

ignoring them, but with a mild reproof that points out the error of the child's way and points him to the proper spiritual behavior.

Is it easy to control our teenage students? Certainly not! It means we forfeit that last cup of coffee in the lounge at recess. It means that we don't always have the time and opportunity to sit at noon hour with our feet up on our desks and a good book in hand. It means that we must struggle to control our own short tempers and sharp tongues and cultivate Godly patience and pray for an abundance of sanctified common sense — common sense that seeks the true spiritual welfare of the child. It means that as dedicated teachers we take our problem students home in our hearts and contemplate their ways even while we go about the routines of our home life.

Is it easy to be a junior high or high school teacher? No, that is not what God's Word teaches us to ask. Rather, we must ask, "Is it rewarding?" Indeed we as teachers are blessed in our efforts when we see our students graduate and grow to be adults and parents in the covenant line. Indeed we are rewarded with the words that echo and re-echo in our minds and hearts, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." ■ ■

## **Promotion and Retention**

by Lamm Lubbers

As the end of the school year approaches, decisions on student failure and progress begin to have renewed significance. Graduation is a time to recognize the achievement of goals. The certificate awarded indicates that minimal standards have been met for an elementary education. The parents of our schools have been committed to the principle that education must be soundly scriptural and be marked by academic excellence.

Automatic promotion of all students from grade to grade without corresponding progress has made a laughing stock of educational standards in our country. Promotion to the next grade should not be as automatic as a birthday since it does not mark age but stages of learning. Nor should academic promotion be based on the doctrine of the covenant upon which all children of believing parents are guaranteed academic success and progress.

This should not be seen as a hard-nosed, promotion-retention policy.

Our school has insisted that the responsibility of the teacher is to identify the child's problems and work closely with parents for their solution. The teacher has the responsibility of recommending non-promotion at a point in the child's schooling where it has the greatest possibility of helping the student. (Probably in the first two or three years in school.) If the parent disagrees with the teacher's recommendation, the parent may request promotion of the student. Requests for promotion when standards have not been met do not lead to a regular diploma.

The problem of the teacher is much more complex than getting all students in the right compartments. Each student is so different that a grade of fifteen students has fifteen different learning situations. Group instruction only approximates the needs of each student. Typically, there is a range of reading abilities of more than four years in a junior high class. If instruction is directed to the "average" ability it must be stimulated with challenges for the able and special consideration and fundamental concepts for the slower learner.

The daily problem is to select concepts and make learning situations and assignments which are realistic for the students at their level of maturity. This decision is usually made on the basis of the average ability rather than the exceptional abilities.

The teacher is vital to the selection and development of curriculum, but not autonomous. For example, the goals of the school must be met, a body of material has to be covered, a list of words must be spelled, memory work assigned and checked. The pressures of goals set and to be achieved rest not only on the student but also upon the teacher. The teacher who spends too much time developing ideas at a pace comfortable for all will miss the needs of the class to progress and fall short of his expected goals.

For this reason teachers work under the board and the administrator. They are responsible to the parents through the board. If a parent feels that the pace the courses taught, or the work given is not realistic to the abilities of his student, he works first directly with the teacher. The administrator will be aware of the problem and the parent should seek his help since both student placement and curriculum are his concern as well as the teacher. If the parent needs further help or wishes to bring a matter to the board he should appear at an appropriate committee of the board or at a board meeting.

Parents should remember that problems are best solved in this orderly approach. It has been my experience that many major problems could have been avoided if the parties involved would meet

personally and the matter not be spread to other "interested" but not involved people. Drumming up support is the cause of many problems becoming insoluble for years to come and much party strife in the school and society.

Our staff has attempted to avoid the pitfalls of frequent and unnecessary retentions. We have attempted to teach each student enrolled by the board and assigned to the classes. We will continue to the best of our ability to recommend the best grade placement for each child's benefit. We are committed to work with each parent and we ask for your continued support. ■ ■

## Book Reviews

*Style and Class*, by Sietze Buning; Middleburg Press, 1982; 127 pp., paper. (Reviewed by G. VanDer Schaaf.)

*Style and Class* is Sietze Buning's second book of poetry. When Mr. Buning is not busy writing poems, he teaches literature at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The college treasurer cannot spell "Sietze Buning" correctly, and so Sietze is forced to accept paychecks made out to "Stanley Wiersma."

In *Style and Class*, as in Wiersma's first book, *Purpaleanie*, the reader hears two voices. The first voice is that of the Dutch immigrants who settled in N.W. Iowa a hundred years ago, bringing to that place a strong and simple faith in God, a faith which found expression in a vital and vivid antithesis that gave order and meaning to every activity secular or sacred, from plowing to praying. This is the voice of men

who sang psalms while driving six-horse teams, who debated supra- versus infralapsarianism in country kitchens over saucers of cooling coffee, who, following the testimony of the Spirit in their hearts, would lose a field of corn to a hailstorm rather than harvest on the sabbath. It is the voice of women who gathered eggs, helped with the milking, fixed dinners for 18-men threshing rings as a matter of course, baked pie, bread, and chicken for classis, and still found time to teach the children their catechism and hear their bed-time prayers. This first voice is the voice of the *vaderen en moeders in Israel* who now are gone to glory. In *Style and Class* their voice speaks again, and we would do well to pay heed.

The second voice is that of Sietze Buning. Sietze is a son of the immigrants, an heir of the first voice who has grown up and away from N.W. Iowa, geographically from the place and, in