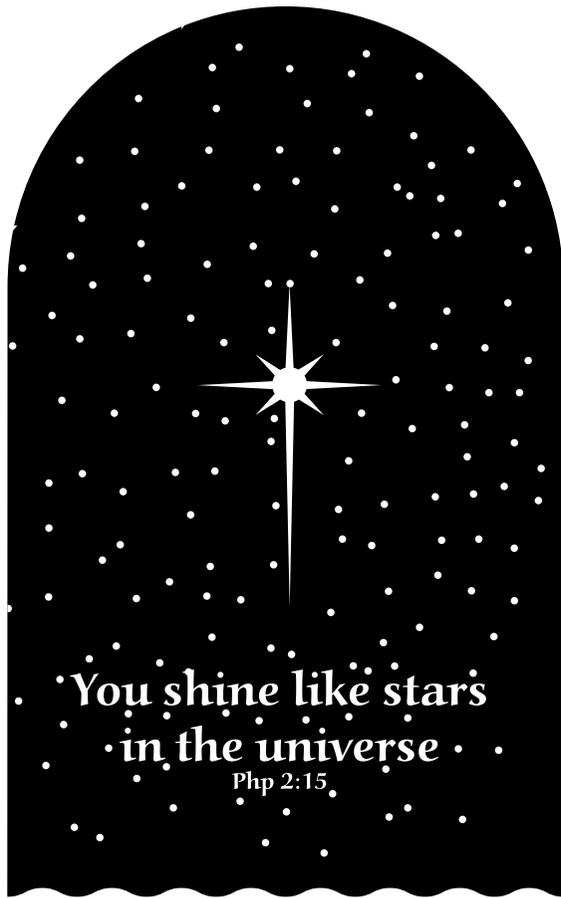


THE LUTHERAN

EDUCATOR



Number 1

Volume 49

October 2008

The Lutheran Educator

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

ARTICLES

- Thank God for Christian Parents**
John Schultz 4
- What Living Faith Looks Like (Part 1)**
David Sellnow 6
- James 2: 1 - 4**
Theodore Hartwig 13
- “What exactly do you do?”**
Brian Davison 15
- 1-2-3 Magic for Teachers**
Amanda Treder 18
- A Four Step Process for Reflective Journal Writing**
Ray Dusseau 24
- Homework: Bain or Benefit?**
Kristin Strong 27

DEPARTMENTS

- As we see it
Privileged to Serve** 3
- Coming Home**
Steve Balza 14,17

VOLUME 49

NUMBER 1

OCTOBER 2008

Editor — Jack N. Minch

Editorial Board — Philip M. Leyrer, Cheryl A. Loomis, James F. Pope, David D. Sellnow

Editorial correspondence and articles should be sent to *The Lutheran Educator*, Editor, Martin Luther College, 1995 Luther Court, New Ulm, MN 56073. Phone 507-354-8221. Fax 507-354-8225. e-mail: lutheraneducator@mlc-wels.edu

The Lutheran Educator (ISSN 0458-4988) is published four times a year in October, December, February, and May by Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-3284. Periodical Postage Paid at Milwaukee, WI.

Rates: One year—USA/\$12.00 –single copy/\$3.00. Canada/\$12.84–single copy/\$3.21. All other countries—air mail \$18.80. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Write for multi-year rates. For single issue only, Wisconsin residents add 5% sales tax, Milwaukee County residents add 5.6% tax.

Subscription Services: 1-800-662-6093 extension 8 (Milwaukee 414-615-5785). Write NPH, 1250 N. 113th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284. Order online: www.nph.net/periodicals

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Educator*, %Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-3284.

Copyright ©2008 by Martin Luther College. Requests for permission to reproduce more than brief excerpts are to be addressed to the editor.



Privileged To Serve

1 Timothy 1:12-17

I often wonder, “Why me, Lord? Why me?” Waves of wonderment cascade through my mind as I travel the highway from school to school, as I lie awake at night, or as I sit at my desk. “Why me?”

Why had God chosen me to be his child? Why has he chosen me to help prepare the next generation of teachers? The sins of the day and of a lifetime are overwhelming. I would have imagined God to have discarded me long ago. Yet, for some reason beyond my comprehension, he still numbers me among his disciples. He still nurtures me daily with his Word. He still regularly assures me of the forgiveness of my sins by feeding me his body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. He still gives me the privilege of serving him through the works that he has prepared in advance for me to do. How privileged am I to serve such a Lord!

Have you pondered the grace of God, who had led you to join those privileged to serve him as his child and in his ministry? As you gather with your colleagues for faculty meetings or morning devotion do you consider the privilege of serving him with friends who share his love and daily experience his grace? God has given us the privilege of serving him in the blessed ministry of making disciples of young people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. How privileged we are to serve such a Lord!

Thank God daily for the privilege of being able to serve him as his child and as a minister of his gospel of salvation. Thank him for providing you with that army of fellow workers who daily experience that same joy and privilege in serving him in the teaching ministry. May God preserve among us the sense of joy and thanksgiving that comes from recognizing the he has given us the privilege of serving him.

Oh Lord, as we embark on a new school year, grant us a full measure of your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes from on high. We know that if left to our own resources, we will cause your work to come to naught. Remove from our hearts all coldness and indifference. Replace them with a burning zeal and love for your kingdom work. Enable us under your direction to expend ourselves and our abilities in your service, assured that all we undertake and do in your name has your blessing. Guide and direct us at all times, always performing in us your will and pleasure. Amen

JNM



...and others

Thank God for Christian Parents

John Schultz

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. Luke 2:41-42

I heard a Christian teacher once remark, “My work would be so much easier if it weren’t for parents.” Obviously, the teacher remembered a few challenging situations and stereotyped most parents. While it may happen that one or two parents can make a teacher’s life frustrating, Christian parents are one of a Christian school’s greatest assets. They have a primary God-given responsibility. Thank God for our Christian parents.

Being God-fearing Jewish parents, Joseph and Mary undoubtedly attended synagogue services on Sabbath days in Nazareth. When the yearly Passover Feast drew near, they traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem to worship in the

Temple. In our text they did not travel alone but took Jesus along when he was twelve years old. At age twelve Jewish boys began preparing to take their place in the religious community the following year. Jesus’ parents in a painstaking way gave their beloved child the religious instruction God commands all parents to give their children whom he has entrusted to their care.

God’s command is clear. Such instruction is to be given diligently and consistently. Involving children in Christian training is somewhat like training for a race. It’s not a sprint; it’s a relay marathon. Time after time, hour after hour, day after day the training goes on. The Law removes the rough edges. The Gospel gives the smooth handoff. And where is the practice track? Where is the place where rough edges cannot be hidden, cannot be left untouched? Where is the place where the sweet Gospel smooths the way? It’s inside of the front door of each Christian home and each Christian school. The home and school are God’s built-in training facilities.

“Talk about them when you sit at

home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up,” Deuteronomy 6:7. Parents and teachers relay Christian truth diligently and consistently. The home and the school work hand in hand. How blest when the transition from home to school creates consistency of mission and purpose. Such a situation avoids sloppy handoffs and irregular starts. Moms and dads realize they don’t have forever. Christian parents and teachers fully realize they need each other to get children ready for the big race.

And how is this done? Over the long haul. Hit and miss at home is negligence. Negligence is an open door to the devil’s temptations. I’ve heard parents remark that they leave religious instruction until the child is old enough to make up his own mind. If one waits that long, Satan will not.

God bless Christian teachers who faithfully shepherd Christian youth and appreciate fully their partners in

Christian education: Christian parents. God bless Christian parents who lead their children to Christ at home and spare no expense in giving them Christian training in school.

Read some more: Mark 10:13-16

Prayer:

Let children hear the mighty deeds
Which God performed of old,
Which in our younger years we saw,
And which our fathers told.
Oh, teach them with all diligence
The truths of God’s own Word,
To place in him their confidence,
To fear and trust their Lord,
To learn that in our God alone
Their hope securely stands,
That they may ne’er forget his works,
But walk in his commands.

CW 512, st 1,4,5

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

YOUR OWN VERSION

You are writing a Gospel
A chapter each day,
By deeds that you do,
By words that you say.

Men read what you write,
Whether faithless or true;
Say, what is the Gospel
According to you?

PAUL GILBERT

What Living Faith Looks Like (Part 1)

David Sellnow

In four parts (this being the first), we will examine closely one of the more challenging chapters in the Bible—James chapter two. Before parsing the chapter, we do well to read the whole of it.

For the sake of variety and enriched understanding, let's look at James' message in an alternate Bible translation, before proceeding through the study according to our accustomed *New International Version* (NIV). The following is taken from the *New Living Translation* (NLT), copyright 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust.

James chapter 2

¹ My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

² For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and

another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes.³ If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well,⁴ doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

⁵ Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?⁶ But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court?⁷ Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

⁸ Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself."⁹ But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a

Editor's note: Throughout this academic year, *The Lutheran Educator* will present you with themes from the book of James. In each issue, a devotion from the book, "Faith Active in Love: Meditations on the Letter of James," by Prof. em. Ted Hartwig (Eagles' Wings Publishing, 2007), will set the tone. Additionally, a set of four studies concentrating on James chapter two will be featured. You might use these studies and their accompanying discussion questions as part of your faculty or other church staff meetings throughout the year.

sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

¹⁰ For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws.

¹¹ For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.

¹² So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. ¹³ There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

¹⁴ What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

¹⁸ Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰ How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good

deeds is useless?

²¹ Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. ²³ And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. ²⁴ So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

²⁵ Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. ²⁶ Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Signs of life

In the weeks after our first child came home from the hospital, often I would creep into her bedroom while she was sleeping. By the dim glow of the night-light, I'd observe. Was she still breathing? Could I see her chest expand and contract, her lungs taking in and letting out air? Yes, okay, she was fine.

All of my children were born quite healthy. There were no medical reasons to warrant my parental anxiety. Perhaps, however, reports about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome appeared in the media often enough to scare me. With each child, I made similar nocturnal and nap-time checks, just to make sure. I needed

to see that they were breathing; I wanted to know that they were okay.

A living body breathes signs of life. Respiration can be monitored. Pulse can be felt. Activity is evident. It's how we know a body is alive.

Spiritual life also has evident signs. Now, of course, faith itself is unseen. It can't be quantified; it can't be measured. One is either spiritually alive or spiritually dead. But like life in the body—you can't see life but you see signs of it—life in the spirit has visible effects too. A person alive by the Spirit is characterized by the kind of life that comes from God's Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Faith inside a person affects the

A person alive by the Spirit is characterized by the kind of life that comes from God's Spirit.

attitude and actions of that person. And so, if there is indeed faith hidden in one's heart, there will be signs of life—evidences of faith—that can be seen.

What living faith looks like—this is essentially the message of James, the brother of our Lord, accentuated in the second chapter of James' letter to Christians. The final verse of the chapter sums up the theme: "As the body

without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26).

Deeds are to faith what breath is to the body. For a moment, let me cast James' words in that light—"as a body without breath is dead." In the language in which James wrote, the same word means "spirit" and "breath." You've likely been to a funeral home and have seen the body of someone lying in a casket. On such occasions we may say things like, "He looks nice," or "She seems so peaceful." But no amount of make-up can hide the obvious fact: what is in the coffin is a corpse. There is no breath. There is no life.

Similarly, "faith without deeds is dead." If there are no actions, no evidences, no independent movements in a person's life, resulting from faith, then there really is no faith. And cosmetic fixes—mere surface actions that pretend to look like a godly life—won't suffice. "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Deeds themselves, apart from faith, are not good to God. But God, without fail, will bring about genuine good from those whom he has called to faith. We were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). If such signs of faith are not happening, there is no faith life. All that is left is a spiritual corpse.

Where it all begins

James' writing has come under criticism in the course of the church's history. The great 16th century reformer Martin

Luther called James “an epistle of straw” because it so emphasizes a person’s works and says little about God’s grace. And yet, the Christian church has never been able to look away from the message of James. His strong words haunt our hearts with accusations we know are true. We often get lazy in our Christianity. We fail to live the faith we profess. We need to be reprimanded by James—telling us to snap out of it before we slip into a comatose state in our spiritual life, and then stop having faith altogether.

James hammers us with a preaching of law. His book is a call to repentance. He speaks firmly. He is harsh on us. We dare not avoid James. The old sinner in us needs to be drowned by daily sorrow over sin—a point on which Luther strongly agreed.

Spiritual life has its beginning in us in repentance. Our lives as Christians are to be lived continuously in repentance and in faith. It’s like breathing—a constant state of being, without which life in us ceases to exist. We are to be ever aware of who we are of ourselves and who we are by the mercy of God. We are sinners, rotten and dead ... but we are alive and lively because of Jesus Christ. In turn, faith in Jesus will produce in us the good deeds that James describes as the evidence of spiritual life.

Faith is rooted in Jesus Christ. James’ letter doesn’t speak the name of Christ frequently, but everything he says stands on the fact that we know Jesus and believe in him. The chapter we are considering begins with these words: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious

Lord Jesus Christ ...” (James 2:1).

It is significant that James calls us brothers. He had come to a new understanding of the term brother. James was a member of Jesus’ immediate family, the household of Joseph and Mary. When Jesus began ministry as a teacher in Israel, James and his siblings thought their brother was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). Jesus’ brothers “did not believe in him” as the Messiah (John 7:5). But that changed. When Jesus came back to life after being crucified,

*Deeds are to faith
what breath is to the
body.*

he made a special appearance to his brother James (1 Corinthians 15:7). James came to understand that being “a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1) was more vital than any physical blood-relationship to him. Being a believer in Jesus as Lord (God) and Christ (Savior) was what made James—in the truest sense of the word—a brother of Jesus. The same faith is what makes us Jesus’ brothers and sisters, and sisters and brothers thus also to James and to each other. It all begins with believing in Jesus. We are “believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (James 2:1). He is glorious to us because of what he has done for us. He has made us children of the heavenly Father. Without him, we are nothing but sinners who have no relationship to God—no matter how impressive our religious

Sellnow

family tree.

Remain in Jesus

There isn't much gospel in James chapter two, beyond that opening allusion to our relationship in Christ. James' purpose in this writing is not to preach gospel. We are uneasy about that—we shy away from all-out law. Yet when God's preachers hit us with law, they do it all-out, without pulling any punches. They intend to kill in us whatever is of sin. Jesus himself once let a young man walk away dejected after confronting him with a word of law that destroyed any hope of earning heaven by commandment-keeping (Mark 10:17-22).

The law is spoken to those whose hearts are in the wrong place, and until those hearts are crushed by condemnation, it is not yet time to bring soothing good news. James' intent was to cut to the core Christians who had become un-Christlike. Oh, they were churchgoing folks, but they had become merely "churchy," rather than living in the love of Christ. They needed a blunt confrontation with the law again.

Jesus had said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). What James saw in these believers indicated that they were in danger of falling out of that relationship to Jesus. Jesus had also said, "You are my friends if you do what I command. ... This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:14,17). James saw things happening in the church which were out of character with Jesus and the urgency he placed on love. So James did what he needed

to do. The last lines of his letter reveal what he was after: "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). James wrote a letter that was tough with law because he had an overriding gospel-based objective. He wanted Christians to remain in Christ and in Christ's love, not practice a form of religion that merely called itself Christian.

I hope that as you are reading this, you are thinking of how James' message to 1st century Christians is still pertinent to 21st century Christians. To all of us who have become rather complacent about believing and selective about how and to whom we show love in our lives, James' warnings call us back from the brink. As you continue reading through these brief studies (one in each issue of this year's *The Lutheran Educator*), you will be challenged in your comfortable religiosity. Through James, may God change our attitudes completely—that's what repentance means.

Christ, remain in us and renew us in your love!

Don't show favoritism

The chief fault in the church addressed by James chapter two is hypocrisy. I'm using that term not in a technical, theological way, but in the common way hypocrisy has come to be identified by people: professing certain beliefs while acting in a way inconsistent

with those beliefs. The latter half of the chapter will talk in a general way about how beliefs and actions must be connected. But first, we are confronted with a specific, glaring example of how hypocritical behavior evidences itself within the church: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism” (James 2:1).

The way James phrased his command, he was telling people to stop doing something they were habitually doing. He wasn’t inventing a hypothetical situation; he was dealing with realities that were happening in the church then—as they are now. Some people are treated differently than others, based on how they look, how they dress, who they are, where they live, their place in the community, etc. The way we act toward certain people displays more deference or respect than the way we look upon others. Some faces seem to be more welcome in our midst. James says: Stop it! God isn’t one to play favorites. As the people of God in Christ, neither ought we.

Faith and favoritism don’t mix—like oil and water. In this case, faith is like water—life-giving, fresh, clean, pure. Favoritism is like oil—greasy, slimy. The way of the world is to “grease the skids,” to be smooth and to get in good with other people—people you think might offer advantages to you. Faith isn’t at all like that. Faith is focused on Jesus Christ, and because of Jesus considers all people equally.

Faith in Jesus would have us show love to all. “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all”

(2 Corinthians 5:14). A believer’s attitude toward everyone is the same. “We regard no one from a worldly point of view” (2 Corinthians 5:16). However, we must admit, our attitudes toward people often are more worldly than spiritual. We do play favorites. We eagerly incorporate new members into our congregations if they already think like us and are willing to do things the way we already like to do them. But imagine what would happen if a wave of new folks began coming to church, and they

*To all of us who have
become rather
complacent about
believing and
selective about how
and to whom we
show love in our
lives, James’
warnings call us
back from the brink.*

all were tattooed, body-pierced, gnarly-haired ruffians who clapped and swayed when they joined in worship. Our reaction might be less than welcoming.

We rarely display deep, all-encompassing love—love like Christ’s that extends to every human being, regardless of race, tribe, language or nation.

We mostly practice lesser affections that we mislabel as love. We have affinity for people who share our cultural commonalities. We have camaraderie with persons our own age, or who share a specific interest or task. We exchange pleasantries with fellow church members; we talk about sports, the weather, the highlights of our kids' activities and antics ... but we don't live up to what Jesus urged of us: "All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). We don't get involved meaningfully in one another's lives. We don't offer equal kindness to everyone and anyone we meet. Our love is limited, and so our witness is less than convincing.

More to come

Having introduced the subject of favoritism, we'll break off the study for now. Discuss on your own some of the issues raised in the preceding pages (see questions below). Further treatment of the message of James will be forthcoming in subsequent issues of this publication. ❁

Talk about it

Use the following discussion starters within your school faculty or with other church staff.

1. We check for pulse and breath to see if a body is alive and well. How do we check on the health of souls? What signs of spiritual life do you hope to see in the people to whom you are ministering?

2. Agree or disagree: If children are well behaved in the classroom, we can assume that their good behavior is being produced as a fruit of faith.
3. Can you think of a school or church situation which would merit the approach taken by James—one which preaches mostly law?
4. Do we, as Lutheran teachers, give proper emphasis to the importance of good works in the lives of believers?
5. How can we teach children the importance of doing good, without giving them the impression that works contribute to their salvation?
6. James spoke out against Christians showing any form of favoritism. We will look at this issue in greater detail in the next issue of *The Lutheran Educator*. For now, though, list ways in which ...
 - you've seen favoritism occur within the church;
 - you've been hurt by any instances of favoritism in your life;
 - you are tempted to play favorites yourself;
 - favoritism is diametrically opposed to the message of the gospel

David Sellnow teaches in the History and Religion Division at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN.



James 2: 1 - 4

Theodore Hartwig

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say: "Here's a good seat for you," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

At various times during past centuries, some people have judged the letter of James to be unworthy of inclusion in the New Testament. It is claimed that James contains too much law and very little gospel. However, when the letter is judged in the total context of why it was written, doubts about its eligibility subside. The entire letter vibrates with an unseen gospel. The case resembles what a visitor to the city of Oxford in England may not be aware of. The visitor will see 35 colleges scattered throughout the city and wonder, "Where is the university?" But the hidden institution of the university, represented by the officers and by teachers from the colleges, constructs the examinations, confers the degrees, and conducts the graduation ceremonies. Similarly, the gospel permeates all the admonition and good counsel which

James shares with his fellow believers.

In his opening sentence James states that he is writing to disciples of Jesus who are at home with the gospel of their Lord. He confronts them with a touchy topic common in society and from which Christians are not immune. It is the devilry of favoritism.

James then cites an example of favoritism in the congregation. At that time, believers, when they assembled Sunday evenings for a fellowship meal and celebration of the Lord's Supper came, like today, from all walks of life. Some were wealthy, others poor. And since public display of one's wealth is an all too common habit, James compares treatment of the rich with treatment of the poor. When the rich come to worship "wearing a gold ring and fine clothes," the human inclination to favoritism springs into view. With their money and influence the wealthy can do much to help the congregation with its building and budget. As for the poor, distinguished by their shabby clothing, the favoritism vanishes. Should chairs be lacking to accommodate everyone, let the poor stand or sit on the floor.

So which people in the congregation may more likely be favored? Will it be the member who drives to church in a Cadillac, or the one who drives a junker? Making distinctions between the rich and the poor is out of joint with

Hartwig

Christian life. In this context, other external factors that lead to distinctions come to mind, such as color of skin, accent in speaking, and the like. All of this rates people by outward appearance, idiosyncrasies, and possessions rather than by inward character.

Lord Jesus, may your holy gospel, which extends to all people without dis-

crimination, preserve me from the infection of favoritism.✠

Devotion taken from "Faith Active in Love: Meditations on the Letter of James." New Ulm MN: Eagles' Wings Publishing, 2007 used with permission. Theodore Hartwig is a professor emeritus of Martin Luther College and resides in New Ulm, MN.

Coming Home

Steve Balza

Autumn in New Ulm - Why does it seem so exciting?
Autumn in New Ulm - It spells the thrill of first knightng.
Shimmering clouds, glittering crowds In canyons of steel
They're making me feel - I'm home.

- adapted from Vernon Duke's "Autumn in New York"

OK, so maybe Sinatra never visited our fair Minnesota Star City. And maybe the modest brick structures which form our quaint campus aren't exactly canyons of steel. But there is something about this bluffsides campus which says "home" to many of us who fondly recall our years here on the hill.

Perhaps it's the familiarity or the smallness of it all. People know each other. People care. Perhaps you subscribe to the old adage that home is where the heart is. College memories often invoke happy thoughts of blossoming friendships, youthful exuberance, and unbridled optimism. Or, perhaps you think of home simply as a place where you can grow, be challenged, and feel loved.

For me, (D)MLC was a place where a Father daily fed me with the truths of Scripture, molded me with the influence of a faithful faculty, and surrounded me with Christian friends who encouraged and accepted me.

In his word, God describes heaven as our future home. When God's people gather around his word in worship and enjoy the true fellowship which comes from knowing our status as sisters, brothers, and heirs in Christ, it provides an imperfect preview of our future.

No, MLC isn't heaven. It's not even Iowa. But it's a case where, by God's grace, through the working of his Spirit, young men and women were, are, and God willing, will continue to be prepared for the privilege of serving God's people.

So, come on home for a visit...to MLC. You'll be glad you did.

(See page 17 for the listing of events at MLC.)

Steve Balza is the Director of Alumni relations, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

“What exactly do you do?”

Brian Davison

I tend to get that question a lot. Most of the time, it comes in the context of a conversation about my call as a staff minister at St. Marcus Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, WI. What is a staff minister? What does a staff minister do? Is that program even around anymore? Yes, it is still around, and doing quite well. I will attempt to answer the other questions for you, as well.

Can you imagine what would have happened in the early church if the apostles would not have opened the window to letting others participate in ministry? How quickly would the church have grown if each apostle felt that he, and only he, could take care of the widows, do all the preaching and teaching, and help settle disputes? They knew that they couldn't do it all, so they assigned people who had the gifts and abilities to help them. That is staff ministry.

I see staff ministry as a level between ministry by lay members and pastoral ministry. I don't know that I have ever

spoken to a pastor who has said, “I really feel like I have it all under control.

There is nothing our church could do better. There is not a single person that I don't reach out to as well as I could or should.” Such an attitude would be unfortunate; any called worker will tell you that there are endless things to do and people to see, but not enough time. Lay members help our pastors in many ways, but sometimes the need is greater than what a volunteer minister can handle. This is where a staff minister comes in; he or she is called, either full-time or part-time, to help fulfill the needs of the ministry of a particular congregation or calling body.

My life as a staff minister has changed and evolved almost every year to adjust to the needs of the ministry as well as to the gifts and abilities of our people. For three years, I taught 5th and 6th grade Catechism classes in our school and was the director of the Sunday School Program. I have helped teach Bible information classes, start our first high school youth ministry, and develop a

Editor's Note: One out of eight WELS members belongs to a congregation that is served by a staff minister. An article in the May 2008 issue of *The Lutheran Educator* gave an overview of staff ministry: what a staff minister is, how they are trained, and the general areas in which they serve (“A Primer on Staff Ministry,” Vol. 48:4, 102-105). The issues that will be published during this academic year will allow four staff ministers to make the abstract concrete as they provide us with profiles of their specific ministries.

ministry to people with disabilities.

One of the biggest responsibilities I have involves outreach to the community. Before I came to St. Marcus, the congregation had started an after-school program called Wandani for kids in the inner-city of Milwaukee. “Wandani” is a Swahili term that means “companions.” I became the director of the youth outreach efforts, which are directed at children who are neither members of our church nor students in our school. Last year alone we had over 200 children like that come through our doors without those connections to St. Marcus. We offer tutoring programs, basketball, karate, a youth center, and mentoring.

My specific duties with this program are to coordinate and train volunteers, lead devotions, and basically anything else that needs to get done for the ministry to be successful. I have vacuumed many floors, cleaned many toilets, and scraped gum off the gym floor, all in the name of Jesus. I have also hugged a child who desperately needed it, disciplined another child who needed that more, and built relationships with both children and volunteers that will remain for the rest of this lifetime (just ask my wife; she was a volunteer at Wandani when I met her!).

St. Marcus has recently asked me to become the leader of the rest of our community ministries as well, which includes a food and clothing pantry, parish nurse program, and the Deacons program, where we collect old furniture, bedding, kitchen supplies, etc. and distribute them to families in need. It

sounds like a lot, doesn't it? It is. But with so many ministries happening all at the same time, I act mostly as a volunteer coordinator, empowering lay people to do most of the “ministering.”

The community ministries are the biggest portion of my time, but coming in a very close second would be music ministry. I had no plans to be involved in music ministry when I was being trained as a staff minister at MLC, but the Lord had it in his plan. When I started my internship at St. Marcus, the congregation was just about to start a new worship service that was to be completely different from the “normal” Sunday morning services. The pastor who was to lead the service, Pastor Jim Skorzewski, wanted the worship music to be led by a band, but they did not have a lead singer. Hesitatingly, I said, “I have done some singing before,” to which he replied, “... Really?” I told him we could try it out and see if he liked it, and if he didn't I would try to find someone else. Little did any of us know what the Lord was about to do.

I passed the “audition” period, and the band that emerged as a result is called Koiné, a Greek word that means “common.” The Sunday night worship service at 6:30 pm has grown to an average weekly attendance of 150-200 people, 80% of whom are between the ages of 20 and 30 years old. Koiné has released two CDs, which have sold approximately 10,000 copies, and is currently recording the third. We have visited well over 100 different churches in our Synod, spanning from Kennewick, WA, to Ottawa, ON, to Charlotte, NC,

sharing with them many hymns from our Lutheran heritage, played with a new and vibrant feel.

So, what exactly does a staff minister do? It has been my experience that no two staff ministers do exactly the same thing. All of them use the gifts, abilities, and opportunities that the Lord provides them, and their congregations, to serve his people. Why? Because

“Christ’s love compels us (2 Corinthians 5:14).” You may ask, “Isn’t that really what every Christian should do?” My response would be, “Yes ... I just get paid for it!” ☛

Brian Davison is a staff minister at St. Marcus Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, WI. For more information about St. Marcus or Koiné, go to www.stmarcus.org or www.koinemusic.com.

Upcoming events at Martin Luther College

October 24-25 Homecoming Weekend...a smorgasbord of activity including the ever-popular talent show, alumni reception, Cross Country open, soccer games, campus tours, and, of course, football.

Other upcoming events...

- October 31 MLC Football at the Minneapolis Metrodome
- November 6-9 Focus on Ministry Recruitment Weekend
Forum’s *The Sundance Kid* Musical Production
- November 23 Wind Symphony Concert
- December 5-6 Forum’s *Frankenstein* Radio Dramatic Production
- December 14 Christmas Concert
- December 18 Midyear Commencement

Don’t forget to mark your calendars for next summer’s Reunion Weekend, July 24-26.

For details on these and all other MLC activities, check out our website at www.mlc-wels.edu or give us a call at 877 MLC-1995.



1-2-3 Magic for Teachers

Amanda Treder

What an awesome privilege and responsibility we as Christian day school teachers have been given! It is truly a joy and blessing to teach God's little lambs each day. Because we live in a sinful world and we human beings are fallen creatures, there are also trials in our teaching. One of the greatest challenges of teaching is managing a classroom. I came across the book, *1-2-3 Magic*, by Thomas Phelan, Ph. D. after my first year of teaching. I put some of Dr. Phelan's techniques, written for parents, to use in my classroom. Several years later, I ran into another edition of this book, *1-2-3 Magic for Teachers*. Let us first take a look at the discipline plan presented in this book and then apply it to our Christian classrooms.

The four basic teacher personalities

Before we discuss the 1-2-3 Magic plan, we must first talk about teacher personality. In the book, four basic teaching personalities are identified. Below are the four teaching styles briefly described.

Authoritarian

The authoritarian teacher can usually be identified as the yeller. Discipline is usually not a problem for this teacher. Students are intimidated by this teacher and comply immediately to orders. This type of teaching may also bring with it anxiety for the students. There may be little warmth or positive reinforcement in this classroom.

Permissive

Permissive teachers are known as the teachers that are very nice. They are very warm and caring and want their students to like them. Because this teacher is often looked upon as a "pushover," permissive classrooms can easily become out of control. Students may not feel safe in this classroom or trust the teacher to take care of problems.

Detached

A detached teacher is neither warm nor demanding. This type of teacher does his job and that is all. Students do not usually benefit either academically or emotionally from this teaching style.

Authoritative

The authoritative teacher is, of course,

the ideal teacher. This teacher is very warm and cares deeply for the students. This teacher also knows how to get results. The classroom is orderly and high levels of learning take place. The students trust this teacher and feel safe.

Understanding our teaching personality (the book has quizzes) can help us uncover our strengths and weaknesses. We may then improve our teaching style.

How does 1-2-3 Magic work?

1-2-3 Magic addresses two kinds of behaviors that need to be corrected. The first is called “stop” behavior. These are things like talking, excessive noise, getting out of seats, fighting, and pretty much any obnoxious behavior we do not want our students to do.

The second kind of behavior is called “start” behavior. Keeping neat desks, picking up items off the floor, transitioning smoothly, and other behavior we want our students to do are included under start behavior. Once we have decided what kind of behavior we are dealing with, we may then proceed with either the stop tactics or the start tactics.

Stop behavior

The stop behavior tactics are so simple and work so easily some have said they work like “magic.” This is how the title for this plan came to be. When a child is doing something you want him to stop doing, you simply look at him and say, “That’s one.” Give them a moment to correct the behavior. If it continues,

simply look at them and say, “That’s two.” Again, give them time to stop the unacceptable behavior. If they choose to continue, say, “That’s three, take five.” The child knows he is out of warnings and proceeds to take a five minute time out. In the classroom, this time out may simply be putting his head down for five minutes.

Does this sound too good to be true? It really does work if two simple rules are followed. The first rule is “no talking” and the second is “no emotion.” When you count a child, all responsibility is being placed on him. Excess talking not only wastes valuable time, it puts some of the responsibility for bad behavior back on the teacher. Show no emotion when counting. Kids love to get adults riled and excited. Save excitement for complimenting and praising your students. If they want to see you excited, they will repeat the behaviors that get you that way.

Start behavior

Start behavior is somewhat trickier because it involves motivating students to do something. The book includes several tactics for “getting kids to move.” Positive reinforcement is, of course, the obvious way to motivate good behavior. Other ideas include using timers, charting (rewards for accomplishments), and across the room praise. Counting could be used at times to start behavior. For example, if a teacher calls a student and they say “just a minute,” the teacher could say, “That’s one.”

This past school year at our Michigan

District Teachers' Conference, the host school from Adrian, MI had a neat way of motivating the teachers to stop chatting and come back into the church at the end of the break times. They had several gift bags and began drawing names from a hat. If the teacher drawn was in the room, he received the gift. I thought this was such a neat "start tactic" that I went back to my classroom and began doing the same thing when the students came in from recess. I began drawing names from a jar. If the student drawn was in his seat and all items hung neatly, he received a small piece of candy or a sticker. Snow pants, coats, hats, and mittens came off so quickly! Every student wanted to be sure to be in his seat in case his name was drawn!

You need not spend large amounts of money on incentives. Because I teach four grades, I usually have students come to a table in the front of the classroom for their individual classes. I give them some warning when the class before them is wrapping up. I call them to come to the table by the count of 10. If the entire class has transitioned by this time, we put a tally on the board. When we get to the designated number of tallies, we may have an extra recess. Students love going home and telling their parents they had four recesses in one day!

Start behaviors are among the most frustrating for teachers. There's always the student who did not hand in his assignment or the desk that always looks like a hurricane shot through it. Instead of letting these behaviors turn into

stress, think up a creative start tactic. It will become a game to the students and teacher alike!

Testing and manipulation

All students come equipped with sinful Old Adams. They are not all going to respond immediately to counting. The book cites several kinds of testing and manipulation from students.

- Badgering "Please, please, please" If they ask enough, maybe the teacher will give in.
- Temper Tantrums, kicking, physical attacks
- Threat "I'm going to tell my parents." "I'll never speak to you again."
- Martyrdom "I never get anything." "No one likes me."
Butter Up-"You look really nice today. Can I have...?"
- Physical Tactics These are the bigger scarier tactics. Students may run away or harm themselves or others.

Know that testing is inevitable. When students begin the testing tactics, simply count them. Show no emotion and say no extra words. In fact, testing often peaks after a couple of weeks. Ride it out, stay firm, and the students will soon know they cannot manipulate you.

Tantrums

Sometimes children use temper tantrums that need to be addressed in a different manner. Tantrums can cause distress to other students and classroom order. Pressing students during a tantrum (even as simply as counting)

may feed the tantrum or cause them to shut down.

Dr. Phelan uses a different approach in dealing with tantrums. When a child begins his tantrum, do nothing for the first 15 to 30 seconds. Continue with what you are doing. If the child does not have an audience (this means training the other students to ignore him), many times the tantrum will stop. If the child does not calm down after the 30 seconds, go to him and offer him a choice. "You may calm down and find your seat or you may go into the library." Leave him alone and ignore him for another 30 seconds. Often, the student will see his tantrum is not working and will choose to calm down. Of course, there are times when the child needs to be removed from the room. This would include help from another teacher or adult to supervise the child until the tantrum is over. Be sure the other adult can ignore the tantrum until the child is finished. Any unnecessary talking often prolongs the tantrum.

When the tantrum is over, then the child begins his time out or other punishment. A tantrum does not allow for a child to "get out of" a consequence. The consequence, however, should not begin until the child is calm.

Making 1-2-3 Magic work for you.

1-2-3 Magic has several chapters that include using 1-2-3 Magic for different situations such as hallways, lunch, and field trips. Dr. Phelan also suggests how to use 1-2-3 Magic in different grade levels and with special needs students.

The book is highly effective at encouraging teachers to develop relationships with each of their students. By developing a trust with your students, they will come to you with important needs and serious issues that may arise.

1-2-3 Magic at work in the classroom

Before beginning 1-2-3 Magic in your classroom, you will first want to decide what behavior you will count. In my classroom, I use counting when students forget to raise their hands, get out of their seats without permission, and for other behaviors that need to stop (such as tattling, whining, etc.). I have a stoplight to show what number count a student is on. The stoplight is cleared at each recess. This means that a child may get "1" at 9:00, "2" at 9:20, and "3" at 9:45. It may be for three different things. That is fine. The system is training them in self-discipline. At times the

*Too often we focus on
the negative behavior
in our classrooms*

whole class may be acting silly, so I count everyone.

There are times when 1-2-3 is not effective. For example, when students are lining up and I want them to do so quietly, it is more effective to have them practice the appropriate behavior several times than to use counting.

Using the start behavior tactics makes me think about encouraging good

behavior. Too often we focus on the negative behavior in our classrooms and forget to train children in what we want them to do.

Several coworkers have not always been big supporters of 1-2-3 Magic. One criticism I have heard is that giving three warnings leads students to push the line, knowing they have two more chances. In some cases, they are correct in their observations and this would need to be addressed. An advantage to three warnings is that the students are learning self-control. After using 1-2-3 Magic consistently for several months, most students will stop inappropriate behavior at the first count.

This plan is extremely effective with ADD and ADHD students. They have clear and simple rules and know what the consequences will be. They have a visual of how they are doing. A calm and positive environment helps them focus. They are learning to control their impulsive behavior and know they will benefit if they complete their tasks.

Students and parents alike are usually happy with this kind of management plan. There is no yelling or nagging. All students are treated very fairly and know exactly what to expect. One year I was explaining the classroom rules and consequences to a new group of students. Looking at me with wide eyes, these new first graders responded with, "Well, that certainly seems fair." The 1-2-3 plan goes along on field trips and to special events. It keeps order while keeping the focus of the classroom on learning, not discipline.

1-2-3 Magic as Christian Discipline

Discipline from a Christian definition is to "train disciples." We as Christian teachers are in effect training the children entrusted to us for life-long service to their Savior and others. Our task is to assist their parents in molding them and equipping them with training in God's Word. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Paul encourages Timothy in his ministry with these words: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). We can take these words and apply them to our own classrooms. We "preach" God's Word to our children. Each day we instruct and correct and encourage with great patience. We want to teach our children about their Savior. My goal is not to show them who the boss of the classroom is or to fear me above all because I am the teacher. We want our students to learn about their Savior and his great love for them. We want to obey God's commands and show love to others because "He first loved us." Christian teachers model "serving one another in love." The Holy Spirit will work the seeds sown and bring about a harvest of righteousness.

1-2-3 Magic on its own does not motivate children according to the gospel. We must continue to let God's law and gospel predominate in our teaching. 1-2-3 Magic is the management plan by which the law is carried out. Christian

teachers will have a discipline plan, not for motivation, but for good structure and order in the classroom.

As Christians modeling Christ's love, we will want to emphasize the forgiveness that comes through Jesus. I really like how the plan indicates "no talking" and "no emotion" when disciplining. However, that does not mean we should never discuss behavior with our students. Christian schools educate the whole child, especially spiritually. As Christian teachers we will certainly want to take advantage of opportunities through devotions, *Christ Light* lessons, and situations throughout the day to apply God's Word. Talk with your students about what God's Word teaches us about stealing, cheating, gossiping, and other topics that easily apply to their lives.

Enjoying your students

Enjoy the students the Lord has given you to teach. They are precious souls. They are little personalities. They are sensitive and have feelings, too. Get to know your students and their families. Ask them questions about themselves. Let them tell their stories sometimes. They are little people, fearfully and wonderfully made by their Creator.

Love your students deeply. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. We want them to show us proper respect as God's authority, of course. There are boundaries that need to be established in our relationships with them. However, do not let these things hinder your love for them. There needs to be a

balance of love and discipline. If you err, err on the side of love. That Christ-like love will carry them so much farther in their lives than a lot of strict discipline.

Let your students be kids. This is not always easy. There is often a fine line with enforcing rules and letting them just be children. Children bring unique views on subjects. They are special little people. They are fellow believers with us in God's kingdom.

With consistent use of a discipline plan such as 1-2-3 Magic, the students will quickly learn what is expected in the classroom. They will know what consequences are earned for their actions. A simple, yet structured management plan in the classroom allows the teacher to spend the majority of time teaching. Students will spend their time learning.

Final words

1-2-3 Magic is a book that I would encourage every teacher to read. Many parts of the plan could be adapted even if the whole system is not used. When applied with God's Word, 1-2-3 Magic can serve as a wonderful base for effective classroom management. The Lord will continue to bless and prosper our Christian schools. The Holy Spirit will continue to strengthen all students and teachers as they grow in grace and godly living. He, who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. 🙏

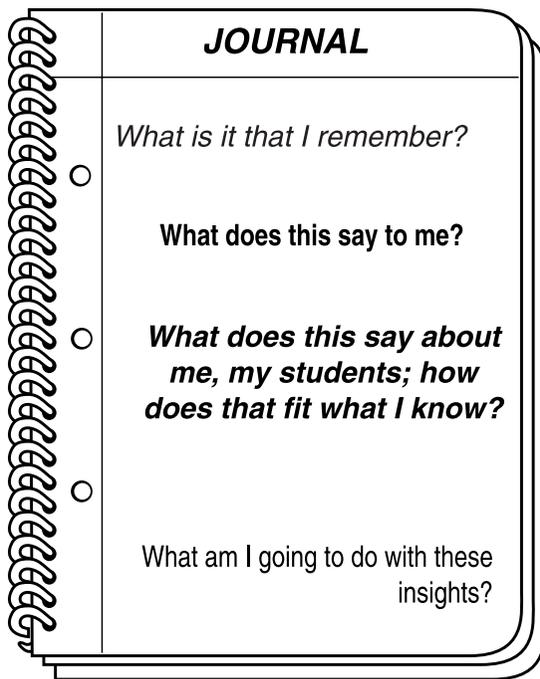
Amanda Treder teaches at St. John, Lutheran School, Dowagiac, MI.

A Four Step Process for Reflective Journal Writing

Ray Dusseau

So you want to keep a journal and you want it to be a place where reflective experiences can be recorded and revisited. This sounds like a simple process, but there is still that nagging question that you must answer. How will this writing be truly reflective, and not just a series of “Dear Diary” entries?

As one who has repeatedly requested intended teachers, student teachers, and classroom teachers to journal, I too searched for an adequate way to explain the reflective writing process. In some settings we had used the traditional “What, So What, and Now What” formula. That proved to be helpful, but it seemed that there was still more to the



process.

Over time I began explaining to my students and other colleagues that if you want to write reflectively then you can not regard the journal as a mere depository for isolated facts. It is true that you need to include facts in your journal narrative. The challenge, how-

ever, is to go beyond these basic facts and convert the journal entry into a dynamic record of the academic and value-based expectations, perceptions, and feelings that cluster around the daily experiences of teaching and learning. What emerges from this clustering of insights is a very personal record of your professional growth as a Christian educator.

Reflective journal writing need not be

considered a one-size-fits-all experience. You may appropriately use a variety of forms. Including a photo or illustration may be an appropriate choice for your style of writing and for the subject of your journal entry. By all means let your feelings and your voice be clearly present in this record of your journey. The 4-R design that follows is a sample of a structured approach that may assist you in your process of reflective journaling.

The 4-R Design

Step #1: Recollection – Capturing the moment

In this first step you simply ask the question, what is it that I remember?

Journaling close to the active events of the day will help you record an account of the events of the day that are accurate and rich in detail. Your recollection

A journal [is] ... a dynamic record of academic and value-based expectations, perceptions, and feelings....

tions unfold in a factual recitation of events which are the focus for your journal writing. Introduce the entry into your journal by simply telling your story of what happened. This is your introduction to the written account and it will set the scene. If your narrative

describes a teaching incident, this is the time to address the “who, what, when, and how” questions of the episode.

As you get started it may be helpful to remember that the basis of your journal narrative may be drawn from sources other than the events of the day. A favorite passage from your reading, a headline from the daily newspaper, or a conversation are all examples of life events that may contain the spark for reflective writing.

Step #2: Reaction – Engaging your attitudes, beliefs, and feelings

As you review your record of the event or the issue that is the focus of your journal entry, what does the “evidence” that you have documented say to you? As you mentally explore the relationship between the recorded event and your beliefs, consider how this makes you feel. How will you describe your feelings? Are there examples that you can reference that will illustrate the feelings that you are recording? As you write you are connecting the dots for your reader and you are just beginning to explore the meaning of the events.

Step #3: Relevance – Engaging the thought process and analytical inquiry

You are now ready to explore what makes this an important event in the world of teaching and learning. By asking a series of questions you will be able to sort out the relevance of the recollections recorded in step one. Begin by considering what you are learning about your students and about yourself or any others who are involved in this episode.

How do the events align with your acquired research base? Are your observations consistent with your existing knowledge base? Consider what makes this meaningful to you and what impact it is having on you. What new possibilities do you see; what perspectives have been changed or added? Try to be as specific as possible to make this reflection concrete and substantive. Analyze the feelings that you have experienced during the episode and how this connects to new or existing views of how teachers teach and students learn.

Step #4: Responsibility – Engaging the active servant-leader role

This final step is the piece that is frequently omitted in the reflective journaling process. It is time for you to look to the future. What are you going to do with the insights that you have identified in the previous steps? What guidance have you found in your examination of today's events that nudges you into action? How will this new information, the knowledge gained, be useful to you in the teaching and learning process? As you come face to face with your feelings and the significance of those feelings, you are left with the task of determining how the new information and insights will impact your behavior. What else do you need to know before you can move forward with an action plan? Here is the connection between reflective journal writing and your role as servant leader. This is the sacred trust given to the Christian teacher. We have been charged by Christ Himself to "love one another." Doing – serving – is at the

heart of your preparation and your life as a Christian educator.

Conclusion

The time spent in reflection is especially valuable as it contributes to personal change and results in the enrichment of your teaching and your emerging role as a true servant leader. This is an essential step in the unfolding of your purposefully professional approach as a Christian in education. The love of Christ compels you to serve as an instructional leader within your classroom and in your school community. ❧

Dr. Ray Dusseau serves as a Professor of Education and as the Director of the Center for Urban Education at Wisconsin Lutheran College Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The time spent in reflection is especially valuable as it contributes to personal change and results in the enrichment of your teaching and your emerging role as a true servant leader.

Homework: Bain or Benefit?

Kristin Strong

There is a growing movement among parents and some educators who believe that teachers and the educational institutions that they represent have gone too far concerning the amount of homework that is assigned to children in this country. They are raising questions like does homework really work? Is it really beneficial to subject students to rigorous amounts of homework each night? Homework is described by many as a necessary part of an educational system trying to compete within the global market. Others, mostly parents, view homework as detrimental to the overall well being of the child and their family. In this paper I will give an overview of both sides of the homework debate concluding with some thoughts of my own on the subject.

Historically speaking, views on homework have varied greatly over the past two hundred years. In the early 1800s most people did not attend school past the 5th grade. Those few who went on to grammar school were generally required to spend many hours each night memorizing the next day's lessons. Drill, memorization and recitation were thought to be the essence of

education; therefore, the practice of requiring homework for older students continued up until the late 1800s and early 1900s. The industrial revolution of the late 19th century changed the way Americans lived and worked. At the same time people began to change the way they viewed education and the practices connected with it. No longer were children being viewed as blank slates onto which learning must be inscribed. Rather, the brain was viewed as the great achievement in human evolutionary development. We survived natural selection because we were able to problem solve. Consequently, during the early part of the 20th century the practice of assigning homework lost its popularity and the idea of increasing physical activities to help educate the whole child gained popularity. (Buell & Kralovec, 2000)

Homework's comeback in the modern era can be attributed to two major historical events: the 1957 launching of Sputnik and the 1983 United States Department of Education report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. The launching of the U.S.S.R satellite created a panic that we had been surpassed technologically by our most feared enemy. Not surpris-

ingly our government responded by passing the National Defense Education Act the goal of which was to improve math and science education. Everyone seemed to agree that students needed to do more math at home. The politics of the cold war were also behind the now famous 1983 government report. The report suggested that our nation was at risk because we were losing our competitive edge (especially to Japan at the time) in commerce, industry, science and technology. The report went on to cite our mediocre educational performance as a cause for the decline. According to the authors:

...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people...Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to obtain them. (1983)

Consequently, the report called for higher standards in math, science, English, and foreign-language instruction and it stated that students should be required to do more homework and have a much longer school year. (Skaggs, 2007) Since the 80s, educational reform has been a rallying cry for many politicians, including our current president, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) being the latest example.

The escalation of the stakes put on education by our government is directly

proportional to the increase in the amount of homework over the past twenty years. It is a fact that homework loads even among the smallest of children have increased. A headline in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* read, "Kindergarten or 'kindergrind'? School getting tougher for kids." The article stated that kindergarten has gone from a cocoon for social and emotional development to a rigorous classroom environment. It asked the question, "How much should 4, 5 and 6 year olds be expected to learn?" The article goes on to explain that there is a national debate going on among educators. Some feel that today's curriculum asks too much of children and that academic pressures have squeezed out all the fun. Others believe that a heightened academic focus prepares children for high-stakes testing and global competition. They point to a correlation between early reading development and success later on standardized tests. (Gao, 2005)

Just how much homework is a typical student doing these days? In a MetLife study it was reported that 45% of students in grades 3-12 spent at least one hour per day doing homework while 77% in those same grades reported doing at least one half hour of homework each night. The homework load increases the higher the grade level. Thirty-seven percent of children in grades 3-6 reported doing at least one hour of homework per day while another 9% said that they did two plus hours of work each night. Fifty percent of the students in grades 7-12 reported that they do one hour of homework each

day on average while 21% said that they do two or more hours of homework each night. (MetLife, 2007)

Interestingly in Japan the average combined time spent in school and doing homework was 52 hours per week. In the United States the time spent in school and doing homework was only 34 hours per week. (Thomas, 1992)

The proponents of homework list many reasons why homework is a necessary part of education today. These reasons fall into three major categories instructional, communicative, and political. The most often cited instructional purposes of homework are 1) homework offers students a chance to practice what they have learned in class 2) assigning new material prepares students for future lessons 3) homework allows a student to show comprehension of the subject matter 4) homework promotes personal development through learning the responsibility of completing and handing in their assignment. (Skaggs, 2007)

Harris Cooper has done extensive research on the topic of homework. In his book, *The Battle over Homework*, Cooper lists the following as the major positive and negative effects of homework as identified by educators:

Positive effects of homework:

- Immediate Achievement and Learning
 - Better retention of factual knowledge
 - Increased understanding
 - Better critical thinking, concept

formation, and information processing

- Curriculum enrichment
- Long-term Academic
 - Encourage learning during leisure time
 - Improved attitude toward school
 - Better study habits and skills
- Nonacademic
 - Greater self-direction
 - Greater self-discipline
 - Better time organization
 - More inquisitiveness
 - More independent problem solving

Negative effects on achievement and learning:

- Satiation
 - Loss of interest in academic material
 - Physical and emotional fatigue
- Denial of access to leisure time and community activities
- Parental interference
 - Pressure to complete and perform well
 - Confusion of instructional techniques
- Cheating
 - Copying from other students
 - Help beyond tutoring
- Increased differences between high and low achievers

Cooper found that the research findings often contradicted one another especially those trying to link homework with academic achievement. (Cooper, 2007)

Most people would agree that home-

work has become a part of the educational culture in this country. However, some feel that too much importance is placed on homework and at the expense of those whom it is meant to benefit. Jeanne Lehninger teaches at Wisconsin Lutheran High in Milwaukee, WI. She decided that homework was not helping her high school students achieve. In her 2005 article for *Parents Crosslink*, she states that she had an epiphany of sorts when she saw first hand the negative effect homework was having on her daughter. After 30 years of teaching she decided to enact a minimal-homework policy in her classroom. Mrs. Lehninger states other reasons for reducing homework, besides trying to regain balance in her daughter's life, are that pushing kids excessively not only upsets the balance but it sends the wrong message. Lehninger wrote, "It says that the most important thing is climbing the ladder of success, that making something of ourselves is more important than being good stewards of our health, our relationships, and our homes." (Lehninger, 2005) Her article also includes 11 items that she lists as benefits gained from switching to a minimal-homework policy. A few of them were less cheating, more accurate feedback on student capability, a more balanced life for teacher and students, higher grades, and happier parents.

Etta Kralovec and John Buell two educators who co-authored the book, *The End of Homework*, make some interesting challenges to the more homework is better debate. In their book they ask the question "Does homework work?" They

list many studies which have been done on the subject and come to the conclusion that the data is inconclusive as to whether homework really boosts academic achievement. The problem with the research as stated in the book is that it is too focused on achievement and does not take into consideration other factors such as attitudes towards school and subject matter, study habits, cheating, or participation in community activities. Kralovec and Buell come to the conclusion that politics and not conclusive data is the driving force behind increased homework. An interesting quote in the book is taken from the California Civil Code of 1901 it states, "No pupil under the age of fifteen years in any grammar or primary school shall be required to do any home study." (Kralovec & Buell, 2000)

Many would respond to Kraklovec, Buell, and Lehninger that students simply need to be taught how to study at home. The National Education Association states, "It is important for parents and teachers to work as a team when it comes to students completing homework, and receiving a quality public education and lifelong learning experiences. Ensuring student's success is a shared responsibility." (2006) The NEA partnered with Leap Frog Learning to put out the pamphlet from which this quote was taken. It was designed to help parents help their middle school child with homework. Corporate America seems to have a stake in homework too.

After considering the research and opinions on homework I think it is safe

to say that several myths concerning homework need to be busted. No evidence is out there to support these ideas:

- The best teachers give homework regularly.
- More homework is better than less.
- Parents want their children to have homework.
- Homework supports what children learn in school.
- Homework fosters discipline and personal responsibility.

What can be said about homework is that

- Homework is easily misused or abused by teachers and schools.
- Homework can be the bane of parent's existence in the early grades.
- Homework can make some students avoid rather than enjoy school work.
- The best homework may be work done at home and brought into school.
- Policy makers, educators and parents can all benefit from knowing the results of research on homework. (Skaggs, 2007)

Kraklovec and Buell would further argue that people cannot judge the effectiveness of homework based on achievement. They would challenge the ideas that homework increases academic achievement, that student's test scores will not be internationally competitive without an undue amount of homework, and that those who question homework want to weaken curriculum and encourage student laziness. (Kraklovec & Buell, 2000)

Mrs. Lehninger stated in an online

forum that in her opinion we need a paradigm shift from "product" to favor "process." She also said in response to a question about whether a student who did minimal homework in high school would be ready for college, "God calls us to be faithful, not successful as the culture defines it. We know that success for us Christians isn't about money or prestige finally. Let's teach our children rather to have a balanced life so that they can be faithful to the vocations God has given them now and in the future. They will have callings to be good family members, neighbors involved in their churches, etc. Who of us pleases God by having a rat race of a life with no down time, quiet time or time to take care of others and ourselves thoughtfully and unhurriedly?"

I would concur with Mrs. Lehninger that we need to be careful not to be caught up in the worldly view of homework. Whether we choose to assign homework or not it all must be done in the spirit of giving glory to God. It seems that even though opinions differ, the idea that homework is beneficial is well entrenched in the minds of many. As LES teachers we should make responsible homework assignments that will truly enhance learning without causing undue stress to the child or his family.✪

REFERENCES

- Cooper, H.M. (2007). *The battle over homework: Common ground for administrators, teachers and parents*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.
- Gao, H. (2005, April 11). Kindergarten

Strong

- or 'kindergrind' School getting tougher for kids. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.
- Kralovec, E. & Buell, J. (2000). *The End of Homework*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Lehninger, J. (2005). "A Minimal-Homework Policy." *Parents Crosslink*. National Education Association Research Department. (2006). *Bridging the great homework divide: A solutions guide for middle school parents*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED496302)
- Skaggs, A.N. (2007) *Homework: A nightly ritual beginning in the elementary grades*. Dominican University of California. San Rafael, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED497419)
- The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher. (2007, Spring). *The homework experience*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED500012)
- The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983, April). *A nation at risk: The imperative of educational reform*. Retrieved April 27, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>
- Thomas, A. H. (1992, September). *Homework: How effective? How much to assign? The need for clear policies*. Oregon School Study Council. University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED348754)
-
- Kristin Strong teaches at Reformation Lutheran School, San Diego, CA. The article was written for the class EDU 5001 Issues in Education.*