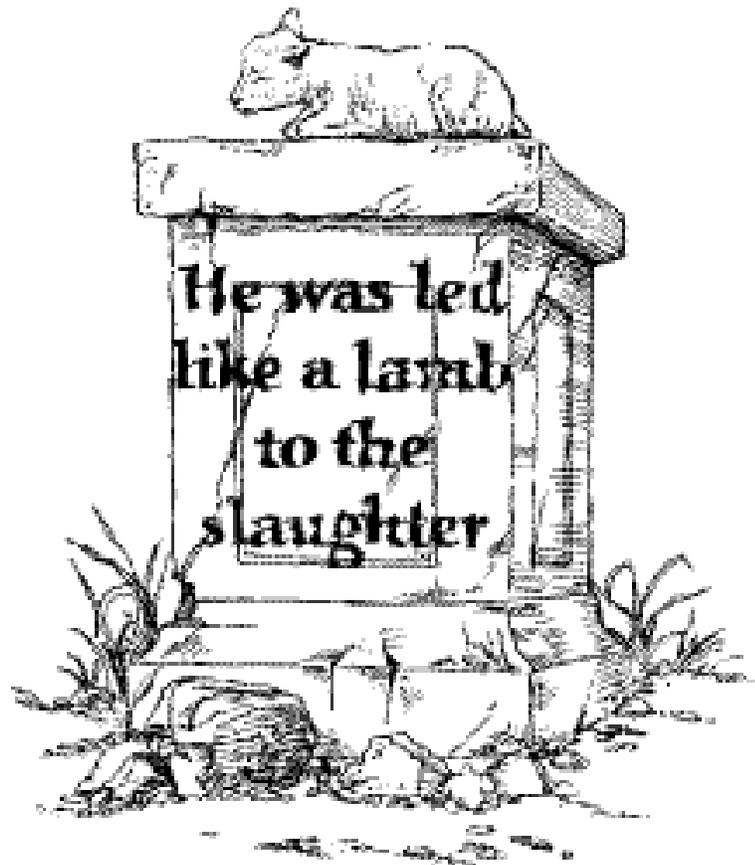


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The Lutheran Educator



The WELS Education Journal



The Lutheran Educator

The education journal
of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
edited by faculty of Martin Luther College

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ARTICLES

- “Don’t Laugh Until Christmas”** 68
John Schultz
- MLC—Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow** 70
David Wendler
- The WELS Calling Process for Teachers** 74
LeDell Plath
- Accommodate and Adapt for Struggling Students** 80
Dr. Alan Spurgin
- Finding Time for Music** 84
David Bauer
- Saxon Phonics: Three Teachers Comment** 88
Pamela Duveneck, Amy McCargar, Elise Shambeau
- Spontaneous Combustion and Very Long-range Lesson Plans** 94
Stephen Merten

DEPARTMENTS

- As We See It** 67
At the Center
Planning Support for Schools
R. Fischer, A. Nommensen
- Continuing Education** 83
John Paulsen



At the center

Many a refrigerator bears the magnet with the message, “When Mom’s not happy, nobody’s happy.” We smile at the surface truth, but don’t miss the one underneath. The axiom attests to mom’s central role in the home where she touches the lives of family members as no one else can. From this post she is the default tone-setter in chief, a great honor and responsibility.

This principle that attitude and tone emanate from a primary source and then move out to affect others is easily transferred to other family models. The Christian congregation is one. And in the role of “mom” are called workers.

Teachers, pastors, and staff ministers are human, and no one can expect that they won’t have the same emotional peaks and valleys everyone else has. To hold them responsible for someone else’s mood is not reasonable. Regarding the congregation’s sense of mission and its spirit toward that mission, however, called workers must own their central place. This calling is our profession. By God’s grace and with his guiding, we at some point made the conscious decision to become full-time workers in the church. Members have a right to expect that our belief in what we are doing runs deep.

So a few questions are properly put to us. We have been called to a ministry of the word. Does our personal and public study of that word reflect the proper regard? In accepting our calls, we have agreed to become spiritual leaders in carrying out the great commission. Do our members sense in us a passion for the lost in our community? Are we the ones gently and persistently asking how the congregation’s ministry plans are tied to outreach? The risen Lord is the Head of our church. Do our members sense in us a resurrection confidence about the work we carry out together and individually?

“Hold it” we might say, “I can’t control how fired up our members are for ministry.” That’s right; we can’t control it. We can, however, recognize that ministry attitudes are contagious. Somewhere on a continuum from self-serving and defeatist to outreaching and certain lies our ministry mindset. We do well to ask ourselves frequently where ours is, because our members are drawing their own conclusions. They’ve been watching.

Thankfully, this is no exercise in the power of positive thinking. Our Lord supplies strength for tasks, love for souls, and trust in his good will. Ask him for generous portions of all, and remember that sinners like us must keep asking. The psalmist modeled ministry enthusiasm and confidence when he wrote, “...with my God I can scale a wall” (Ps 18:29). We’re in the same company.

PML



“Don’t Laugh Until Christmas”

John Schultz

A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit ... All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast. Proverbs 15: 13 & 15

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 17:22

It was a long time ago when I was twelve years old that the Thanksgiving family get-together suffered a catastrophe. I remember it as if it were yesterday. The relatives were standing around the buffet table loaded with turkey and holiday food. Just as we were about to pray, the table collapsed in the middle. Turkey and food slithered everywhere. My uncle, the host, turned red with anger. Everyone fell silent, expecting an outrage. I laughed. My cousin laughed. We all laughed, almost to hysterics.

It was my third year of teaching. My classroom had a full map rack above the front blackboard. Facing the class, I reached behind and above to pull down a map, as the lesson went on. Down came the rack, hitting me squarely on the shoulders. The room was still. Then one, then another, then the entire class,

including the teacher, erupted in laughter. Sore shoulders and all, the tension evaporated.

Laughter is one of God’s treasured gifts to the human race. Yet the stereotypical teacher is often thought of as stern and somber. Some develop the look of a basset hound through long hours of practice in holding back humor and squelching laughter.

Looking stern is nothing new. It seems to me that the chiefs of frowners in the first century were the bunch of stuffed shirts we know as Pharisees. Jesus reserved his harshest words for them.

Perhaps you own or have seen R. Hook’s picture of *Christ, Come Follow Me*. Notice the compelling eyes and the encouraging smile? Wouldn’t it be great to see a picture of Jesus and his disciples laughing? Certainly Jesus had very serious work to do. But he also spoke the sweet Gospel, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,” John 10:11. How that fills us with a happy heart, which in turn makes our face cheerful! We too can encourage each other with Paul’s words, “Rejoice in the Lord always,”

Philippians 4:4a.

The Proverbs passages show us that lightheartedness, a sense of humor, is Scriptural. It frequently is therapeutic. Teachers who demonstrate a sense of humor frequently have a positive spirit in the classroom. It motivates by releasing the grip of the daily grind. It simplifies—things suddenly become less complicated. It encourages—without ignoring sin it tends to focus on the benefits of things and the hopes we have.

Some may think, “Well, somebody’s got to do the job. Life is more than a merry-go-round. We have a task to perform that’s deadly serious.” Nobody’s going to argue against the fact that life has its demands and being mature

involves discipline and responsibility.

But our God would have us display a happy, cheerful heart so that a crushed spirit does not “dry up the bones,”

Proverbs 17:22. So pick up that turkey from the floor, reattach the map rack more firmly to the wall, and “Rejoice in the Lord,” Philippians 4:4a.

Read some more: Psalm 126

Dear Lord Jesus, give us a happy heart as we work together with you in your earthly kingdom. We thank you for your gift of salvation. We can truly rejoice. Amen.

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

Prayer

I know not by what methods rare,
 But this I know, God answers prayer.
 I know that He has given His Word,
 Which tells me prayer is always heard,
 And will be answered, soon or late.
 And so I pray and calmly wait.
 I know not if the blessing sought
 Will come in just the way I thought;
 But leave my prayers with Him alone,
 Whose will is wiser than my own,
 Assured that He will grant my quest,
 Or send some answer far more blest.

Eliza M. Hickok

MLC—Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: A Vice-President's Perspective

David Wendler

1995-2001

The year was 1994. The place was Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Faculty from Northwestern College and from Dr. Martin Luther College met to compare curricula. What was the same? What was unique to each college? In a few meetings and with long distances between them, it was not possible to merge the two curricula and forge a totally new curriculum, but curricular dialog began.

On July 1, 1995, Martin Luther College (MLC) opened its doors. The transplanted curricula of Northwestern College (NWC) and Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) served students for the initial years of the newly formed MLC. Some elective courses and Spanish courses served both pastoral and education students, but most courses were still either NWC or DMLC courses.

A 1996 focus visit by our accrediting agency, The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, encouraged the college to find ways to combine courses. The facul-

ty earnestly began a curriculum study. First, the faculty turned its attention to general education. A task force was appointed to develop objectives for general education. In 1999 the faculty adopted the following fifteen objectives:

1. Grow in personal faith and sanctification.
2. Increase their understanding of Scripture and evangelical Lutheran doctrine.
3. Grow in a positive attitude toward the ministry.
4. Value responsible participatory membership in society.
5. Understand and cultivate physical and mental health.
6. Acquire people skills, especially those appropriate for service in the church.
7. Develop competency in written and oral communication.
8. View past, present, and future within a historical perspective.
9. Understand Western and American civilization.
10. Cultivate knowledge of and sensitivity to the values, customs, and social institutions of other cultures.

11. Develop an informed appreciation of literature and the arts, especially music.
12. Use mathematics in life.
13. Examine science and its applications to life.
14. Integrate technology in personal and professional life.
15. Exercise and augment thinking, research, and evaluative skills for lifelong learning.

The 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 aca-

*The common core
strives to give all
students a firm
foundation in all of
the disciplines.*

ademic years involved all faculty members in a thorough curriculum study. The study examined general education, pastoral studies language requirements, early childhood education, elementary education, and the secondary education majors. It was also during these years that the Education Division studied the possibility of obtaining Minnesota licensure for teacher graduates. The synod in its 1999 convention gave approval for Minnesota licensure. The Education Division was then charged with designing a curriculum that would meet the needs of our Lutheran schools and that would also meet the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice. The faculty worked tirelessly during these years

to forge a curriculum that would effectively serve our students and the congregations of our synod.

2001-2005

The result of this all-encompassing curriculum study was a General Education Common Core, revised language options for pastoral students, revised education courses, revised secondary education majors, and many courses available to all students.

The General Education Common Core is taken by all students regardless of area of study. These courses are cross-taught; that is, pastoral students, education students, and staff ministry students are in the same course. The common core strives to give all students a firm foundation in all of the disciplines. Since 2001 minor adjustments to the core have been made. Table 1 below shows the common core as students experience it today.

Before 2001 pastoral students were required to take Hebrew, Classical Greek, and either Latin or German. The curriculum study revised the language options for pastoral students. While all students still take Hebrew, they are now enrolled in either Classical Greek or Koine Greek. In addition, students now have the choice of four non-biblical language options, namely, Latin, German, Spanish, and a Latin & German combination. Students may satisfy the language requirement by demonstrating proficiency in a language MLC does not offer. A solid foundation in Greek and Hebrew is essential

1. Religion		
Biblical History & Literature I	3 credits	
Biblical History & Literature II	3 credits	
Biblical History & Literature III	3 credits	
2. English		
Literature & Writing I	3 credits	
Literature & Writing II	3 credits	
Public Speaking	3 credits	
Interpersonal Communication	3 credits	
3. Mathematics		
Mathematics: A Human Endeavor	3 credits	
or		
Introduction to Contemporary Mathematics	3 credits	
Computer Applications	2 credits	
4. Music		
Introduction to Fine Arts	3 credits	
5. Physical Education		
Fitness for Life	.5 credit	
Activity courses	.5 credit	
6. Science		
Our Living World	3 credits	
Science elective or Our Physical World	3 credits	
7. History/Social Science		
Western History & Culture I	4 credits	
Western History & Culture II	4 credits	
American History since 1945	3 credits	
Introduction to Minority Cultures (or appropriate substitute)	3 credits	
Total	50 credits	

Board of Teaching granting MLC licensure. Education graduates are eligible for a K–8 Minnesota license. To accomplish this, professional education credits increased from 42 to 49. These credits are distributed among two psychology courses, methods courses (language arts, reading, religion, music, physical education, art, social studies, science, and mathematics), and courses in children’s literature, foundations of education, curriculum and instruction, and the exceptional child. Early field experiences and student teaching complete the professional education curriculum. Before curriculum revision, students spent 170 hours in early field experiences. Now students spend 430 hours in early field experiences before student teaching. These hours must include experiences with children

for our future pastors. Latin and German study enable students to study the writings of our Lutheran forefathers. Spanish study enables students to prepare for reaching out with the Gospel to the Hispanic population in our country.

The professional education curriculum revision resulted in the Minnesota

from diverse cultures and children with special needs. The goal of the professional education curriculum is to prepare graduates to meet the needs of our synod’s churches and schools.

The secondary education majors were also revisited in the 2000–2001 curriculum study. Some majors received extensive revision while others received only

minor changes. Many of the content courses in the majors are taken as electives by pastoral students. Thus, even the secondary education content courses are reviewed by the entire faculty. With the exception of professional edu-

Students spend 430 hours in early field experiences before student teaching.

cation courses and the biblical languages, most other courses are available to all students.

Future

Curriculum is dynamic. It is constantly assessed and studied. How can we serve our synod's churches, schools, and missions? MLC continues to assess the needs of our synod by doing strategic planning and constant curriculum study. Following are some thoughts that are currently buzzing around and that may find themselves in future curriculum plans.

- The North American Outreach Task Force is discussing the role and prominence of evangelism in our curriculum.
- The Education Division and all the division chairs are discussing an urban ministry program.
- The History-Social Science and Science divisions are revising their

offerings and requirements to better meet the needs of our high schools.

- The idea of a four-year secondary major and a four-year early childhood degree (without elementary education) has surfaced.
- How can we more effectively impart the attitudes and skills for using our Lutheran schools as outreach tools?
- Divisions have begun to explore Minnesota licensure for early childhood and secondary education majors.
- A campus-wide effort has begun to study the curriculum in terms of majors and minors.

The dedicated faculty of Martin Luther College continues to review the curriculum because it strives to meet the needs of a changing synod and world. It does this confident that our Lord will bless its efforts to prepare future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers for service in the 21st century. ✠

David Wendler is a professor and serves as the Vice-President for Academics at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota



The WELS Calling Process for Teachers

LeDell Plath

WHEN DISCUSSING the WELS calling process for teachers invariably the following questions surface: “Why do some teachers receive a call so infrequently and other teachers receive as many as three calls each year? What is the source of the information included on the teacher biographicals which congregations use when calling teachers? Is the information current?” Those questions are asked for a variety of reasons. One of the main reasons is that they want information about aspects of the calling process.

Regardless of the reasons the questions are asked, they deserve some answers.

Preliminary information

Before answering those questions, we need to be aware of several basic assumptions regarding the calling of teachers. Scripture has not prescribed a specific calling process that we are to follow when calling teachers. That is not to say that the process is devoid of guiding scriptural principles. The Lord has laid down some directives: 1) the process is to be orderly and serve to glorify our Lord; 2) only qualified persons are to receive calls into the public ministry; 3) the Lord calls teachers through the calling body, be that the congregation, the board of education or the board of

control of a Lutheran high school; and 4) the Lord places specific requirements on those serving in the public ministry.

One major step WELS has taken to establish an orderly calling procedure is to assign specific responsibilities to individuals and groups. The calling body is ultimately responsible for calling the individual they believe is best qualified for its vacant teaching position. The Conference of Presidents (COP) comprised of the 12 district presidents and the synod’s presidium is responsible for establishing and implementing the policies and guidelines for the calling process. The district president (DP) is in charge of the calling process in his district. He supplies the list of teacher candidates when a congregation or Lutheran high school in his district has a vacancy, and he is to approve all other names used on call lists.

The Conference of Presidents has assigned to the WELS Commission on Parish Schools (CPS) the responsibility of assisting them in the calling process. The CPS carries out this responsibility by maintaining teacher records which contain accurate and current biographical and performance information on teacher candidates. The COP relies on the CPS office staff to provide them with teacher candidate lists for the vacancies in their districts.

Guidelines for the calling process

The district president has responsibility for the calling process in his district and the COP as a corporate body establishes policies and guidelines for the calling of teachers in WELS. The following is a list of policies and guidelines:

- * Calling bodies may issue calls to active teachers from November 1 through the first Sunday in June. This policy is designed to cause the least disruption on school faculties.
- * Teachers' names are not used on call lists until they are in their third year at a calling.
- * Every effort is made to use a teacher's name on only one call list at one time so that the teacher does not receive more than one call at a time.
- * In most circumstances married women may be used on call lists in their locality only so as not to disrupt their family. However, in some cases, married women are used on lists in localities far from their current home because the family is mobile.
- * Calling bodies are asked to submit a call list request to the district president about two weeks in advance of the call meeting so that he and the CPS staff have sufficient time to prepare the list of candidates.
- * The DP approves the candidates and information before submitting the names to the calling body.
- * Teachers who are not synodically certified receive one year calls renewable annually. Renewal is based on satisfactory progress toward synodical certification.

The calling process

To help you understand the calling process, here is a typical situation in which a call is extended to a teacher.

A teacher accepts another call, retires, or resigns, thus causing a vacancy on a school's staff. The calling body informs the DP of their need for a teacher candidate call list, and they precisely define the gifts and talents desired in the teacher. In addition the calling body may ask the DP to restrict the list to teachers who have a specific number of years of experience. Usually this request is made because the calling body feels they are not able to afford the salary of a teacher with more years of teaching experience. The DP then asks the CPS office staff for a list of candidates. Usually within a week to ten days the CPS has the list of four to six candidates in the hands of the DP. Biographical and performance information is provided for each candidate. The DP forwards the list to the calling body including the information he believes is necessary for them to call a teacher. The calling body selects one of the candidates and sends him or her the call. In this age of technology the communication between the parties involved utilizes current technology including email and faxes as well as regular mail service.

Occasionally the members of a calling body ask the DP to include certain names on the call list. The orderly way to do this is for those names to be submitted to the DP at least a week prior to the call meeting so that the DP and the CPS have ample opportunity to check

Plath

their information on the candidate so that the DP can determine if that person is suitable on that particular call list.

CPS records and procedures

A very important part of the calling process is maintaining and providing current and accurate data on each teacher used on a call list. As said earlier the COP has charged the CPS with this responsibility. The CPS spends considerable energy and time obtaining accurate and current biographical and performance data on each WELS teacher, including preschool, elementary, high school, and college. The CPS asks all teachers in the fall of every year to update this biographical information: name; home and email addresses; phone and social security numbers; marital status, and, if married, the number of children; place of birth; type of call (full- or part-time), synodical certification; congregations served; grades and/or subjects currently teaching; duties such as organ, choir, athletics, evangelism, VBS both in the school and for the congregation; course work completed; advanced degrees earned; interests and hobbies; interest in teaching either at the elementary or high school. All of this information is entered in the WELS database and is available for use in the calling process.

The CPS office also maintains performance information for teachers and principals in each early childhood program and in each elementary and high school. The principal or administrator of each WELS elementary and high

school is expected to submit annual performance reports to the CPS. These reports on teachers include assessments in these areas of ministry: classroom teaching and management; relationships within the classroom, school, and congregation; and ministry for the congregation, such as, playing organ for worship services or directing choir. The school's principal works with each teacher in completing the teacher assessments. Reports on principals are done by the principal and the board of education chairman with input from teachers and pastor. Principal assessment includes spiritual and educational leadership, professional relationships, and administrative characteristics. Unfortunately not all principals submit performance reports each year. About 70% of WELS schools send in those reports annually.

With the above information on its database the CPS uses the computer to help locate candidates who can be considered for a call list. Here is an example. A congregation wants a first and second grade teacher who has from 6–10 years of teaching experience and who has these gifts, abilities, and interests: experience and interest in teaching primary grades, strong in discipline, able to play organ and direct choir, and interest in evangelism. Those requirements are plugged into the search engine. The computer then, in just a few minutes, generates a list of names with the gifts and experience required. From that list of names the CPS administrator or the associate administrator selects the names which he will forward

to the DP. Factors that may be considered when selecting the names are these: personal knowledge the CPS office staff has of the candidate, and how well the teacher might fit into the congregation and community (rural, urban, suburban, small town, size of congregation). Getting to know as many of the teachers as possible is important for the CPS administrators. That is why they take a variety of opportunities to be with teachers and principals at conferences and other functions.

Practical situations

Why do some teachers receive many and some teachers receive few if any calls during their teaching career? Maybe you know one of our men or women teachers who have not received a call and they have been serving as a teacher for five, six, or even 15 years. Let's explore some of the reasons.

A major factor in determining which candidates are used on call lists is the teacher's gifts, abilities, and experiences. It is generally true that the teacher who is gifted in a variety of areas of congregational service in addition to teaching will be more likely to be used on call lists and is more likely to receive calls. The gifts and abilities include the following: proficiency at playing organ for worship services, directing a choir, coaching athletics, ability to work with the youth, and administrative gifts. Those teachers who have developed skills in organ playing and choir directing are in especial high demand. Over the past 20–25 years only a small num-

ber of graduates from (D)MLC have the ability to play organ for a worship service or the ability to direct a choir. Every congregation with an elementary school needs organists and choir directors. It is, therefore, logical that the teachers who have those musical abilities will receive more calls than the teachers who do not. This holds true for both men and women teachers.

Another area of service in which we have a shortage is qualified men to serve as school administrators. DMLC did not and MLC does not in its undergraduate program train principals. WELS has assigned to MLC the responsibility of teacher and staff minister training. WELS, however, has granted permission to MLC to implement a post graduate program for the training of principals.

Another factor that impacts the number of men who are willing to accept calls as principals is the challenges that come with the position. In most of our elementary schools the principal also teaches. In many schools he is in the classroom for more than 95% of school time during the week. That arrangement may have been workable 35 years ago when the principal's responsibilities and the stresses of office were appreciably fewer than today. Today, however, the work of the principal is different. These are some his responsibilities: spiritual leadership, leadership in curriculum and instruction, school promotion, using the school for doing outreach to the unchurched, leadership in the congregation (board of education, church council), faculty leader, supervisor of students, working with parents, and tak-

Plath

ing care of the many administrative duties connected with running a school.

In addition to those duties the principal in some of our schools helps with the athletic program, has some music duties, helps with the youth program, or helps with the Pioneer program. Many congregations have recognized the challenges the principal faces and have provided administrative time during the school day for the principal. Each year more and more of our congregations are doing just that. Putting all of what has been said in this paragraph into the perspective of the calling process, men who possess qualities for being principal or who have successfully served as principal are likely to receive more calls than men who have not or are not able to serve as administrators.

We also must not forget the main reason why a teacher may not receive a call for an extended period of time. Even though a teacher's name may be used on call lists repeatedly, the Lord may want that teacher to remain in his or her current position. There are teachers whose names have been used on as many as 20 call lists over a period of eight years and have not received a call. The Lord wants that teacher to continue serving at his or her present calling.

Another factor which affects the number of teachers who receive calls is the demand for teachers. Over the past 35 - 45 years supply and demand has been cyclical. In the late sixties and in the seventies WELS experienced a severe shortage of teachers. When this condition exists more teachers receive more calls. In the eighties and early nineties just

the opposite happened. We had an over supply of teachers. Fewer vacancies and more teachers results in teachers receiving fewer calls. Can we expect the cycle to continue? Very likely.

Teachers' reactions

In times of fewer calls being available teachers have been heard to say, "I wish I would have another call to consider." In times when we have a shortage of teachers we sometimes hear this comment, "Why have I received three calls this year?" Our answer to both of those comments is the same. The Lord is ultimately in charge of who receives calls and when those are extended. We place our trust in the Holy Spirit's omniscience. If I do not receive a call for an extended period of time the Lord has a plan for me. If I receive several calls in one year, that is also in the Lord's plans. We humbly bow to the Lord's wisdom and in faith and trust deal with the situation which the Lord places before us.

Conclusion

Our WELS calling system is far from perfect because it has been developed by sinful Christians and sinful Christians implement the process. In spite of this we are confident that the Holy Spirit has used and will continue to use the process with all of its weaknesses and strengths to accomplish his work of nurturing young people as faithful disciples of Jesus and his work of reaching out to unchurched families to share the saving Gospel message with them. ✠

and lives in Waterford, WI

LeDell Plath, who was the Associate Administrator for the Commission on Parish Schools, is retired

Planning Support for Schools

Robert Fischer, Arnold Nommensen

“Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel” (Proverbs 20:15).

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod possesses a rare jewel: an educational system by which the Lord blesses us with spiritual knowledge. This includes our local elementary and area high schools, synodical prep schools, college and seminary. In recent years we have become aware, more than usual, of the great cost involved in maintaining these schools. But as costly as it is, we could consider the cost “cheap money,” because it pays dividends. We reap rewards from it. Many other church bodies envy the educational system we have. Our system is providing us with a membership well-versed in Scripture. It also supplies our future church leaders and workers, our family heads and parents.

Without our educational system, we as a church body would have difficulty finding future pastors, teachers and staff ministers who are sound in doctrine. Because of this, we WELS members voluntarily support our schools with our regular church contributions. With the rising costs of maintaining our schools, we would do well to utilize also other options available to help us with funding. This is where the WELS Ministry of Planned Giving can help. Using all our resources wisely, and with the help and blessing of the Holy Spirit, we will keep our system of education alive, well and strong until Jesus’ return.

Where can we find the resources needed to continue vital educational programs? Our current gifts provide a lion’s share of the funding, at least for now. Another source can be the estate plans of our members. As we prepare our wills, we provide for those who are dependent on us—our children. This is certainly a God-pleasing use of our resources. Now, if you think about it, our churches and schools are also dependent on us. It is our support that permits them to continue doing the Lord’s work among us. This is where estate planning comes into play—including church and school in your will.

We encourage individuals to think about estate planning that benefits your local, area and synod schools. We also encourage schools to consider educating their supporters about this opportunity to enhance support for education in the WELS. WELS Ministry of Planned Giving stands ready to help.

Robert Fischer and Arnold Nommensen are Planned Giving Counselors living in Wisconsin. WELS Ministry of Planned Giving www.wels.net/mpg1-800-827-5482

Accommodate and Adapt for Struggling Students

Dr. Alan Spurgin

EACH YEAR AND EACH class has a number of students who seem to struggle when they learn. It may be in one area of the curriculum or across all academic subjects. If the prevalence rates are correct, the number of struggling students is likely to rise (Hallahan & Kaufman, 2004). Helping the student who has trouble learning may be a daunting task taking into account the many other aspects of teaching that need to be accomplished each day. How can the teacher help the student who battles with the inability to learn and still provide adequate instruction to all the children in the class? Two concepts are proposed to help the teacher with the student who wrestles with learning: accommodation and adaptation.

Accommodation

When students do not learn commensurate with their peers there is usually a distinct break-down point. The teacher needs to be adept at finding the point. The teacher may use a variety of means to ascertain this point by testing, observing, consulting previous teachers, and just plain using their "gut feeling." Dr. Melvin Levine from the University of North Carolina talks about this point and suggests that remediation is done at

this break-down point or a bypass strategy is put in place to circumvent the problem (Levine & Reed, 1999). This is sage advice and works well for students who have difficulty in school.

Accommodations may be done to help remediate or bypass this point.

One of the best accommodations that a teacher can give children is time. This gift helps children in a number of ways. It gives the children a chance to organize their thoughts. It also gives the children the opportunity to complete work at their own pace. Time also is necessary for the children to learn social skills as well as relax from the rigors of school. This gift helps the children by reducing anxiousness and presents them with the chance to let the teacher know what they have comprehended. This simple accommodation is a blessing to children who struggle with their learning.

Another accommodation made to help the child who struggles to learn is modification of assignments. The students who have trouble with learning are often faced with the daunting task of thirty problems or fifteen vocabulary words. When the mountain is too high, the children may simply refuse to climb to the top. If the children can show mastery of the material in ten problems, let that suffice. If the child has to do all the problems, put a few on multiple pages

with lots of white space. It is easier to do three problems on ten pages than thirty problems on one page. This does work quite well. If the child struggles with writing, let the child dictate into a tape recorder. Another modification for writing can be a peer or educational aid being used as a scribe. In lieu of a writing assignment, let the students demonstrate their knowledge by drawing a picture, constructing a model, or making an oral presentation to a classmate or the entire class.

A number of accommodations can be made when children are required to take tests. Lengthening the time for taking the test is a reasonable accommodation. So is reading the test for the child as well as limiting the choices on a multiple choice test to two rather than four items. If the test is matching, chunk the test so the child has groups of four items to match rather than all twenty choices. Give the child a word bank for fill in the blank tests and provide a scribe to help with essays. Providing a quiet environment is also good for some children who are easily distracted or have difficulty filtering out extraneous stimuli (i.e. a child with ADHD). Let the children write on the test, make notes, and use other parts of the test to help them accomplish the test taking task. Remember that the test is to measure the children's knowledge and not their ability to read or pay attention.

Homework is another area where accommodations may be made without compromising the quality or quantity of the child's education. If the child does not get the work done, it may be reason-

able to shorten the homework assignments. Know what the child is capable of doing for homework, look at the home environment to see if homework is feasible, and provide avenues for the child to complete work at school. Many teachers have become exasperated because of the children not doing their homework. It may be realistic for children to be required to complete the majority of the work in school (i.e. the morning subjects have to be done by afternoon recess and the afternoon subjects done before leaving for home). Sometimes it is simply pragmatic to assign tasks that children are able to accomplish at school because of a possible chaotic and dysfunctional home life.

Other accommodations for children who have trouble learning may be peer mediation (Schweizer, 2004). There are a number of excellent strategies that utilize peers. Cooperative learning strategies are some of the well documented ways in which children learn from peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). Class wide peer tutoring has also received high acclaim in some circles as successful ways to utilize peer helpers (Hallahn & Kauffman, 2004). Cross age peer tutoring and heterogeneous peer tutoring are also good ways for children to learn from each other.

Adaptations

Along with accommodations (only a few are listed above, there are many more) come adaptations.

The first of these adaptations is made by the teachers. They need to under-

stand that children learn at different rates and in different ways. The VKAT model is a good one to keep in mind when teaching all the students in their care. The V in VKAT is visual, the K is kinesthetic, the A is auditory, and the T is tactile. The teacher must match his teaching with the way the child learns the best. The old paradigm states: this is the way I teach and if the children do not learn they fail. Thankfully this idea is changing. The new archetype is to alter the teaching to match the modality of the child. This is a reasonable adaptation and leads to learner success.

Adaptations may be made to the curriculum. Children who struggle with learning may need to interface with only a portion of the curriculum or smaller chunks of the curriculum at one time. This is especially true of children with a cognitive disability (CD). Rather than making the children responsible for the entire material, have them do a part of the curriculum. This can be facilitated by writing the modification in the daily lesson plan or making the children responsible for the first two objectives of the lesson. In some instances it may be appropriate to have the child do her own curriculum. If the child is doing her own thing, additional help may be required to ensure this works well.

Another adaptation that is made to help the children who struggle may be in the classroom environment. Careful placement of the child away from distractions such as windows and doors is a good practice to help a child with attention problems. The number of dis-

tractable items in the room should be monitored. Materials on strings traversing the classroom and subject to movement by moving air may be too distracting for children who struggle in the classroom. Desks may need to be in rows and routines clearly established. Allowing children to move around the classroom, take self time-outs, and take frequent breaks may be beneficial for struggling children. By making the classroom student friendly, many problems with behavior and management are averted.

A number of accommodations and adaptations have been explored at some length in this article. There are a number of additional suggestions to help struggling students that may be found in a variety of resources such as the internet, books, and collaborating with colleagues. Whatever the source, it is essential teachers identify the breakdown point and provide remediation or by pass strategies to help the child with special learning needs. Using the accommodations and adaptations above is the first step in helping all the children be successful. ♣

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Continuing Education

John Paulsen

Education is a funny thing. The more education you have the more you realize that there is so much more that you don't know. When I finally graduated from college, many years ago, I felt that I would never go back to college and take more courses. I knew that I didn't know everything but I was tired of going to class and listening to lectures. Then I started teaching and soon wished I had paid more attention to many of those lectures, most of which I had previously found boring and not very relevant. Within a few years, I found that a masters degree was desirable and obtainable. The masters degree gave me many insights into new subject matter and opened doors for me as to what and where I teach.

One of the purposes for the existence of Martin Luther College Special Services is to provide opportunities for WELS teachers to continue their education. MLC offers courses in improvement of instruction, courses related to curriculum, and courses for expanding horizons. Each year we try to put together a package of courses that will be of benefit to most of our teachers.

Many teachers in the field, and all recent teacher graduates, have deemed it desirable to obtain and maintain state licensure. To maintain a state license, a teacher must take a certain number of continuing education credits (or CEUs) in a given period of time. The number of CEUs and the number of years varies by state. Special Services offers a variety of summer session, in-service, and extension courses that are recognized by the state as applicable toward maintenance of a license. In addition to maintaining this license, the teacher continues to find out how much more there is to learn.

The Commission on Parish Schools, the district coordinators, and MLC's Special Services work together to promote professionalism in WELS teachers by promoting continuing education. Have you considered taking a course or workshop to further your professional skills or background? If you have further questions or suggestions visit our website at: <http://www.mlc-wels.edu/SpecialServices/> or email: paulsejw@mlc-wels.edu

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Finding Time for Music

David Bauer

I GRADUATED FROM DMLC in 1978. I was a music concentrate, in organ course three, sang in the choirs, toured with the College Choir, played in the band, played in the pit orchestras, performed in area congregations as a member of a select brass ensemble, took extra music classes at Mankato State in the summers—you couldn't get much more "musical" than that! Music was my area of greatest talent and interest. My assignment from DMLC was to St. Paul's in Tomah, WI. My duties included 6th grade teacher, head organist, adult choir director, children's choir director, and grade school band director. A dream call for a music person! I tended to the Adult Choir and organ responsibilities; time was set aside for the grade school Junior Choir and Band. But I never got much music going for my 6th grade students. In spite of my talent and love for music, I found it nigh unto impossible to give time to the teaching of it in my own classroom. It was clearly blocked out on my classroom schedule, but I always "ran out of time!"

Do you find yourself sharing this experience with me? I have talked with many teachers who all agree that music

is an important area of study for the children in their elementary classrooms, but who all have an impossible time actually getting music class in on a regular basis, if at all.

After my five years in Tomah, I accepted a call to teach in the grade school band program at Wisconsin Lutheran High School. I didn't have any elementary classroom responsibilities, and didn't have to worry about getting music class into the daily or weekly schedule.

Ten years later, I accepted a call to St. Paul's in Saginaw, Michigan. Except for a different location, the duties were virtually identical to those of my first call at St. Paul's in Tomah. After accepting the call, I reflected on my lack of success in getting classroom music into my Tomah teaching day, and pondered how I could avoid repeating that pattern.

During my five years at St. Paul's in Saginaw, I was successful in teaching music 20–30 minutes four and often five days per week in my 6th grade classroom. We sang a great variety of music, both for fun and for church, including two-part accompanied and unaccompanied, and 3 part (SSA) accompanied

and unaccompanied selections. The quality of the Junior Choir rose as those skillful 6th graders became the predominant membership of the choir. My last year, the Junior Choir sang the Hallelujah Chorus in an SAB arrangement that was almost identical to the SAT of Handel's original. Without question, it was a challenging arrangement, and the kids performed it magnificently! We sang it for a local music contest. The adjudicators gave the choir a standing ovation. They heaped on the praise in their written comments. The quality of the Junior Choir was directly related to the quantity of music education it received when the students were in my 6th grade classroom.

How did I get music into the school day in such quantity and so consistently? What had changed between my days in Tomah and my (nearly) identical days in Saginaw?

First of all, you have to be convinced that the subject area of music is worthy of regular placement in the school day. My experience tells me that teachers for the most part do not need convincing on this point. No, it's not the worth or lack of worth attached to music that is the issue to be addressed.

Most teachers, whether consciously or not, adopt the philosophy that they will teach music as long as there is time for it. The problem is that the school day is already chocked full without music, and a carefully laid out paper schedule allowing 20 or 30 minutes, three or four or five times a week, for music is only going to look good on paper. The agreement that music is important and

ought to be taught does not lead to music actually being taught. In fact, the common reality is exactly the opposite!

How do you get music into the schedule on a regular basis? The great secret is to ask the right question. And that question is (drum roll, please), "What is music as important as?"

"What is music as important as?" Do you see how critical it is to ask and answer that particular question?

There are only so many minutes in the school day. I've been in schools that considered lengthening the school day in order to get more educational minutes. The suggestion never got out of the faculty meeting. One would expect the same with the idea of lengthening the school year. The minutes you have to work with are fixed. The great question is, how are you going to use them, how are you going to divide them up?

That's where it becomes critical that you ask and answer the question, "What is music as important as?"

What do you have to teach in the course of a school week? Does the following alphabetical list cover everything? Add to it, change the wording or subtract from it if it's incorrect for your situation.

- Art
- Computers
- Current Events
- English
- Handwriting
- Math
- Music
- Phy Ed
- Reading
- Science

Bauer

Social Studies
Spelling
Word of God
 Bible History
 Catechism
 Confirmation
 Hymnology

Now start grouping the subject areas. What goes in the “most important” group? What is in the next most important group? Continue until all subjects are part of a group.

When I was teaching in Saginaw, I made the following groups:

Group 1

Word of God
Bible History
Catechism
Confirmation
Hymnology

Group 2

Math
Reading
English

Group 3

Social Studies
Science
Music

Group 4

Art
Phy Ed
Computers
Current Events
Spelling
Handwriting

We would all agree that the Word of God as taught in its various forms must make up the number one group.

Next, I grouped together Math, Reading and English. These are the traditional 3 R’s. They are the core basics

of any curriculum. Not only are they part of the essential core, they are also sequential. I needed to teach those areas well in 6th grade so the kids would be ready for the 7th grade level. To teach any of those three areas poorly is educational negligence and a terrible disservice to the next teacher.

The group of next importance includes Social Studies and Science. First, how do Social Studies and Science end up a notch lower than the 3 R’s? First, what is covered in those two subjects is simply not as important and critical as the content of the 3 R’s. Many of our students would fare quite well in life with no education in Social Studies or Science. They would universally struggle without the basic skills imparted through the 3 R’s. Second, Social Studies and Science are not necessarily sequential. The 5th grade teacher covered the United States. As the 6th grade teacher, I covered the Eastern Hemisphere. The 7th grade teacher covered U.S. History. The 8th grade teacher covered World History. I needed to teach my material well, but not because the 7th grade Social Studies curriculum would be built upon it. The two were largely independent of each other. The same is true in the area of Science. Some levels focus more on the Life Sciences, others on the Physical Sciences.

And in with Social Studies and Science I put Music as being of equal importance. “What?” you gasp! “You must be a music nut!” you say. Well, admittedly, I am. But I firmly believe that music belongs in the same league

as Social Studies and Science, primarily because of the emphasis it receives in the Bible. After studying what the Scriptures have to say about music, I concluded that music is an essential part of our spiritual life. Over and over again in the Scriptures we are commanded to make use of the gift of music in the worship and praise of our God. Over and over again, from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament, we find examples of God's people using music in their corporate and private spiritual lives. It is accurate to conclude: music was a carefully developed gift in the lives of Old and New Testament Christians. We, today, need to be similarly faithful in developing that gift in God's people so that they can skillfully use music as God intended. The realization of that goal must begin with allocating quantity time to the teaching of music.

When I determined what music was as important as, I continued logically. I divided up the precious minutes available to me in the school day. I set aside time for the Word of God, Math, Reading and English. I taught Phy Ed, Spelling, Art, and Handwriting as efficiently as I could. What remained was divided equally between Music, Social Studies and Science.

Haven't we always applied limits to the amount of time available for each and every area in the curriculum, though perhaps not so consciously, and most likely not with the deliberate intention of providing time for Music? Would you teach your Word of God lesson longer if you could? I could easily

have added 10 or more minutes to my Word of God time slot, and occasionally did, much to my frustration when it came time to squeeze in the other subjects that followed. As you teach your Social Studies curriculum, do you cover every last product of every last country in generous depth and detail? Probably not. And do you sometimes find yourself perhaps even skipping whole chapters? None of our subject areas gets the amount of time we could easily devote to it. Even without "stealing" minutes for music, we are applying limits to the amount of time we allocate to every subject area.

With fewer minutes for Social Studies and Science, one might logically conclude that the quality of instruction in those two subjects suffered. I experienced just the opposite. When I put limits on the amount of time available to Social Studies and Science, I actually taught those subjects better than I had ever before. First of all, they still received a generous amount of time. More importantly, with a small reduction in the amount of time available to them, I had to sharpen my pencil to a finer point. Let me make a comparison all of us can relate to. I have been to a great number of church services and listened to a great number of sermons, many of them very fine. Some were longer and some were shorter, but I would hesitate to equate the length of the sermon with the quality of the sermon. Many of the shorter sermons that were preached were excellent. Perhaps the pastor knew that his time would be limited by Communion, installation of

Bauer

church officers and the WELS Connection video, so he really sharpened his pencil and crafted a sermon that made the points and applied the points in a compact but powerful way. The same was true for my teaching of Social Studies and Science.

I have given presentations to several elementary faculties during which I made the case for the importance of Music, weighting it equally with Social Studies and Science. This is usually met with shared glances of questioning from the members of the faculty, or outright gasps of disbelief. Do you hesitate to agree with me? Perhaps you would put Music in the same spot as Social Studies and Science, but not in the same league. Could you agree that Music is 80% as important as Social Studies and Science? Then do the math and allocate your minutes accordingly.

The bottom line will still be similar—music will get into the school day and week on a regular and consistent basis.

And today all of our teachers have a fabulous resource that I did not have when I started out, the *Sing and Make Music* curriculum and materials. This music series enables both the musically gifted, as well as the not-so-musically gifted, teacher to teach music successfully. And all of this in the direct service of better praising and worshipping our awesome God with his marvelous gift of music! What could be more fantastic than that!

☺

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Synodical Council Representative

John Freese

The Synodical Council is the administrative and budgetary governing body of the WELS between synod conventions. There is a “teacher at large” delegate to the Synodical Council, and he needs to hear regularly from the synod’s teachers to represent their concerns and priorities in regard to the synod’s budget and administrative directions. Please contact John Freese (DMLC 1977), who is the “teacher at large” delegate, with your comments and questions so that they may be heard at the Synodical Council.

John Freese teaches at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, WI. He can be reached at john_freese@wlc.edu or at 414.443.8896

Saxon Phonics: Three Teachers Comment

Pamela Duveneck, Amy McCargar, Elise Shambeau

Kindergarten: Pamela Duveneck

For many years, our kindergarten curriculum included the use of 24 letterbooks called *Beginning to Read, Write and Listen*, published by Macmillan/McGraw-Hill. The letterbooks cover the 26 letters of the alphabet (Q is taught with K, and X is taught with Y).

Beginning is a comprehensive reading-language arts program. It contains and correlates reading, handwriting, auditory and oral language skills as it teaches children to read and write. The child learns to write the letter, identify its sound, and blend the sound with other known letter sounds to form words.

Beginning is a multi-sensory program of visual, kinesthetic, and auditory activities. Each letterbook has numerous games, exercises, and art projects, which relate to the reading skills and letter being emphasized.

Beginning is a strong phonics-based curriculum, so why would we look for more? Over the years, those teaching in the elementary grades felt that our reading texts were becoming weaker and weaker in the area of phonics. Many publishers were leaning toward teaching strategies that left out much of the phonics instruction. While our kinder-

garten curriculum was strong in phonics, it did not continue as the children continued in grades 1-3. That's when we began looking for something more.

Saxon Phonics and Spelling provides a very sound phonics curriculum that begins in kindergarten and continues through grade 3. In keeping with the Saxon philosophy, new learning is presented in small increments, which are reviewed daily for the entire year.

At the kindergarten level, the primary goal of the program is for all kindergartners to be able to recognize and know the primary sound of all the letters of the alphabet. However, as many kindergarten children finish the school year reading on a basic level, the program does include reading instruction. A controlled vocabulary is used throughout this program. An annotated bibliography is included to assist you in locating appropriate children's literature to accompany *Saxon Phonics and Spelling*. The children are taught how to code words by marking common vowel patterns and letter clusters, which gives the children the ability to approach new words confidently. The children practice the most common ways to spell specific sounds, allowing them to practice spelling words with regular spelling pat-

Duveneck, McCargar, Shambeau

terns and not just memorizing words. Words that do not follow the spelling rules, called “sight words” and “irregular spelling words,” are also taught and practiced. The Saxon program also provides assessments and evaluations to provide an effective means to gauge how well the children are learning and retaining the concepts.

At this time we are continuing to use *Beginning to Read, Write and Listen* as well as *Saxon Phonics and Spelling*. We begin the year using only the Saxon program and then after a few weeks we add the letterbooks. As it is set up, the letters are introduced with *Saxon Phonics* and then later reviewed and practiced with the letterbooks. The letterbooks provide different reading, auditory, and oral language skills that I feel are important, so at this time I am not comfortable relying only on the *Saxon Phonics*. However, providing the *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* in kindergarten gives the children continuity in the phonics curriculum for grades K–3. At this time, in the kindergarten class, we have two reading readiness blocks in our schedule—one for *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* and one for *Beginning*.

Grades 1 & 2: Amy McCargar

Are you “Hooked on Phonics?” Does it work for you? Does your reading series do all you want it to do? Or are you scrambling to find enough extra material and workshops to attend, to provide those “phonemic awareness” skills you want each one of your students to obtain?

Quite possibly, you may have a separate phonics class in addition to a reading class. There are a number of phonics series available to teachers who are looking to teach phonics separate from their reading basals or literature units.

Slightly more than a decade ago, my experience with teaching phonics in grades 1–4 was positive, straightforward and simple. Phonics was a separate class

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systematic phonics
approach.*

from reading (that was what my school offered) and the students sure learned their phonics rules well. I was sold on the teaching of a separate phonics class.

Five years ago, phonics in grades 1–3 at our school was taught in the whole language approach within a brand new reading/phonics curriculum. Even though we had basals, daily language/sentence corrections, and student workbooks, I found that I was constantly looking for material to supplement the phonics lessons.

Two years ago, I went with our school’s kindergarten teacher to a 30 hour class to become trained in the “Pure Phonics” method. This method was used to teach dyslexics and illiterate

prison inmates how to read. The results we observed were amazing. We were sold on the “Pure Phonics” method. We wholeheartedly took all of our new gained knowledge and fervently taught our students in grades K–2. What we found was renewed hope and excitement in the confidence our students gained in a systematic phonics approach.

Why are we using *Saxon Phonics* if we loved the “Pure Phonics” method so much? We decided as a faculty to teach phonics consistently in grades K–3. We had one teacher who would have needed “Pure Phonics” training. We were lacking a regular method of assessing students. And finally, we wanted the students to learn systematic, sequential phonics rules that they would remember and build upon each year of their education.

Our faculty reviewed a few series that were primarily for teaching a separate phonics class (apart from reading class). We already used *Saxon Math* and were pleased with the success rate of our students in math.

While reviewing the *Saxon Phonics* curriculum, we found that the teacher’s lessons in the manual were all scripted as they are in the math program. We have found that the scripted text in the teacher’s lessons is a benefit for the teachers and the students. The wording, terms and rules are all the same for grades K–3.

In addition, *Saxon Phonics* provides you with leveled readers, posters with rules and phonetic symbols, poster sized wall letter cards and teacher flashcards

for high frequency words, many different types of other phonetic flashcards, daily lesson practice sheets, student spelling/phonics rule dictionaries, and much more. We like *Saxon Phonics* because it helped us teach the students to become fluent readers and gain confidence in their skills.

How long have we been using *Saxon Phonics*? Our school has only been using *Saxon Phonics* one year. The progress the students made in their phonemic aware-

We have found that the scripted text in the teacher’s lessons is a benefit for the teachers and the students.

ness was impressive. It’s a blessing when you find material to teach that is “user friendly,” and so beneficial for the students.

There are a few drawbacks to the *Saxon Phonics*. It is very expensive to purchase. The phonetic terms for teachers new to this program are difficult and unusual.

It will take some time before you feel comfortable with the material. It is very time consuming to set up the program and materials. You will need to study and decide on how to pronounce the terminology. *Saxon Phonics* doesn’t give you a pronunciation guide for the terms. If you use the program in a multi-classroom school, you may want to

Duveneck, McCargar, Shambeau

coordinate your teaching methods and terminology pronunciation with each teacher.

Last but not least, one more possible drawback for *Saxon Phonics* might be the daily homework for the students. If you are familiar with the *Saxon Math* program, the phonics is similar with a four-day home-school connection worksheet. If you're looking for a phonics program, at least send for *Saxon Phonics* samples. Take time and make sure it's right for you, your students, and your school. This series takes a commitment from you and an appreciation for a long range expectation for your students.

Regrets about the program? Only one. We wish that we would have known about and implemented this program about five years ago.

Grade 3: Elise Shambeau

Reading is such an important skill we take for granted, but when you're learning to read you want to be successful and enjoy it. Our students at St. John's grades 1–3 were learning to read, but not as well as the parents or teachers felt they should be. We had a program that was coordinated with the spelling, but we felt it lacked enough phonics.

We began our search of a way to teach our students to be better readers. We looked at a few different programs and then settled on the *Saxon Phonics and Spelling*. Our school enjoys success with the *Saxon Math* curriculum so we felt that the *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* was the way to go. We ordered *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* for grades K–3.

Kindergarten already had a successful program, but we wanted to be consistent.

The *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is a maintenance program designed mainly for students who have already had *Saxon Phonics 1* or *2*. As a supplemental program, *Saxon Phonics and Spelling 3* may be used with any other reading program. The program goal is to provide students with the critical decoding and encoding skills necessary to read and write independently.

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Each lesson includes worksheets and an assessment that contain a list of words. Students code each word before reading it to help them analyze and apply the phonetic principles they have learned. Coding is one of the tools used in the program to help create successful readers. Students review how to code words by identifying the sound of each letter/letter cluster, thus enabling them to read the words.

The *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* has five different decks of cards to practice daily and provide repeated exposure to con-

cepts to ensure mastery. There is the letter deck to review each letter/letter cluster taught. The picture deck features pictures that represent “keywords” that remind students of specific letter sounds. Then, there is the spelling deck that teaches the regular spelling patterns for common sounds. There is the sight word deck where students learn words that do not follow the rules that have been taught. Last, there is the affix deck from which students learn and review prefixes and suffixes.

The program also has alphabet wall cards, syllable division wall cards, vowel rule wall cards, spelling rule wall cards, and letter cluster posters. You also could use their handwriting program that goes with it, but we liked our handwriting books better and have stayed with them.

Each week the students receive a spelling list. The spelling lists have 20-30 words the students are tested on, but it also has a couple hundred of the same type of words to practice that go with the phonics lesson being taught for the week.

The students also have four decodable readers to go along with each unit. I like the practice the students get with these books because they reinforce the concept that was taught in the lesson. Also, I like the comprehension questions that the students have to answer at the end of each book.

Last year was the first year we had *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* and I’m really happy to see how the students’ reading abilities have improved in just one year. I had a few third graders that struggled

in reading at the beginning of the year, but by Christmas they all were reading with very little assistance. Also, when the

I’m really happy to see how the students’ reading abilities have improved in just one year.

students took the MATT and the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test in the spring, their scores had jumped quite a bit. This was the first year that I had all the students in the top two levels (there are four) of the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test. I look forward to the next couple of years to see if the improvements continue. ✪

Pamela Duveneck, Amy McCargar, Elise Shambeau teach at St. John Lutheran School, Two Rivers, Wisconsin



Spontaneous Combustion and Very Long-range Lesson Plans

Stephen Merten

IN MY FIRST YEAR of teaching high school chemistry, I was caught up in the method of presenting a lesson I call: “Hey look kids, an explosion!” (The merits of this style of teaching will be left for discussion at another time.) I was also blessed with back-to-back prep periods just before lunch and a shelf full of “how to” books of chemistry demonstrations.

These were the kind of books with demonstrations that let you say, “Hey look kids, an explosion!” My planning was at best myopic—a day-to-day looking at a short-term goal and without a focus beyond the next test.

And so it was on a fateful winter day that I prepared a demo that would bring my students to the ultimate understanding of spontaneous combustion, or at the very least give me a chance to repeat my mantra of “Hey look kids....” The manual promised multi-hued flames, smoke and sparks by simply adding a few drops of a certain chemical to a small pile of potassium permanganate sitting in an evaporating dish. (I will skip giving all the particulars of this reaction lest I be blamed for your school needing to increase its liability insurance.)

During my prep period, I planned to give the demo a trial run. Everything was ready. The drops were added to the small ominous looking mound in the evaporating dish. And then... well... nothing. Yikes! A quick review of the procedure showed I had followed directions. Paging to the front of the manual I saw a section of precautions. (A fine time to be first reading this!) There I found a warning about using old chemicals. Having inherited most of the items in the chemistry closet from the previous teacher, I had no idea as to their age. Thinking that there may be an adage that a watched reaction doesn't happen, I pushed the dish to the side and attacked a pile of papers that needed the attention of my red pen.

The hour passed. The pile of papers grew smaller. Lunchtime was looming and still no cataclysmic reaction. With questionable judgment I pushed the dish to the center of a lab table away from combustibles and locked the door on my way out.

Returning from lunch I saw the still inert pile mocking me as it sat reactionless in its little dish. Scanning the text one last time for a magic missing step, I found only the disposal instructions, “Place the cooled reactant ashes into a

paper towel and dispose of these in the garbage.” Sadly I consigned this chemical failure to what I assumed was its final resting-place in the can in the back of the room. And that is how I discovered 30 minutes later that the missing elements for a full-scale combustion reaction were a paper towel and a plastic garbage can. The melted remains of this garbage can now occupy a shelf in my

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classroom as a monument to my clueless past.

The lesson plans of my early years were strikingly similar to many of my failed chemistry demonstrations. At times they were inspired; certainly they were labored over, but they were formed without an understanding of the real goal that should be a part of almost any high school instruction.

The lesson I still needed to learn was really a matter of focusing. I am not sure at what point I learned to look beyond the lesson at hand or the next test on the horizon. I was reminded of this when yesterday I was able to talk with a former biology and chemistry student who is now in her fourth year at the Minnesota State University, Mankato, working on a criminology

degree. It is a gratifying thing to see in Karleen the results of mine and countless other teachers' lessons.

And there it was—focus. A real teaching focus should not just be this lesson or this unit or this year, but on the student four or five years from now. What have they learned to do for themselves? Have they developed a method of managing their learning difficulties and found a way to take advantage of their learning strengths? Whether or not a former student remembers Avagadro's number is much less important than if he learned how to make applications of these lessons to his problem solving abilities and reasoning skills.

At times my students, especially those in the advanced sections, become extremely focused on grades. They seem to give off an attitude of “show me the formulas, give me a study guide, give me a set of practice problems and make sure the test that will determine my grade does not deviate from these.” This could be called Formula Learning—neatly packaged concepts to memorize and then recall on the test—a great example of teaching for the moment and no further. Yet, when I talk to these students in five years, I do not expect to find any of them calculating the molar masses of methane gas or balancing a combustion equation. But I do expect them to have taken a method of solving a problem and to have applied it wisely to situations. I expect Karleen to be able to take what she knows of the law and couple it with human nature to solve security problems when she begins her career in law

Merten

enforcement. I expect her to take the problem solving techniques she learned and to have honed them to an ability to make judgments on which the very lives of others may depend.

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Good teaching needs the following stages in its lessons:

- The presentation of a problem
- Examples of reasoning through the problem
- A chance to follow the method of reasoning and attack of the problem
- A chance to apply the method to problems that stray from the original models

Will there still be math formulas to learn and apply? Certainly, this is one way that real problems are solved. Will

there be students that are not mature enough to make it to the fourth stage? Probably at the time you have them in class, yes. But that does not mean that they will not be ready later. You can have had a part in helping them be ready for this.

If my lesson planning can be approached from this attitude, maybe I will have advanced beyond my early teaching days. I do confess that if you walked by my classroom on just the right day, you may still hear the ominous phrase "Hey look kids, an explosion!" ☹️

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