

THE BIBLICAL EDUCATOR

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" Proverbs 1:2

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WHAT'S REALLY WRONG WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

By David H. Chilton

The usual argument against public education is very convincing. And very wrong. It runs something like this: Public schools have become breeding grounds for violence and sexual promiscuity; they often are outlets for socialist propaganda; they now constitute a formidable enemy of Christianity (by teaching evolution and prohibiting prayer and Bible reading) and of the family (by teaching sex education and deriding traditional authority structures). And so on—which is not an unmitigated tragedy, since it is being used, under the providence of God, to lead more and more Christians to abandon the system of public education. No matter what the reason, that is certainly a good result.

Unfortunately, the argument above is not as principled as it looks. It is *not* an argument against state education, but only against certain perceived ills of public schools as they now exist. Thus, even among Christians who agree with the argument, you will find the following attitudes: (1) "The real problems exist in the inner-city schools, but there's nothing wrong with public schools in a rural, Christian community with traditional values"; (2) "We should work to make public schools more moral, by pressuring our legislators to reinstitute prayer and abolish sex-education"; (3) "We should try to force the public schools to give Creation 'equal time' with Evolution." These and similar positions all attest to the fact that much of the opposition to public schools is merely pragmatic: we are very willing for the state to control education, as long as we can be reasonably sure our children won't be beaten, drugged or raped in the library. To put it bluntly, we want our socialism, but we want it *clean*. If only the public schools would teach what we want them to teach, we would be happy to have our children's education funded by legalized theft. Quite an interesting position, philosophically: we'll give our children a "moral" upbringing by robbing our neighbors to pay for it.

As Christians, we do not argue against abortion simply by citing the dangers of malpractice; nor should we consider it sufficient to oppose state education simply because of its evil consequences. We do not work for safer methods of abortion; nor should we work to improve public schools. The basic biblical argument, you see, is that *the very existence of state schools is immoral*—regardless of the level of "morality" contained in them.

According to the Bible (see, e.g., Romans 13:4), the state has an extremely limited function, which may be summed up in two points: *punishing criminals* (as defined by God's law) and *protecting the law-abiding*. That's it. God has appointed civil rulers as *Hism inisters*, and their responsibility is to administer His laws. The Bible severely limits the powers of the state—and just in case rulers might misunderstand the extent of their commission, God built a "strict constructionist" interpretation right into the law: the ruler "may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left" (Deuteronomy 17:20). The Bible does not give rulers the power to educate children; that responsibility belongs to the family. State schools are therefore immoral in principle. They exist only because God's laws have been violated—by greedy rulers

who covet the powers of deity, and by greedy citizens who covet "free" education at their neighbors' expense. Viewed in this light, it is no wonder that the public school system has spawned a generation of illiterate criminals who assume the world owes them a living. Why not? According to their parents, the world owed them an education; they're just extending the logic.

The rise in public-school crime and violence is nothing but the humanistic superstructure built on a rotten foundation. It is quite predictable; in fact, *it was predicted* in Deuteronomy 28, the list of the curses which necessarily fall upon a culture that departs from God's law. If our educational principles are not founded on God's word, we have shut God out of our system of knowledge—and committed cultural suicide. Romans 1:28-32 tells us what happens to people who will not have God in their knowledge: it reads like a modern report card on "citizenship."

"But," it may be objected, "if the state doesn't provide education and force citizens to submit to it, some parents won't bother to do it themselves." This is true. It is also true that some people don't brush their teeth. We should therefore provide free dental care and send bureaucrats to each home every morning and evening, armed with dental floss, to enforce oral hygiene on the population. Right? Where do you draw the line? You draw the line where God draws it: in His law. God has defined the responsibilities and limits of the state, and whenever it falls short of those responsibilities, or transgresses those limits, it is playing god. The inevitable result is national damnation.

No matter what objection you have to all this, it fails the ultimate test: conformity to God's law. When you say the rural, "moral," community-oriented public schools are still OK, all you're saying is that the full harvest of apostasy hasn't caught up with them yet. But the fact that none of your bad checks have returned is no justification of forgery. Those wonderful schools are possible only by the illegitimate beneficence of a deified state which plunders your neighbors to give your kids a free lunch. There's just no way around it. Public schools are immoral, and always have been—even in the bygone, halcyon days of old, when students got regular doses of birch rods and McGuffey readers.

Look at yourself for a prime example. You went to a "nice" public school, and you didn't turn out so badly. You didn't take LSD in 5th grade, you didn't carry a switchblade in Jr. High, and you were a virgin on Graduation Day. State education didn't pervert *you*. Or did it? Consider your reaction to this essay. (Never mind that I'm begging the question for a minute.) Regardless of the biblical evidence, you still find it hard to swallow that the state shouldn't do something beyond God's requirements. You think the argument that public education involves theft is somewhat "abstract." Face it: you're a socialist. Many of your ideas about the proper role of government were fed to you from K through 12, and it's like pulling teeth to get rid of them. I'm constantly running into sincere Christians who are absolutely aghast at the thought of abolishing unbiblical government regulation. ("How will the mail get delivered?") I even heard one theologian boldly assert that *the value of gold and silver comes from the paper money behind it!*

The real problem with public schools is that they exist in the first place. They are an ungodly, unlawful, collectivist institution. The many evils now spewing out of them derive from the curse of God inflicted on all institutions that defy Him. He has commanded parents to educate

their children in terms of His law; that cannot be done in a public school. If we want our children to fear Him, to grow into diligent workers for His kingdom, we cannot afford to train them in an institution which has as its fundamental presupposition that I am entitled to as much money as I can vote out of my neighbor's pocket.

Prayer doesn't belong in a public school (Proverbs 28:9). Your money doesn't belong in a public school. Most of all, your children don't belong in a public school. Institutions premised on sin must not be redeemed, but abandoned. We cannot send young maidens into brothels in the interests of "equal time for chastity." As the light of the world, we must set the standard. Our Lord never called His people to help build the tower of Babel in the hope of getting a Bible study in the basement. He commanded us to build our own city on a hill.

SCHOOL MATHEMATICS OF THE 1980s

Part I

By Larry Zimmerman

At the Northwest Conference of the Association of Christian Schools International held last October in Seattle, I led a seminar in discussing "An Agenda for Action." This publication of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics promotes their "recommendations for school mathematics of the 1980s."

What the 70,000 member N.C.T.M. wants, the N.C.T.M. eventually gets printed in the Mathematics texts of America; concern over this influence is what prompted the seminar.

Of the thirty or so present, nearly all of whom were full time mathematics teachers in Christian schools of the Northwest, I was the only one who was a member of N.C.T.M. Only two of us had attended the national meeting of the N.C.T.M. last April, even though it convened in Seattle.

I suggested they consider joining the N.C.T.M. to monitor the directions in which this group is pushing mathematics education in the United States and about three-fourths of the teachers expressed interest in membership.

Here are the N.C.T.M. recommendations:

1. that problem solving be the focus of school mathematics in the 1980s;
2. that basic skills in mathematics be defined to encompass more than computational facility;
3. that mathematics programs take full advantage of the power of calculators and computers at all grade levels;
4. that stringent standards of both effectiveness and efficiency be applied to the teaching of mathematics;
5. that success of mathematics programs and student learning be evaluated by a wider range of measures than conventional testing;
6. that more mathematics study be required for all students and a flexible curriculum with a greater range of options be designed to accommodate the diverse needs of the student population;
7. that mathematics teachers demand of themselves and their colleagues a high level of professionalism;
8. that public support for mathematics instruction be raised to a level commensurate with the importance of mathematical understanding to individuals and society.

A Christian teacher who fails to see the potential for harm in this list, particularly when reading recommendations one, two, three, five and six, is lacking experience or discernment. At the A. C. S. I. seminar, we concentrated on the first and third.

Students may have trouble counting but they can be counted on to ask embarrassing questions. Recommendation one is in response to their perennial queries: "When am I ever going to use this stuff? Why do we study this junk?"

One answer given in the old days (and also by a teacher at the seminar) was, "It will sharpen your mind to think critically." Studies have shown that this doesn't happen. As Alfred North Whitehead pointed out, the mind is not like a tool to be sharpened.

Until recently, the usual excuse given students was mathematics would

enable them to solve "word" or "story" problems, and by "problem solving" in recommendation one, the N.C.T.M. does mean "word solving" problem solving.

They realize, however, that the word problems found in most textbooks now (digit, age, coin, rate-distance-time, work) will not motivate students to study mathematics. (I omitted listing "mixture problems," some of which are realistic.) "In fact," says Zalman Usiskin of the University of Chicago, "they convince students that there are no real applications of algebra, since the problems are so ridiculous." (*The Mathematics Teacher*, Sept. 1980, p 415.) He goes on to say, "The average student in a typical course never solves with algebra a problem that someone might have done in the real world. Most of the problems the student solves (are) 'answer-known' problems."

So "problem-solving" in recommendation one means solving meaningful, realistic problems, and the N.C.T.M. publishes books full of them. Most of these problems, however, can be handled arithmetically, the only algebra being the use of formulae from geometry, science, and business.

We may as well face it—except for linear programming and elementary maximum-minimum problems, most meaningful applications of algebra to the tangible creation must wait for trigonometry and the calculus.

One teacher attending the seminar thought it not surprising or necessarily bad that we include "answer-known" problems in our course of study, because good teachers always proceed from simple to complex. Students realize or should be told this is the case so they are not put off by the inanity of the problem.

He has a point, though the gap between these and "real" problems is so vast as to put us back almost to the transfer-of-knowledge fallacy. Having for years ignored most word problems, I found that students who reach trigonometry and calculus jump right into real-life "story" problems; their success rate usually follows the curve of normal distribution.

Another consideration is the limited time available for instruction. Many students come unprepared into geometry or algebra 2 because of the emphasis given in their algebra 1 classes to finding Jane's age and locker number if the sum of her age and her locker number is 105 and if the locker number, decreased by 5 times her age, is 15.

Rather than waste time on a Jane's idiotic problem, teachers could train their classes in applying check lists similar to the following:

1. Look at a simpler case
2. Work backwards
3. Draw a diagram
4. Make a table, chart, or graph
5. Guess and test
6. Look for patterns
7. Simulate and experiment

READINESS AND THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

By Rodney N. Kirby

Recent decades have seen an increasing interest among educators in the concept of "readiness." We now have "reading readiness," "math readiness," etc. What should the Christian school do with this?

First, we must see the assumptions on which the non-Christian bases his concepts of "readiness." The child is seen to be basically a mechanistic developing organism. He goes through certain stages of development—physically and intellectually (see especially Jean Piaget'). His intellectual development is so tied in with his physical development that he is incapable of learning certain things ahead of time. If he has not reached a certain point in his development, there is nothing the teacher can do except wait until he becomes (developmentally) ready. The case is mentioned of a teacher who, "when asked why one child sat by himself in the back of the room throughout most of the school day, answered: 'Oh, he is waiting for his reading readiness.'"

This, after all, is the logical outcome of the mechanistic assumption. We cannot push the child to learn ahead of time, any more than we can make him walk at two months; he simply has not acquired the necessary

skills, and he will not until he has reached a certain quasi-physiological maturity. The teacher must simply wait until later to teach him reading, math, or to teach him at all. Some schools, on the basis of "developmental tests," recommend that parents keep their child out of school for one or two years, until he is "ready" for school.

What is the Christian's answer to this view? This gets into the field of developmental psychology and the theory of learning—areas where Christians have not devoted their time, and where, in the few cases where they have, they have been syncretistic in their thinking, accommodating whatever the current secular educational trend might be. We offer these comments as tentative suggestions, to open a kind of "dialog" among Reformed educators.

As the child develops, he does not pass through successive physiologically-determined stages of intellectual development, in each stage of which he adds new skills and functions which he did not have before. Rather, "the entire organism is physically and psychically present in potentiality in the first embryonic stage." "Development is an unfolding, outgrowth or growing up in distinction from a mechanical process of external addition. It is an organic process in which the potential qualities of structure and function of the individual acquire actuality through internal and external stimulation."⁴ So the kindergarten child has the potential for highly abstract reasoning; that potential is not something he must wait many years for. The boy Jesus was able to reason with the teachers of the Law on their own conceptual level (Lk. 2:41-51). Although Jesus was God, He was also truly human, and if He needed to pass through certain "stages" of development, He would have.

Well, then, why don't our kindergarteners engage in abstract reasoning? This brings us from developmental psychology to learning theory. How do we learn anything? First, Scripture ties together *learning* and *living*. One has not truly learned something if it does not affect his life (Matt. 7:24-27). We do not say a person has really learned Calvinism if all he can do is recite and expound the "five points;" he must *live* in accordance with those doctrines. Education has an ethical thrust to it—it is not purely an intellectual matter. In fact, one could even say that cognitive activity *is* ethical, based on Prov. 1. Learning the truth *is* righteousness, and learning falsehood *is* wickedness. There is no categorical distinction between right *thinking* and right *behavior* (cf. Lk. 6:45).

Now we may look at Heb. 5:14. The writer describes the "mature" people as "those who by reason of use (or practice) have their senses exercised to discern good and evil." The two terms "use" and "exercised" refer to the training of an athlete or soldier—drill and repetition of exercises. One must constantly practice righteousness, so that it becomes habitual; this enables one to progress in the Christian life. Because *thinking* and *living* are connected, what the writer says here could apply to learning theory as well. One must *train* and *practice* the ways of right thinking, so that they become habitual. Through practice, the student trains his mind to discern truth and falsehood.

So why doesn't a kindergartener think abstractly? Because he has not had enough *practice* doing so. It is a skill which must be learned through practice. Likewise, many 5-year-olds do not read, not because they are not innately "ready," but because they haven't learned the requisite skills.

Many modern educators seem to recognize this—witness the emphasis on "reading readiness" workbooks, teaching such skills as auditory and visual discrimination, following directions, and left-to-right sequence. It is recognized that children must be taught certain skills in order for them to learn to read. Unfortunately, these standard exercises are not the way to go about it. They are simplistic, boring, and a waste of time. Children can learn visual discrimination just as well by noticing the difference between "E" and "F" as they can by distinguishing an apple from a lemon. They can learn left-to-right progression while they learn to read—that's just the way we do it.

Some children have a hard time learning to read, not because they have not yet reached that "stage," but for one of two reasons. *First*, they may merely have a harder time learning the skills. This is analogous to the situation where one person can learn to play the piano quickly, while another must practice diligently over a longer period of time to

accomplish the same thing. All children have different gifts and abilities. *Second*, they may not have been trained properly at home. Perhaps they had a "deprived" childhood—spending all of their first five years in front of a color TV, instead of being exposed to books or other learning experiences.

Let us, as Christian educators, rethink the concept of "readiness." As said before, it is hoped that someone will work on a thoroughly Reformed, Bible-based educational psychology and theory of learning. Perhaps this paper can be a first step to such a work.

NOTES

1. Morris L. Bigge, *Learning Theories for Teachers*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 309.
2. Martha Dallmann et al., *The Teaching of Reading*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 70.
3. Cornelius Jaarsma, *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935), p. 147. This very helpful book has been reprinted by the Reformed Theological Seminary, and may be obtained from their bookstore at 5422 Clinton Blvd., Jackson, MS 39200.
4. Ibid.
5. Lee J. Cronback, *Educational Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 88.
6. Quoted in Jeanne S. Chall, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 58.
7. Ibid., p. 154.
8. Ibid., p. 155.

BOOK REVIEW

By Kevin Craig

Character Sketches, Volumes I and II, Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, Rand McNally and Company, 1978

Men's Manual, IBYC, Box One, Oak Brook, Illinois 60521

One of the most encouraging trends in Christian education today is not the growing number of nominal Christians who are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the public school system. Nor is it the involvement of parents in scrutinizing and objecting to public school textbooks with overtly anti-Christian passages. It is not even the swelling ranks of those who are taking their children out of the public schools and paying the double tax of private, Christian school tuition (may God bless them!). The most encouraging trend in education today is the hundreds of thousands of children who are not in school, but rather are kept in the home under the Spiritual umbrella of the family. Every few years the number of students being educated at home triples, and, as Phyllis Schlafly notes, "this rapidly growing trend worries and embarrasses the educators."

Why should Christians be interested in home education, even above the Christian school? *The Biblical Educator* has explored this subject in recent issues (see Jim Jordan's articles, "Are Christian Schools the Best Answer?" April 1980, and "Home Education and Christian Music." May 1980). Throughout the Bible it is fairly clear that God has so ordered life that the family is best equipped, above all other institutions, to educate children. Thus, God gives the task of educating to the family (see Deut. 6:7). Biblical education is centered not merely on the accumulation of facts, but in the acquisition of *skills* (tools of thinking and analysis, as well as language abilities), and Biblical *character* (discernment and wisdom; the ability to apply Biblical principles to concrete, everyday situations). The impartation of skills requires patient, continued, one-on-one work. In the home, this is easily spread out over the day, where drill can take place both periodically and continually. The impartation of character requires family-centered "admonition in the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), and beginning almost immediately, saturation with God's Word (II Tim 3:15). Scriptural precepts and principles must permeate the home (Deut. 6:7-9; 11:18-21).

To this end, the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts (IBYC) has compiled two volumes of *Character Sketches* "from the pages of Scripture, illustrated in the world of nature." Volume I is particularly clear in setting forth their purpose, and in distinguishing Christian education from humanistic education. For Humanistic education, knowledge of facts (or of non-Christian "theories") is desired apart from any applied benefit it might have in one's life: "Knowledge for its own sake." But as the IBYC notes, "The great challenge of our day is to grasp the concept of being mighty in spirit and to see how it differs from being directed by intellect. In our day we have unknowingly accepted a standard of education which hinders and destroys the potential of being mighty in spirit and emphasizes the idea that the highest achievement in education is to be guided by the intellect" (Vol I, p. 11). Too many Christians (and Christian schools) have as their standard the "academic" and "intellectual" standards of classical Humanism, not the ethical standards of the Bible. The IBYC volumes make clear the difference between a Scriptural education and a merely "intellectual" one.

These books are also dedicated to helping families, and in particular, *fathers*, educate their children. One of the basic concepts that Christians must realize to restore Biblical, family-centered education, is that "the home must be the learning center. God's educational objectives were designed to be carried out in the home long before anyone ever thought about a school" (p. 16). Yet two stumbling blocks have kept parents from assuming their responsibilities, and have prompted them to abandon their children. First, they have not felt themselves qualified. Statist educators would certainly like to perpetuate this inferiority complex. If one generation of children were educated at home, and were required to tutor their younger brothers and sisters, then the children would grow up able to teach their own children, and a perpetual heritage of Christian, family education will have begun. As far as the building of Christian character is concerned, *Character Sketches* will relieve many fears: "Many parents are unaware that God does not expect them to design curriculum but rather to share with their children what God is teaching them from Scripture and from life. This then becomes the unique heritage that each child has and prepares them to edify and be edified by others outside the home towards spiritual maturity" (p. 16). *Character Sketches* helps the inexperienced parent "use the Scripture as the basic curriculum of character skill, concepts and information which each son and daughter should learn" (p. 16). A second reason many parents are reluctant to keep their children in the home is simply the amount of work involved. Jim Jordan has noted, "people who have tried pure home education testify that . . . far less time is needed in formal teaching than is needed in a school" (*The Biblical Educator*, May 1980). But

nevertheless, it *does* take *time* and requires patience, diligence, and longsuffering. Many parents are simply unwilling to expend the energy. "It is not difficult to see why parents have so willingly delegated their teaching responsibility to others" (p. 16). But God's command is clear.

Another significant contribution is the emphasis IBYC places on the importance of involvement by *fathers*. "God never intended for a father to lose his role as a 'teacher.' As a father or grandfather, Scripture commands him to 'Teach . . . thy sons, and thy son's son' (Deut. 4:9)." "The primary purpose of this book is to place in the hands of *fathers* basic concepts of Scripture. . ." (p. 17, my emphasis).

Now that IBYC has published their *Men's Manual* there is simply no excuse for fathers not taking a more active role in family education. It could well be one of the most significant books in decades. It takes the brilliant theological and exegetical work contained in harder books like R. J. Rushdoony's *The Institutes of Biblical Law* and makes it accessible to all fathers. In this simplified, conceptualized, attractively illustrated, well-organized handbook is a complete program of moral instruction. Its 30 quizzes, designed for family meals, make for good catechizing.

These books are for everybody, even if everybody is not for home education. Christian school teachers and administrators should purchase these books, read them, and integrate them into their curriculum. Teachers should tell their children's parents that they must take on more responsibility at home, and with these books they can show them how. Parents with children in Christian schools can at least supplement their children's education in the home with these books. And for all children, from birth to kindergarten, *some* learning should take place in the home (!), and these books can help. All adults can read these books with profit.

The two volumes of *Character Sketches* are available from Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, Box One, Oak Brook, Illinois, 60521. The books are beautifully bound and colorfully illustrated, and the nearly 400 9 x 12 pages are well worth the \$20.00 price (+ \$3.00 shipping) each. They are available without the shipping charge at the IBYC seminars, which all would do well to attend. Regrettably, the *Men's Manual* is available only through Pastors. Pastors, write "Men's Institute" at the IBYC address and get the *Men's Manual* into the hands of the fathers in your church. Deut. 4, 6, and 11 command fathers to teach their children the Word of God. Deut. 28:15-68 predicts what will happen to our nation if fathers neglect this great responsibility. (And if you think Deuteronomy and the rest of the Old Testament apply only to ancient Israel, then you need to read what the *Men's Manual* says about the inspiration of God's Inscripturated Word—see p. 64, or, in the absence of the *Manual*, Matt. 5:17-19).