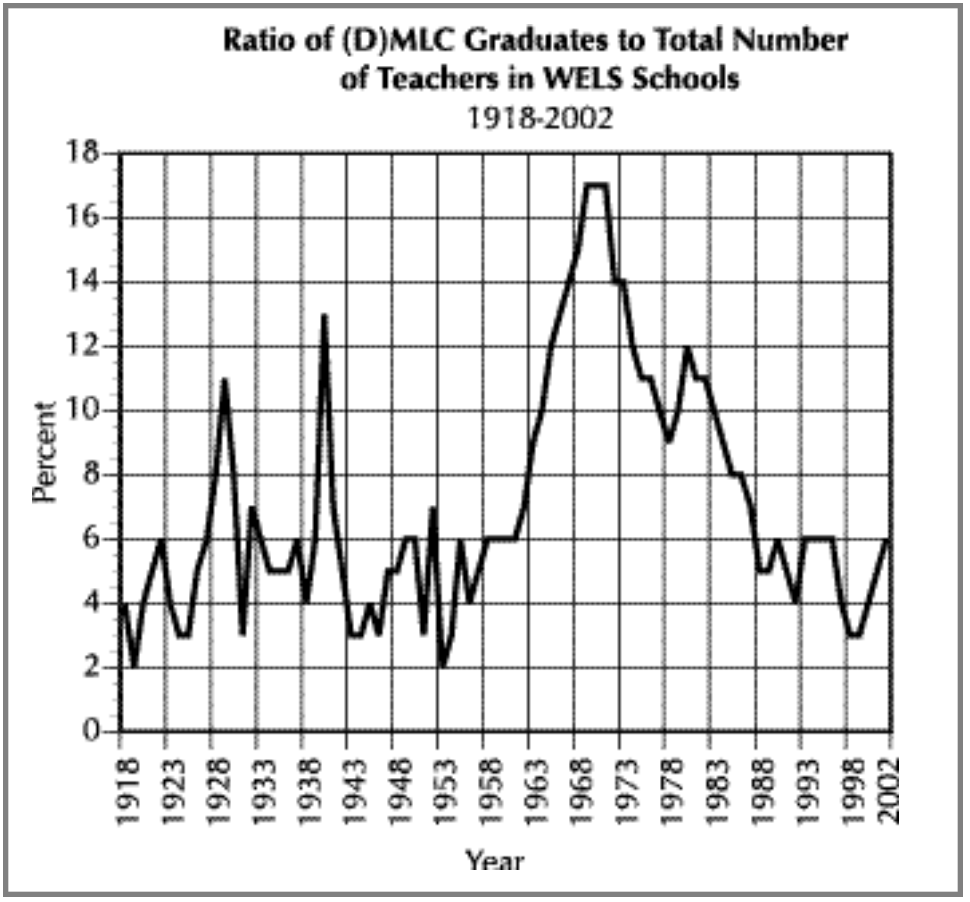
your family, friends, and students why that joy is in you. You plan faculty study and devotions focusing on reconciliation. You examine with your teachers age-appropriate instructional techniques which stress why God is our Friend. May God bless you and your teachers as you share the message of reconciliation.

Read some more: Romans 5:9-11

Dear Heavenly Father, help me to be your Son's joyful ambassador as I encourage others to share with everyone that they are forgiven through Jesus. Amen.

John R. Schultz until recently served as principal/administrator of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. He is currently retired and living in New Ulm, Minnesota.

WELS Factoid



As a comparison, in 2002 the 28 colleges and universities that train teachers in Minnesota had a ratio of graduates to total teachers in Minnesota of .04 (4%).

Parents, Teachers, Don't Shortchange Those Young Memories

Theodore Hartwig

He knew no Catoun, for his wit was rude.

This line occurs in one of Chaucer's more ribald *Canterbury Tales.* Its reference is to Cato the Elder (Catoun in French, still spoken by the upper classes in England before 1400), a prominent Roman statesman of the second century BC, also known for his practical wisdom. Consequently, Cato's name became attached to a collection of two-line proverbs in verse, the *Distichs,* which evolved in the late Roman Empire.

Easily committed to memory as poetry, their homespun, and often pungent, common sense recommended their employment for the textbook used as first reader in the Roman grammar schools to master the Latin language. Thus, as often happens, the textbook itself acquired the name of *Cato* or *Catoun.* Its simple Latin and attractive content then kept it alive as a popular text in the secondary schools of the Middle Ages well into the 1800s. In that process its first use for mastering Latin was trumped by its other appeal of furnishing students with a memory treasure of delightful maxims. So it was translated into the vernaculars of northern Europe; incorporated into his people's academic curriculum by Melanchthon, the preceptor or teacher of Germany; praised for its usefulness by the great Bohemian educator Comenius; then brought to America, where it gained wide currency with the help of Benjamin Franklin's printing press. Since popularity is often complimented and complemented with parody, that too happened in a publication entitled *Cato Turned Wrongside Outward.* Recalling Chaucer's jibe, not to know Cato or Catoun simply meant to be uneducated. The proof of the pudding is in its eating, so let a few samples from the collection of 144 distichs, exhibit their appeal.

Who rules his tongue doth highest praises reap,
Godlike is he who silence well doth keep.

Try not with words the talker to outdo,
On all is speech bestowed: good sense

on few.

Fail not another's kindness to proclaim,
Thine own good deeds 'tis better not to name.

With pleasure lighten now and then thy care
That so life's burdens thou mayest better bear.

Read much, and much of it forget. 'Tis well
T'admire but not believe what poets tell.

Cease not to learn; wisdom's through study gained
By lapse of years alone 'tis ne'er attained.

When thou at last from study hast much lore
Recall there's much to learn from life's vast store.

Dost ask why I this form of verses choose?
Know brevity did bid me couplets use.

It's time to inquire how the foregoing relates to the title of this article. Simply like this. In an age when technology was minimal, when books were costly, and when slates substituted for expensive parchment and not-yet available paper, Cato's Distichs like knowledge in general were communicated chiefly by teacher dictation to pupils. Thus learning leaned heavily on memory. To be sure, educational method has made vast strides since the invention of the printing press and its recent more sophisticated heirs. Nevertheless, exercise of the memory should not be relaxed, especially when viewed from the perspective that memory is a precious gift of God without which we lose a large degree of what it is to be human. Exercise of the memory, as with other parts of the body, strengthens and enlarges its capacity for retention, while lack of exercise, as with other parts of the body, invites atrophy that becomes more rigid with mounting age.

> *"Let memory be employed for treasuring up soul nurturing and spirit enlarging knowledge, both sacred and secular, for easy recall when needed or desired."*

Despite the technology now ready at hand to relieve memory of exercise, it seems to me that Christians above all other people have good reason to put

this divine gift to full use. Let it be employed for treasuring up soul nurturing and spirit enlarging knowledge, both sacred and secular, for easy recall when needed or desired. What a fund, to cite Philippians 4, of the good, the lovely, the excellent, the praiseworthy, Christians can draw on for commitment to memory. Poetry would be the natural choice for making a start with the youngest ones. It is committed to memory most readily, and when set to music and learned with music memorization becomes much easier. In this context, our precious heritage of hymns comes to mind. Their val for praise, for thanksgiving, for comfort in all the vicissitudes of life grows with mounting age and its accompanying infirmities. How much more serviceable their message when it is right at hand, within us. eliminates all need to dr on, or even want to draw on, exterior technology for assistance as when lying helpless on a sickbed. Does it not then seem wise for teachers to seize the moment and instill into children's minds and souls the tried and true gems of Christian hymnody which can nurture them for the rest of their lives? Is not this the better way than to consume time with having children learn ephemeral, thin-soup spiritual songs for presentation at the Sunday or the Christmas service?

Our *Christian Worship* furnishes a wealth of hymns from many different cultures that are good for memory work. Let all these sources be tapped, especially the short-stanza-ed British hymns, without neglecting our distinctively Lutheran heritage. Some of the poetry from Luther and Paul Gerhardt ought to belong to every child's memory bank. Luther's warrior hymn based on the 46th Psalm and his penitential hymn from Psalm 130 will serve Christians nobly throughout life. Gerhardt's hymns are unrivalled for personal devotion, at bedtime and in times of stress and sickness. CW 428 (Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve e) is made to order for the latter need, the third stanza of CW 587 (Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow) for the former. Add to these the first and fifth stanzas of CW 40 (O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is) as an effective counterpoise to the allurements of American affluence everywhere around us.

The value of committing Bible verses to memory speaks for itself. Here, children in the upper grades are well served if these assignments go beyond single passages which, besides the most familiar, ought to include Romans 8:38,39, Psalm 73:25,26, and John 11:25,26. A few of the shorter Psalms that speak of faith, trust, and comfort will be priceless pearls in a Christian's memory treasure throughout life. The day is probably long past when my upper grade teacher in the sixth to eighth grade assigned parables and entire chapters of the Bible, like Matthew 5 to 7, for memory

work.

Nevertheless, memorization of the precious "Little Bible" in its entirety ought to be a *sine qua non* in our Lutheran day schools and confirmation classes, to be expected of every child not burdened by mental handicaps. The reference, of course, is to the Small Catechism, that is, the Enchiridion of fewer than 25 small printed pages written by Luther himself. It is distressing to hear of parents nowadays complaining that a son or daughter was required to commit a petition explanation to memory, and that over a space of "only four days." Though much of Luther's gift for poetry is lost in translation, the Catechism's English text has retained some of the original rhythm and alliteration which expedite memory work. This is most evident in the explanations to the Creed. All three are masterpieces of Christian literature. Together with the rest of the Enchiridion, they serve well for Christian devotional life. Luther himself, he writes in his Large Catechism, daily prayed the Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer with their explanations.

Up to this point the focus has been on treasuring up knowledge to nurture the soul. In moving on to secular literature worthy of memorization, perhaps its value can be described as spirit enlarging. Here, too, a memory treasure of the good, the beautiful, the praiseworthy, will be heightened for Christians by the Holy Spirit through the gift of faith. Though the choice of materials both in verse and prose is legion, poetry again offers the best way to go, from nursery rhymes in the early grades to works of the masters in the upper grades, secondary schools, and colleges. Here there is no price premium for literature of highest quality, so why not get possession of the very best? For practical reasons we limit this review to poetry in our mother tongue.

Useful is the wisdom of Alexander Pope, such as

> Be not the first by whom the new is tried,
> Nor yet the last to put the old aside.

or

> Of all the causes which conspire to blind
> Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,
> What the weak heart with strongest bias rules
> Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools.

For their rhapsodies over nature and their appeal to the emotions, the works of the English Romantics furnish a variety of poetic jewels for the memory. Consider Wordsworth's description of those substitutes for fences as well as habitats for wildlife so prominent in rural England:

> Once again I see
> Those hedgerows, hardly hedgerows,
> Little lines of sportive wood run wild.

or these lines which he wrote in a child's album:

Small service is true service while it lasts:
Of humblest Friends, bright Creature!
Scorn not one;
The Daisy, by the shadow that it casts,
Protects the lingering dew-drop from the Sun.

Or this commentary on a meaningful life:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

For beauty of language, breadth of wisdom, and insightful commentary on life, English literature's *creme de la creme* is contained in the works of him whom Milton described as

Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warbling his native wood-notes wild.

How exquisite a description of genuine love in his 116th sonnet:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his highth be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come,
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

How interesting Shakespeare's judgment that it is worse to be victimized by a broken eighth rather than seventh commandment, as he states in *Othello:*

Good name in man or woman
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash;
'tis something, nothing;
Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

and these examples of eminent wisdom from *Comedy of Errors:*

For if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh.

and

For slander lives upon succession

Forever hous'd where it gets possession.

Or from *The Winter's Tale:*

The silence often of pure innocence
Persuades when speaking fails.

Or from *Love's Labors Lost:*

My beauty, though but mean:
Needs not the painted flourish of your praise,
Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye,
Not utt'red by base sale of merchants' tongues.

Among my favorites, this evaluation of an honest worker over against a time server, from *As You Like It:*

O good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world,
Where service sweat[ed] for duty, not for meed!
Thou art not for the fashion of these times,
Where none will sweat but for promotion,
And having that do choke their service up
Even with the having.

And, when the vocabulary is mastered, here, from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and clothed in sparkling imagery, is good, practical advice for overly meddlesome parents:

Didst thou but know the inly touch of love,
Thou wouldst as soon go kindle fire with snow
As seek to quench the fire of love with words,
The more thou dam'st it up, the more it burns;
The current that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage;
But when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with th' enamell'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;
And so by many winding nooks he strays
With willing sport to the wild ocean.

And so on and on with Shakespeare;

the fund of memorable lines seems bottomless, and so enjoyable to recall simply from memory. All this holds, of

course, for American poetry as well. Unforgettable are the lines from one of Sandburg's Chicago poems:

> The fog comes
> on little cat feet.
>
> It sits looking
> over harbor and city
> on silent haunches
> and then moves on.

Also memorable for the familiar images and experiences brought to mind, these stanzas from Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

> Whose woods these are I think I know,
> His house is in the village, though;
> He will not see me stopping here
> To watch his woods fill up with snow.
>
> The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep.

Memory ownership of things good, lovely, useful, praiseworthy is spirit-enlarging. Germany's premier man of letters, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, once wrote, as my western civilization students these past ten years may recall:

> A person should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul.

All three arts—poetry, music, painting—would normally have to be first found, first searched out for enjoyment, yet poetry has the distinction that quantities of it, unlike the other two, can be immediately savored in the memory. To repeat, memory is a precious divine gift. It deserves, indeed, it needs to be exercised for personal well-being, both to nurture the soul and to enlarge the spirit.

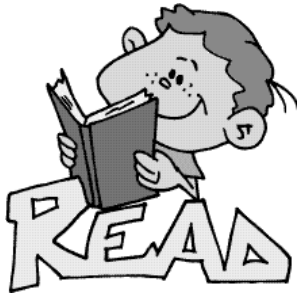
And Christian teachers, above all others, have a gold mine of literature, sacred and secular, from which they can draw to serve their students for the rest of their lives with the good, the lovely, the honest, the noble, the praiseworthy. The optimum time for memory work, of course, is in the formative years. To slough off on this educational privilege and responsibility with the fatuous excuse that young folks nowadays are overly preoccupied with other demands on their time, so many of which are here today and gone tomorrow, is doing them an inexcusable injustice like being shortchanged in a financial transaction. When it comes to money, no one cares to be shortchanged. Likewise, no parent or teacher should want the amazing potential of a child's memory to be shortchanged by giving children less than they are capable of mastering. Therefore the alert needs to be sounded and sounded and sounded again:

Parents, teachers, don't shortchange those young memories.

Theodore Hartwig taught at (Dr.) Martin Luther College in the social studies/religion department. He is retired and lives in New Ulm, Minnesota.

Book Buddies
An Adventure in Cross-age Reading

Patricia M. Grabitske



"You have to read this book!"
"Look at these neat pictures!"
"Cool story!"

Comments like these are music to a teacher's ears. What makes them all the more pleasing is the fact that all were made by seventh and eighth graders participating in a cross-age reading program called Book Buddies.

Book Buddies was originally designed as a means of occupying a group of seventh and eighth grade students and our third and fourth graders in a constructive activity during a block of time set aside for junior Choir rehearsal. Those students not participating in choir generally needed more reading practice, yet did not need discouraging contact with material written on the junior high level. Third and fourth graders needed supervision during the same time frame. Solution? Combine the two groups in a purposeful, pleasurable reading experience.

Stimulating interest in reading can be a challenge with any age group. As our students grow older, the pressure of measuring up to peer expectations becomes stronger and stronger. For a child who continues to struggle with reading in those sensitive middle school years, life at school can become an overwhelming challenge.

> "*I liked that they read with good expression, They listened to us. They picked good books.*
> *(Third Grader)*
>
> *The 3rd and 4th graders get to know what they are reading and not just the words.*
> *(Eighth grader)*"

Middle grade students need lots of

> *They were good because they read with good expression.*
> *(Third Grader)*
>
> *My Book Buddies taught me to read with expression.*
> *(Fourth Grader)*
>
> *The 3rd and 4th graders get to know what they are reading and not just the words.*
> *(Eighth grader)*

practice reading orally and hearing others read in order to develop fluency in their own reading.

The greater the variety of opportunities they encounter in these areas, the more their interests will be piqued and abilities honed.

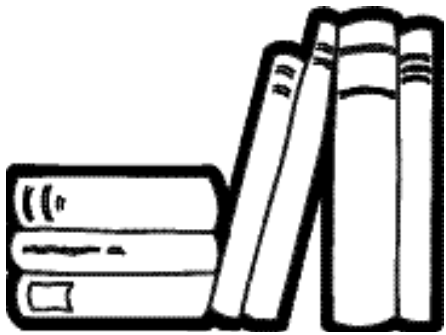
Children at this grade level also respond well to encouragement from those they admire, including older students.

As responsible educators, we search for ways to help all students. Extra help in the classroom and pull-out programs are certainly options, but these strategies focus attention on the reading weakness. Adolescents would rather struggle with reading deficiencies privately than have their need for remediation made public.

Sensitive educators wish to deal with both the tender ego and the academic problem. Doing so sometimes takes a little creativity. Cross age reading is one way to approach this situation and reap benefits for all participants. Giving both age groups opportunity to improve reading skills by making use of their peculiar needs and attitudes gave rise to the development of the Book Buddy program.

Book Buddies paired up seventh and eighth grade students with third and fourth grade students for a weekly session of reading and responding to literature. The older students were responsible for selecting a piece that they read to their younger buddies and for developing an activity based upon that selection. The partners met for about twenty minutes each week to share the reading of a picture book or beginning chapter book. Both age groups looked forward to these sessions as a break from the classroom routine, and both age groups gleaned academic and social benefits from the seeds sown through the process.

The Book Buddy plan was presented to the seventh and eighth graders as an opportunity to help the younger students strengthen reading skills and fluency. In theory, the opportunity to help



a younger student would appeal to the adolescents' self-concept and motivate them to diligence in following the program's structure. In addition, the program gave the students a vehicle for showing Christian love and concern for

> *I think the Book Buddy program was a good thing to do ... it gave us a chance to give something back.*
> *(Seventh Grader)*
>
> *I learned that reading fast is bad sometimes because I could not understand what they were saying. I enjoyed it a lot.*
> *(Third Grader)*
>
> *The one thing I would want to change is that we should change partners more often.*
> *(Eighth Grader)*

a younger brother or sister in Christ.

Selecting a piece for reading required a trip to the school library and becoming familiar with the way books are organized on the shelves. Selecting from the EZ section or from beginning chapter books held no shame because the purpose was to benefit the little kids. After selecting the book, the older student needed to read it before structuring a

response activity. Finally, producing a response activity required the use of a computer. In one activity, the student was developing library skills, reading, reflecting, and using the computer. All this was done in the name of helping a younger student!

To prepare a response activity, the book buddy needed to read the selection and study the text for story structure, opportunities for phonetic studies, context clues for words they thought might present challenges, and the like. Employing all these strategies with a simple text eliminated the stress of dealing with textbooks written at or above their grade level and eliminated the social stigma of reading "baby books" since this level of print best suited the needs of the program.

At first the selection of books centered on very simple picture books. As the partners got to know each other, their interests, and their abilities, the selection of books moved to picture books with more text, some easy chapter books, and some shorter works of nonfiction. The older students were generally surprised at the reading abilities of

their younger partners and needed to adjust their book selections to meet the changing standards. Seventh and eighth graders began sharing information about "a really cool book" they had used. Imagine—book talks!

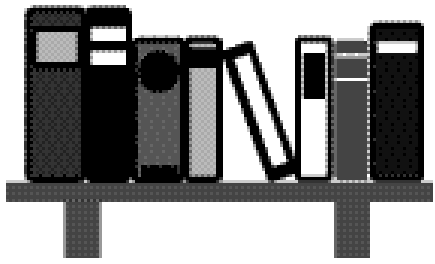
> *I enjoyed reading to the third and fourth graders because they showed their appreciation and it made me feel like I was actually helping them to read better.*
> *(Seventh Grader)*
>
> *I liked Book Buddies because they were fun.*
> *(Fourth Grader)*
>
> *My favorite part was trying to make up questions that would make them think a little bit.*
> *(Eighth grader)*

Reading this variety of literature exposed both groups to new genres and different authors. The advantage for the younger students lay mainly in yet another opportunity to read with some guidance and develop fluency with a simple text. They also developed friendships with the "big kids" who previously had been viewed as somewhat unapproachable.

Advantages to the upper graders were multiple. As these struggling readers selected and prepared material to share with their younger partners, they unknowingly read and reread a simple text, developing fluency. Preparing a discussion guide or other response activity focused their attention on comprehension strategies in a way that one of their own textbooks could not. Delving into phonetic components gave them a review of those skills without bruising their tender egos through direct instruction.

Writing questions about the selected books was another challenge. The initial attempts resulted in numerous yes/no questions. By encouraging open-ended questions for the purpose of giving the younger students opportunity to practice their oral communication and sentence writing skills, the older students were also forced to rethink and rewrite. In fact, the younger partners began asking for what they termed "fat questions," questions requiring a longer ("fat") answer.

A by-product of this project was an increase in keyboarding skills as computers were used to produce the response activities. The additional



opportunity to use the computer was also a motivational tool. Students also learned to plan their project and to budget their time in order to meet the weekly deadline.

> *I learned big words and what they mean. The bad things were they goofed around and read too fast.*
> *(Fourth Grader)*
>
> *I think next year they should do it again.*
> *(Eighth Grader)*

Both age groups enjoyed the sessions. Third and fourth graders said they liked reading such a wide variety of books. Many voiced an appreciation for getting to know the seventh and eighth graders. Comments of "He's cool" and "She's neat" were frequently used to describe their buddies.

The seventh and eighth graders reflected upon the experience with such statements as "I like reading with the little kids." Many stated that they felt good when they could help a younger student. Some of the older students even admitted they enjoyed reading picture books and were entertained by the illustrations and story lines.

Our foray into cross age reading through the Book Buddy program yielded many benefits for students in both age groups. All found reading to be enjoyable and a welcome break from the classroom routine. Word attack skills were improved, as was the ability to formulate questions. Friendships were formed. Computer skills improved, library skills were learned, and the responsibility of preparation to meet a deadline experienced. Students and teachers rated the adventure a success.

At the end of our first year of the Book Buddy project, we asked the students to reflect on their experiences. Most students had comments on both sides of the spectrum, but all thought the program should continue.

Pat Grabitske teaches at Trinity Lutheran School in Belle Plaine, MN.

A Balanced Approach to Reading Instruction

Cindy Whaley

WHAT VISUAL PICTURE comes to mind when you hear the word balance? As each person who reads this question constructs his or her own picture, some of you may think of the first time you tried to ride a bicycle. Some of you may think of trying to stay upright as you walked across a balance beam. Others of you may think of balancing your checkbook. The visual pictures are many and varied. No matter what the picture, the concept of balance needed to be mastered to accomplish the task at hand.

With the concept of balance in your mind, we will investigate a balanced approach to reading instruction at the elementary level. A balanced approach to reading instruction, with its emphasis on beginning and elementary reading, has gained the interest of many teachers and literacy researchers as well as considerable media attention. I became interested in studying this approach to reading instruction when I began pursu-

ing my doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction, with an emphasis in literacy education, at the University of Minnesota. My continued interest, my new teaching duties at Martin Luther College, and the need for more research on this topic served as catalysts in helping this approach to reading instruction become the foundation for my doctoral dissertation.

Definition of terms

Balanced reading instruction: Balanced reading instruction does not possess a unilateral definition (Freppon & Dahl, 1998; McIntyre & Pressley, 1996; Pearson, 1996; Tompkins, 1997; Weaver, 1998). According to my research study, balanced reading instruction is defined by the following characteristics: 1) teachers base their instruction on their deep knowledge of language and learning, taking advantage of the natural relationship between oral and written language (Pearson, 1996), 2) instructional methods are designed by both the teachers and the students, 3) language arts is integrated with a focus on children's literature (Tompkins, 1997), 4) a common ground is found between whole language and explicit instruction in both skills and strategies (McIntyre & Pressley, 1996), 5) phonics is taught in the context of meaningful acts of reading and writing and letter-sound cues are kept in balance with other kinds of knowledge (Pearson, 1996; Weaver, 1998), and 6) thoughtful teachers provide engaging settings and activities for literacy learning and hold high expectations for all of their students (Pearson, 1996).

Literature-based reading instruction Literature-based reading instruction can be described in a variety of ways: 1) combining the use of trade books with a basal series that a school has adopted, 2) building a reading curriculum by using trade books, 3) using a reading curriculum based entirely on the children's self selection of texts, 4) pursuing a reading curriculum in which students study the same book through teacher guided discussions, 5) using a reading curriculum in which students select books and engage in follow-up activities, and 6) designing a combination of these approaches (Galda, Cullinan, & Strickland, 1997).

Reading/language arts instruction This is the time allotted in the daily schedule for the actual reading/language arts lesson and for related activities designed by the teacher and/or the students. Some teachers prefer to note it on their daily classroom schedules as reading, while others prefer to call it language arts. This reading/language arts lesson encompasses reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation.

Integration/integrated activities: Integration is defined in the narrow sense by combining reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation activities at anytime throughout the school day. In a broader sense, any or all of the language arts components may be combined with another discipline or disciplines

throughout the school day, for example, language arts and social studies.

Essential components for the implementation of a balanced approach to reading instruction

The enactment approach to curriculum implementation

The importance of any curriculum, including a balanced approach to reading instruction, is in its implementation. Researchers are increasingly interested in studying how the curriculum has been enacted and experienced by teachers and students, rather than how a proposed curriculum is implemented or adapted by teachers. This enactment approach views curriculum as the educational experiences jointly created by teachers and students (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, in Jackson, 1992). Both teachers and students are central figures in curriculum development and implementation, and both experience continual growth as the process of the enacted curriculum unfolds. The teachers and students are creators rather than only receivers of curriculum knowledge.

Teacher beliefs and practices related to reading instruction

It is vital that teachers have an understanding of what they believe about language and language learning (DeFord & Harste, 1982; Strickland & Freeley, 1991; and Strickland & Morrow, 1989.) "Instruction, be it by design or default, is theoretically based. Teachers must come to understand how their beliefs affect what children believe about language and language learning" (DeFord & Harste, 1982, p. 593). The various contexts surrounding classroom instruction, such as the home or the community, can support or negate the specific instructional context as defined by the teacher.

Research on the teaching of reading in the 1990s saw investigations of teachers' thought processes as they made instructional decisions in the complex classroom setting (Graves and Graves, 1994). Much of this research was grounded in constructivist philosophy which posits that students are engaged in the construction of meaning through reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which enables students to truly understand that knowledge. Further, many studies focus on settings in which reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integrated (i.e., integrated language arts) and children's literature is an important component of the literacy program (Pressley, 1998). The teacher plays a huge role in planning and in aiding the student to be successful in both the cognitive and affective activities involved in reading instruction.

Therefore a major focus has been on the impact of a teacher's philosophy of reading and how that plays out in the decisions she makes and what she implements as she teaches reading. Numerous studies reflect the notion that the students tend to respond and perform in conjunction with their teacher's philosophy and instructional practices. These same studies suggest that the manner in which children are taught to read and to write is related to

the conceptions that children hold and take into future literacy experiences.

The role of literature in balanced reading instruction

The use of literature is an integral part of balanced reading instruction. Literature plays an important role in the lives of children. It entertains and informs children about themselves and the world around them. Reading carefully crafted poetry and prose may improve children's facility with language. Literature helps children become strong readers because the stories, poetry, and information are appealing and engaging to children. Children become better readers by reading more and, in turn, also learning more in the process. Literature also helps children become strong writers because they borrow structures, patterns, formats, and words they have observed in their reading. Finally, students understand themselves better and gain more insight into human experience by reading literature (Cullinan & Galda, 1998, pp. 5-6). Since literature is a powerful force in the lives of students, teachers can take advantage of this by shaping their curriculum around children's books (Cullinan & Galda, 1998).

Effective teachers

Research on balanced reading instruction reflects the assumption that teachers need to be effective instructors (McIntyre & Pressley, 1996). Effective teachers are businesslike, skilled classroom managers who are organized both in task and in direction for themselves and their students. They encourage active student learning for the maximum amount of time during the school day by being well prepared, using short transitions, asking probing questions, and having high expectations for all students. In addition, effective teachers communicate well with their students' families/caregivers (Brophy, 1973; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

Teaching is both an art and a science (Glover & Bruning, 1990). Good teachers are creative. They solve problems by inventing teaching methods and materials. They also demonstrate the ability to implement methods of science, such as hypothesizing, experimenting, and observing outcomes. Effective teachers are able to develop student thinking, facilitate student development, manage classrooms effectively, deliver high quality instruction in a variety of ways, evaluate learning using many forms of assessment, and adapt to changing requirements in order to be sensitive to the needs of all students. "The best teachers are always learning; they are themselves dedicated students" (Glover and Bruning, 1990, p.11).

A national sample of teachers in kindergarten through grade two who were identified by their supervisors as being effective primary-level literacy teachers was surveyed by Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi (1996). Effective was defined as being successful in educating large numbers of their students to be readers and writers. The purpose of the investigation was to arrive at a detailed description of the instructional prac-

tices that outstanding teachers of literacy considered to be vital in educating their students. The practices that the eighty-three teachers considered crucial were found to be (1) modeling, (2) practice and repetition, (3) a combination of whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction, (4) sensitivity to the needs of individual students, and (5) curriculum integration.

This investigation was extended by Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampton (1998) when they conducted an observational study in nine first-grade classrooms. The following beliefs and practices distinguished the instruction of the three teachers whose students demonstrated the highest levels in the crucial areas of literacy achievement: (1) coherent and thorough integration of skills with high quality reading and writing experiences, (2) a high density of instruction integrating multiple goals in a single lesson, (3) extensive use of scaffolding, (4) a thorough integration of reading and writing activities, (5) encouragement of student self-regulation, (6) masterful classroom management, (7) high expectations for all students, and (8) an awareness of their instructional practices and the goals underlying them.

Understanding balanced reading instruction

The implementation of balanced reading instruction is an exciting, complex process. Within that process, the use of the enactment approach to curriculum implementation, the connection of teachers' beliefs and practices concerning reading instruction, the importance of effective teaching, and the role that literature plays in balanced instruction are essential components that enhance literacy learning for both teachers and students. These components are necessary and are naturally intertwined as teachers go about enacting a balanced approach to reading instruction with their students.

There is a call for research involving teachers as colleagues in a common quest to discover the qualities, the complexities, and the richness of life in balanced reading classrooms. Teachers' voices need to be heard (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). Hearing teachers' voices provides an opportunity for researchers to describe the complexities, the qualities, and the exciting learning that is unique to a balanced reading classrooms.

In order to better understand balanced reading instruction, my research allowed exemplary teachers' voices to be heard concerning their philosophies and practices as they enacted a balanced approach to reading instruction at the first grade level. Exemplary means a model deserving of imitation. Teachers were selected by how their pedagogy matched the pedagogy of balanced reading instruction at Martin Luther College in the reading/language arts area. In addition, the selection team stated that exemplary first grade teachers would also have teaching experience, demonstrate leadership qualities, and successfully mentor student teachers. Finally, exemplary teachers demonstrated those qualities revealed by the research on effective teaching discussed

earlier in this article.

The study was driven by the following questions: 1) What are exemplary first grade teachers' philosophies of literacy teaching and learning? 2) What do observations reveal about how exemplary first grade teachers balance skills instruction with a more holistic approach? 3) What are the instructional decisions that exemplary first grade teachers make as they plan and implement their reading/language arts lessons? and 4) How do exemplary first grade teachers' philosophies fit with their classroom practices?

Findings

Dominant themes related to research question one

- Teaching and learning in various ways

All of the teachers were able to articulate their philosophies. Their philosophies were very similar, even though they may have stressed some points over others in their individual interviews.

All of the teachers reported that students learn in a variety of ways. Students need to be active learners. The classroom environment should be fun, interesting, stimulating, meaningful, warm, friendly, print-rich, and child-centered. The same held true for their teaching. They all noted that they must teach in a variety of ways to meet the various needs of the students. Concerning reading, they all remarked that students learn how to read in a variety of ways, similar to student learning in general. The teachers spoke strongly about the importance of getting their students excited to read and making reading meaningful. They saw the need to supply their students with many strategies for reading unknown words. All of the teachers stated that reading and writing go hand-in-hand.

- Making reading exciting and meaningful

All of the teachers suggested that students should not look at reading as a class but rather as a part of their daily lives. They felt it was their job to get their students excited for reading and to supply them with a vast array of strategies to help make them successful readers. Connecting the students' background knowledge with the text was paramount for these teachers as they helped their students to see reading as a meaning-making process. Discussions ensued concerning the connection between oral and written language and how children move from whole to part, seeing the whole story first and then looking at the individual components.

- The need for curriculum integration

All of the teachers emphasized the need to integrate naturally the various disciplines in both the narrow and broad sense of curriculum integration. Just as connections are made in everyday living, these teachers ascribed to connecting the various disciplines while teaching their students.

Dominant themes related to research question two

- Teaching skills in the context of the whole story

All teachers in this study taught skills in context during their newsboard/daily

news time, shared reading time, guided reading time, various writing activities, reading of poetry, and the extension activities that followed these experiences. These skills included consonant and vowel sounds, rhyming words, spelling patterns, capitalization, punctuation, describing words, vocabulary building, predicting, inferencing, and story structure. They mentioned that this was their preferred way to teach the skills.

Some of the teachers began their week with a big book. These books were used to begin the shared reading activities every morning. On the first day, each teacher, allowing only time for predictions, read straight through the big book. On the following days, the teachers taught skills and vocabulary within the meaningful context of the big book. Skills taught within the context of the big books included vowel sounds, rhyming words, describing words, spelling patterns, and proper punctuation. Another teacher began her week with a story from a literature-based basal rather than a big book. Her shared reading activities closely mirrored those of the other teachers during the overall reading planned for the week.

- Teaching skills in the context of the other reading and writing activities

All of the teachers had their students involved in reading and writing activities at the beginning of the day. Some teachers had their students writing in journals before the school day began. Another option used by the teachers was beginning the day with morning news or newsboard. Skills that were taught within the context of these settings were word recognition strategies, parts of speech, capitalization, vowels, describing words, and punctuation.

- Integrating the curriculum

All of the teachers integrated the subject matter whenever natural connections arose in the narrow and broad sense of the term. Examples included singing action songs that incorporated the teaching of graphophonic cues, read aloud books connecting with the science or social studies themes being studied in the various classrooms, writing a class book that mirrored the big book or story being read. Depending upon each teacher's thematic teaching, I also saw them naturally connecting art and math activities whenever possible.

- Using children's literature

Some of the teachers structured their own balanced reading program primarily with children's literature while others chose to use a literature-based basal to teach skills instruction with a more holistic approach. When using a literature-based basal, the teacher had freedom to plan her own lessons, even though the textbook had everything laid out as to how skills should be taught. A teacher using the literature-based basal incorporated children's literature into her day in a variety of ways. Further evidence of an enacted curriculum in their classrooms included open-ended activities, self-selected reading time, and student input into theme choices. Students were able to help construct the curriculum with their teachers.

All of the teachers used literature to

enhance their language arts block of integrating reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation. The components of the language arts block encompassed their entire day rather than being a certain time frame on a daily schedule. The use of poetry was also an integral part of the literature used during the daily language arts activities and when integrating reading with other subjects such as science and social studies.

- Connecting reading and writing

Reading/language arts encompassed the entire day for all of these teachers. All of the teachers had their students writing in a variety of formats throughout the day.

The teachers, when interviewed, responded by saying: "Reading and writing go hand in hand. It is a great way to assess how students read. They need daily experiences with both."

"What can be written down can be read. The reading and writing connection has to be there."

"Students have to see writing to see its importance. They need to see that it has a purpose and that it is fun."

Dominant themes related to research question three:

- All learning is meaningful and purposeful.

All of the teachers shared that their students' learning should be meaningful and purposeful. This included the activities that extended from all facets of the language arts area. The teachers carefully made their daily and weekly instructional decisions for their daily/weekly plans. They worked hard to integrate the language arts with other curricular areas so that natural connections could be made and related to real life situations. All of the teachers spoke of the need to help their students see that reading and writing are life skills, not just classes. They also spoke of the importance of making the literature extension activities meaningful rather than just busy work.

- Making natural connections during curriculum integration is of utmost importance.

All of the teachers again stressed the need to make connections across the language arts in the narrow sense every day and in the broad sense as often as the opportunity arose. They again reiterated the importance of making connections with what they were teaching and relating it to the student's everyday life.

- Teacher modeling is a necessity.

All of the teachers discussed the importance of modeling the love of reading and writing for their students on a daily basis. This was demonstrated during instructional and non-instructional times. On a daily basis, all of them read enthusiastically during read aloud time, talked about books they personally enjoyed, and shared their writing abilities, such as how to craft a proper sentence.

- Teachers teach language arts by balancing skills with a more holistic approach.

All of the teachers reminded themselves of the word "balance" as they designed their weekly lesson plans.

Referring back to my definition, this meant trying to construct an equal amount of skills instruction while using a more holistic approach. All of the teachers stressed in their teaching and modeling the need for their students to understand all three cueing systems—semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic as they helped their students figure out unknown words in their reading.

- Teachers must implement a variety of instructional methods.

All of the teachers agreed on the importance of implementing a variety of instructional methods in order to meet the needs of the different interests and abilities of the students in their classrooms. All of them used whole-group, small-group, and individualized instructional settings within their daily schedules. They also planned various activities to enhance the understanding of the stories they were reading or the integrated concepts they were learning by allowing their students to use the entire room as a place for learning, not just their desks or table spaces. Some of the teachers used centers extensively in their teaching while another would possibly use centers one day each week.

- Teachers strive to meet the diverse needs of their students.

All of the teachers believed strongly that their students must be taught in variety of ways in order to be more effective in teaching to the diverse needs of their students. The teachers did not concern themselves with the fact that this might mean more work for them. They all chose to put their students' needs first before their own needs.

Dominant themes related to research question four

- The fit between teachers' philosophies and practices.

This study caused these teachers to dig deeply into their knowledge of theory and practice and then to articulate their thoughts. They all, through the interview process, saw the vital need for their philosophies and practices to fit together to facilitate successful balanced reading instruction in their classrooms.

The teachers were asked to articulate their philosophies in five areas: general student learning, the teaching of reading, the teaching of writing, curriculum integration, and the enactment of a balanced approach to reading instruction. These stated philosophies were compared with their practices in general student learning. Using criteria I designed, the teachers were determined to be consistent, somewhat consistent, or not consistent. In the teaching of reading they were consistent or somewhat consistent. In the teaching of writing they were all consistent. In the area of curriculum integration they were all consistent. In the enactment of a balanced approach to reading, according to my definition, they were either consistent or somewhat consistent.

- Teaching as a journey—the process of change in a teacher's life.

All of the teachers evoked the same response concerning the tremendous importance of continuing education by taking classes, workshops, and by reading professional books and journals.

They also stressed the need to observe and talk with other teachers to share ideas and expertise.

The pathways that all of the teachers took in order to become balanced reading teachers were fascinating to report. They realized their own frustrations and their students' frustrations as they taught them to read and write. These frustrations emphasized the importance of the need to change and the positive effects that their changes had on their students as they became more successful readers and writers, as well as for themselves becoming more effective teachers.

Each teacher stated that the need to change was driven by trying to meet the needs of their students. Changes were made slowly and systematically. All of them expressed positive effects primarily that their students would become lifelong readers and writers and for themselves as effective teachers. They all know the journey is still unfolding and more change is yet to come as they enact a balanced approach to reading instruction in their classrooms.

Concluding remarks

God's Word is the foundation for everything we do in our schools, both the planned and the hidden curriculum. That will never change. What a comfort for us. With that foundation firmly laid, we design the educational philosophy, objectives, curriculum, methods, and evaluation tools in each of our unique settings across the WELS. We, as educators, must challenge ourselves to know and articulate our philosophies of teaching and learning. Questions that should joyously plague us may be: What is your philosophy concerning how students learn in general? What is your philosophy concerning how students learn to read? How does your philosophy match the practices that you implement in your classroom?

No Child Left Behind, evidence-based reading, high-stakes testing, state standards, phonemic awareness, phonics, the balanced approach to reading at every stage of life, the impact of knowing more about how the brain works; this is only a start to the list of topics that we must "battle" as we search for best practices for teaching and learning in the twenty-first century. We, as educators, must remember that we are always learners, just like those that we are privileged to educate in our classrooms. As we continue to learn and to learn from each unique group of students that the Lord gives us, we must decide if changes are needed in our philosophies of teaching and learning. Whether these changes are big or small, we change for the sake of those students that we are privileged to help on their journeys to becoming successful, lifelong readers.

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Cindy Whaley teaches in the Education Division at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN.

Choices and Decisions

Paul L. Willems

WE LIVE IN A WORLD filled with choices. We must make decisions every day. Are we making good decisions? Are we teaching our students how to choose wisely?

Humans were created with the ability to choose. God gave our first parents a choice between two trees growing in the Garden of Eden. Luther said this was their "church," their opportunity to worship their Creator by making a correct choice. We know they had the ability to do this because they were created with perfect knowledge and righteousness. They possessed the image of God. We also know Adam decided to rebel by deliberately choosing to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He chose sin over obedience. Adam's son Cain also was given the choice of pursuing good or evil. As a believer he could have turned his back on sin and obeyed God. Cain decided to kill his brother instead. Mary, on the other hand, chose the better part by deciding to hear the instructions of Jesus rather than to help her sister Martha prepare a ıeal. Choices are important.

Choices imply there are alternative behaviors, several options, or a fork in the road. If there were not such a branching in behavior or in thought, there would be no need to decide. When a ballot lists the name of only one candidate, there is no reason to make a choice. However, when several different options are presented, we need to make intelligent choices and to teach the students in our care to do the same.

To make a decision means to end considering alternatives and to pick one. It means to make a judgment about the choices presented. This idea of choosing requires a degree of maturity and experience to weigh the choices. One reason adults often make better decisions than do young people is that adults have experienced many more choices and have emotionally-tagged memories of what a good choice is.

Logic is another aid to making good decisions. When individuals approach the process of choosing with rational and systematic methods, it has been found they make fewer decisions that they find to be emotionally "bad" later on. To apply such logic to decision making we must seek to remove bias and eliminate predisposed preferences. Our minds must be able to see the pros and the cons of each alternative. Once this is done, selection becomes relatively easy. However, it is not easy to be so open-minded. Many things may obscure our decisions. Today there are many pressures from advertisers and the media to choose their opinion over other options. There are also many "politically correct" preferences that can cloud decision making to the point where the making of any choice is wrong because any judgment favors one alternative and does not select the others. We live in a world that values "feeling good" above making logical decisions.

Another aid to decision making is the possession of a table of ethics or a set of moral standards or values of right and wrong. These ethical resources will help screen out alternatives that are morally incorrect. Our conscience is our built-in witness to moral standards, but it is not an infallible source. Just read the newspapers or watch the news on television. Many are confused over right and wrong. This is why God revealed his will to us in the Bible. This is one reason Christian schools teach the inerrant truths of the Bible and ask their students to memorize key Bible passages. By possessing such a base of ethics we and our students do not have to experience every evil to know that such activities are wrong. However, no one can decide to chose Christ on his own. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Humans may choose only to reject the gospel invitation.

Still another way to assist our students in their decision-making processes is to have them meet in groups to form a consensus within the group. This is a way of deciding other than by voting. It's a process of putting many alternatives together based on individual feelings or needs. Forming a consensus takes more time than does voting. It requires many resources, but it creates a commitment to the decision by all parties and not just a commitment by those in the majority.

In the Christian environment of your classroom it may be easy to discuss and teach decision-making skills because all involved share a common value system. All are Bible-believing Christians. Practice in conflict resolution, in separating the relevant from the irrelevant, and in showing respect for those with differing opinions is also helpful.

You may argue such decision-making skills take too much time to practice. Class time is already stretched and is in jeopardy from other forces. Yet, students in mathematics and science classes are already practicing logical problem-solving methods. These courses pose problems in which irrelevant data must be eliminated and in which facts must be found to support findings that lead to a solution. Don't we stress discussion skills, respect for the opinions

of others and conflict resolution in social studies discussion groups? We learn to take turns when speaking and to avoid name-calling and other personal attacks or emotional appeals when presenting our point and in reaching a conclusion. Finally we can practice decision making throughout the day, not only during formal class time, but also in casual social encounters and interactions with others in extra-curricular activities and in the lunchroom or on the playground.

As we allow our students to make decisions in the haven of the loving, caring environment in our Christian classrooms, they will grow in their ability to make logical and morally appropriate choices.

I am not advocating teaching a separate class in decision making or even advocating new activities to teach such skills. I am stating teachers can inform their students that the activities already employed in the classroom promote good decision making. Both the teacher and the students should become consciously aware of the concepts that promote the making of better choices as our students interact with us and with each other throughout the day. These interactions involve decisions. Any encounter is practice in making choices. One reason the "Just say, No!" campaign failed was that the alternatives were not clearly defined. Any decision must move toward a positive direction and not just away from a negative. Let's use such opportunities to discuss decision-making skills.

As we allow our students to make decisions in the haven of the loving, caring environment in our Christian classrooms, they will grow in their ability to make logical and morally appropriate choices. Granted, because of sin, both teachers and students will fail at this task as we fail at all we do. Go back to the cross. Try again. As we practice and strive to better our decision-making skills, we will improve. This is important. For it is our choices that show who we truly are far more than any talents and God-given abilities we may have.

Paul Willems is an instructor at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minnesota.

October 11 Homecoming 2003

Women Knights Soccer vs. Northwestern 10:00 AM

Cross Country 11:00 AM

Men Knights Soccer vs. Northwestern 12:00 Noon

Knights Football vs. Principia 12:00 Noon

Talen Show 7:30 AM

Alumni gatherings throughout the day

November 6-8 Focus on Ministry Days

November 6-9 Musical: "Into the Woods"

December 14 Family Open House 12:00 Noon

Christmas Concert 3:00 AM

Dec. 17 Midyear Graduation

End of fall semester