How Do We Decide What to Teach

"Hi, Ted! It's sure nice to see you here!" Linda Clements spotted Ted as she stood in the lineup for lunch at a conference on the teaching of social Studies at Mountain City State College. Linda is the teacher of a combined grade five/six class at a small Christian school one hour's drive from Mountain City. Linda continued, "I'm really thankful that I was given today off to attend these sessions. After teaching for a year and a half, I needed some fresh ideas. You know, I struggle to keep up with all the work, and our small staff just doesn't seem to have time to discuss anything but the nuts and bolts of who has playground duty or who will look after coffee for parent-teacher interviews."

"Let's sit at that small table at the side," Ted suggested, "and compare notes on this morning's sessions." Both Linda and Ted had attended the workshops on the use of classroom resources. Ted said, "My workshop leader showed very clearly how textbook knowledge represents messages about our present society and what those who pull the political strings want the future to look like. Do you remember how Paul Vitz a few years ago criticized American textbooks for deliberately cutting out all references to faith and religion? Well, that may be changing with California, for instance, now insisting that textbooks must address America's Christian heritage. But I'm starting to see that there are much deeper problems with textbooks that can't be solved with some additions about religion. I heard once again this morning that seventy-five percent of what happens in classrooms depends either directly or indirectly on textbooks. That means they have tremendous power in controlling teachers -- and, consequently, in affecting the minds of our children. The so-called rational decisions made by textbook publishers are anything but neutral!

Linda responded, "I remember one of my college profs emphasizing that textbook content not only influences the beliefs, values, and attitudes of students, but also the ways in which they learn. But I'm so busy just keeping up from day to day that I've given it little thought as I teach. I'd like to implement some of your approaches at Central Station, but I seem to be forced back to using the one class set of textbooks I have for each major subject. Our library is the pits, our district public library is ten miles down the road in the next town, and I don't have the time or money to provide other resources. Yet I know that the textbooks limit what I'd like to do."

Ted rejoined, "I heard this morning that the concept of text is not limited to print resources. For instance, the texts students use today include audio tapes, videos, and computer software. But the prevailing knowledge promoted in such school texts is usually based on a world view at odds with our Christian one. And that, it seems to me, is true both because of the content and the type of pedagogy implicit in them."

"But if that is so," Linda asked, "how can a teacher like myself provide effective Christ-centered education in her classroom? Parents sacrifice a great deal to send their children to our school, and I believe I guide students to look at issues from a Christian point of view, but almost all my resources are secular. Moreover, the handful of Christian textbooks we have available may have the right perspective, but they're not always well written and seldom pay attention to pedagogy. And the few software programs I have for the computer in my classroom use such flagrantly behavioristic approaches to learning that they are suitable mainly for drill reinforcement. As you can tell," she grinned, "I'm rather frustrated."

"It seems to me that the key is that we keep on analyzing resources for their basic values, for how they view the world and how they view humans and their calling -- including whether they treat students as responsive images of God in the way they structure learning," Ted answered. "We can then use the text as a tool, not as a master. Even in your case, you have personal resources in the
classroom and around the school -- yourself, your students, your parents, your surroundings -- that you can draw on in your learning activities. As you get more experience and discover how to use those resources and build up your personal bank of integral units, you'll likely find that you need the 'official' textbooks less and less."

They spent the rest of their lunch hour exploring ideas on how Linda could do this. Linda's surprise encounter with Ted became, for her, the most valuable part of the conference.

Textbooks promote conformity. Produced for a mass market, they must satisfy the lowest common denominator of expectations. Effectively, they must be able to sell in California and Texas or they will fail commercially.

Conformity is reinforced by textbook-based teaching but also by many other assumptions about what schools should look like. Sizer (1985, 5-6) found a stunning uniformity in his study of high schools:

This big country contains numerous educational jurisdictions, with authority decentralized. Nonetheless, as one visits communities one is gradually struck by how similar the structure and articulated purpose of American high schools are. Rural schools, city schools; rich schools, poor schools; public schools, private schools; big schools, little schools: the framework of grades, schedules, calendar, courses of study, even rituals, is astonishingly uniform and has been so for at least forty years. In most schools, I visited biology and social studies classes, and I could soon predict the particular topics tinder study during a given month in Bio 1 or U.S. History, whatever the school. While the texts had different covers and authors, their commonness was stunning.... High school is a kind of secular church, a place of national rituals that mark stages of a young citizen's life. The value of its rites appears to depend on national consistency.

The issue of content selection is obviously closely related to that of textbooks. Are Christian schools generally successful in breaking out of the mold of North American education and in designing programs that reflect the distinctives of their faith? Or are they marked by conformism and compromise with the surrounding culture (Wagner 1990), demanding conformity from their students as well? You will have to make that judgment for your own school.

Linda's and Ted’s discussion highlights two issues Christian teachers need to address with respect to curriculum resources. First, what are the common world-view-related biases in textbooks and other resources and how can Christian teachers capitalize on an awareness of this as they use them? Second, how can learning activities incorporate classroom resources to help students become thoughtful, responsive disciples rather than being uncritical assimilators? To answer the first question we will briefly consider the predominant nature of textbook content; for the second, we will give some suggestions that relate to issues we will explore further in the following chapter.

VanBrummelen (1991) analyzed the content of Canadian elementary textbooks, and most of his conclusions appear to apply to resources in the United States as well. Today's textbook authors, he claims, promote a consumer-oriented, self-reliant individualism (even in the choice of a large proportion of word problems in mathematics!). The authors assume that long-term change, rooted in technology and in our economic system, is inevitably positive.

Individualism is the view that it is individuals choosing to do things together for common social and economic advantage that leads to the formation of institutions and groups. A family, for instance, is a convenient grouping of people living together to promote self-interest -- but the individuals within the family are autonomous. The theme that recurs time and again is that "everything is possible when I am me." There is no recognition, let alone encouragement, of scriptural norms for family life or of the fruit of the Spirit embodied by concepts such as humility and compassion.

While the Golden Rule as well as the need for obedience to the law are not totally disregarded, students are seldom faced with situations where they consider serious moral and social problems. Textbook authors present a superficial morality that, they feel, will not be controversial. As a result, they fail to deal with the need for making long term commitments in life or developing dispositions on the basis of well-defined values. As long as we try to work hard to earn money, we can all fit comfortably into our current Western way of life. The serious consequences of sin such as wastefulness, injustice, discrimination, immorality, and family and social
breakdown are neglected. Students are spurred to choose their own values; Christmas, for instance, means “what you make of it.” Christian faith, if mentioned at all, is shown in a truncated and often negative light, and the role of religion as a way of encountering the fundamental mysteries of life is absent.

In short, textbook content contributes to the promotion of shortsighted technological, economic, and personal interests without promoting the essential shared commitments and moral and religious obligations so necessary for life.

Textbooks and other resources, therefore, need to be used critically in Christian school settings. Teachers must make selections carefully, whether that be sections in social studies or science textbooks, or the materials used for a personalized reading program. They have to help students evaluate rather than blindly accept what they read.

There are various strategies that may be employed to achieve this. As they get older, students may be asked to respond to textbook content in a textbook journal, rather than just requiring them to write summaries in their notes. Teachers should explore the underlying value perspectives in print and other resources, encouraging students to discern how these themes harmonize with or oppose a Christian world view. It is also important to identify the perspectives and questions that are not acknowledged. In short, teachers should select texts judiciously and use them in such a way that students become aware of intrinsic biases. Van Brummelen (1988, 129-30) gives a set of questions to help teachers plan effective use of classroom resources.

There is a second dimension to the use of resources. Text resources, as Ted pointed out to Linda, must be learning tools, not masters. Yet especially textbooks are surrounded by an aura: they are considered truth-giving authorities from which we passively learn flat, factual assertions. Their impersonal and objective tone encourages a feeling that they are above criticism; as Luke, de Castell, and Luke (1989, 255-56) have shown, textbooks have served as educational icons to be revered, not anthologies of challenging ideas to be played with. They are structured to convey information rather than to promote problem-posing and critical thinking.

While today's textbooks pay more attention to pedagogical concerns than in the past, perhaps suggesting a variety of learning activities, the structure of the text and the nature of the recommended activities often implicitly assume that the teacher will believe that "the textbook knows best." Fortunately, most teachers intuitively as well as purposefully emphasize and de-emphasize, select and exclude (Luke, de Castell, and Luke 1989,252). Many teachers give running commentaries and interpretations on textual content. Yet the overall configuration of the textbook too often circumscribes how teaching and learning proceed in the classroom.

Having the textbook determine the pattern of learning is a trap that teachers fall into effortlessly, particularly when, like Linda, they find it difficult to find the time to fulfill all their teaching responsibilities. But it is a trap, nevertheless. Teachers as responsive disciples are called to determine, individually and communally, the knowledge of God's world and the social issues to be studied, in the context of an evaluation of the needs of their students. Resources should be chosen to fit our intentions, rather than themselves determining these intentions. Preferably, this would involve more than just a class set of a particular textbook. Of course, so many times we may have to alter our original plans because resources essential for some aspects of a unit are unavailable. The textbook tail, however, must not wag the curriculum dog.

In her situation, Linda's curriculum would differ from Ted's at Central Station Middle School. Nevertheless, Linda can also gradually work toward using her textbooks as only one of a number of instruments in her resource repertoire. She can adapt and develop integral, Christian units for her particular situation. She can actively collect free and inexpensive text resources, involving her students and using their own thinking and writing. She can choose learning activities that help students become discerning users of texts and that make increasing use of material and human resources other than her textbooks. In this way Linda will take ownership of her teaching and ensure that the Christian perspective she cherishes is not undermined by the biases of her texts. The teacher is a servant leader who guides; the text becomes a tool that furthers her intentions.

Programs for Diversity or Conformity?

It was nearly the end of May when Mountain City Christian School held its annual society meeting. Such events were usually not earth-shaking. Besides a devotional led by the president of the school board, reports by the principal and some of the assistants, some singing by the
audience spiced with a "special number" by the choir, band, or theatrical group, and the approval of the new budget, there was usually little to discuss further -- unless someone introduced something controversial.

That's exactly what happened this year, The Reverend Marshall Barton, pastor of Malachi Baptist Church, one of the fastest growing in Mountain City, was invited to lead in devotions.

Rev. Barton and his wife have three children, two of whom are in Mountain City Christian. One is in the fourth grade, and one in the fifth. They are among the few minority children enrolled. At least a dozen of the children from Rev. Barton's church do attend Central Station downtown, it's a little closer to the neighborhood where many of Malachi's members live. But most are enrolled at local public schools; none of them attends Mountain City Christian High. Rev. Barton is not happy with this, but he knows that before this would change, some things at the school would have to change.

In his devotional, Rev. Barton decided to raise some questions about the very theology that he knew his audience held dear. He referred to Matthew 19:14, Psalm 78, and Deuteronomy 6. But instead of accenting the "for us and our children" theme, Rev. Barton broadened these accents with an appeal to the missionary mandate of Matthew 28:19 and 20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations commanded you."

So this pastor of a burgeoning church tried to show, with a zeal and all intensity not often found at annual meetings, that when one links Genesis 12:3 ("all peoples on earth will be blessed through you") with Matthew 28:19, and applies them to Christian schooling, one may well be struck by the gap between the promise and the reality. "Christian schools," he said with jarring realism, "have tended to become inward directed, elitist, provincial, and separatist." Rev. Barton really created an enormous hush over his by now spell-bound audience when lie proposed climactically that Christian schools ought to broaden their outreach and in fact "specialize in marginal, hard-to-reach, learning impaired, and poor children!"

Rev. Barton was riot engaged in special pleading. He wasn't suggesting that the children of Malachi Baptist were educationally marginal, or underachievers, and that Mountain City should make concessions for his special learners. He was, instead, simply and earnestly pushing the unusual implications of several familiar passages of Scripture. For when, a week later, Pastor Barton was invited by Principal Ken Heard to speak to the faculty and clarify some of his remarks, Pastor Barton explained that he had a broader range of diversity in mind than first appeared.

"When I visit Mountain City Christian, and even Central Station for that matter, I see mostly white people, of middle- and upper-middle-class status, of largely similar Northern European ethnic origins, with little denominational diversity beyond subtle shades of difference within a conservative Protestantism. At the least, I think that many more denominations ought to be represented, Beyond this, I wonder whether we have a calling to serve even those students who do not yet know the Lord Jesus. And one step further: I firmly believe that the Word challenges us to ethnic and racial diversity as well. And I am quite certain that increasing diversity would also mean enrolling more students with physical, communication, and behavioral disorders and students with learning disabilities."

But he had something else in mind, too. He was convinced that somehow the total educational program, in class and out of class, ought to take account of a greater variety of gifts than was presently the case. Pastor Barton was sure that the nub of the issue had to do with defining gifts in a Christian school setting.

Ken Heard succinctly summarized Pastor Barton's remarks for the faculty: "Given diversity of such magnitude, what curricular and other organizational changes should be made at Mountain City to accommodate greater varieties of learners?" In doing so, Ken reminded his teachers of a line from the contemporary testimony "Our World Belongs to God" -- that "in education we seek...schools and teaching where students, of whatever ability, are treated as persons who bear God's image and have a place in his plan."

The faculty had plenty to think about at the close of the school year, and Ken reminded them that he would soon appoint a committee to address some of the issues that Rev. Barton had helped raise, in the context of a broader evaluation of the school's program.
The committee that Ken Heard assembled began meeting in the fall of the new school year. They were given at least a year to come up with some recommendations. The members included Rob Boonstra, chair of the Education Committee, serving as co-chair with Valerie Lavigne, the assistant principal of the high school, a highly organized person known for her ability to move things along. Also serving were Rev. Greg Fouts, the high school Bible teacher; Geoff Schmidt, the veteran chemistry teacher; Cal Holbrook, a middle school English teacher, Sam Freeland, from the Central Station faculty and a member of Malachi Baptist, along with three parent representatives. Ken Heard and Karla Hubbard, the head teacher at Central Station, served ex officio.

The committee was given a mandate to advise the school board about curricular changes that might have to be made at Mountain City, not just to meet the possibility of increased student diversity, but to stimulate it.

Discussion quickly raised all sorts of issues.

"I wonder whether changing the composition of the student body, particularly in the direction that Pastor Barton suggested, would mean lowering academic standards?" one parent asked.

"Well, I'm concerned that additional attention would have to be given to remediation, and that this would detract from efforts spent on enrichment activities for the academically talented," suggested another.

Cal Holbrook asked about the meaning of the terms curriculum and program. "How extensive is our mandate as a committee? Does curriculum refer only to content of courses, and could it refer to how courses are organized in relation to each other? Does it refer to instructional methods as well as content?"

Greg Fouts, who had recently returned to his alma mater to finish a master's program in counseling, suggested that the committee's study of curriculum could get pretty "heavy" if the committee chose to dig too far into the matter, "After all, curriculum should ideally be something practical, a plan of action. But we can't avoid asking questions such as, What does it mean to be human? Who is the learner? What is education for? How should demands coming from society shape the curricular choices that we make?"

Valerie Lavigne, sensing that attempting to answer all these questions would take more time than the committee had to give, urged them to read the school's mission statement again. "It tries to answer many of the 'big questions' that Greg has raised. I think we need to look at the organizational and programmatic changes that might happen in the school, though I really have no idea what these might be."

Rob Boonstra, soon supported by Sam Freeland, suggested that, "Whatever tack the committee takes, it must think people, students. Teaching," said Rob rather eloquently, "must always face students, must answer to their needs."

Sam took up Valerie's reference to the mission statement. He reminded his listeners that their schools, both at the main campus and at Central Station, were supposed to be about the task of responsive discipleship. "I feel that Central Station faculty has taken that idea very seriously and has already instituted a number of constructive changes, but I'm not convinced that the faculty at Mountain City is too eager to do the same."

At that point, Geoff Schmidt reminded the committee of some of the handouts that Ken Heard had prepared for its meetings. "Usually, when educators want to decide what ought to be included in a school's program, they lay down certain criteria by which the choices -- this goes in, this stays out -- are made. I think that the focus we are looking for can definitely be found in our mission statement. We are dedicated to working out the meaning of responsive discipleship. Therefore, the committee needs to create a curricular blueprint that meets two challenges. The first is to try to increase the diversity of the student population, which I think will require us to deepen our understanding of giftedness. The second is to develop a program which will engage students more effectively with what they are learning, a program that is more in touch with the real world than the
fact-based approach of most of our texts and subject outlines. Discipleship means action that is faithful to the Lord Jesus; that can't be achieved by just soaking up information."

Rob Boonstra closed with a prayer of thanks after the group decided to meet once a month until they had formulated a concrete proposal.

October

Meanwhile, in anticipation of the next meeting of the committee, Valerie Lavigne invited Karla Hubbard to prepare a report that outlined the program and accompanying structural changes that Karla had introduced at Central Station.

Karla leaped at the opportunity. She had felt all along that Mountain City faculty and some of the administrators had really paid little attention to Central Station, for whatever reason. Here was her chance to be heard.

Her report was lengthy and detailed. Some of the more unusual features of Central Station's program included these developments:

1. Since nothing important was going to happen unless teachers have time to plan together, Karla first instituted a faculty planning period every Wednesday afternoon from 2:30 to 4:00.
2. While the faculty was meeting, the students were engaged in a variety of service projects, some of which were linked to agencies in the neighborhood of the school, others of which arose from the needs at Central Station itself. For example, some students ministered to elderly people in a nearby rest home, some aided children at a day-care center, some interacted with people with mental or physical disabilities (some of whom were at a local public school, some enrolled at Central Station), or did some coaching with peers or younger children. It took some organizational skills to pull this off with approximately seventy-five students, but a parent volunteer headed the service program and a number of others provided transportation.

   Good as this system was, Karla reported that her staff thought it could be improved if these activities and the discipling perspective behind them were linked with the other courses rather than functioning as a separate component. The faculty was now working on trying to make that happen more consistently throughout the curriculum.
3. Karla went on to explain that when Central Station first began, the "explicit curriculum" was comprised of five strands: the humanities, science and mathematics, fine arts, practical arts, and biblical studies. But she and her staff had been shaping this in some unusual ways. For example, early on the staff developed a series of exploratory courses. They could vary in size such that some might be taught once a day for two weeks, for six, or for nine; others for one class period twice a week for six weeks, and so on. Some of the courses were required, some were elective. But all of them gave the student an introduction to a wide variety of areas (like photography, furniture refinishing, aerobics, bicycling, macramé, cooking, current events, bee-keeping, outdoor education, newspaper writing, and local history) that seemed particularly appealing to young adolescents.

   However, these mini-courses, like the service component, were an "add on" to the regular, solid, "respected" curriculum. Karla and her staff saw that as another challenge and wondered what changes they could make.

   Her staff also developed a theme week where for five full days the entire school would attend to a single topic. They chose "Earthkeeping" the first time, and since have tried "Christian Self-Awareness." The theme week incorporated a variety of activities that led eventually to products by all students, including creating something that had to be written, something that had to be acted out, and something that had to be constructed or drawn, thereby appealing to a variety of gifts in each learner but within a sense of commonality (Stronks 1990).
Karla indicated that, given the small size of her staff, theme weeks tended to stretch the competence and interests of the teachers to the limit. She was also beginning to wonder whether they in fact detracted from more full-scale reform of the curriculum. She had seen other schools where theme weeks not only tired teachers, but also left them with the feeling that they had done all the innovation that was required or possible.

Karla then explained that she and her staff were considering moving even more deeply into a commitment to integrality in curriculum. A couple of her teachers had proposed a unit on "Growing Old" (Stronks 1990) in which, as a team and using a large block of time several days a week, they would draw from a variety of studies. In the context of ongoing contact with elderly people, they would focus on problems that they felt young adolescents ought to know about and have some empathy for. These problems included, for example: Do you think the elderly should have the right to die when they wish? What happens to cells when they grow old? What can you find out about the effects of aging on intelligence and other mental processes? How many people now inhabit the earth? Formulate a year's budget for a person over sixty-five taking into account Social Security benefits. Study a collection of photographs of elderly people; what did the camera "see" in these people? How are the elderly portrayed in the history of art? How are older persons typically portrayed in magazines, in popular literature, in movies, on TV? What kinds of attitudes toward the elderly are being expressed in your own homes? How do you perceive the elderly?

In the exploration of these problems, teachers would guide students to purposeful responses, helping to flesh out what it meant to love these elderly neighbors as themselves. Karla suggested that such a unit would be linked to the services that an eighth-grade class could perform for the elderly -- visiting them in their homes, cleaning sidewalks, cutting the grass, or washing windows; or visiting the elderly in rest homes, reading to them and playing games with them: "adopting a grandparent" in effect. This would achieve an even greater curricular coherence.

The committee was impressed, especially with Karla's explanation of how Central Station was able to use the civic resources of Mountain City. These included its library, museums, art gallery, halls of justice, jail, rescue missions, coffee houses, concert halls, and a host of others. Nonetheless, some members of the committee were stimulated to ask a few searching questions.

One of the parents wanted to know: "What happens to the fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating that all students must master if one takes this experiential education seriously?"

Greg Fouts asked, "If we were to play down the disciplines in favor of a more integrated curriculum, will the colleges and universities accept our students?"

Geoff Schmidt, reflecting (without sharing) faculty opinions he had recently overhead, asked, "if by the year 2000 our country is supposed to become first in the world in math and science, wouldn't such a curriculum actually work against such a goal?"

Ken Heard laid this one on the table: "We have parents who will support our school as long as the curriculum maintains a rigorous academic flavor. But if we move in this direction, I dare say some of them will be prompted to abandon the ship."

And from Rev. Fouts came this: "Look, many of us are part of a Christian tradition that has had a high regard for the intellect, for analytic rational abilities, for a systematic approach to achieving a knowledge of reality. For example, we've always demanded a highly educated clergy, and, in addition, we've always desired an educated parishioner, one alert and alive to sound doctrine. Schools and colleges and seminaries of learning are needed, we've said, to carry out the biblical command to cultivate the earth and exercise stewardship. Isn't a move in the curricular direction that Central Station is undertaking going to undercut and perhaps destroy some of the glory of that tradition?"

Sam Freeland and Karla teamed to answer some of these questions. They tried to show that the strictly sequential approaches to skill mastery apart from application, the uniform forty-minute chunks of time instead of a flexible schedule, the fragmented treatment of subject matter that could better be integrated, and other mechanisms long taken for granted did not necessarily enhance learning, particularly learning for responsive discipleship.
Valerie had her own file full of questions, but when she glanced at the clock she knew that the meeting should be adjourned. She also predicted that the committee would have to answer these nagging questions, and many others, before their work was completed.

November

Joan Fisher, a science teacher known for her devotion to academics, had recently joined the committee. She had wondered aloud in a staff meeting "whether education at Central Station wasn't just another progressive ebb in the traditionalist flow of recent events."

Joan's remark sounded ominous to Valerie. In preparation for the November meeting, Valerie had consulted with Ken Heard about Joan's probable intent. Joan was a highly respected member of the faculty and if she dug in her heels against some of the suggestions that were flowing, chiefly, from Central Station, Valerie knew that there would be little chance for change. But if she could get Joan and some of the other "conservatives" on the faculty to see that even some hard-headed educational traditionalists have some ideas that supported the Central Station direction, maybe she could nudge Joan and others into accepting some changes. Ken wasn't sure what Valerie had in mind, but he encouraged her anyway.

She decided to try to exploit several sources. One was a book by the noted Roman Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, Education at the Crossroads ([1943], 1978). It was published first during the 1940s and constituted part of the attack on progressivism. When the committee reconvened, she led off with a review of the curricular framework that she found in Maritain, especially the idea that in addition to those subjects that had "knowledge" value were another set of subjects or activities (like games, sports, handicraft work, gardening, and jam-making) that had "play" value. Both, said Maritain, were essential because they helped unite "head" with "hand." As far as Maritain (1943, 45) was concerned, intelligence is not only in the head, but in the fingers too.

Valerie liked that, and quoted it often. She thought that these "play" activities could not only introduce some curricular diversity but could also help accent individual differences in an otherwise fairly seamless curricular garment. They also had a concreteness to them that clearly contrasted with the abstract nature of some of the disciplines.

Another "conserving" voice that she had read lately was Kieran Egan (1986; 1988; 1990). Maritain (1943, 60) had spoken of the educational world of the child as "the universe of imagination ... which evolves little by little into reason." Hence the knowledge that has to be "given" to the child is "knowledge in the state of story." But beyond stating such generalities, Maritain never developed the idea.

That's why Valerie liked Egan. Convinced that the "pedagogical task is to . . . organize content about the real world in such a way as to encourage ordinary children to use their considerable intellectual abilities in learning" (1986, 63), Egan gives numerous examples of how, in elementary schools and beyond, teachers can use a "story-form model" in the serious study of history, social studies, math, language arts, and science, with the intent to convey meaning and at once appeal to the imagination of the learner. Ironically, by accenting the fantasy life of children, Egan thinks the curriculum for the elementary school can be enriched academically; he lifts up the need for leadership in the classroom by teachers becoming skilled "story" tellers who "affectively engage" the growing awareness of the pupil.

Valerie was even more intrigued by the work of Adler (1984). Just as conservative as Maritain, Adler expects all pupils to study language and literature, math, science, history, social studies, fine arts, and a foreign language. But Val focused her attention on Adler's proposals that all students "irrespective of sex, career interests, or innate abilities" undertake work in crafts, mechanics, and the domestic arts! Why? Because "acquiring skill in the manual arts is as much mind-training as acquiring skill in the language arts" (Adler 1984,154). Adler goes on to propose that all students should learn how to cook a dinner, and learn some of the mechanical functions of autos. All must be taught some plumbing and electrical skills. In this same category of manual or mechanical arts,
Adler placed typing and computer skills (with age eight not too young to begin). Here was some of that same respect for concreteness that Maritain displayed. Val liked that.

In addition, Val showed how Adler advanced the ideas that history, before the seventh grade, be taught through readings in English and science; that beginning with grade seven history be taught partly through open-ended problem posing; that social studies be taught through journals, notebooks, and projects that link history, geography, social studies, and civics; and that schools henceforth and forthwith cease using present methods of educational score-keeping: testing, examining, and grading students! All this from a noted conserving educator bent on helping students acquire organized knowledge, develop intellectual skills, and enlarge their understanding of ideas and values.

At this point she looked up and to her surprise saw that the meeting had already gone beyond the hour. "I'm truly sorry to have kept you so long. There's just one more thing I want to say before we go. I think Maritain, Adler, and Egan affirm what many of us have been talking about, both here and at Central Station. They all recognize the importance of a rich, concrete experience and of engaging students with it in meaningful, whole-bodied ways. Maritain and Adler might in the end come down to saying that the disciplines are the most important, but at least they've recognized something significant about creation that an approach that is restricted to the disciplines normally overlooks. Though they're obviously very much influenced by a classical view of knowledge, I am sure that we can make use of their insights if we incorporate them within a biblical view of learning.

Thank you for your attention today. I promise that we will stick to our schedule next time."

Highlights of the Committee's Report

The committee met on three more occasions, during which time they managed to hammer out a consensus. By March, they were ready to submit their report to the faculty:

The committee affirms that the gifts of knowing ought to be understood in broader terms than we have tended to describe them, and therefore while giving high honor to knowing as intellectual apprehension, rational analysis, or critical thinking, we must also unwrap gifts of several other kinds. Without in any way downgrading the importance of lingual and logico-mathematical knowing, for example, we must give honor in schools to spatial, musical, kinesthetic, and personal forms of knowing as well.

The committee affirms that knowledge is never for its own sake but always for a higher purpose, always as a means for cultivating whole growth and a willing attitude that leads to loving deeds. It is ultimately for growth in responsive discipleship.

Therefore, to develop our gifts of knowing, teachers will draw rigorously and critically from intellectual content and will attend to developing skills and abilities, but they will do so as far as possible in the context of concrete experience, which we have termed the realm of play. They will also extensively employ problem-posing strategies, which will call for creative and imaginative responses from students.

In this context, the committee makes the following recommendations:

1. To increase cultural and racial diversity, we affirm the necessity of promoting such diversity not only among students but also within the staff and therefore recommend that the ratio of minority faculty to the entire faculty be at least equal to the ratio of minority students to the total school population; that staff development be aimed at understanding other cultures and eliminating ethnocentric teaching styles; that cultural diversity of custom, history, and thought be integrated into the curriculum; and that criteria for tuition assistance be reviewed in order to give greater access to minority applicants.

2. The committee recommends that the school encourage the enrollment of students with physical and learning disabilities, and communication and behavior disorders. We recognize that such a program will only be possible if additional personnel are appointed. We believe however that it is time to address the injustice whereby parents of children with special
education needs must bear a substantially greater cost, while children in other, equally costly special programs, can participate in these without extra tuition. We therefore recommend the appointment of a special task force to explore the implications of this move to a more inclusive program. This committee should also investigate the alterations and additions to existing facilities that would be necessary to accommodate this more diverse student body.

3. The committee believes that little if anything will be changed unless teachers have more time together for planning. We recommend a midweek session, similar to that at Central Station, from 2:30 to 4:00 each Wednesday afternoon. We propose that the school day on the other four days of the week be lengthened moderately to make up for the "lost" time.

4. The committee desires a more integral curriculum. We recognize that this encouragement is fairly gratuitous at the K-5 level since many teachers are already deeply committed to integral units, whether celebrating the seasons of the year, or centering on special events like Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, or topics like Native Americans and African-Americans. We lay down no hard and fast rules, but we are hoping that in K-5 there would be at least 50 to 80 percent of the work done in integral units, that in the middle school up to half of all the work done would be integral, and that for the high school approximately twenty-five percent would be appropriate.

5. We recommend that in the high school, to facilitate an integral approach, studies be reorganized within three groupings: arts, sciences, and foundational studies (cf. Sizer 1992).
   a. The foundational studies would include the formal study of the Bible, as well as courses such as "Living in Hope" (1992), intended to address issues like the environment, health, communication, aesthetics, economics, justice, life in community, marriage and the family, and the church, ultimately to reinforce the school's commitment to responsive discipleship, and the "world of work," conceived as a bridge between schooling and the working world, a work and study experience for those students not regularly employed that should entail no time away from class because it will be done after school, on Saturdays, or during the summer months.
   b. Within the arts and sciences divisions, the committee affirms a commitment to specialized studies, which represent a significant way in which we may come to know the world. These studies include language and literature (English and at least one other language); mathematics and science; history and social studies; the fine arts, the manual (and mechanical) arts; physical education. Although these can be taught separately, we strongly recommend that teachers, teaming together perhaps within larger blocks of time, make an effort to open up creation in ways that integrate these studies, and thus challenge students to respond with a greater variety of gifts than is conventional in schools.

6. The committee recommends that the high school program, which has been divided into pre-college, commercial, and general streams, be revised in favor of an inclusive program with a required foundational section and elected specialized studies.

7. The committee recommends that the school make a special effort to overcome gender stereotyping and that both male and female students participate equally and without discrimination in math and science, manual and mechanical arts, and homemaking and parenting courses. Thus students who may be gifted lingually and logically might discover that others who are gifted mechanically are able to offer them help.

8. To get things started, the committee recommends that the high-school and middle-school staffs combined divide into small disciplinary groups and do a very simple exercise: lay out for a semester, and then for a year, just what major topics the teachers are including in their courses. After completing this task, interdisciplinary groups should be formed to undertake the same kind of curricular mapping.

9. The committee recommends that all freshmen and sophomores be required to do fifteen hours of service a year under the supervision of the teacher of Bible. We recognize that this isn't ideal, but it is a start. Some members of the committee had wanted the service component to arise out of the work in various courses but others opposed this as too radical
(Stob 1989). The committee also recommends that the high-school student council be encouraged to cultivate a strong sense of social service.

10. One of the more persistent problems at Mountain City Christian High is the fact that faculty members, on any given day, will teach well over a hundred different students. The committee recommends that the entire high school student body be divided into two "houses" of up to 150 students each for the sake of literature and language, history, mathematics, science, and Bible. (Additional specialized studies and all-school activities like band and choir are to be done outside the houses.) Instructors assigned to each house will be expected to teach courses in at least two areas with the intent that each instructor would teach the same student more than once in a given day. That way faculty members would have fewer students to get to know and would presumably be better able to cultivate greater varieties of gifts (Sizer 1992).

11. The committee also recommends that, in addition to homerooms arranged by grade level, students be organized vertically in groups or clubs of not more than twenty-five, supervised by a faculty mentor, and meet with the regularity of the old homeroom system. In such an "advisory," the social distance that often stretches between a junior or senior and a freshman would be removed. The older students or the more capable could help the younger or the less capable, thereby building caring learning communities in this more intimate setting, within the larger community of the school.

Mountain City’s Response

So how did the Mountain City teachers respond to these recommendations? We have space for only a few examples but these should give you an idea.

At the fourth-grade level one of the teachers has her class engage in a "New World Expo." The children are divided into five groups, each group representing a different country. They study the history, the geography, and the social and cultural life of their nation and fulfill a range of requirements that call for a variety of gifts. They construct displays, learn to perform musical items and folk dances, prepare characteristic foods, and memorize poetry. The culminating activity is a one-day program in which parents and students from other grades are invited to visit national pavilions that the fourth-graders have set up. But what makes this expo truly special is the emphasis on how the gospel has affected each culture and how Christ's redemption might be more fully expressed: this is why it's a "New World" exposition.

As in the elementary school, the middle school teachers generally welcomed the encouragement of innovation. One sixth-grade teacher (Oosterhuis 1988), upset that her students complained that they were bored with school (she thought this expression would arise later in the eighth or ninth grades but not here in the sixth!) decided to teach "Ancient Greece" for five solid weeks by total immersion. She transformed the scheduled reading, spelling, language arts, math, science, Bible, social studies, and all the rest by having her students talk, read, write, listen, draw, dance, act and sing activities relating to Greece, with the five weeks culminating in a celebrative day-long series of activities that involved the parents and interested members of the community.

Some of the middle school teachers began planning integral units for an all-school theme week to be held the following spring, eventually deciding on the theme "Building Christian Community" after a series of events at the school strongly suggested that a pervasive meanness was an unfortunate undercurrent of school life at Mountain City.

The high school teachers were willing to accept the foundations-specialized studies framework, even though it did seem fairly complex (Goodlad 1984). For some, it seemed that the school was raising its standards for all students; others sensed that the delicate balancing that the system would introduce represented an effort at greater diversity within some required commonalities. On the edges of a core of studies it provided the remediation that some students required at the same time that the academically able could be challenged, while avoiding the perils of tracking.
When teachers began working in teams, they were surprised by the degree of overlap in the list of topics and therefore the places where they could eliminate some of the repetition. The high-school teachers working in cross-disciplinary groups were also struck by the parallels and decided to correlate the work in several of the high school classes. This was at least a beginning.

Unlike Central Station with its weekly Wednesday afternoon service component, the Mountain City Middle teachers decided to institute a servanthood component in association with the lower grades. Middle school students were encouraged to volunteer to be a buddy to one of the lower school students. One of the more remarkable outcomes of this arrangement was the case of a sixth grader classified as seriously emotionally disturbed who was assigned to a second-grade class where he served as a tutor under the watchful eye of the second-grade teacher. Although the young man continued to present behavior challenges to his own teachers and peers, he is described by the second grade teacher as a model of appropriate behavior and a valuable instructional asset. At Christmas, he chose to forego his own class party to attend the second grade celebration, during which he presented gifts to the entire class and the teacher (Stainback and Stainback 1992).

The student council took up the call to service with enthusiasm. One of the first projects during the following year was to help stimulate nearly one hundred percent attendance at parent-teacher conferences, especially at the elementary levels, by serving without remuneration as sitters.

Many of the faculty liked the idea of the house structure, not realizing that behind that idea were some others. For when they became accustomed to teaching more than just their major, they eventually became more open to collaborative planning and team teaching, and moved beyond mere correlation of topics and activities toward effective integration and integrality. This illustrated a commonplace: we grow to like what we get good at.

Mountain City has developed a comprehensive plan for change which will obviously require a gradual, step-by-step implementation. We would not wish you to be discouraged by the extent of their intended reforms. They still have a great deal of work to do in working out the details. Nonetheless, although we have brought together suggestions from a number of different sources, all the proposals formulated at Mountain City have their real-life counterparts.

Mountain City has also demonstrated quite clearly that decisions about curriculum are largely decisions about how people are to be treated. They have opted for a program that will encourage diversity and thus support the unwrapping of gifts. At the same time, it respects the common humanity of all people, and the calling that we have to bear each other's burdens and share each other's joys. They have decided that the "subjects" of curriculum are in the first place the students and teachers. They have recognized that if the curriculum is to be more responsive to individuals and to God's revelation in creation, they will need to make their program decisions in terms of broad educational objectives. Only then will they turn their attention to the "textbook tail" of resource selection. But textbooks will be only one kind of resource among many that they employ.

Selecting Topics for Integral Units

The broad policy outlines for a school's program are of great significance. But the chalk meets the chalkboard at the level of unit selection and design. Now that we have discussed the broad outlines of a school program, we need to turn our attention to the specifics of unit selection. We suggest that three criteria should guide this process. These are the structure of creation, students' interests and concerns, and societal issues.

Fundamental to the idea of an integral curriculum is that creation is a meaning-rich whole, ordered and sustained by the Word of the Lord. It is the dynamic holding together of all things in Christ that constitutes shalom. Meaning in human life is founded in God's revelation to us in creation. It is creation in its integrality, rather than the disciplines as the outcome of theoretical reflection on creation, that ought to be our starting point in selecting areas for study. The disciplines help us in wonderful ways to deepen our insight into creation, and they therefore have an important place in school learning. This is especially so at the higher levels of schooling, when students have developed the capacity for sustained analytical thinking. But even there, the disciplines
should take their place as analytical ways of knowing alongside the other ways of knowing. And they should always be related as much as possible to concrete experience.

Thus, the first step in unit selection is to identify an area that is rich in meaning and that has creational integrity. It is by immersion in creation, by playing around faithfully in God's world, that we first come to know. By "creational integrity," we mean that we should recognize the given structures of creation, the boundaries that God has established between various realms and between individual things. It is this ordered structure that the first chapter of Genesis points us to. Everything was made to relate to everything else in meaningful ways, and according to its own kind, within God's law order. This bounded order is reflected in the Ten Commandments, for instance, where God reveals what is faithful behavior within life's various relationships. Schools that are seeking shalom will seek the just and righteous relationships that God ordains.

We may identify four realms (physical things, plants, animals, persons) in a general map of creation. Within the human realm, we recognize distinct kinds of relationships such as the church, marriage, family, businesses and factories, artists' groups and galleries, schools and universities, the media, social clubs, the state (government and citizens) as well as activities like farming and technology. God expects us to treat our neighbors in each of these relationships in ways that are true to the particular relationship (Eph. 5:21-6:9).

These areas of creation are not static, of course. Our task as image bearers has been and is to responsively, playfully, and faithfully shape God's world so that he is glorified in the blossoming of the works of his hands. We would therefore recognize the different historical and cultural forms these have been developed. Above all, however, we would be seeking a deeper insight into the way in which varying religious visions have influenced this shaping of human life and the other parts of creation.

Thus, teachers will work to identify the significant biblical insights and responses that they will be seeking from their students. They will have clearly in mind how God intends us to act in the particular area, holding fast to that which is good. They will lead students to discern the distortions that affect our understanding and acting in this area of life. And they will work with students to discover avenues of shalom.

The area of creation selected will provide a focus for student experience. This experience will be concrete, because it will be experience of a whole, displaying creation in its many-sidedness and calling forth from students a many-sided response. A book, a film, an exploration of a period of history or of another culture may each provide this rich concrete experience, as may various out-of-classroom experiences.

In an established school seeking to move toward a more integral curriculum, the teaching staff will want to carefully examine the present curriculum and additional resources in order to determine which areas of experience, as well as skills and concepts, are significant at a given developmental level. In a discipline-based curriculum, one way to begin is with teachers listing the topics presently covered in each subject. This will help them to identify connections that are already present that could be just as adequately (we would say, more adequately) treated in an integral approach. Such a mapping of the curriculum will give confidence to teachers and also to parents that a nondisciplinary approach will still address the areas that are important.

Curriculum development that is concerned with promoting purposeful response and unwrapping gifts will also take into account those matters that are of concern to students. The curriculum will not be determined by these interests, but it will take them seriously. Students too are image bearers of God, and they should be treated with integrity.

Principal: I asked the middle school teachers in my school to identify what things the students in their classes want to know. They listed questions such as: When do we get out of here? Do we have to know this for the test? How long do we have to do this? What should I wear? Who will be there? Perhaps the teachers are correct, but now we intend to ask the same questions of the students.

One way to determine students' concerns is to ask them to write in response to the following topics: What do you think is God's purpose for human beings? What keeps you from fulfilling that purpose perfectly? What questions do you have about yourself? What do you think is wrong with the world? What questions and concerns do you have about the world?

Another approach (McDonough 1991) is to have students complete the following stems:

I wish I knew why…
I wish I knew how…
I wish I knew more about…
I wish I knew when….
Sometimes I wonder about...
Sometimes I daydream about...
Sometimes I worry about...
Ten years from now, this is what I see myself doing:
I like classes that…
I don't like classes that…

Whichever approach is used, the next step is to have the students, either in small groups or within the large group, present lists of responses. Ask such questions as: Where can you see any common questions or concerns about yourself or about your world? Are there any similarities or themes connecting ideas between the common questions and concerns? Identify the themes and select one theme for study. Which of our questions could we answer to help us learn about our theme? What activities could we do to answer our questions and concerns? What knowledge and skills will we need to be able to answer these questions?

In this way, students are encouraged to respond to problems posed, but also to pose problems for themselves. The same is true in the exploration of social issues.

It is appropriate for students to be involved in identifying issues that society faces but it will also be necessary that teachers bring important issues to their attention. Many societal problems overlap with the personal concerns students have. In fact, often a personal concern is simply a facet of the larger concern.

Some problems that have surfaced at the middle school and high school levels are: How should it affect our daily lives if we believe that we live in global interdependence? Does the Christian community have a special task in learning to live with cultural diversity? Can either a capitalistic society or a socialistic society be a just society? Is it possible to have a just war? What forms has discrimination taken throughout history? What are Christian schools and public schools for? How can Christians make ethical decisions concerning medical issues? What are biblical guidelines that inform political decisions? What are Christian responses to environmental issues?

Taking the information from the students' interests and concerns, societal issues, and our understanding of the structure of creation into consideration, the staff is ready to decide on specific topics for the units to be studied. At the same time they will determine which topics can be presented as problems that can be studied in integral units; they will identify relationships which can best be presented as problems in a correlated subject manner; and they will determine which areas of the curriculum can best be studied in units that are part of separate disciplines.

Having selected the topics, teachers consider how they may invite students to engage with the area concretely, in whole-bodied ways, as whole persons. The "story" of the particular unit would start with as rich as possible an immersion in the area. Certainly, there will need to be a setting of the scene if students' attention is to be engaged. And teachers will not merely throw their students in at the deep end to sink or swim; they are responsible at all points to guide their students through the terrain and they will call their students to purposeful responses at each point on the journey.

Examples of integral units are given in the next chapter, where we also describe a process for unit planning.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. This chapter assumes a broad definition of gifts in relation to the work of schools. But if "schools must be schools" (and not "churches" or "homes"), are there gifts that don't deserve recognition in a school setting? And if so, what would those gifts be? What are the priority concerns of the school as school? What kinds of gifts do you think Christian schooling should honor?
2. This chapter argues for broadening the range of students who enroll in Christian schools. The assumption is that, given rising tuition, Christian schools can be pressured toward becoming rather elitist, selective organizations. Either path has its costs. Which path can we not afford?

3. The chapter assumes that setting aside regular hours weekly for teachers to work and plan with each other will likely lead to a variety of educational blessings, including collaborative teaching, integral units, and the creation of a lively Christian community for learning and teaching. Is this too idealistic? Or is it the one thing desperately needed? What's your experience with this?

4. What is the structure of the curriculum in your school? Considering the possibilities outlined in this chapter, which of these might be adopted or adapted in your school? In what ways does your present curriculum structure constrain your educational endeavor? What changes other than those recommended might be possible in your school?

**Recommended Reading**

5. Individual Christian schools have developed units; one example is *American culture,* available from Holland Christian High School, Holland, Mich.