

from the TEACHERS' LOUNGE

From the teachers' lounges of various of our schools we hear some first-year teachers this time reflecting on the year that was. Experiences vary, of course, since the situations in which teachers find themselves can be so different. Some teach upper level classes, others lower, and still others may find themselves with a little of both. Some teach in combined-grades situations, while others have but one grade. Some find in their classroom a more or less even mix of boys and girls. Others, like Mr. Bos, are faced with a four to one imbalance. In spite of those differences, however, we catch from all four of those who kindly submitted a short article something of the excitement which is the usual corollary of a successful first year in teaching. And we might add too that we catch something of their vision, their hopes and aspirations — enough to be assured that they are coming to grips with “the basics.”

The first two, by the way, hail from Hull. That's Mrs. Van Maanen and Mr. Gritters. Mr. Bos teaches at Hope (Grand Rapids) and Mrs. DeKryger at Heritage.

The First-Year Teacher

Jacque VanMaanen

Being a first-year teacher, I have found the Kindergarten and first grade very challenging but yet rewarding. Every day brings new experiences — from learning to deal with problems on the playground and classroom, to bundling up the kids, which includes snow boots, stocking caps, gloves, and snow suits, in the winter months.

Throughout my college years, I was constantly reminded and challenged in my classes with meeting the needs of every child, and how difficult it really is. I often questioned that, but now find myself figuring out ways to meet each student's needs. It is difficult, at times, to keep the higher achiever challenged, when you work so hard on getting the

lower achiever to understand what's going on so that he'll not become overwhelmed with his work.

The age of these children is also what makes teaching exciting. There are always so many happy faces. In the morning when they come to school, they are always so cheerful they fill you up with joy. So often I am reminded of that childlike faith. When I see

these children listen to a Bible story with such eager ears, I am again reminded of Matthew 18:4. God has given me the responsibility and the grace to nurture the minds of these little children. I am thankful for this responsibility and pray for the grace needed to fulfill the task of teaching God's covenant children.

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Reflections

Loren Gritters

As I near the end of my first year of teaching, I am fascinated by how fast the school year has gone. Soon it will be time to say good-bye to the students for the summer. My first year of teaching has been one of great joy, with much learning and growing both intellectually and spiritually. Each day throughout the year has brought many new and exciting challenges to me. Being able to teach God's children and see the eager learning which the students show, whether it be in the classroom or in their daily life, has enabled me to have much happiness.

My first year has been one of great learning. The business of preparation for the various subjects and seeing the results and reactions in the students brings even greater motivation to me.

Trying to find ways to challenge all of the students in the classroom, in order to help them reach their highest potential and become better servants in God's kingdom, is a daily task which isn't so easily carried out. Each subject involves much study and research, to try to find fresh ideas to present to the students in order to enhance their learning. But this preparation is also of a spiritual nature. Being prepared to apply the principles of God's Word to my teaching in all the subjects has helped my students and me see the wonder of God and His creation. I realize that God has placed me with a great calling of instructing the children in the words of the Law of God and showing the students how this applies to their covenant walk of life.

Teaching two and one half grades has kept me very busy. It has made my first year very challenging, yet very rewarding. I can see in myself the changes that a year of teaching has had on me. I began the year with many doubts and fears, in not knowing completely what to expect or how things would turn out. Now I feel more comfortable with certain things and am eagerly looking forward to my next year.

I have learned many new ideas throughout the year. Trying out different techniques (some of

which have worked and others of which have not) in the various subjects is also included in my first year of teaching. I realize that it is through God's grace which has helped me throughout this year and all of my life. I hope I can continue to learn and meet the needs of all my students as I continue down the path God has laid out for me, giving Him all the praise and honor.

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," Ephesians 6:20. ■■■

The First Year - a Real Learning Experience

Ed Bos

Everyone said the first year would be rough. But this year presented a couple of situations which made the normal even more challenging. It didn't take long to realize that it was a good thing I gave myself a few extra years before I began teaching.

I graduated from college with a certificate to teach on the secondary level, yet I spent half of my time teaching fourth grade. My mornings were spent in the junior high and the afternoons with the fourth grade. It seems that the younger class adjusted quite easily to having two teachers, but it was a nearly constant struggle

to shift down every noon.

Yet, teaching at this lower level proved to be a more rewarding experience than at first anticipated. The eagerness of the students was nice to see. Time moved so quickly that often we found ourselves behind where we wanted to be; I found it difficult to try to fit geography and science into a fifty-minute time slot. Yet moving quickly every day kept the students involved in what was going on.

Now I am not saying there was no eagerness or enthusiasm in the upper grades. They tried to hide it sometimes, but the discussions

showed that, in spite of themselves sometimes, there was a real desire to learn.

Also, I am not saying that time did not go fast in the upper grades. But there, the class periods lasted forty-five minutes each, which left more time to get things done. So it didn't seem as if I were rushed for time.

However, the seventh grade presented its own special challenges. For one thing discipline plays a greater role. This was accentuated by the fact that seventeen of the twenty-one students were boys. The class was also a very active class.

However, this activity had its advantages. It definitely helped when it came to discussions. There were many in the class who were willing to contribute to

discussions, which certainly made things easier for me. Of course, it was a great temptation for them to get me off on a tangent, and sometimes they were successful; but it was always a learning experience for all of us.

All in all, I guess it is a good sign that I am looking forward to teaching again in the fall. There were times when it took much perseverance and prayer for strength. But there were also many times of prayers of thanksgiving for God's providing of strength and showing the way. It becomes clear very fast how much we need to depend on His gracious care to get us through, especially when the task at hand involves helping to bring up the covenant seed.

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Rejoicing in Diversity

Vicki DeKryger

If variety is the spice of life, then a teacher's life is spicy indeed! In my first year of teaching I have never ceased to be amazed at how many different things are found daily in my classroom. My life with my students is filled with variety.

I have often noted that many people like everything and everyone to be the same, or nearly so. People are much easier to deal

with when they think and act much like oneself. Diversity and variety can be threatening to us at times, because we don't know quite what to expect next.

In this first year I have found myself sending so many messages to my students which encourage them to conform. So often I have had to say, "Put your name here. Go out row by row. Line up for gym. Do your math work this

way." So much time and energy is given to doing this in school. We *have* to teach children to do certain things in the same or nearly the same ways. If we did not, our school life would be very chaotic.

But before this first year I'd never realized how little of a teacher's time is spent actively encouraging children to be *different!* So often, I've had to remind myself that my actions must *show* my belief in each child's uniqueness. I've really worked hard at seeing each child as an individual — a person with a variety of likes and dislikes.

In my prayers with the children, I often ask God to help us rejoice in the ways we are different, while uniting us in our common goal of serving Him. These prayers have been answered. When we have class discussions about current events and issues, we work hard to understand each class member's point of view. When we do our art, the children are amazed (as am I) at the variety of interpretations. I often overhear things such as, "Wow, I never thought of doing that!" and "Your idea really worked out neat!" When we share creative writing, the

students love to hear all the different literary works.

As a classroom teacher I have come to understand that I must promote diversity and unity simultaneously. This is no easy job, especially when one considers this in terms of a classroom full of students! However, this is a task that is so necessary in a Christian school that it cannot be ignored. Conformity is important in many aspects of our lives. We serve the Lord our God and follow His Word. We are united in that goal. But we cannot forget to encourage each child to develop his own unique talents and skills. Promoting diversity strengthens our faith because children and their teachers then become more aware of the diverse ways of serving the Lord. Some of us have the gift of singing and serve the Lord with that talent. Others can be extremely encouraging people to be around and serve God with that talent. Approaching a classroom of students in that way can sometimes be more work, I have discovered, but the rewards are incalculable! God has taught me to rejoice in my students' diversity! Variety is the spice of this teacher's life! ■■■