

Center associated with the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario Canada. The expressed viewpoint of the work is stated in the Preface. “. . . we have attempted to rewrite the textbooks themselves, or to put it plainly, to describe the facts from a Biblical point of view. It is our conviction that facts do not exist by themselves but are always humanly known facts, revealing our view of life. As Christians, therefore, we are bound to look ever at the common things of life like butterflies and flowers, leaves and snow, fire engines and subways, quite differently. In keeping with this view, our aim has been to reformulate the contents of children’s learning experiences themselves so that they might learn to look at life from a Biblical perspective.”



My Philosophy of Education

by Deane Wassink

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(This paper was written for a senior class at Hope College just before I did student teaching under supervising teacher John Kalsbeek. I must admit that I have learned much since I wrote this paper. Nevertheless, I still believe what I wrote here and have implemented most of my ideas in the classroom. The paper is divided according to the answers I was required to give to three questions given by the professors.)

I. Personal Commitment

My commitment to education stems from a more basic commitment, my love of God and desire to serve Him. Because of the wonder of grace that God has accomplished in me, in thankfulness I seek to live my whole life in such a way that it brings glory and honor to Him. All my wants, all my hopes, all my conduct is subservient to that one purpose. Out of that basic commitment arises my desire to serve the cause of God in this world, His church. All my talents and abilities are His to command. I purpose to use them in ways that will build up

my fellow saints and enable me to witness to others for the truth. Thus I must use my abilities first in my own home where God has called me to have a godly marriage with my wife and raise up the children God has given me in the fear of His name. After my home I must serve the church as far as I am able and called to do.

Out of my basic commitment to God arises my commitment to education. Though I will discuss it later in more detail, I must point out here, that I am restricting my comments to Christian education in parental schools. I consider Christian education to be one of the primary means godly parents use to help their children grow into spiritually mature members of the church. I thus believe it to be a very important aspect of service in the church. I feel that God has given me talents that will be very useful and beneficial in the education of covenant children. Also, God has so guided my steps by opening and closing different doors in my life that I have been prepared for teaching in many unique ways. I refer to the fact that I spent nearly eight and one-half years pursuing the ministry of the Word. In more than one way that door was closed, at least for a time. Now, within one and one-half years, from when I terminated my seminary studies, I can be certified as a teacher. For that work and calling my seminary training has specially qualified me. My wide variety of life experiences from traveling to blueberry farming to work in construction have also lent an appreciation for the many facets of life that is very helpful as a teacher. Two things then, my talents and the guidance I have received, make my desire to teach very sure; and they make my commitment to teaching very strong.

On a less spiritual note, though indeed it receives its direction and impetus from the previous aspects of my commitment, is my personal love for teaching. I find great joy and happiness in helping another human being learn. If I can contribute in any way to another person's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual maturity, I find a great sense of personal satisfaction. I love people. I want to help them in any way that I can. I seek personally to obey Christ's command to seek first of all not my own good but the good of others (Luke 6:27). For that same reason my interest has been growing in the area of special education. I have done some work in the area and enjoyed it immensely. At present I plan to seek an endorsement with my certificate in that area. Perhaps in that way I can help the children with special needs in the Christian schools which I hope to serve.

II. School in Community / Change Agent

The application of this point concerning the role of the school must be changed from the public schools to parental Christian schools. These are schools organized by confessing Christian parents for the instruction of their children. Even more particularly, I am addressing the role of the schools organized by parents who belong to the Protestant Reformed Churches. I do so because I hope to teach within that particular group of schools. These schools have a sure basis upon which they are founded. They are founded upon the Scriptures. And they hold the Word of God as the sole authority for doctrine and life. Further, these schools hold to the three forms of unity of the Reformed churches. Finally, these schools maintain the doctrinal heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches. A very significant part of the belief of the Protestant Reformed Churches is the Biblical emphasis on the Covenant. This doctrine I will delineate briefly because it is the principal motivating force behind the establishment of the Protestant Reformed schools. Here are the main points: First, the essence of the covenant is a relationship of friendship and communion. It is not an agreement or pact. Secondly, God as a triune God has a covenant life of fellowship in Himself. Together, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in perfect fellowship and harmony. Thirdly, God establishes His covenant with His elect people through Jesus Christ. Therefore each believer experiences the covenant fellowship of God through Jesus Christ. Fourthly, God establishes His covenant with His people usually in the way of continued generations by means of the instruction of covenant children by their godly parents. Fifthly, not all covenant children will be saved. Rather, the Christian parent has the promise of God that He will take His children out of their children. Sixthly, in heaven the child of God will experience the perfect bliss of covenant fellowship with God. It is this beautiful idea of the covenant that forms the doctrinal perimeter of my concept of my role and the role of the school with respect to the status quo.

The purpose of the school is to prepare the covenant children God has given to the church for their place in the earthly manifestation of the kingdom. How is it that such a high purpose belongs to the school? It is because the teachers in the school stand *in loco parentis*. Scripture emphasizes again and again that the parents of covenant children are to instruct their children in the way of godliness. For example, we read in Ephesians 6:4b that the fathers are to bring up their children

“...in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Critics might consider this goal to be cold and formal indoctrination of the children in a particular religion. Nothing could be further from the truth. The purpose of this education is to develop the *whole* person so that each individual’s talents blossom. Further, there is included in this purpose the preparation of each child to be an independent thinker. Such a child when mature will not blindly follow dynamic persons, tradition, or social practice. Instead, he will independently examine the Scriptures and guide his steps according to it. In an article for *Perspectives in Covenant Education*, the journal of the Protestant Reformed teachers, Jon Huiskens writes that the independent thinker is “one of the central purposes, if not the most important objective, of Christian education.” Because covenant instruction does not purpose to develop blind followers but independently thinking, well-rounded individuals, their education should be a liberal arts education as opposed to a technically oriented vocational education. A liberal arts education prepares children for life, not just for making a living. In that form of education individuals are able to develop their particular talents. By doing so the glory of God in Christ is reflected in many different ways. With respect to the church, the people of God are able to contribute in manifold ways. They are able to give a clear and rich witness of their faith. They are more able then to rear their own families. They are able to support the causes of the kingdom in many ways. Reverend David Engelsma, a Protestant Reformed minister in South Holland, Illinois, summed up the purpose of Covenant instruction in a series of lectures entitled *Reformed Education*. He said, “the goal of Reformed, covenantal education is a mature man or woman of God who lives in this life, in every area of life, with all his powers, as God’s friend-servant, loving God and serving God in all of his earthly life with all his abilities (which are developed and exercised as fully as possible), *and* who lives in the world to come as king under Christ, ruling creation to the praise of God his Maker and Savior.”

Having laid the basic principles and goals of Protestant Reformed education, I can now address the question of whether or not the teacher or the school is an agent of change. The answer is an emphatic *no!* The teacher is called to maintain the status quo as established by the parents whose children he instructs. He is bound by the doctrinal framework of the schools. He may not try to change the principles of Scripture which form the framework in which he fulfills his calling. It

is true, of course, that the teacher is called to build on the existing foundations. He must seek to teach the children in his care in such a way that they might more clearly understand themselves, their calling, and their faith so that they will be strengthened to walk as Christians in the world. This role of the teacher is that of encouraging growth and development in the church, not change. He works in the sphere of the faith of the parents who have collectively established the school in which he labors. He fails if he undermines, changes or in any way opposes the faith of the parents.

III. Classroom Management

In this section of the paper I will direct my remarks to the grade levels I hope to teach, 3-5.

My relationship to my students in the classroom is one of my chief considerations. In educational psychology terms, I consider my relationship to be that of an interventionist rather than an interactionist or non-interventionist. I purposely consider this relationship to be my calling because Scripture speaks of the fact that a father is called to actively direct and discipline his children. Scripture uses words such as "instruction," "training," "correction" to describe the calling of the father. Also, the sin that characterizes even a regenerated child means he cannot be left to develop on his own. As a teacher, therefore, I must lead the class by directing their activities, determining the rules for conduct, disciplining when the rules are broken. Further, as the father is called to do, I must give them spiritual instruction in all the various subjects that I teach them. My attitude must be that of spiritual love and concern for each child as a covenant child.

The classroom that I envision as my own will include the following elements:

- 1) The format will be rather traditional with much of the instruction being led by the teacher with a variety of teaching aids. However, the children will have individual and group projects in which they will do their own research, development, and organization in order to develop their ability to discover, interact, and think independently. The desks, probably more often than not, will be arranged in rows. As the activities demand, they will be moved to a circle for discussion or in separate groups for team work.

- 2) The discipline in the classroom will be strictly enforced. The basis will be the guidelines of the Word of God. The rules of the class-

room as well as the disciplinary action that will be taken if the rules are broken will be posted and discussed so that they are clearly understood. I consider such posting to be important for my consistency and fairness. I will certainly spank if I feel it is needed. However, I consider it to be a last resort. I also intend to work closely with the parents if there are any discipline problems. I intend to include prayer with my discipline if there appears to be a more serious spiritual problem with the behavior. This prayer would of course be with the problem student only. This aspect of discipline fits in with my calling to be a spiritual leader and counselor of the children I am given the responsibility to teach.

3) The grading system I intend to use is the traditional letter grades. I will assign my grades by the standard of criterion reference. I will not use a norm reference standard. I take that position for principle reasons. God says in Galatians 6:4, "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." In applying this text to grading, I believe it means that a child's work must not be graded by its relationship to the work of his neighbor, but by its achievement of a pre-set goal.

4) As much as possible I intend to keep the parents very actively involved with the work their children are doing in school. I do not want to leave the impression that I am the professional who cannot be helped by the parents because they are unable to understand or contribute. I *want* the parents to help in the classroom. I hope to use them as aides as well as for instructing in the areas of their expertise. I want the parents to understand what is happening in the classroom and why I am doing what I am doing with their child.

5) My method of teaching must be geared to help the student grow in knowledge as well as the ability to do critical and logical thinking. In educational terms that twofold goal is called product and process. To achieve that goal I intend to use a variety of techniques. I intend to use memorizing, lecturing, discovering, discussing, and questioning in order to develop the ability to acquire knowledge as well as analyze it, understand it, and apply it to something else. This method is derived from the purpose of covenant instruction which is the development of an independently thinking person. By all the techniques I use, I hope to encourage in the children a love of learning as well as a sense of adventure and excitement in the study of this creation as it reflects the wonder and glory of God. My own love and excitement will help

them in this I am sure.

6) The atmosphere of the classroom will be that of love and concern for each individual. One would expect nothing less from an education that has as its motivating force the fellowship and friendship of covenant life with God. Just as God loves each of His children as individuals so that He sent Christ to die for their sins, so also the father in his family must love each of his children. Because I represent the parent in the classroom I must love each child. In doing so I will seek their highest good. In doing so I will help each one develop as an individual. May God give me grace to implement this philosophy.

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Caring for Our World

by Mr. Doug DeBoer

This article submitted by Mr. Doug DeBoer, faculty member of the Protestant Reformed Christian School of Hull, Iowa, was presented originally as a speech at the P.R.T.I. convention of 1983.

Taking care of our world is a popular subject. All one has to do is pick up the newspaper or turn on the radio or television to read or hear of an ecological issue. Management of resources was really brought into the limelight during the tenure of Interior Secretary James Watt. Organizations such as the Sierra Club never saw so much money and support headed their way. Many such organizations were sad to see him resign because they wanted land and resource issues to remain in the spotlight. The whole country still seems to be focused on environmental issues. I was able to gather information from sources ranging from the *National Geographic* to *Sports Illustrated*, from local news to national news, from pamphlets to full length books such as *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources*. These issues are faced by Christian and non-Christian alike. How to teach and what to teach students regarding these issues are questions faced by public school teachers, Christian school teachers, and Protestant Reformed school teachers. This topic could be discussed at any teacher's convention.