Catholic Education Foundation presents

THE CATHOLIC EDUCATOR

Volume 11 | Fall 2011

In This Edition

A Word from Our Editor	Reverend Peter M. J. Stravinskas	Page 4
Vouchers Prompt Indiana School Exodus	Associated Press	Page 6
Muslim Students Enrolling in Catholic Schools	Kate Hammer	Page 7
Catholic School Teachers Wrestle with Faith and Obedience in Negotiating a Contract	Angel Franco	Page 9
New Catholic Schools Opening in Far-flung Suburbs	Regina H. Boone	Page 12
What if the Secret to Success Is Failure?	Paul Tough	Page 15
If It Feels Right	David Brooks	Page 27
"Strongest Educational Option for Students"	*California Catholic Daily*	Page 29
The Education Our Economy Needs	Norm Augustine	Page 31
Saving Catholic Education	Richard Riordan	Page 33
The Lost Tools of Learning	Dorothy Sayers	Page 35

How to Stop the Drop in Verbal Scores	E.D. Hirsch, Jr.	Page 49
Promoting Schools' Catholic Identity Key to Their Survival, Leaders Say	Carol Zimmermann	Page 51

A Word from Our Editor

The NCEA recently released the latest statistics on Catholic schools in the United States. Almost totally unnoticed in nearly all the reporting was a small but critically important detail: Over 26% of our schools have waiting lists!

The first lesson to be taken from this is the necessity of passing along good news when it happens, rather than purveying an incessant stream of bad news. Now, we cannot ignore the sad fact that Catholic schools, especially in inner-city environments, continue to close. Which leads to a second lesson.

Why are Catholic schools still closing? In the inner cities, we are told, it is because of a population shift. In other words, the traditional Catholic demographic reality is no longer there. Fair enough. Then what about the populations that have replaced the Catholics? In many instances, whole sections of cities have become veritable ghost-towns, particularly in terms of children — which is why government schools are closing in those places as well. So, let's make sure that when a story is told about the shuttering of a Catholic school that it is put in the context of what is occurring in the overall sociological reality.

On the other hand, if Catholic children have been replaced by non-Catholic children, the Church should maintain an educational presence there — as a contributor to the common good so manifest in the offering of a quality education and as a promoter of evangelization. And here comes the rub in all too many cases: Decisions were made as far back as the 1970s that our inner-city schools would not "proselytize." Needless to say, proselytism is always offensive and wrong because it involves deception and/or coercion. Evangelization, on the other hand, is written into the very DNA of the Catholic Church by her Founder, and evangelization must be at the root of every outreach program of the Church. When that ceases to be the *modus operandi* of our schools, it is no wonder that clergy and laity alike begin to question the wisdom and prudence of expending vast amounts of time, treasure and talent (in any era of already limited resources) on institutions that have lost their sense of direction. Simply put: A Catholic school which does not produce a regular flow of new Catholics has ceased to be a Catholic school. While it may still be providing a good secular education, it has lost its moorings in terms of its fundamental *raison d'être*. Two responses are then indicated: Challenge faculty and administration to reorient themselves or, lacking that willingness, close up shop.

Now, back to suburbia — where the vast majority of Catholics have lived for the past three decades and will continue to live into the foreseeable future. A fundamental error in strategic planning was made on the part of ecclesiastical leaders in the 1970s as the demographic shift from urban to suburban began. Whereas up through the 1950s, new parishes always began with schools, that was generally not the case in the 1970s, either because Church authorities were too enamored of the burgeoning CCD cottage industry as a viable alternative to Catholic schools or because bishops and priests failed to see the basic fatal flaw in so-called public education — pointed out so clearly by Pope Pius XI in his 1929 encyclical, *Divini Illius Magistri*. Of course, both possibilities coalesced in not a few dioceses.

At any rate, it should now be obvious that "public" education is incompatible with Catholic principles. Bishops and priests need to say that in every forum, thus renewing the clarion call of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 — every Catholic child in a Catholic school. In other words, enrollment of one's children in a Catholic school is not just a nicety for someone who has a few extra thousand dollars to toss around; it is a moral obligation, which obligation is to be shouldered by the entire Catholic community — not simply parents of school-age children, nor of a parish that happens to have a school on its premises. If that mentality would take hold, suburban parishes with 1000 students in CCD would be directed by their bishops to build schools, in order to rescue those children from the clutches of a pervasive and destructive secularism, a secularism that will cause immense losses to the Church of the next several decades, let alone the loss of souls to Christ.

Episcopal leadership, lay initiative, and priestly cooperation are needed to ensure waiting lists in all our schools, waiting lists eventually eliminated because new schools have been built to accommodate our Catholic families. Let's adopt a rallying cry: "The Spirit of 1884 — Every Catholic child in a Catholic school!"

Devotedly yours in Christ,
Reverend Peter M. J. Stravinskas, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Executive Director

Vouchers Prompt Indiana School Exodus

SOUTH BEND, Ind. - Weeks after Indiana began the nation's broadest school voucher program, thousands of students have transferred from public to private schools, causing a spike in enrollment at some Catholic institutions that were recently on the brink of closing.

It is a scenario public school advocates have long feared: Students fleeing local districts in large numbers, taking with them vital tax dollars that often end up at parochial schools. Opponents say the practice violates the separation of church and state.

In at least one district, public school principals have been pleading with parents not to move their children.

"The bottom line from our perspective is, when you cut through all the chaff, nobody can deny that public money is going to be taken from public schools, and they're going to end up in private, mostly religious schools,'' said Nate Schnellenberger, president of the Indiana State Teachers Association.

Under a law signed in May by Governor Mitch Daniels, more than 3,200 Indiana students are receiving vouchers to attend private schools. That number is expected to climb significantly in the next two years as awareness of the program increases and limits on the number of applicants are lifted.

The vouchers are government-issued certificates that can be applied to private tuition, essentially allowing parents to channel some of the tax dollars they would normally pay to public schools to other institutions. Until Indiana started its program, most voucher systems were limited to poor students, those in failing schools, or those with special needs. But Indiana's program is significantly larger, offering money to students from middle-class homes and solid school districts.

Nearly 70 percent of the vouchers approved statewide are for students opting to attend Catholic schools, according to figures provided to the Associated Press by the five dioceses in Indiana. The majority are in the urban areas of Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, South Bend, and Gary, where many public schools have long struggled.

John Elcesser, executive director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association, said it is not surprising that Catholic schools are receiving so many of the vouchers.

Most already had state accreditation, which some private schools lack, and have more space available, he said.

Associated Press
August 29, 2011

Muslim Students Enrolling in Catholic Schools

At a time when progressive sex education and gay-rights clubs are becoming an increasing part of the secular curriculum, many devout families in the country's most populous province are looking for a faith-based approach to learning. In Ontario, however, the only publicly funded faith-based option is Catholic schools – and that's just fine for some Muslim parents, even if it's someone else's faith.

For Seid Oumer, an observant Muslim and a father of four from Ethiopia, Catholic education has a lot going for it. He sells the other Muslim parents on the benefits of uniforms, discipline and the faith-based approach.

Mr. Oumer's 16-year-old daughter, Daliya, has been attending Catholic religion classes at Cardinal Ambrozic Catholic Secondary School in Brampton, Ont., for two years.

"I find it very interesting, I like getting an idea of how our religions are very similar," she said.

Ms. Oumer feels comfortable using the chapel whenever she needs to pray. The only time she feels a little awkward is on special occasions such as Christmas, Easter or Remembrance Day, when the school attends Mass, and she's left alone in a pew while her classmates line up to take the Holy Eucharist.

"They suggest that non-Catholics go up for a blessing, but I don't know, I don't want to do that," she said. "So I sit down and everyone's like, 'Why aren't you going up?' I tell them I just don't want to."

Though at least one parent must be Catholic in order for a student to enroll in a Catholic elementary school, at the high-school level faith doesn't matter as long as there's room. Declining high school enrolment has meant that there often is room – about 10 per cent of the pupils attending Catholic boards in the Greater Toronto Area are non-Catholic.

Shared Abrahamic traditions and an emphasis on modest dress help make Muslim students feel at home at Catholic schools. Over the past decade, there is anecdotal evidence that more and more of them have been taking advantage of the fact that at the secondary level, Catholic schools are open to any local family who wishes to register, be they Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Rastafarian.

In the Catholic board, religious accommodation hasn't ignited controversy like it has at the Toronto District School Board.

This spring, when it became widely known that a Toronto middle school was allowing an imam to lead prayer sessions in the school cafeteria on Fridays, critics including Jewish, Hindu and secular groups accused the school of taking accommodation too far, saying such services were inappropriate during class time. This summer, they rallied outside that board's headquarters protesting "the mosqueteria."

One of the reasons Muslims students attend Catholic schools is because many Canadian Muslims are recent immigrants from East Africa and South Asia where "often, the best schools are the ones run by nuns," said Shafique Virani, a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto. "That

image may have remained from when they were back home."

So far, no one has tried to quantify the trend or study the reasons behind it, he said.

Mr. Oumer said he is grateful that in Catholic schools his children will be taught a conservative approach to reproductive biology, sex education and same-sex relations.

Sometimes the local Catholic school does have a better reputation or higher standardized test scores than its secular counterpart.

That's what prompted Saadia Sediqzadah to ask her parents if she could attend Father Michael McGivney Catholic Academy in Markham, Ont., east of Toronto.

She says her father was worried she might convert, but that his biggest concern was that she might face discrimination or bullying at her new school.

"He said it was okay if I didn't tell anyone I was Muslim," she said. "But I decided I had to be up front and I went around to everyone and told them, 'Hi my name is Saadia, I'm Afghan and I'm Muslim.' "

The fall of her Grade 9 year, Ms. Sediqzadah said there were only a few Muslims at her school, but by the time she graduated, in 2006, there were close to 40.

"It's word of mouth, parents talking to other parents," she said. "Often families are related or from the same community and they're telling each other good things about the Catholic schools."

Kate Hammer
Globe and Mail
September 05, 2011

Catholic School Teachers Wrestle with Faith and Obedience in Negotiating a Contract

Wednesday morning, on the first day of the new school year at St. Paul's Roman Catholic School in East Harlem, Gertrude Zagarella expects to arrive, as always, at 7:05. By 7:45, the children — mostly Hispanic, black and poor — will be done with breakfast, and then it is Ms. Zagarella's responsibility to lead all the students, from kindergartners to eighth graders, into the gym for morning prayers.

The rest of Wednesday she will spend in Room 11, teaching the new first graders where to find the bathroom, when to wash their hands and how to properly stand in a lunch line. That first day, they feel smaller than they expected, but lucky for them, no one is more experienced at calming first-grade jitters than Ms. Zagarella.

Of the 56 years she has taught in Catholic schools, 55 have been in first grade. At 77, she can think of little that she does not love about it. First graders learn to read. First graders notice when she changes her hairstyle. First graders speak from the heart.

Ms. Zagarella once taught a boy who stood up in the middle of a lesson and announced he wasn't going to grow up because he wanted to stay with her in first grade. "That's better than money," she said.

Not completely. Ms. Zagarella earns $56,000 a year. When she retires, her annual pension will be $20,974. In New York's public schools, teachers reach a maximum salary of $100,000 after 22 years, with a pension of $60,000.

Ms. Zagarella is a member of the Federation of Catholic Teachers, which is currently working without a contract. Members tend to be respectful of church leaders and not very threatening. "I know the archdiocese doesn't have a lot of money," Ms. Zagarella said, "but once in a while, if they could throw us something, the teachers would be grateful."

Or as Patricia Gabriel, the union's president, put it, "When it comes to asking for more, it's hard for our teachers to do it."

Unions for public school teachers are sometimes criticized for wielding too much power, but teachers in Catholic schools suffer because theirs do not.

Alan Engram, 34, a science teacher at Monsignor Scanlan High School in the Bronx who makes $49,000 a year, lives with his father and brother and drives a 2004 Chevy Malibu. "We're not asking a lot," he said. "We'd just like them to meet us halfway."

The union, which represents 2,600 teachers at 173 schools on Staten Island and in Manhattan, the Bronx and several upstate counties, has asked for raises of 2 percent each year for three years.

The church has offered the teachers no raise the first year and 1 percent the second — the same as the nonunion employees in the Archdiocese of New York.

Joseph Zwilling, a spokesman for the archdiocese, said financial pressures, declining enrollment and the closing of 30

schools last year made it difficult. Officials, he said, do not want to raise tuition, which averages $4,500 at elementary schools, because two-thirds of archdiocesan students are at or near the poverty level. “If we raise tuition,” he said, “studies show more will drop out.”

Mr. Zwilling pointed out that teachers would still receive annual 2.7 percent step raises, though those end after 17 years, with a maximum salary of $60,641.

That’s what Matthew Tomasulo was making when he retired in June, after 40 years at Transfiguration Middle School in Lower Manhattan. Mr. Tomasulo attended Transfiguration, too. He was baptized and was an altar boy at Transfiguration Church. Ten years ago, he was married there to another Transfiguration teacher. His two best men were former students he had taught in sixth grade, Michael Mah and Ginsen Yee.

“I was educated by priests,” Mr. Tomasulo said. “They are the Catholic Church. What they say has to go. You feel like you can’t ask for more money — it’s the church.”

Mr. Engram, the teacher at Monsignor Scanlan High, said the faculty was under awful pressure. When his school was facing layoffs last spring, he said, there were teachers in the principal’s office crying.

Their jobs are getting harder. Ms. Zagarella had 28 children last year, a lot for first grade. “They want to keep the numbers built up so they don’t close the school,” she said.

Catholic school teachers do not have the same protections as public school teachers. When a parochial school is closed, everyone is laid off. Teachers can be hired back, in order of seniority, if they can find a school that needs their expertise. The best job security is to be in a school that doesn’t close.

The union initiated negotiations in May with hopes of having an agreement before the contract expired Aug. 31. The teachers’ side of the table is mainly women. A majority on the diocesan side are men — including a monsignor and a Christian brother.

Jennifer Fleckenstein is a teacher at St. Philip Neri School in the Bronx. She attended St. Philip Neri, as did her father, an uncle and several cousins; now, her two children go there.

“Zero,” she said. “Zero makes me feel like the diocese is saying we’re worth zero.”

Teachers said that during negotiations a labor lawyer for the archdiocese called their proposal “unrealistic” and “silly.”

“To be told it’s silly,” said Mary Ann Driscoll, one of the teachers at the table, “when these are such tough economic times for everyone, is not right.”

Mr. Zwilling, the spokesman, said: “I spoke with the labor lawyer. He knows he said ‘unrealistic,’ and does not believe he said ‘silly,’ but can’t swear to it.”

Ms. Gabriel, the union president, said that at negotiating sessions, archdiocesan officials don’t seem to be listening. “I was speaking and they kept looking at the watches,” she said. “They kept rolling their eyes.”

The teachers’ Catholic education has taught them to be respectful, but has also made them smart and disciplined. In 2008, they went for months without a contract. Then,

on April 4 that year, teachers at 10 archdiocesan schools held a surprise one-day strike. On April 7, teachers at eight schools struck; on April 8, five schools. At every school, every teacher walked out.

Three days later, they had a new contract providing a 15 percent raise spread over four years.

Which is a prime lesson for Labor Day. There are times when people in power will not listen until confronted by people with power.

Angel Franco
The New York Times
September 4, 2011

New Catholic Schools Opening in Far-flung Suburbs

For the first time in a long while, things are looking up for Catholic education in metro Detroit.

One year after St. Catherine of Siena Academy enrolled 10 girls in ninth grade in temporary offices, it will start the school year Tuesday in a $17-million, state-of-the-art facility on Napier Road, just south of I-96, in Wixom. St. Catherine is the first from-the-ground-up Catholic girls high school built in the six-county Archdiocese of Detroit since Mercy High relocated from Detroit to Farmington Hills in 1965.

And last month, near Romeo, 10 students began ninth-grade classes at Austin Catholic Academy, the start of a coed Catholic high school in northern Macomb County.

Since 1998, Catholic schools in the archdiocese have declined from 170 schools with 56,862 students to 99 schools with 32,000. The two recent openings serve Catholic families in surging areas of Oakland, Livingston and Macomb counties.

"It really is a cause for celebration," said Bernadette Sugrue, the Archdiocese of Detroit's school superintendent.

Population changes driving Catholic school growth

St. Catherine of Siena Academy enrolled 10 girls in ninth grade last year. They studied in temporary offices.

On Tuesday, 38 ninth-graders will join those 10 sophomores in a new Wixom facility that has room for 700 students and is about a mile west of Detroit Catholic Central in Novi, an all-boys school with more than 1,000 students.

The new school boasts 27 classrooms, high-tech computer and science labs, a two-story gymnasium with an upper running track, and a chapel where its all-girl enrollees are required to attend daily mass.

St. Catherine is in a demographic sweet spot, drawing from western Oakland County and nearby Livingston County, where the population has grown 60% in 20 years.

"All the demographics showed there was a need," said Pinckney businessman Michael Dewan, president of St. Catherine's board of directors. "There aren't enough Catholic schools for the kids in this area."

When it peaked in 1964-65, Catholic school enrollment in the six-county Archdiocese of Detroit hit 203,389 students. There were 55 Catholic high schools in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park alone, and nearly twice as many grade schools, at a time when the city's population was about 50% Catholic. With Detroit's changing demographics came a steady drumbeat of school closures. Now, there are only three Catholic high schools and seven Catholic grade schools in the city.

Education closer to home

Dewan graduated from Detroit Catholic Central in 1985, when it was in Redford Township, and promoted the school's move to Novi in 2005. His wife graduated from Mercy High in Farmington Hills. They have seven kids — five boys, two girls.

"I promised my wife that I'd put every effort in getting a school built for our girls, as I did for our boys," said Dewan, who said his family and others wanted Catholic high school education closer to home.

He started collaborating on a girls school when his oldest daughter, Bridget, was in second grade. On Tuesday, she'll be one of the ninth-grade Siena Stars, St. Catherine's mascot name for the teams it will field in such sports as tennis, soccer and volleyball.

Archdiocese Schools Superintendent Bernadette Sugrue said St. Catherine and the newly opened Austin Catholic Academy in northern Macomb County were grassroots initiatives by parents. The St. Catherine board raised $33 million in financing through bond sales to purchase the land and finance construction of the school. Tuition is $9,800 a year. The Archdiocese of Detroit provided no funds for the school's construction, archdiocese spokesman Ned McGrath said.

Closings leave a void

In the past, a Detroit or suburban Catholic parish typically operated a Catholic grade school, a high school or both. But that changed after baby boomers passed through schools and people moved out to far-flung suburbs.

A number of Catholic schools in Detroit's inner suburbs have closed in recent years. In June, St. Clement of Center Line closed its elementary school; its high school closed in 2005. In Taylor, St. Alfred Elementary closed, leaving that Downriver suburb with no Catholic school.

Also in June, Wyandotte Mt. Carmel High School closed, and its elementary school merged into one facility with Christ the Good Shepherd school in Lincoln Park and Wyandotte Catholic Consolidated. The newly renamed Blessed John Paul II elementary school is in the Lincoln Park building.

For the first time in nearly a century, there is no Catholic school within Wyandotte's city limits.

New schools in far-flung areas

In northern Macomb County, Austin debuted last month in a former middle school in Ray, in the New Haven school district. Ten ninth-graders started the school, which is being sponsored by an order of Catholic priests, the Augustinians, who once ran the all-boys Austin High School in Detroit, which closed in 1978.

Austin alumni attended the dedication mass last week and presented a time capsule to the new students, who come from Harrison Township, Clinton Township, Macomb, Romeo and St. Clair.

The Austin Academy has been in the planning stages since 2006, and the archdiocese donated land in Macomb Township for a new building. But fund-raising stalled during the recession, and the school's founders decided to use an existing building for now.

A benefactor has donated $1,000 toward the tuition of the first 25 students to enroll, shaving their cost of the $6,750 tuition for this year only.

In northern Oakland County, the order of Catholic priests known as the Legionaries of Christ opened a Catholic grade school known as Everest Academy in 1991. Three

years ago, it added a high school component. Starting with 20 ninth-graders, Everest Collegiate High School was born. The high school now has 87 students and offers single-sex classes but coed clubs and after-school activities.

Allie Barsh, 15, of Milford has spent time in Huron Valley public schools but decided to enter the pioneer class of St. Catherine last year.

"I really wanted something Catholic and smaller than where I was at," Allie said.

"What really got me into it was the mission and how it's all built on faith. ... That everyone has their own gifts, and we are all taught to use our gifts in our own ways, and we are different for a reason."

Regina H. Boone
Detroit Free Press
September 5, 2011

What if the Secret to Success Is Failure?

Dominic Randolph can seem a little out of place at Riverdale Country School — which is odd, because he's the headmaster. Riverdale is one of New York City's most prestigious private schools, with a 104-year-old campus that looks down grandly on Van Cortlandt Park from the top of a steep hill in the richest part of the Bronx. On the discussion boards of UrbanBaby.com, worked-up moms from the Upper East Side argue over whether Riverdale sends enough seniors to Harvard, Yale and Princeton to be considered truly "TT" (top-tier, in UrbanBabyese), or whether it is more accurately labeled "2T" (second-tier), but it is, certainly, part of the city's private-school elite, a place members of the establishment send their kids to learn to be members of the establishment. Tuition starts at $38,500 a year, and that's for prekindergarten.

Randolph, by contrast, comes across as an iconoclast, a disrupter, even a bit of an eccentric. He dresses for work every day in a black suit with a narrow tie, and the outfit, plus his cool demeanor and sweep of graying hair, makes you wonder, when you first meet him, if he might have played sax in a ska band in the '80s. (The English accent helps.) He is a big thinker, always chasing new ideas, and a conversation with him can feel like a one-man TED conference, dotted with references to the latest work by behavioral psychologists and management gurus and design theorists. When he became headmaster in 2007, he swapped offices with his secretary, giving her the reclusive inner sanctum where previous headmasters sat and remodeling the small outer reception area into his own open-concept work space, its walls covered with whiteboard paint on which he sketches ideas and slogans. One day when I visited, one wall was bare except for a white sheet of paper. On it was printed a single black question mark.

For the headmaster of an intensely competitive school, Randolph, who is 49, is surprisingly skeptical about many of the basic elements of a contemporary high-stakes American education. He did away with Advanced Placement classes in the high school soon after he arrived at Riverdale; he encourages his teachers to limit the homework they assign; and he says that the standardized tests that Riverdale and other private schools require for admission to kindergarten and to middle school are "a patently unfair system" because they evaluate students almost entirely by I.Q. "This push on tests," he told me, "is missing out on some serious parts of what it means to be a successful human."

The most critical missing piece, Randolph explained as we sat in his office last fall, is *character* — those essential traits of mind and habit that were drilled into him at boarding school in England and that also have deep roots in American history. "Whether it's the pioneer in the Conestoga wagon or someone coming here in the 1920s from southern Italy, there was this idea in America that if you worked hard and you showed real grit, that you could be successful," he said. "Strangely, we've now forgotten that. People who have an easy time of things, who get 800s on their SAT's, I worry that those people get feedback that everything they're doing is great. And I think as a result, we are actually setting them up for long-term failure. When that person suddenly has to face up to a difficult

moment, then I think they're screwed, to be honest. I don't think they've grown the capacities to be able to handle that."

Randolph has been pondering throughout his 23-year career as an educator the question of whether and how schools should impart good character. It has often felt like a lonely quest, but it has led him in some interesting directions. In the winter of 2005, Randolph read "Learned Optimism," a book by Martin Seligman, a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania who helped establish the Positive Psychology movement. Randolph found the book intriguing, and he arranged a meeting with the author. As it happened, on the morning that Randolph made the trip to Philadelphia, Seligman had scheduled a separate meeting with David Levin, the co-founder of the KIPP network of charter schools and the superintendent of the KIPP schools in New York City. Seligman decided he might as well combine the two meetings, and he invited Christopher Peterson, a psychology professor at the University of Michigan, who was also visiting Penn that day, to join him and Randolph and Levin in his office for a freewheeling discussion of psychology and schooling.

Levin had also spent many years trying to figure out how to provide lessons in character to his students, who were almost all black or Latino and from low-income families. At the first KIPP school, in Houston, he and his co-founder, Michael Feinberg, filled the walls with slogans like "Work Hard" and "Be Nice" and "There Are No Shortcuts," and they developed a system of rewards and demerits designed to train their students not only in fractions and algebra but also in perseverance and empathy. Like Randolph, Levin went to Seligman's office expecting to talk about optimism. But Seligman surprised them both by pulling out a new and very different book, which he and Peterson had just finished: "Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification," a scholarly, 800-page tome that weighed in at three and a half pounds. It was intended, according to the authors, as a "manual of the sanities," an attempt to inaugurate what they described as a "science of good character."

It was, in other words, exactly what Randolph and Levin had been looking for, separately, even if neither of them had quite known it. Seligman and Peterson consulted works from Aristotle to Confucius, from the Upanishads to the Torah, from the Boy Scout Handbook to profiles of Pokémon characters, and they settled on 24 character strengths common to all cultures and eras. The list included some we think of as traditional noble traits, like bravery, citizenship, fairness, wisdom and integrity; others that veer into the emotional realm, like love, humor, zest and appreciation of beauty; and still others that are more concerned with day-to-day human interactions: social intelligence (the ability to recognize interpersonal dynamics and adapt quickly to different social situations), kindness, self-regulation, gratitude.

In most societies, Seligman and Peterson wrote, these strengths were considered to have a moral valence, and in many cases they overlapped with religious laws and strictures. But their true importance did not come from their relationship to any system of ethics or moral laws but from their practical benefit: cultivating these strengths represented a reliable path to "the good life," a life that was not just happy but also meaningful and fulfilling.

Six years after that first meeting, Levin and Randolph are trying to put this conception of character into action in their schools. In the process, they have found themselves wrestling with questions that have long confounded not just educators but anyone trying to nurture a thriving child or simply live a good life. What is good character? Is it really something that can be taught in a formal way, in the classroom, or is it the responsibility of the family, something that is inculcated gradually over years of experience? Which qualities matter most for a child trying to negotiate his way to a successful and autonomous adulthood? And are the answers to those questions the same in Harlem and in Riverdale?

Levin had believed in the importance of character since KIPP's inception. But on the day of his trip to see Seligman, he was feeling a new urgency about the subject. Six years earlier, in 1999, the first group of students to enter KIPP Academy middle school, which Levin founded and ran in the South Bronx, triumphed on the eighth-grade citywide achievement test, graduating with the highest scores in the Bronx and the fifth-highest in all of New York City. Every morning of middle school they passed a giant sign in the stairwell reminding them of their mission: "Climb the Mountain to College." And as they left KIPP for high school, they seemed poised to do just that: not only did they have outstanding academic results, but most of them also won admission to highly selective private and Catholic schools, often with full scholarships.

But as Levin told me when we spoke last fall, for many students in that first cohort, things didn't go as planned. "We thought, O.K., our first class was the fifth-highest-performing class in all of New York City," Levin said. "We got 90 percent into private and parochial schools. It's all going to be solved. But it wasn't." Almost every member of the cohort did make it through high school, and more than 80 percent of them enrolled in college. But then the mountain grew steeper, and every few weeks, it seemed, Levin got word of another student who decided to drop out. According to a report that KIPP issued last spring, only 33 percent of students who graduated from a KIPP middle school 10 or more years ago have graduated from a four-year college. That rate is considerably better than the 8 percent of children from low-income families who currently complete college nationwide, and it even beats the average national rate of college completion for all income groups, which is 31 percent. But it still falls well short of KIPP's stated goal: that 75 percent of KIPP alumni will graduate from a four-year college, and 100 percent will be prepared for a stable career.

As Levin watched the progress of those KIPP alumni, he noticed something curious: the students who persisted in college were not necessarily the ones who had excelled academically at KIPP; they were the ones with exceptional character strengths, like optimism and persistence and social intelligence. They were the ones who were able to recover from a bad grade and resolve to do better next time; to bounce back from a fight with their parents; to resist the urge to go out to the movies and stay home and study instead; to persuade professors to give them extra help after class. Those skills weren't enough on their own to earn students a B.A., Levin knew. But for young people without the benefit of a lot of family resources, without the kind of safety net that their wealthier peers enjoyed, they seemed an indispensable part of making it to graduation day.

What appealed to Levin about the list of character strengths that Seligman and Peterson compiled was that it was presented not as a finger-wagging guilt trip about good values and appropriate behavior but as a recipe for a successful and happy life. He was wary of the idea that KIPP's aim was to instill in its students "middle-class values," as though well-off kids had some depth of character that low-income students lacked. "The thing that I think is great about the character-strength approach," he told me, "is it is fundamentally devoid of value judgment."

Still, neither Levin nor Dominic Randolph had a clear vision of how to turn an 800-page psychology text into a practical program. After that first meeting in Seligman's office, Levin and Randolph kept in touch, calling and e-mailing, swapping articles and Web links, and they soon discovered that they shared a lot of ideas and interests, despite the very different school environments in which they worked. They decided to join forces, to try to tackle the mysteries of character together, and they turned for help to Angela Duckworth, who at the time was a graduate student in Seligman's department (she is now an assistant professor). Duckworth came to Penn in 2002 at the age of 32, after working for a decade as a teacher and a charter-school consultant. When she applied to the Ph.D. program at Penn, she wrote in her application essay that her experiences in schools had given her "a distinctly different view of school reform" than the one she started out with in her 20s. "The problem, I think, is not only the schools but also the students themselves," she wrote. "Here's why: learning is hard. True, learning is fun, exhilarating and gratifying — but it is also often daunting, exhausting and sometimes discouraging. . . . To help chronically low-performing but intelligent students, educators and parents must first recognize that character is at least as important as intellect."

Duckworth's early research showed that measures of self-control can be a more reliable predictor of students' grade-point averages than their I.Q.'s. But while self-control seemed to be a critical ingredient in attaining basic success, Duckworth came to feel it wasn't as relevant when it came to outstanding achievement. People who accomplished great things, she noticed, often combined a passion for a single mission with an unswerving dedication to achieve that mission, whatever the obstacles and however long it might take. She decided she needed to name this quality, and she chose the word "grit."

She developed a test to measure grit, which she called the Grit Scale. It is a deceptively simple test, in that it requires you to rate yourself on just 12 questions, from "I finish whatever I begin" to "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one." It takes about three minutes to complete, and it relies entirely on self-report — and yet when Duckworth took it out into the field, she found it was remarkably predictive of success. At Penn, high grit ratings allowed students with relatively low college-board scores to nonetheless achieve high G.P.A.'s. Duckworth and her collaborators gave their grit test to more than 1,200 freshman cadets as they entered West Point and embarked on the grueling summer training course known as Beast Barracks. The military has developed its own complex evaluation, called the Whole Candidate Score, to judge incoming cadets and predict which of them will survive the demands of West Point; it includes academic grades, a gauge of physical fitness and a Leadership Potential

Score. But at the end of Beast Barracks, the more accurate predictor of which cadets persisted and which ones dropped out turned out to be Duckworth's 12-item grit questionnaire.

Levin and Randolph asked Duckworth to use the new methods and tools she was developing to help them investigate the question of character at KIPP and Riverdale, and she and a handful of Penn graduate students began making regular treks from Philadelphia to New York. The first question Duckworth addressed, again, was the relative importance of I.Q. and self-control. She and her team of researchers gave middle-school students at Riverdale and KIPP a variety of psychological and I.Q. tests. They found that at both schools, I.Q. was the better predictor of scores on statewide achievement tests, but measures of self-control were more reliable indicators of report-card grades.

Duckworth's research convinced Levin and Randolph that they should try to foster self-control and grit in their students. Yet those didn't seem like the only character strengths that mattered. The full list of 24, on the other hand, felt too unwieldy. So they asked Peterson if he could narrow the list down to a more manageable handful, and he identified a set of strengths that were, according to his research, especially likely to predict life satisfaction and high achievement. After a few small adjustments (Levin and Randolph opted to drop love in favor of curiosity), they settled on a final list: zest, grit, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism and curiosity.

Over the course of the next year and a half, Duckworth worked with Levin and Randolph to turn the list of seven strengths into a two-page evaluation, a questionnaire that could be completed by teachers or parents, or by students themselves. For each strength, teachers suggested a variety of "indicators," much like the questions Duckworth asked people to respond to on her grit questionnaire, and she road-tested several dozen of them at Riverdale and KIPP. She eventually settled on the 24 most statistically reliable ones, from "This student is eager to explore new things" (an indicator of curiosity) to "This student believes that effort will improve his or her future" (optimism).

For Levin, the next step was clear. Wouldn't it be cool, he mused, if each student graduated from school with not only a G.P.A. but also a C.P.A., for character-point average? If you were a college-admissions director or a corporate human-resources manager selecting entry-level employees, wouldn't you like to know which ones scored highest in grit or optimism or zest? And if you were a parent of a KIPP student, wouldn't you want to know how your son or daughter stacked up next to the rest of the class in character as well as in reading ability? As soon as he got the final list of indicators from Duckworth and Peterson, Levin started working to turn it into a specific, concise assessment that he could hand out to students and parents at KIPP's New York City schools twice a year: the first-ever character report card.

Back at Riverdale, though, the idea of a character report card made Randolph nervous. "I have a philosophical issue with quantifying character," he explained to me one afternoon. "With my school's specific population, at least, as soon as you set up something like a report card, you're going to have a bunch of people doing test prep for it. I don't want to come up with a metric

around character that could then be gamed. I would hate it if that's where we ended up."

Still, he did think that the inventory Duckworth and Peterson developed could be a useful tool in communicating with students about character. And so he has been taking what one Riverdale teacher described as a "viral approach" to spreading the idea of this new method of assessing character throughout the Riverdale community. He talks about character at parent nights, asks pointed questions in staff meetings, connects like-minded members of his faculty and instructs them to come up with new programs. Last winter, Riverdale students in the fifth and sixth grades took the 24-indicator survey, and their teachers rated them as well. The results were discussed by teachers and administrators, but they weren't shared with students or parents, and they certainly weren't labeled a "report card."

As I spent time at Riverdale last year, it became apparent to me that the debate over character at the school wasn't just about how best to evaluate and improve students' character. It went deeper, to the question of what "character" really meant. When Randolph arrived at Riverdale, the school already had in place a character-education program, of a sort. Called CARE, for Children Aware of Riverdale Ethics, the program was adopted in 1989 in the lower school, which at Riverdale means prekindergarten through fifth grade. It is a blueprint for niceness, mandating that students "Treat everyone with respect" and "Be aware of other people's feelings and find ways to help those whose feelings have been hurt." Posters in the hallway remind students of the virtues related to CARE ("Practice Good Manners . . . Avoid Gossiping . . . Help Others"). In the lower school, many teachers describe it as a proud and essential part of what makes Riverdale the school that it is.

When I asked Randolph last winter about CARE, he was diplomatic. "I see the character strengths as CARE 2.0," he explained. "I'd basically like to take all of this new character language and say that we're in the next generation of CARE."

In fact, though, the character-strength approach of Seligman and Peterson isn't an expansion of programs like CARE; if anything, it is a repudiation of them. In 2008, a national organization called the Character Education Partnership published a paper that divided character education into two categories: programs that develop "moral character," which embodies ethical values like fairness, generosity and integrity; and those that address "performance character," which includes values like effort, diligence and perseverance. The CARE program falls firmly on the "moral character" side of the divide, while the seven strengths that Randolph and Levin have chosen for their schools lean much more heavily toward performance character: while they do have a moral component, strengths like zest, optimism, social intelligence and curiosity aren't particularly heroic; they make you think of Steve Jobs or Bill Clinton more than the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi.

The two teachers Randolph has chosen to oversee the school's character initiative are K.C. Cohen, the guidance counselor for the middle and upper schools, and Karen Fierst, a learning specialist in the lower school. Cohen is friendly and thoughtful, in her mid-30s, a graduate of Fieldston, the private school just down the road from Riverdale. She is intensely interested in character development, and like Randolph, she is

worried about the character of Riverdale students. But she is not yet entirely convinced by the seven character strengths that Riverdale has ostensibly chosen. "When I think of good character, I think: Are you fair? Are you honest in dealings with other people? Are you a cheater?" she told me. "I don't think so much about: Are you tenacious? Are you a hard worker? I think, Are you a good person?"

Cohen's vision of character is much closer to "moral character" than "performance character," and so far, that vision remains the dominant one at Riverdale. When I spent a day at the school in March, sitting in on a variety of classes and meetings, messages about behavior and values permeated the day, but those messages stayed almost entirely in the moral dimension. It was a hectic day at the middle school — it was pajama day, plus there was a morning assembly, and then on top of that, the kids in French class who were going on the two-week trip to Bordeaux for spring break had to leave early in order to make their overnight flight to Paris. The topic for the assembly was heroes, and a half-dozen students stood up in front of their classmates — about 350 kids, in all — and each made a brief presentation about a particular hero he or she had chosen: Ruby Nell Bridges, the African-American girl who was part of the first group to integrate the schools in New Orleans in 1960; Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian fruit vendor whose self-immolation helped spark the recent revolt in that country; the actor and activist Paul Robeson.

In the assembly, in classes and in conversations with different students, I heard a lot of talk about values and ethics, and the values that were emphasized tended to be social values: inclusion, tolerance, diversity. (I heard a lot more about black history at Riverdale than I did at the KIPP schools I visited.) One eighth-grade girl I asked about character said that for her and her friends, the biggest issue was inclusion — who was invited to whose bat mitzvah; who was being shunned on Facebook. Character, as far as I could tell, was being defined at Riverdale mostly in terms of helping other people — or at least not hurting their feelings.

Randolph told me that he had concerns about a character program that comprised only those kind of nice-guy values. "The danger with character is if you just revert to these general terms — respect, honesty, tolerance — it seems really vague," he said. "If I stand in front of the kids and just say, 'It's really important for you to respect each other,' I think they glaze over. But if you say, 'Well, actually you need to exhibit self-control,' or you explain the value of social intelligence — this will help you collaborate more effectively — then it seems a bit more tangible."

When I spoke to Karen Fierst, the teacher who was overseeing the character project for the Riverdale lower school, she said she was worried that it would be a challenge to convince the students and their parents that there was anything in the 24 character strengths that might actually benefit them. For KIPP kids, she said, the notion that character could help them get through college was a powerful lure, one that would motivate them to take the strengths seriously. For kids at Riverdale, though, there was little doubt that they would graduate from college. "It will just happen," Fierst explained. "It happened to every generation in their family before them. And so it's harder to get them to invest in this idea. For KIPP students, learning these strengths is partly about trying to demystify

what makes other people successful — kind of like, 'We're letting you in on the secret of what successful people are like.' But kids here already live in a successful community. They're not depending on their teachers to give them the information on how to be successful."

At KIPP Infinity middle school, which occupies one floor of a school on West 133rd Street, across from the M.T.A.'s giant Manhattanville bus depot, report-card night last winter fell on a cold Thursday at the beginning of February. Report-card night is always a big deal at KIPP schools — parents are strongly urged to attend, and at Infinity, almost all of them do — but this particular evening carried an extra level of anxiety for both the administrators and the parents, because students were receiving their very first character report cards, and no one knew quite what to expect.

Logistically, the character report card had been a challenge to pull off. Teachers at all four KIPP middle schools in New York City had to grade every one of their students, on a scale of 1 to 5, on every one of the 24 character indicators, and more than a few of them found the process a little daunting. And now that report-card night had arrived, they had an even bigger challenge: explaining to parents just how those precise figures, rounded to the second decimal place, summed up their children's character. I sat for a while with Mike Witter, a 31-year-old eighth-grade English teacher, as he talked through the character report card with Faith Flemister and her son Juaquin Bennett, a tall, hefty eighth grader in a gray hooded sweatshirt.

"For the past few years we've been working on a project to create a clearer picture for parents about the character of your child," Witter explained to Flemister. "The categories that we ended up putting together represent qualities that have been studied and determined to be indicators of success. They mean you're more likely to go to college. More likely to find a good job. Even surprising things, like they mean you're more likely to get married, or more likely to have a family. So we think these are really important."

Flemister nodded, and Witter began to work his way down the scores on Juaquin's character report card, starting with the good news: every teacher had scored him as a perfect 5 on "Is polite to adults and peers," and he did almost as well on "Keeps temper in check." They were both indicators for interpersonal self-control.

"I can tell this is a real strength for you," Witter said, turning to Juaquin. "This kind of self-control is something you've developed incredibly well. So that makes me think we need to start looking at: What's something we can target? And the first thing that jumps out at me is this." Witter pulled out a green felt-tip marker and circled one indicator on Juaquin's report card. " 'Pays attention and resists distraction,' " Witter read aloud, an indicator for academic self-control. "That's a little lower than some of the other numbers. Why do you think that is?"

"I talk too much in class," Juaquin said, a little sheepishly, looking down at his black sneakers. "I sometimes stare off into space and don't pay attention."

The three of them talked over a few strategies to help Juaquin focus more in class, and by the end of the 15-minute conversation, Flemister seemed convinced by the new approach. "The strong points are

not a surprise," she said to Witter as he got up to talk to another family. "That's just the type of person Juaquin is. But it's good how you pinpoint what he can do to make things easier on himself. Then maybe his grades will pick up."

A month later, I returned to KIPP to visit Witter's classroom. By that point in the school year, character language had permeated Infinity. Kids wore T-shirts with the slogan "Infinite Character" and Seligman's 24 character strengths listed on the back. The walls were covered with signs that read "Got self-control?" and "I actively participate!" (one indicator for zest). There was a bulletin board in the hallway topped with the words "Character Counts," where students filled out and posted "Spotted!" cards when they saw a fellow student performing actions that demonstrate character. (Jasmine R. cited William N. for zest: "William was in math class and he raised his hand for every problem.")

I came to Witter's class to observe something that Levin was calling "dual-purpose instruction," the practice of deliberately working explicit talk about character strengths into every lesson. Levin wanted math teachers to use the strengths in word problems; he explained that history teachers could use them to orient a class discussion about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. And when I arrived in Witter's class at 7:45 on a Thursday morning in March, he was leading a discussion about Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart." Above Witter's head, at the front of the class, the seven character strengths were stenciled in four-inch-high letters, white on blue, from optimism to social intelligence. He asked his students to rank Okonkwo, the protagonist, on his various character strengths. There was a lot of back and forth, but in the end, most students agreed that Okonkwo rated highest on grit and lowest on self-control. Then a student named Yantzee raised his hand. "Can't a trait backfire at you?" he asked.

"Sure, a trait can backfire," Witter said. "Too much grit, like Okonkwo, you start to lose your ability to have empathy for other people. If you're so gritty that you don't understand why everyone's complaining about how hard things are, because nothing's hard for you, because you're Mr. Grit, then you're going to have a hard time being kind. Even love — being too loving might make you the kind of person who can get played." There was a ripple of knowing laughter from the students. "So, yes, character is something you have to be careful about. Character strengths can become character weaknesses."

Though the seven character strengths aren't included in every lesson at KIPP, they do make it into most conversations about discipline. One day last winter, I was speaking with Sayuri Stabrowski, a 30-year-old seventh-and-eighth-grade reading teacher at KIPP Infinity, and she mentioned that she caught a girl chewing gum in her class earlier that day. "She denied it," Stabrowski told me. "She said, 'No, I'm not, I'm chewing my tongue.' " Stabrowski rolled her eyes as she told me the story. "I said, 'O.K. fine.' Then later in the class, I saw her chewing again, and I said: 'You're chewing gum! I see you.' She said, 'No, I'm not, see?' and she moved the gum over in her mouth in this really obvious way, and we all saw what she was doing. Now, a couple of years ago, I probably would have blown my top and screamed. But this time, I was able to say: 'Gosh, not only were you chewing gum, which is kind of minor, but you lied to me twice. That's a real

disappointment. What does that say about your character?' And she was just devastated."

Stabrowski was worried that the girl, who often struggled with her behavior, might have a mini-meltdown — a "baby attack," in KIPP jargon — in the middle of the class, but in fact, the girl spit out her gum and sat through the rest of the class and then afterward came up to her teacher with tears in her eyes. "We had a long conversation," Stabrowski told me. "She said: 'I'm trying so hard to just grow up. But nothing ever changes!' And I said: 'Do you know what does change? You didn't have a baby attack in front of the other kids, and two weeks ago, you would have.' "

To Tom Brunzell, who as the dean of students at KIPP Infinity oversaw the implementation of the character report card, what is going on in character conversations like that one isn't academic instruction at all, or even discipline; it's therapy. Specifically, it's a kind of cognitive behavioral therapy, the very practical, nuts-and-bolts psychological technique that provides the theoretical underpinning for the whole positive psychology field. Cognitive behavioral therapy, or C.B.T., involves using the conscious mind to understand and overcome unconscious fears and self-destructive habits, using techniques like "self-talk" — putting an immediate crisis in perspective by reminding yourself of the larger context. "The kids who succeed at KIPP are the ones who can C.B.T. themselves in the moment," Brunzell told me. Part of the point of the character initiative, as he saw it, was to give their students the tools to do that. "All kids this age are having mini-implosions every day," he said. "I mean, it's middle school, the worst years of their lives. But the kids who make it are the ones who can tell themselves: 'I can rise above this little situation. I'm O.K. Tomorrow is a new day.'"

For Randolph, the experience that Brunzell was describing — the struggle to pull yourself through a crisis, to come to terms on a deep level with your own shortcomings and to labor to overcome them — is exactly what is missing for so many students at academically excellent schools like Riverdale. And perhaps surprisingly, it may turn out to be an area where the students at KIPP have a real advantage over Riverdale kids. On the professional development day in February when I visited Riverdale, Randolph had arranged a screening for his entire faculty of "Race to Nowhere," a movie about the stresses facing mostly privileged American high-school students that has become an underground hit in many wealthy suburbs, where one-time showings at schools, churches and community centers bring out hundreds of concerned parents. The movie paints a grim portrait of contemporary adolescence, rising in an emotional crescendo to the story of an overachieving teenage girl who committed suicide, apparently because of the ever-increasing pressure to succeed that she felt both at school and at home. At Riverdale, the film seemed to have a powerful effect on many of the staff; one teacher who came up to Randolph afterward had tears in her eyes.

"Race to Nowhere" has helped to coalesce a growing movement of psychologists and educators who argue that the systems and methods now in place to raise and educate well-off kids in the United States are in fact devastating them. One central figure in the movie is Madeline Levine, a psychologist in Marin County who is the author of a best-selling book, "The Price of Privilege: How

Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids." In her book, Levine cites studies and surveys to back up her contention that children of affluent parents now exhibit "unexpectedly high rates of emotional problems beginning in junior high school." This is no accident of demographics, Levine says, but instead is a direct result of the child-raising practices that prevail in well-off American homes; wealthy parents today, she argues, are more likely to be emotionally distant from their children, and at the same time to insist on high levels of achievement, a potentially toxic blend of influences that can create "intense feelings of shame and hopelessness" in affluent children.

Cohen and Fierst told me that they also see many Riverdale parents who, while pushing their children to excel, also inadvertently shield them from exactly the kind of experience that can lead to character growth. As Fierst put it: "Our kids don't put up with a lot of suffering. They don't have a threshold for it. They're protected against it quite a bit. And when they do get uncomfortable, we hear from their parents. We try to talk to parents about having to sort of make it O.K. for there to be challenge, because that's where learning happens."

Cohen said that in the middle school, "if a kid is a C student, and their parents think that they're all-A's, we do get a lot of pushback: 'What are you talking about? This is a great paper!' We have parents calling in and saying, for their kids, 'Can't you just give them two more days on this paper?' Overindulging kids, with the intention of giving them everything and being loving, but at the expense of their character — that's huge in our population. I think that's one of the biggest problems we have at Riverdale."

This is a problem, of course, for all parents, not just affluent ones. It is a central paradox of contemporary parenting, in fact: we have an acute, almost biological impulse to provide for our children, to give them everything they want and need, to protect them from dangers and discomforts both large and small. And yet we all know — on some level, at least — that what kids need more than anything is a little hardship: some challenge, some deprivation that they can overcome, even if just to prove to themselves that they can. As a parent, you struggle with these thorny questions every day, and if you make the right call even half the time, you're lucky. But it's one thing to acknowledge this dilemma in the privacy of your own home; it's quite another to have it addressed in public, at a school where you send your kids at great expense.

And it's that problem that Randolph is up against as he tries to push forward this new kind of conversation about character at Riverdale. When you work at a public school, whether it's a charter or a traditional public school, you're paid by the state, responsible, on some level, to your fellow citizens for the job you do preparing your students to join the adult world. When you work at a private school like Riverdale, though, even one with a long waiting list, you are always conscious that you're working for the parents who pay the tuition fees. Which makes a campaign like the one that Randolph is trying to embark on all the more complicated. If your premise is that your students are lacking in deep traits like grit and gratitude and self-control, you're implicitly criticizing the parenting they've received — which means you're implicitly criticizing your employers.

When I asked Randolph to explain just what he thought Riverdale students were missing

out on, he told me the story of his own scholastic career. He did well in boarding school and was admitted to Harvard, but when he got to college, he felt lost, out of step with the power-tie careerism of the Reagan ’80s. After two years at Harvard, Randolph left for a year to work in a low-paying manual job, as a carpenter’s helper, trying to find himself. After college, he moved for a couple of years to Italy, where he worked odd jobs and studied opera. It was an uncertain and unsettled time in his life, filled with plenty of failed experiments and setbacks and struggles. Looking back on his life, though, Randolph says that the character strengths that enabled him to achieve the success that he has were not built in his years at Harvard or at the boarding schools he attended; they came out of those years of trial and error, of taking chances and living without a safety net. And it is precisely those kinds of experiences that he worries that his students aren’t having.

“The idea of building grit and building self-control is that you get that through failure,” Randolph explained. “And in most highly academic environments in the United States, no one fails anything.”

Most Riverdale students can see before them a clear path to a certain type of success. They’ll go to college, they’ll graduate, they’ll get well-paying jobs — and if they fall along the way, their families will almost certainly catch them, often well into their 20s or even 30s, if necessary. But despite their many advantages, Randolph isn’t yet convinced that the education they currently receive at Riverdale, or the support they receive at home, will provide them with the skills to negotiate the path toward the deeper success that Seligman and Peterson hold up as the ultimate product of good character: a happy, meaningful, productive life. Randolph wants his students to succeed, of course — it’s just that he believes that in order to do so, they first need to learn how to fail.

Paul Tough
New York Times
September 14, 2011

Paul Tough (inquiries@paultough.com), a contributing writer, is the author of "Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America." His book "The Success Equation" will be published next year.

If It Feels Right ...

During the summer of 2008, the eminent Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith led a research team that conducted in-depth interviews with 230 young adults from across America. The interviews were part of a larger study that Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, Patricia Snell Herzog and others have been conducting on the state of America's youth.

Smith and company asked about the young people's moral lives, and the results are depressing.

It's not so much that these young Americans are living lives of sin and debauchery, at least no more than you'd expect from 18- to 23-year-olds. What's disheartening is how bad they are at thinking and talking about moral issues.

The interviewers asked open-ended questions about right and wrong, moral dilemmas and the meaning of life. In the rambling answers, which Smith and company recount in a new book, "Lost in Transition," you see the young people groping to say anything sensible on these matters. But they just don't have the categories or vocabulary to do so.

When asked to describe a moral dilemma they had faced, two-thirds of the young people either couldn't answer the question or described problems that are not moral at all, like whether they could afford to rent a certain apartment or whether they had enough quarters to feed the meter at a parking spot.

"Not many of them have previously given much or any thought to many of the kinds of questions about morality that we asked," Smith and his co-authors write. When asked about wrong or evil, they could generally agree that rape and murder are wrong. But, aside from these extreme cases, moral thinking didn't enter the picture, even when considering things like drunken driving, cheating in school or cheating on a partner. "I don't really deal with right and wrong that often," is how one interviewee put it.

The default position, which most of them came back to again and again, is that moral choices are just a matter of individual taste. "It's personal," the respondents typically said. "It's up to the individual. Who am I to say?"

Rejecting blind deference to authority, many of the young people have gone off to the other extreme: "I would do what I thought made me happy or how I felt. I have no other way of knowing what to do but how I internally feel."

Many were quick to talk about their moral feelings but hesitant to link these feelings to any broader thinking about a shared moral framework or obligation. As one put it, "I mean, I guess what makes something right is how I feel about it. But different people feel different ways, so I couldn't speak on behalf of anyone else as to what's right and wrong."

Smith and company found an atmosphere of extreme moral individualism — of relativism and nonjudgmentalism. Again, this doesn't mean that America's young people are immoral. Far from it. But, Smith and company emphasize, they have not been given the resources — by schools, institutions and families — to cultivate their moral intuitions, to think more broadly about moral obligations, to check behaviors that may be degrading. In this way, the study

says more about adult America than youthful America.

Smith and company are stunned, for example, that the interviewees were so completely untroubled by rabid consumerism. (This was the summer of 2008, just before the crash).

Many of these shortcomings will sort themselves out as these youngsters get married, have kids, enter a profession or fit into more clearly defined social roles. Institutions will inculcate certain habits. Broader moral horizons will be forced upon them. But their attitudes at the start of their adult lives do reveal something about American culture. For decades, writers from different perspectives have been warning about the erosion of shared moral frameworks and the rise of an easygoing moral individualism.

Allan Bloom and Gertrude Himmelfarb warned that sturdy virtues are being diluted into shallow values. Alasdair MacIntyre has written about emotivism, the idea that it's impossible to secure moral agreement in our culture because all judgments are based on how we feel at the moment.

Charles Taylor has argued that morals have become separated from moral sources. People are less likely to feel embedded on a moral landscape that transcends self. James Davison Hunter wrote a book called "The Death of Character." Smith's interviewees are living, breathing examples of the trends these writers have described.

In most times and in most places, the group was seen to be the essential moral unit. A shared religion defined rules and practices. Cultures structured people's imaginations and imposed moral disciplines. But now more people are led to assume that the free-floating individual is the essential moral unit. Morality was once revealed, inherited and shared, but now it's thought of as something that emerges in the privacy of your own heart.

David Brooks
New York Times
September 12, 2011

"Strongest Educational Option for Students"

Inner city children who attend Catholic schools do far better than their public school counterparts, LMU study finds

The following item was posted Sept. 19 on the website of the Los Angeles archdiocesan Department of Catholic Schools.

New research from the Loyola Marymount University School of Education shows that inner city Los Angeles students attending Catholic schools graduate high school and go on to college at much higher rates than their peers in comparable public schools. The study, conducted by SOE's Center for Catholic Education, followed a group of students who received tuition from the Catholic Education Foundation between 2003 and 2008 to attend Los Angeles Archdiocesan schools. Researchers found that 98.2 percent of those students graduated high school and an almost equal percentage, 97.6, continued on to some type of post-secondary education. Currently, the Los Angeles Unified School District reports its graduation rate is as low as 55 percent and does not report college enrollment rates.

The study also examined how Catholic schools prepare students for college. Researchers found that the schools offered the courses required for admission to University of California and California State University schools and encouraged all students to take them. While 90 percent of the Catholic school students completed the courses, only 31 percent of public school students did. Catholic schools also motivated students to take the SAT college entrance examination and, as a result, a greater percentage took the exam and got higher scores than students at comparable public schools.

"This study demonstrates the success Catholic schools have educating some of the most economically disadvantaged youth in Los Angeles," said Shane P. Martin, dean and professor for the LMU School of Education and a co-author of the study. "Students attending Catholic schools in inner city neighborhoods are completing a rigorous curriculum, outperforming their peers on national standardized tests, graduating from high school in exceptional numbers and going on to college at a very successful rate."

At a time when the nation's Catholic schools face many challenges — declining enrollment, changing ethnic and socio-economic demographics and shrinking financial support — this research shows that Catholic schools are able to provide a higher quality education at a lower per pupil cost.

"The strong achievement numbers and 98 percent college attendance rate shows the impact Catholic schools and the Catholic Education Foundation have on some of the most disadvantaged youth in Los Angeles," said Kathy Anderson, executive director of the CEF. "In many parts of inner city Los Angeles, the local Catholic school is not only the strongest educational option for students, it is the best way to invest in their future potential and service to the common good of society."

The Catholic Education Foundation was established to ensure that underserved children in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles would have access to a Catholic school education. Since 1987, CEF has issued over 110,000 tuition awards and over $108 million.

This new research is the second phase of a longitudinal study on the efficacy of inner city Catholic Schools in the Los Angeles area. The first phase of the study was released in 2008. This study is one of several ongoing research projects in the Center for Catholic Education, including an analysis of education tax relief models in California in partnership with the California Catholic Conference of Bishops and research on the efficacy of an extended school year in partnership with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

California Catholic Daily
September 21, 2011

The Education Our Economy Needs

We lag in science, but students' historical illiteracy hurts our politics and our businesses.

In the spirit of the new school year, here's a quiz for readers: In which of the following subjects is the performance of American 12th-graders the worst? a) science, b) economics, c) history, or d) math?

With all the talk of America's very real weaknesses in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and math), you might be surprised to learn that the answer — according to the federal government's National Assessment of Educational Progress — is neither science nor math. And despite what might be suggested by the number of underwater home loans, high-school seniors actually fare best in economics.

Which leaves history as the answer, the subject in which students perform the most poorly. It's a result that puts American employers and America's freedoms in a worrisome spot.

But why should a C grade in history matter to the C-suite? After all, if a leader can make the numbers, does it really matter if he or she can recite the birthdates of all the presidents?

Well, it's not primarily the memorized facts that have current and former CEOs like me concerned. It's the other things that subjects like history impart: critical thinking, research skills, and the ability to communicate clearly and cogently. Such skills are certainly important for those at the top, but in today's economy they are fundamental to performance at nearly every level. A failing grade in history suggests that students are not only failing to comprehend our nation's story and that of our world, but also failing to develop skills that are crucial to employment across sectors. Having traveled in 109 countries in this global economy, I have developed a considerable appreciation for the importance of knowing a country's history and politics.

The good news is that a candidate who demonstrates capabilities in critical thinking, creative problem-solving and communication has a far greater chance of being employed today than his or her counterpart without those skills. The better news is these are not skills that only a graduate education or a stint at McKinsey can confer. They are competencies that our public elementary and high schools can and should be developing through subjects like history.

Far more than simply conveying the story of a country or civilization, an education in history can create critical thinkers who can digest, analyze and synthesize information and articulate their findings. These are skills needed across a broad range of subjects and disciplines.

In fact, students who are exposed to more modern methods of history education — where critical thinking and research are emphasized—tend to perform better in math and science. As a case in point, students who participate in National History Day — actually a year-long program that gets students in grades 6-12 doing historical research — consistently outperform their

peers on state standardized tests, not only in social studies but in science and math as well.

In my position as CEO of a firm employing over 80,000 engineers, I can testify that most were excellent engineers — but the factor that most distinguished those who advanced in the organization was the ability to think broadly and read and write clearly.

Now is a time to re-establish history's importance in American education. We need to take this opportunity to ensure that today's history teachers are teaching in a more enlightened fashion, going beyond rote memorization and requiring students to conduct original research, develop a viewpoint and defend it.

If the American economy is to recover from the Great Recession — and I believe it can — it will be because of a ready supply of workers with the critical thinking, creative problem-solving, technological and communications skills needed to fuel productivity and growth. The subject of history is an important part of that foundation.

Norm Augustine
Wall Street Journal
September 21, 2011

Mr. Augustine, a former under secretary of the Army, is the retired chairman and CEO of Lockheed Martin.

Saving Catholic Education

Over 50 years, the U.S. Catholic school population has dropped by almost two-thirds.

Earlier this week, the Los Angeles Catholic Education Foundation announced a campaign to raise $100 million for Catholic schools in our area.

Catholic education in the United States is in dire straits. A report from Loyola Marymount University in June found that Catholic schools continue to close even though they graduate 98% of their high school students and send almost all of them onto college. In the early 1960s, the U.S. had over 13,000 Catholic schools with 5.5 million students. Today there are 6,900 schools with two million students. In the Los Angeles area, enrollment has fallen by 20% over the past 10 years, to 80,000 students from 100,000. This trend is due not to lack of demand, but to the inability of parents to pay tuition.

The urban poor are more desperate than ever for Catholic education. Urban public schools have failed these families, graduating approximately 30% of Los Angeles high school students in four years. Catholic schools are their best hope — something I know from personal experience.

Catholic schools shaped my spiritual, intellectual and social growth. This included grammar school (where I got a very good education despite having 55 students in my classroom), high school and then college. I remember vividly my third-grade teacher reading to us for a half-hour every day. It started me on a lifelong love of reading. I remember the ethic of service the nuns and lay teachers instilled in me. I was taught that the poor were not to be pitied — they wanted only to be given the opportunity to succeed. And the fortunate had an obligation to help.

So why are Catholic schools the answer to our urban education woes? Aren't charter schools beginning to help this underserved population? Charter schools are an amazing development, and I've chaired the Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools and the Inner City Education Foundation, both charter advocacy organizations. But not everyone will be able to attend charter schools because the capacity isn't there.

Charter schools are public schools that receive the same dollars as other public schools (in California, $7,500 per student). By contrast, Catholic schools rely on private contributions (averaging $4,000 per student) and tuition (averaging $2,500 per student) from some of our poorest families. In terms of graduation rates, only the very best charter schools in Los Angeles are on par with Catholic schools.

Catholic schools infuse beliefs, values and standards that children will carry all their lives. They provide a safe learning environment for those from high-crime neighborhoods as well as structure and a faith-based education. The schools create a sense of community and an expectation that every child will achieve his or her goals.

Many students in Catholic schools are not Catholic. As Catholic school teachers often

say, "We provide this education not because the students are Catholic but because we are." Our faith calls us to it.

So how can we provide the gift of Catholic education to the thousands of struggling families who want it but could never scrape together an extra $2,000 or $3,000 a year? Of the 17,500 applications the Los Angeles Catholic Education Foundation received for financial aid last year, 17,000 qualified for a tuition award. But the foundation could afford to give awards to only 8,400 students. The average income level for a family of four who received tuition assistance last year was $21,500. We believe that if we increase our endowment by $100 million, we will be able to offer scholarships to all deserving children for decades to come.

In the years that I was mayor of Los Angeles, I was interested to find that some of the best people who worked for me had Catholic school experience. My fire and police chiefs were both Catholic school graduates. And I see significant numbers of Catholic school alums in a leadership course I teach at UCLA's business school.

Each of us, no matter what career we have followed, has an obligation to educate the next generation. The education needed for success in our world necessarily includes the basics of reading, writing and math. It must also include the ability to reason, to make good judgments, and to be responsible for our planet and all its peoples. These have been the fundamentals of our Catholic schools for over a century. We must guarantee they are here for generations to come.

Richard Riordan
Wall Street Journal
September 30, 2011

Mr. Riordan, who was mayor of Los Angeles from 1993 to 2001, is the founding president of the Los Angeles Catholic Education Foundation.

The Lost Tools of Learning

"The Lost Tools of Learning" by Dorothy Sayers has been used by many schools in the US as a basis for the classical education movement, reviving the medieval trivium subjects (grammar, logic and rhetoric) as tools to enable the analysis and mastery of every other subject.

That I, whose experience of teaching is extremely limited, should presume to discuss education is a matter, surely, that calls for no apology. It is a kind of behavior to which the present climate of opinion is wholly favorable. Bishops air their opinions about economics; biologists, about metaphysics; inorganic chemists, about theology; the most irrelevant people are appointed to highly technical ministries; and plain, blunt men write to the papers to say that Epstein and Picasso do not know how to draw. Up to a certain point, and provided the criticisms are made with a reasonable modesty, these activities are commendable. Too much specialization is not a good thing. There is also one excellent reason why the veriest amateur may feel entitled to have an opinion about education. For if we are not all professional teachers, we have all, at some time or another, been taught. Even if we learnt nothing — perhaps in particular if we learnt nothing — our contribution to the discussion may have a potential value.

However, it is in the highest degree improbable that the reforms I propose will ever be carried into effect. Neither the parents, nor the training colleges, nor the examination boards, nor the boards of governors, nor the ministries of education, would countenance them for a moment. For they amount to this: that if we are to produce a society of educated people, fitted to preserve their intellectual freedom amid the complex pressures of our modern society, we must turn back the wheel of progress some four or five hundred years, to the point at which education began to lose sight of its true object, towards the end of the Middle Ages

Before you dismiss me with the appropriate phrase – reactionary, romantic, mediaevalist, *laudator temporis acti* (praiser of times past), or whatever tag comes first to hand — I will ask you to consider one or two miscellaneous questions that hang about at the back, perhaps, of all our minds, and occasionally pop out to worry us

When we think about the remarkably early age at which the young men went up to university in, let us say, Tudor times, and thereafter were held fit to assume responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs, are we altogether comfortable about that artificial prolongation of intellectual childhood and adolescence into the years of physical maturity which is so marked in our own day? To postpone the acceptance of responsibility to a late date brings with it a number of psychological complications which, while they may interest the psychiatrist, are scarcely beneficial either to the individual or to society. The stock argument in favor of postponing the school-leaving age and prolonging the period of education generally is there is now so much more to learn than there was in the Middle Ages. This is partly true, but not wholly. The modern boy and girl are certainly taught more subjects — but does that always mean that they actually know more?

Has it ever struck you as odd, or unfortunate, that today, when the proportion of literacy throughout Western Europe is

higher than it has ever been, people should have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard of and unimagined? Do you put this down to the mere mechanical fact that the press and the radio and so on have made propaganda much easier to distribute over a wide area? Or do you sometimes have an uneasy suspicion that the product of modern educational methods is less good than he or she might be at disentangling fact from opinion and the proven from the plausible?

Have you ever, in listening to a debate among adult and presumably responsible people, been fretted by the extraordinary inability of the average debater to speak to the question, or to meet and refute the arguments of speakers on the other side? Or have you ever pondered upon the extremely high incidence of irrelevant matter which crops up at committee meetings, and upon the very great rarity of persons capable of acting as chairmen of committees? And when you think of this, and think that most of our public affairs are settled by debates and committees, have you ever felt a certain sinking of the heart?

Have you ever followed a discussion in the newspapers or elsewhere and noticed how frequently writers fail to define the terms they use? Or how often, if one man does define his terms, another will assume in his reply that he was using the terms in precisely the opposite sense to that in which he has already defined them? Have you ever been faintly troubled by the amount of slipshod syntax going about? And, if so, are you troubled because it is inelegant or because it may lead to dangerous misunderstanding?

Do you ever find that young people, when they have left school, not only forget most of what they have learnt (that is only to be expected), but forget also, or betray that they have never really known, how to tackle a new subject for themselves? Are you often bothered by coming across grown-up men and women who seem unable to distinguish between a book that is sound, scholarly, and properly documented, and one that is, to any trained eye, very conspicuously none of these things? Or who cannot handle a library catalogue? Or who, when faced with a book of reference, betray a curious inability to extract from it the passages relevant to the particular question which interests them?

Do you often come across people for whom, all their lives, a "subject" remains a "subject," divided by watertight bulkheads from all other "subjects," so that they experience very great difficulty in making an immediate mental connection between let us say, algebra and detective fiction, sewage disposal and the price of salmon — or, more generally, between such spheres of knowledge as philosophy and economics, or chemistry and art?

Are you occasionally perturbed by the things written by adult men and women for adult men and women to read? We find a well-known biologist writing in a weekly paper to the effect that: "It is an argument against the existence of a Creator" (I think he put it more strongly; but since I have, most unfortunately, mislaid the reference, I will put his claim at its lowest) — "an argument against the existence of a Creator that the same kind of variations which are produced by natural selection can be produced at will by stock breeders." One might feel tempted to say that it is rather an argument for the existence of a Creator. Actually, of course, it is neither; all it proves is that the same

material causes (recombination of the chromosomes, by crossbreeding, and so forth) are sufficient to account for all observed variations — just as the various combinations of the same dozen tones are materially sufficient to account for Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata and the noise the cat makes by walking on the keys. But the cat's performance neither proves nor disproves the existence of Beethoven; and all that is proved by the biologist's argument is that he was unable to distinguish between a material and a final cause.

Here is a sentence from no less academic a source than a front-page article in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "The Frenchman, Alfred Epinas, pointed out that certain species (e.g., ants and wasps) can only face the horrors of life and death in association." I do not know what the Frenchman actually did say; what the Englishman says he said is patently meaningless. We cannot know whether life holds any horror for the ant, nor in what sense the isolated wasp which you kill upon the window-pane can be said to "face" or not to "face" the horrors of death. The subject of the article is mass behavior in man; and the human motives have been unobtrusively transferred from the main proposition to the supporting instance. Thus the argument, in effect, assumes what it set out to prove — a fact which would become immediately apparent if it were presented in a formal syllogism. This is only a small and haphazard example of a vice which pervades whole books — particularly books written by men of science on metaphysical subjects.

Another quotation from the same issue of the *TLS* comes in fittingly here to wind up this random collection of disquieting thoughts — this time from a review of Sir Richard Livingstone's "Some Tasks for Education": "More than once the reader is reminded of the value of an intensive study of at least one subject, so as to learn the meaning of 'knowledge' and what precision and persistence is needed to attain it. Yet there is elsewhere full recognition of the distressing fact that a man may be master in one field and show no better judgment than his neighbor anywhere else; he remembers what he has learnt, but forgets altogether how he learned it."

I would draw your attention particularly to that last sentence, which offers an explanation of what the writer rightly calls the "distressing fact" that the intellectual skills bestowed upon us by our education are not readily transferable to subjects other than those in which we acquired them: "he remembers what he has learnt, but forgets altogether how he learned it."

Is not the great defect of our education today — a defect traceable through all the disquieting symptoms of trouble that I have mentioned – that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils "subjects," we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning. It is as though we had taught a child, mechanically and by rule of thumb, to play "The Harmonious Blacksmith" upon the piano, but had never taught him the scale or how to read music; so that, having memorized "The Harmonious Blacksmith," he still had not the faintest notion how to proceed from that to tackle "The Last Rose of Summer." Why do I say, "as though"? In certain of the arts and crafts, we sometimes do precisely this — requiring a child to "express himself" in paint before we teach him how to handle the colors and the brush. There is a school of thought which believes this to be the right way to set about the job. But observe: it is not the way in which a trained craftsman

will go about to teach himself a new medium. He, having learned by experience the best way to economize labor and take the thing by the right end, will start off by doodling about on an odd piece of material, in order to "give himself the feel of the tool."

Let us now look at the mediaeval scheme of education — the syllabus of the Schools. It does not matter, for the moment, whether it was devised for small children or for older students, or how long people were supposed to take over it. What matters is the light it throws upon what the men of the Middle Ages supposed to be the object and the right order of the educative process.

The syllabus was divided into two parts: the Trivium and Quadrivium. The second part — the Quadrivium — consisted of "subjects," and need not for the moment concern us. The interesting thing for us is the composition of the Trivium, which preceded the Quadrivium and was the preliminary discipline for it. It consisted of three parts: Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric, in that order

Now the first thing we notice is that two at any rate of these "subjects" are not what we should call "subjects" at all: they are only methods of dealing with subjects. Grammar, indeed, is a "subject" in the sense that it does mean definitely learning a language – at that period it meant learning Latin. But language itself is simply the medium in which thought is expressed. The whole of the Trivium was, in fact, intended to teach the pupil the proper use of the tools of learning, before he began to apply them to "subjects" at all. First, he learned a language; not just how to order a meal in a foreign language, but the structure of a language, and hence of language itself – what it was, how it was put together, and how it worked. Secondly, he learned how to use language; how to define his terms and make accurate statements; how to construct an argument and how to detect fallacies in argument. Dialectic, that is to say, embraced Logic and Disputation. Thirdly, he learned to express himself in language – how to say what he had to say elegantly and persuasively

At the end of his course, he was required to compose a thesis upon some theme set by his masters or chosen by himself, and afterwards to defend his thesis against the criticism of the faculty. By this time, he would have learned — or woe betide him — not merely to write an essay on paper, but to speak audibly and intelligibly from a platform, and to use his wits quickly when heckled. There would also be questions, cogent and shrewd, from those who had already run the gauntlet of debate.

It is, of course, quite true that bits and pieces of the mediaeval tradition still linger, or have been revived, in the ordinary school syllabus of today. Some knowledge of grammar is still required when learning a foreign language — perhaps I should say, "is again required," for during my own lifetime, we passed through a phase when the teaching of declensions and conjugations was considered rather reprehensible, and it was considered better to pick these things up as we went along. School debating societies flourish; essays are written; the necessity for "self-expression" is stressed, and perhaps even over-stressed. But these activities are cultivated more or less in detachment, as belonging to the special subjects in which they are pigeon-holed rather than as forming one coherent scheme of mental training to which all "subjects" stand in a subordinate relation. "Grammar" belongs especially to the "subject" of foreign languages, and

essay-writing to the "subject" called "English"; while Dialectic has become almost entirely divorced from the rest of the curriculum, and is frequently practiced unsystematically and out of school hours as a separate exercise, only very loosely related to the main business of learning. Taken by and large, the great difference of emphasis between the two conceptions holds good: modern education concentrates on "teaching subjects," leaving the method of thinking, arguing, and expressing one's conclusions to be picked up by the scholar as he goes along' mediaeval education concentrated on first forging and learning to handle the tools of learning, using whatever subject came handy as a piece of material on which to doodle until the use of the tool became second nature.

"Subjects" of some kind there must be, of course. One cannot learn the theory of grammar without learning an actual language, or learn to argue and orate without speaking about something in particular. The debating subjects of the Middle Ages were drawn largely from theology, or from the ethics and history of antiquity. Often, indeed, they became stereotyped, especially towards the end of the period, and the far-fetched and wire-drawn absurdities of Scholastic argument fretted Milton and provide food for merriment even to this day. Whether they were in themselves any more hackneyed and trivial then the usual subjects set nowadays for "essay writing" I should not like to say: we may ourselves grow a little weary of "A Day in My Holidays" and all the rest of it. But most of the merriment is misplaced, because the aim and object of the debating thesis has by now been lost sight of.

A glib speaker in the Brains Trust once entertained his audience (and reduced the late Charles Williams to helpless rage) by asserting that in the Middle Ages it was a matter of faith to know how many archangels could dance on the point of a needle. I need not say, I hope, that it never was a "matter of faith"; it was simply a debating exercise, whose set subject was the nature of angelic substance: were angels material, and if so, did they occupy space? The answer usually adjudged correct is, I believe, that angels are pure intelligences; not material, but limited, so that they may have location in space but not extension. An analogy might be drawn from human thought, which is similarly non-material and similarly limited. Thus, if your thought is concentrated upon one thing — say, the point of a needle — it is located there in the sense that it is not elsewhere; but although it is "there," it occupies no space there, and there is nothing to prevent an infinite number of different people's thoughts being concentrated upon the same needle-point at the same time. The proper subject of the argument is thus seen to be the distinction between location and extension in space; the matter on which the argument is exercised happens to be the nature of angels (although, as we have seen, it might equally well have been something else); the practical lesson to be drawn from the argument is not to use words like "there" in a loose and unscientific way, without specifying whether you mean "located there" or "occupying space there."

Scorn in plenty has been poured out upon the mediaeval passion for hair-splitting; but when we look at the shameless abuse made, in print and on the platform, of controversial expressions with shifting and ambiguous connotations, we may feel it in our hearts to wish that every reader and hearer had been so defensively armored by his education as to be able to cry: *"Distinguo."*

For we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects. We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda with a smattering of "subjects"; and when whole classes and whole nations become hypnotized by the arts of the spell binder, we have the impudence to be astonished. We dole out lip-service to the importance of education — lip-service and, just occasionally, a little grant of money; we postpone the school-leaving age, and plan to build bigger and better schools; the teachers slave conscientiously in and out of school hours; and yet, as I believe, all this devoted effort is largely frustrated, because we have lost the tools of learning, and in their absence can only make a botched and piecemeal job of it.

What, then, are we to do? We cannot go back to the Middle Ages. That is a cry to which we have become accustomed. We cannot go back — or can we? *Distinguo*. I should like every term in that proposition defined. Does "go back" mean a retrogression in time, or the revision of an error? The first is clearly impossible *per se*; the second is a thing which wise men do every day. "Cannot" — does this mean that our behavior is determined irreversibly, or merely that such an action would be very difficult in view of the opposition it would provoke? Obviously the twentieth century is not and cannot be the fourteenth; but if "the Middle Ages" is, in this context, simply a picturesque phrase denoting a particular educational theory, there seems to be no *a priori* reason why we should not "go back" to it — with modifications — as we have already "gone back" with modifications, to, let us say, the idea of playing Shakespeare's plays as he wrote them, and not in the "modernized" versions of Cibber and Garrick, which once seemed to be the latest thing in theatrical progress.

Let us amuse ourselves by imagining that such progressive retrogression is possible. Let us make a clean sweep of all educational authorities, and furnish ourselves with a nice little school of boys and girls whom we may experimentally equip for the intellectual conflict along lines chosen by ourselves. We will endow them with exceptionally docile parents; we will staff our school with teachers who are themselves perfectly familiar with the aims and methods of the Trivium; we will have our building and staff large enough to allow our classes to be small enough for adequate handling; and we will postulate a Board of Examiners willing and qualified to test the products we turn out. Thus prepared, we will attempt to sketch out a syllabus — a modern Trivium "with modifications" and we will see where we get to.

But first: what age shall the children be? Well, if one is to educate them on novel lines, it will be better that they should have nothing to unlearn; besides, one cannot begin a good thing too early, and the Trivium is by its nature not learning, but a preparation for learning. We will, therefore, "catch ‘em young," requiring of our pupils

only that they shall be able to read, write, and cipher.

My views about child psychology are, I admit, neither orthodox nor enlightened. Looking back upon myself (since I am the child I know best and the only child I can pretend to know from inside) I recognize three states of development. These, in a rough-and-ready fashion, I will call the Poll-Parrot, the Pert, and the Poetic — the latter coinciding, approximately, with the onset of puberty. The Poll-Parrot stage is the one in which learning by heart is easy and, on the whole, pleasurable; whereas reasoning is difficult and, on the whole, little relished. At this age, one readily memorizes the shapes and appearances of things; one likes to recite the number-plates of cars; one rejoices in the chanting of rhymes and the rumble and thunder of unintelligible polysyllables; one enjoys the mere accumulation of things. The Pert age, which follows upon this (and, naturally, overlaps it to some extent), is characterized by contradicting, answering back, liking to "catch people out" (especially one's elders); and by the propounding of conundrums. Its nuisance-value is extremely high. It usually sets in about the Fourth Form. The Poetic age is popularly known as the "difficult" age. It is self-centered; it yearns to express itself; it rather specializes in being misunderstood; it is restless and tries to achieve independence; and, with good luck and good guidance, it should show the beginnings of creativeness; a reaching out towards a synthesis of what it already knows, and a deliberate eagerness to know and do some one thing in preference to all others. Now it seems to me that the layout of the Trivium adapts itself with a singular appropriateness to these three ages: Grammar to the Poll-Parrot, Dialectic to the Pert, and Rhetoric to the Poetic age.

Let us begin, then, with Grammar. This, in practice, means the grammar of some language in particular; and it must be an inflected language. The grammatical structure of an uninflected language is far too analytical to be tackled by any one without previous practice in Dialectic. Moreover, the inflected languages interpret the uninflected, whereas the uninflected are of little use in interpreting the inflected. I will say at once, quite firmly, that the best grounding for education is the Latin grammar. I say this, not because Latin is traditional and mediaeval, but simply because even a rudimentary knowledge of Latin cuts down the labor and pains of learning almost any other subject by at least fifty percent. It is the key to the vocabulary and structure of all the Teutonic languages, as well as to the technical vocabulary of all the sciences and to the literature of the entire Mediterranean civilization, together with all its historical documents.

Those whose pedantic preference for a living language persuades them to deprive their pupils of all these advantages might substitute Russian, whose grammar is still more primitive. Russian is, of course, helpful with the other Slav dialects. There is something also to be said for Classical Greek. But my own choice is Latin. Having thus pleased the Classicists among you, I will proceed to horrify them by adding that I do not think it either wise or necessary to cramp the ordinary pupil upon the Procrustean bed of the Augustan Age, with its highly elaborate and artificial verse forms and oratory. Post-classical and mediaeval Latin, which was a living language right down to the end of the Renaissance, is easier and in some ways livelier; a study of it helps to dispel the widespread notion that learning and literature came to a full stop when

Christ was born and only woke up again at the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Latin should be begun as early as possible — at a time when inflected speech seems no more astonishing than any other phenomenon in an astonishing world; and when the chanting of *"Amo, amas, amat"* is as ritually agreeable to the feelings as the chanting of "eeny, meeny, miney, moe."

During this age we must, of course, exercise the mind on other things besides Latin grammar. Observation and memory are the faculties most lively at this period; and if we are to learn a contemporary foreign language we should begin now, before the facial and mental muscles become rebellious to strange intonations. Spoken French or German can be practiced alongside the grammatical discipline of the Latin.

In English, meanwhile, verse and prose can be learned by heart, and the pupil's memory should be stored with stories of every kind – classical myth, European legend, and so forth. I do not think that the classical stories and masterpieces of ancient literature should be made the vile bodies on which to practice the techniques of Grammar — that was a fault of mediaeval education which we need not perpetuate. The stories can be enjoyed and remembered in English, and related to their origin at a subsequent stage. Recitation aloud should be practiced, individually or in chorus; for we must not forget that we are laying the groundwork for Disputation and Rhetoric.

The grammar of History should consist, I think, of dates, events, anecdotes, and personalities. A set of dates to which one can peg all later historical knowledge is of enormous help later on in establishing the perspective of history. It does not greatly matter which dates: those of the Kings of England will do very nicely, provided that they are accompanied by pictures of costumes, architecture, and other everyday things, so that the mere mention of a date calls up a very strong visual presentment of the whole period.

Geography will similarly be presented in its factual aspect, with maps, natural features, and visual presentment of customs, costumes, flora, fauna, and so on; and I believe myself that the discredited and old-fashioned memorizing of a few capitol cities, rivers, mountain ranges, etc., does no harm. Stamp collecting may be encouraged.

Science, in the Poll-Parrot period, arranges itself naturally and easily around collections — the identifying and naming of specimens and, in general, the kind of thing that used to be called "natural philosophy." To know the name and properties of things is, at this age, a satisfaction in itself; to recognize a devil's coach-horse at sight, and assure one's foolish elders, that, in spite of its appearance, it does not sting; to be able to pick out Cassiopeia and the Pleiades, and perhaps even to know who Cassiopeia and the Pleiades were; to be aware that a whale is not a fish, and a bat not a bird — all these things give a pleasant sensation of superiority; while to know a ring snake from an adder or a poisonous from an edible toadstool is a kind of knowledge that also has practical value. The grammar of Mathematics begins, of course, with the multiplication table, which, if not learnt now, will never be learnt with pleasure; and with the recognition of geometrical shapes and the grouping of numbers. These exercises lead naturally to the doing of simple sums in arithmetic. More complicated mathematical processes may, and perhaps should, be postponed, for the reasons which will presently appear.

So far (except, of course, for the Latin), our curriculum contains nothing that departs very far from common practice. The difference will be felt rather in the attitude of the teachers, who must look upon all these activities less as "subjects" in themselves than as a gathering-together of material for use in the next part of the Trivium. What that material is, is only of secondary importance; but it is as well that anything and everything which can be usefully committed to memory should be memorized at this period, whether it is immediately intelligible or not. The modern tendency is to try and force rational explanations on a child's mind at too early an age. Intelligent questions, spontaneously asked, should, of course, receive an immediate and rational answer; but it is a great mistake to suppose that a child cannot readily enjoy and remember things that are beyond his power to analyze — particularly if those things have a strong imaginative appeal (as, for example, "Kubla Kahn"), an attractive jingle (like some of the memory-rhymes for Latin genders), or an abundance of rich, resounding polysyllables (like the *Quicunque vult*).

This reminds me of the grammar of Theology. I shall add it to the curriculum, because theology is the mistress-science without which the whole educational structure will necessarily lack its final synthesis. Those who disagree about this will remain content to leave their pupil's education still full of loose ends. This will matter rather less than it might, since by the time that the tools of learning have been forged the student will be able to tackle theology for himself, and will probably insist upon doing so and making sense of it. Still, it is as well to have this matter also handy and ready for the reason to work upon. At the grammatical age, therefore, we should become acquainted with the story of God and Man in outline — i.e., the Old and New Testaments presented as parts of a single narrative of Creation, Rebellion, and Redemption — and also with the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. At this early stage, it does not matter nearly so much that these things should be fully understood as that they should be known and remembered.

It is difficult to say at what age, precisely, we should pass from the first to the second part of the Trivium. Generally speaking, the answer is: so soon as the pupil shows himself disposed to pertness and interminable argument. For as, in the first part, the master faculties are Observation and Memory, so, in the second, the master faculty is the Discursive Reason. In the first, the exercise to which the rest of the material was, as it were, keyed, was the Latin grammar; in the second, the key-exercise will be Formal Logic. It is here that our curriculum shows its first sharp divergence from modern standards. The disrepute into which Formal Logic has fallen is entirely unjustified; and its neglect is the root cause of nearly all those disquieting symptoms which we have noted in the modern intellectual constitution. Logic has been discredited, partly because we have come to suppose that we are conditioned almost entirely by the intuitive and the unconscious. There is no time to argue whether this is true; I will simply observe that to neglect the proper training of the reason is the best possible way to make it true. Another cause for the disfavor into which Logic has fallen is the belief that it is entirely based upon universal assumptions that are either unprovable or tautological. This is not true. Not all universal propositions are of this kind. But even if they were, it would make no difference, since every syllogism whose

major premise is in the form "All A is B" can be recast in hypothetical form. Logic is the art of arguing correctly: "If A, then B." The method is not invalidated by the hypothetical nature of A. Indeed, the practical utility of Formal Logic today lies not so much in the establishment of positive conclusions as in the prompt detection and exposure of invalid inference

Let us now quickly review our material and see how it is to be related to Dialectic. On the Language side, we shall now have our vocabulary and morphology at our fingertips; henceforward we can concentrate on syntax and analysis (i.e., the logical construction of speech) and the history of language (i.e., how we came to arrange our speech as we do in order to convey our thoughts).

Our Reading will proceed from narrative and lyric to essays, argument and criticism, and the pupil will learn to try his own hand at writing this kind of thing. Many lessons — on whatever subject — will take the form of debates; and the place of individual or choral recitation will be taken by dramatic performances, with special attention to plays in which an argument is stated in dramatic form.

Mathematics — algebra, geometry, and the more advanced kinds of arithmetic — will now enter into the syllabus and take its place as what it really is: not a separate "subject" but a sub-department of Logic. It is neither more nor less than the rule of the syllogism in its particular application to number and measurement, and should be taught as such, instead of being, for some, a dark mystery, and, for others, a special revelation, neither illuminating nor illuminated by any other part of knowledge.

History, aided by a simple system of ethics derived from the grammar of theology, will provide much suitable material for discussion: Was the behavior of this statesman justified? What was the effect of such an enactment? What are the arguments for and against this or that form of government? We shall thus get an introduction to constitutional history — a subject meaningless to the young child, but of absorbing interest to those who are prepared to argue and debate. Theology itself will furnish material for argument about conduct and morals; and should have its scope extended by a simplified course of dogmatic theology (i.e., the rational structure of Christian thought), clarifying the relations between the dogma and the ethics, and lending itself to that application of ethical principles in particular instances which is properly called casuistry. Geography and the Sciences will likewise provide material for Dialectic.

But above all, we must not neglect the material which is so abundant in the pupils' own daily life.

There is a delightful passage in Leslie Paul's "The Living Hedge" which tells how a number of small boys enjoyed themselves for days arguing about an extraordinary shower of rain which had fallen in their town — a shower so localized that it left one half of the main street wet and the other dry. Could one, they argued, properly say that it had rained that day on or over the town or only in the town? How many drops of water were required to constitute rain? And so on. Argument about this led on to a host of similar problems about rest and motion, sleep and waking, *est* and *non est*, and the infinitesimal division of time. The whole passage is an admirable example of the spontaneous development of the

ratiocinative faculty and the natural and proper thirst of the awakening reason for the definition of terms and exactness of statement. All events are food for such an appetite.

An umpire's decision; the degree to which one may transgress the spirit of a regulation without being trapped by the letter: on such questions as these, children are born casuists, and their natural propensity only needs to be developed and trained — and especially, brought into an intelligible relationship with the events in the grown-up world. The newspapers are full of good material for such exercises: legal decisions, on the one hand, in cases where the cause at issue is not too abstruse; on the other, fallacious reasoning and muddleheaded arguments, with which the correspondence columns of certain papers one could name are abundantly stocked.

Wherever the matter for Dialectic is found, it is, of course, highly important that attention should be focused upon the beauty and economy of a fine demonstration or a well-turned argument, lest veneration should wholly die. Criticism must not be merely destructive; though at the same time both teacher and pupils must be ready to detect fallacy, slipshod reasoning, ambiguity, irrelevance, and redundancy, and to pounce upon them like rats. This is the moment when precis-writing may be usefully undertaken; together with such exercises as the writing of an essay, and the reduction of it, when written, by 25 or 50 percent.

It will, doubtless, be objected that to encourage young persons at the Pert age to browbeat, correct, and argue with their elders will render them perfectly intolerable. My answer is that children of that age are intolerable anyhow; and that their natural argumentativeness may just as well be canalized to good purpose as allowed to run away into the sands. It may, indeed, be rather less obtrusive at home if it is disciplined in school; and anyhow, elders who have abandoned the wholesome principle that children should be seen and not heard have no one to blame but themselves.

Once again, the contents of the syllabus at this stage may be anything you like. The "subjects" supply material; but they are all to be regarded as mere grist for the mental mill to work upon. The pupils should be encouraged to go and forage for their own information, and so guided towards the proper use of libraries and books for reference, and shown how to tell which sources are authoritative and which are not.

Towards the close of this stage, the pupils will probably be beginning to discover for themselves that their knowledge and experience are insufficient, and that their trained intelligences need a great deal more material to chew upon. The imagination — usually dormant during the Pert age — will reawaken, and prompt them to suspect the limitations of logic and reason. This means that they are passing into the Poetic age and are ready to embark on the study of Rhetoric. The doors of the storehouse of knowledge should now be thrown open for them to browse about as they will. The things once learned by rote will be seen in new contexts; the things once coldly analyzed can now be brought together to form a new synthesis; here and there a sudden insight will bring about that most exciting of all discoveries: the realization that truism is true.

It is difficult to map out any general syllabus for the study of Rhetoric: a certain freedom

is demanded. In literature, appreciation should be again allowed to take the lead over destructive criticism; and self-expression in writing can go forward, with its tools now sharpened to cut clean and observe proportion. Any child who already shows a disposition to specialize should be given his head: for, when the use of the tools has been well and truly learned, it is available for any study whatever. It would be well, I think, that each pupil should learn to do one, or two, subjects really well, while taking a few classes in subsidiary subjects so as to keep his mind open to the inter-relations of all knowledge. Indeed, at this stage, our difficulty will be to keep "subjects" apart; for Dialectic will have shown all branches of learning to be inter-related, so Rhetoric will tend to show that all knowledge is one. To show this, and show why it is so, is pre-eminently the task of the mistress science. But whether theology is studied or not, we should at least insist that children who seem inclined to specialize on the mathematical and scientific side should be obliged to attend some lessons in the humanities and vice versa. At this stage, also, the Latin grammar, having done its work, may be dropped for those who prefer to carry on their language studies on the modern side; while those who are likely never to have any great use or aptitude for mathematics might also be allowed to rest, more or less, upon their oars. Generally speaking, whatsoever is mere apparatus may now be allowed to fall into the background, while the trained mind is gradually prepared for specialization in the "subjects" which, when the Trivium is completed, it should be perfectly will equipped to tackle on its own. The final synthesis of the Trivium — the presentation and public defense of the thesis — should be restored in some form; perhaps as a kind of "leaving examination" during the last term at school.

The scope of Rhetoric depends also on whether the pupil is to be turned out into the world at the age of 16 or whether he is to proceed to the university. Since, really, Rhetoric should be taken at about 14, the first category of pupil should study Grammar from about 9 to 11, and Dialectic from 12 to 14; his last two school years would then be devoted to Rhetoric, which, in this case, would be of a fairly specialized and vocational kind, suiting him to enter immediately upon some practical career. A pupil of the second category would finish his Dialectical course in his preparatory school, and take Rhetoric during his first two years at his public school. At 16, he would be ready to start upon those "subjects" which are proposed for his later study at the university: and this part of his education will correspond to the mediaeval Quadrivium. What this amounts to is that the ordinary pupil, whose formal education ends at 16, will take the Trivium only; whereas scholars will take both the Trivium and the Quadrivium.

Is the Trivium, then, a sufficient education for life? Properly taught, I believe that it should be. At the end of the Dialectic, the children will probably seem to be far behind their coevals brought up on old-fashioned "modern" methods, so far as detailed knowledge of specific subjects is concerned. But after the age of 14 they should be able to overhaul the others hand over fist. Indeed, I am not at all sure that a pupil thoroughly proficient in the Trivium would not be fit to proceed immediately to the university at the age of 16, thus proving himself the equal of his mediaeval counterpart, whose precocity astonished us at the beginning of this discussion. This, to be sure, would make hay of the English public-school system, and disconcert the universities very much. It would, for example, make quite a different

thing of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race.

But I am not here to consider the feelings of academic bodies: I am concerned only with the proper training of the mind to encounter and deal with the formidable mass of undigested problems presented to it by the modern world. For the tools of learning are the same, in any and every subject; and the person who knows how to use them will, at any age, get the mastery of a new subject in half the time and with a quarter of the effort expended by the person who has not the tools at his command. To learn six subjects without remembering how they were learnt does nothing to ease the approach to a seventh; to have learnt and remembered the art of learning makes the approach to every subject an open door.

Before concluding these necessarily very sketchy suggestions, I ought to say why I think it necessary, in these days, to go back to a discipline which we had discarded. The truth is that for the last three hundred years or so we have been living upon our educational capital. The post-Renaissance world, bewildered and excited by the profusion of new "subjects" offered to it, broke away from the old discipline (which had, indeed, become sadly dull and stereotyped in its practical application) and imagined that henceforward it could, as it were, disport itself happily in its new and extended Quadrivium without passing through the Trivium. But the Scholastic tradition, though broken and maimed, still lingered in the public schools and universities: Milton, however much he protested against it, was formed by it – the debate of the Fallen Angels and the disputation of Abdiel with Satan have the tool-marks of the Schools upon them, and might, incidentally, profitably figure as set passages for our Dialectical studies. Right down to the nineteenth century, our public affairs were mostly managed, and our books and journals were for the most part written, by people brought up in homes, and trained in places, where that tradition was still alive in the memory and almost in the blood. Just so, many people today who are atheist or agnostic in religion, are governed in their conduct by a code of Christian ethics which is so rooted that it never occurs to them to question it.

But one cannot live on capital forever. However firmly a tradition is rooted, if it is never watered, though it dies hard, yet in the end it dies. And today a great number — perhaps the majority — of the men and women who handle our affairs, write our books and our newspapers, carry out our research, present our plays and our films, speak from our platforms and pulpits — yes, and who educate our young people — have never, even in a lingering traditional memory, undergone the Scholastic discipline. Less and less do the children who come to be educated bring any of that tradition with them. We have lost the tools of learning — the axe and the wedge, the hammer and the saw, the chisel and the plane — that were so adaptable to all tasks. Instead of them, we have merely a set of complicated jigs, each of which will do but one task and no more, and in using which eye and hand receive no training, so that no man ever sees the work as a whole or "looks to the end of the work."

What use is it to pile task on task and prolong the days of labor, if at the close the chief object is left unattained? It is not the fault of the teachers — they work only too hard already. The combined folly of a civilization that has forgotten its own roots is forcing them to shore up the tottering

weight of an educational structure that is built upon sand. They are doing for their pupils the work which the pupils themselves ought to do. For the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dorothy Sayers. "The Lost Tools of Learning." (1947).

"The Lost Tools of Learning" was first presented by Dorothy Sayers at Oxford in 1947

THE AUTHOR

Dorothy Sayers was a renowned English crime writer, poet, playwright, essayist, translator and Christian humanist. In 1912, she won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford, and studied modern languages and medieval literature. She finished with first-class honours in 1915. Although women could not be awarded degrees at that time, Sayers was among the first to receive a degree when the position changed a few years later. She is best known for her mysteries, a series of novels and short stories set between World War I and World War II that feature English aristocrat and amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey. However, Sayers herself considered her translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia* to be her best work.

Her religious works did so well at presenting the orthodox Anglican position that, in 1943, the Archbishop of Canterbury offered her a Lambeth doctorate in divinity, which she declined.

Sayers essay, Creed or Chaos? is a restatement of basic historical Christian Doctrine, based on the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed in which she sought clearly and concisely to explain the central doctrines of Christianity.

Catholic Education Resource Center

How to Stop the Drop in Verbal Scores

The latest bad but unsurprising news on education is that reading and writing scores on the SAT have once again declined. The language competence of our high schoolers fell steeply in the 1970s and has never recovered.

This is very worrisome, because the best single measure of the overall quality of our primary and secondary schools is the average verbal score of 17-year-olds. This score correlates with the ability to learn new things readily, to communicate with others and to hold down a job. It also predicts future income.

The decline has led some commentators to embrace demographic determinism — the idea that the verbal scores of disadvantaged students will not significantly rise until we overcome poverty. But that explanation does not account for the huge drop in verbal scores across socioeconomic groups in the 1970s.

The most credible analyses have shown that the chief causes were not demographics or TV watching, but vast curricular changes, especially in the critical early grades. In the decades before the Great Verbal Decline, a content-rich elementary school experience evolved into a content-light, skills-based, test-centered approach.

Cognitive psychologists agree that early childhood language learning (ages 2 to 10) is critical to later verbal competence, not just because of the remarkable linguistic plasticity of young minds, but also because of the so-called Matthew Effect.

The name comes from a passage in the Scriptures: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Those who are language-poor in early childhood get relatively poorer, and fall further behind, while the verbally rich get richer.

The origin of this cruel truth lies in the nature of word learning. The more words you already know, the faster you acquire new words. This sounds like an invitation to vocabulary study for tots, but that's been tried and it's not effective. Most of the word meanings we know are acquired indirectly, by intuitively guessing new meanings as we understand the overall gist of what we are hearing or reading.

The Matthew Effect in language can be restated this way: "To those who understand the gist shall be given new word meanings, but to those who do not there shall ensue boredom and frustration."

Clearly the key is to make sure that from kindergarten on, every student, from the start, understands the gist of what is heard or read. If preschoolers and kindergartners are offered substantial and coherent lessons concerning the human and natural worlds, then the results show up five years or so later in significantly improved verbal scores. (Five years is the time span by which this kind of educational intervention should be judged.)

By staying on a subject long enough to make all young children familiar with it (say, two weeks or so), the gist becomes understood by all and word learning speeds up. This is especially important for low-income children, who come to school with smaller vocabularies and rely on school to impart

the knowledge base affluent children take for granted.

Current reform strategies focus on testing, improving teacher quality, increasing the number of charter schools and other changes. Attention to these structural issues has led to improvements in the best public schools, charter and noncharter. But it is not enough.

E. D. Hirsch Jr.
New York Times
September 18, 2011

E. D. Hirsch Jr., a literary critic, is the author of "The Making of Americans: Democracy and Our Schools."

Promoting Schools' Catholic Identity Key to Their Survival, Leaders Say

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Promoting Catholic identity in Catholic high schools and elementary schools is not just a good thing to do but a necessary action for survival, according to speakers at conference in Washington for Catholic school leaders.

The speakers noted candidly that the participants in the Oct. 2-4 conference at The Catholic University of America knew full well the challenges currently facing Catholic schools such as dwindling enrollments, rising expenses, and closures or threats to close.

But speakers at the "Catholic Identity of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools" conference also noted that these diocesan superintendents, college professors, high school principals and education researchers also are fully aware that Catholic schools have something unique to offer students that extends far beyond quality academics or even a faith-based education.

Bishop David M. O'Connell of Trenton, N.J., and former president of Catholic University, stressed that the mission of Catholic schools is to "proclaim the good news" and provide a "place to encounter God."

This has not changed, he said, "since Jesus told his disciples to go and teach all nations."

The bishop stressed that the mission or Catholic identity aspect of Catholic schools is "not a mere add on" but something that is fundamental to their very existence and sets them apart from other schools.

If Catholic schools aren't inspiring, engaging and changing lives, he said, they are "simply schools, that's all." Instead, they need to be places of learning that are "willing to educate and transmit faith in ways that are unambiguous."

Bishop O'Connell noted that this kind of dedication isn't just for religion classes either, but something that needs to take place throughout the curriculum, on the playground, and in faculty and parent meetings. He said teachers and administrators set this tone and thus advised school administrators to hire teachers who believe in the school's mission and to follow up with faith formation training programs and support to these teachers during the year.

He also said bishops should be visiting the schools in their dioceses to make sure the "faith-oriented needs are met" and should make the decision to close a school only as a last resort.

During a question-and-answer session, the bishop was asked what schools could do when the Catholic identity that they highlight doesn't seem to be something parents necessarily want.

The bishop responded by saying priests and other Catholic leaders need to "be shameless about promoting Catholic education."

College leaders who spoke at the conference sponsored by Catholic University and St. John's University in Queens, N.Y., said they saw the link between the work of Catholic higher education and Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

There is a "kinship between our enterprises," said John Garvey, president of Catholic University, who noted that all Catholics schools not only share the same mission but face the same challenges including the decline in the number of religious and the rising influence of secular trends.

Vincentian Father Donald Harrington, president of St. John's University, noted that "for too long there has been a great divide between Catholic higher education and elementary and secondary schools."He said "great things will happen" when these groups cooperate especially since they "share the sacred trust of educating young people."

To this end, Catholic colleges are conducting studies on Catholic education, providing student mentors at Catholic schools and offering teacher training and leadership programs for Catholic school teachers. He said St. John's also gives tuition discounts for applicants who are Catholic high school graduates.

Father Harrington noted that Catholic college leaders have thought long and hard about Catholic identity through their work in implementing "Ex Corde Ecclesiae," an apostolic constitution issued by Pope John Paul II that identifies the mission of Catholic higher education.

He said Catholic colleges should share their resources with their younger counterparts, "not out of charity but from the belief that this is important" and to "do all we can to support and continue Catholic education."

Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service
October 5, 2011