

Some Good Change | Celesta Martin

She stood tall and sweet in her white dress before the congregation. Softly, she spoke her vows of faithfulness to God and His people. Spellbound, I watched her — just a few years ago a child in my classroom, now a young woman taking this important step of baptism.

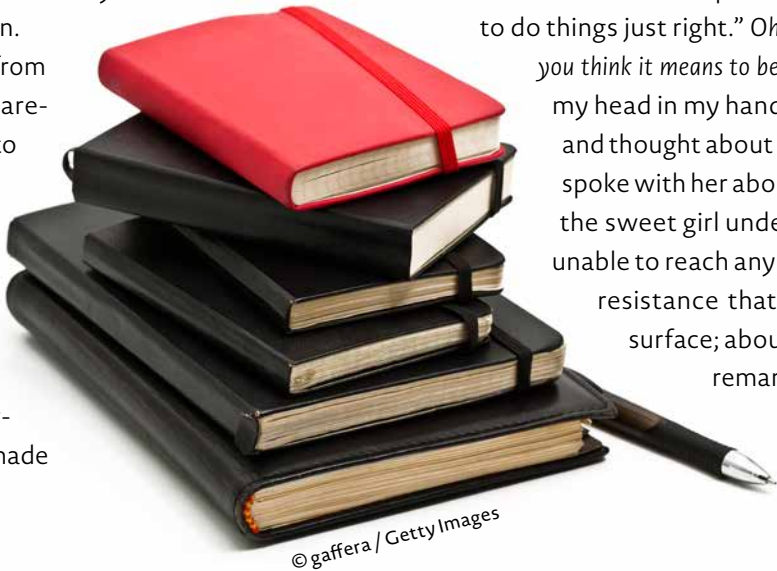
Suddenly a vivid memory came to me in the quietness and happiness of that moment. A stack of eleven journals sat on my desk. My substitute had given the students a journaling assignment. They were to write what they thought it means to be a Christian.

My students that year ranged from ten to twelve years old, from care-free to troubled, from innocent to rebellious. I would have hesitated to give them such an assignment, but despite my misgivings, I was eager to see what they had written.

One lively fifth grader was brief: “a sin-free life.” Her tow-headed classmate’s evaluation made

me chuckle and then sigh: “They are good. They go to instruction class. They wear suit coats.” My slender, athletic sixth grader who couldn’t hide the pain in his eyes, surprised me with his practical evaluation: “Usually drives an old car, loves God.” And the lad who rarely remembered what nouns are and didn’t finish his math lessons on time answered correctly, “He just walks the way God wants him to.”

When I opened the next journal, my heart sank. The penciled words were dark and pointed: “People who have to do things just right.” *Oh, child, is this really what you think it means to be a Christian?* I propped my head in my hands, stared at the paper, and thought about her closed face when I spoke with her about her attitudes; about the sweet girl underneath that I seemed unable to reach anymore; about the silent resistance that lay just beneath the surface; about her quiet but barbed remarks to her friends about my decisions. Was this another barb?



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Or was this an honest feeling? Regardless, the words she'd written accented my feeling of defeat.

The sunlight and summer breeze coming in the church windows pulled me back to the present. Watching the young woman before me, I knew that today her answer would be different. I was deeply thankful that when we are at the end of our weak and puny efforts, God is still working, and He keeps on working.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Another student, a thoughtful girl of eleven, had written, "I think a Christian should be kind and think of others first. People should be able

to see some good change in them and see them care and love each other."

"Some good change." 

Celesta taught middle grades for seven years and plans to teach upper grades in San Andreas, California, in the 2026-2027 term. Some of her favorite parts of teaching are playing ball with her students, reading stories to them, and teaching math and science classes. Home is in Colorado, and when she's not teaching, you will probably find her driving a tractor, irrigating, or working with cows.

Apparently not all "teaching" happens in the classroom.

Of Slumber Parties and Unlikely Endings | Judith Lehman

The clock—had there been one that worked—would have chimed 2:00 a.m. when I went to join the way-too-lively conversation on my porch. *The poor neighbors, after all!* The conversation was happening under a sheet sustained by its eight occupants. The air under that sheet was just as hot as the conversation. The group-imposed rule was whoever held the Luci Light had the right to talk. Everyone else was *supposed* to listen.

Apparently, there were cliques in Grade 8, and this was a concentrated effort to dissolve the disunity, air their grievances, and agree to pull together again. This was AFTER the midnight request for coffee, in which Humpty Dumpty the coffeepot spilled, and down came the coffeepot, coffee maker, and all. We had a black, gritty, glassy, hot mess to mop. Oh, the joys.

The event? The eighth-grade girls' slumber party.

I told them to please shut it down at three, to lie down and sleep. At 3:30 the voices were still animated. I shuffled my own blankets into the mix and said, "Please lie down and sleep!"

But one young lady didn't lie down. She remained hunched with her knees pulled to her chin, and I heard her snuffle. "Are you ok?"

"Yes, my nose is just stuffy." Hmm.

She took a trip to the outhouse with a friend. (One would never go alone in Latin culture, especially at night.)

The visit to the outhouse didn't help the stuffy nose.

I addressed her by name. "Would you like to go inside and talk about what's bothering you, or don't you feel like talking right now?" It was 4 a.m. She nodded yes. We went to the spare bedroom, shoving the many backpacks away to make a spot big enough to sit down.

"What's bothering you?"

"I miss my mom!" *We were fine until 4:00 a.m., and NOW we miss our mom? This is strange.*

"Is your mom at home?" As soon as the question was out of my mouth, I remembered. We had had a conversation about eight hours before. She shook her head no. By now the sobs shook her frame.

"Oh, that's right, she's in the States."

"Yes, and when you came out the door, I thought you were my mom." *What a sinking disappointment, the poor dear! To think for a split second that someone who had abandoned her five years ago had returned, only to realize it's the nagging teacher!*

"I'm sorry." I wasn't apologizing for not being her mom; I felt sorry that she had to face this incredible loss at 4 a.m. She

fell into my arms and sobbed disconsolately. I let her cry for a while and silently screamed at parents who sacrifice their children to the gods of money and the American dream.

"How old were you when your mom left?"

"Eight."

"With whom do you live?"

"My aunt and uncle."

"Do you get along with them?"

"Yes."

"Do you have communication with your mom?"

"Yes."

"Let's thank God for those blessings that you have."

Again, I silently screamed at parents who believe that their child is "fine" because they occasionally communicate with her, thinking that she is "in good hands." NO! NO! NO! A thousand times NO! Your presence would mean so much more.

"Is there something else bothering you besides that you miss your mom?"

"No. Just that."

"May I pray with you?"

Vigorous yes.

We asked the Lord to fill the hole in her heart, to make His presence and love real, to comfort her, to help her know that He will never abandon her.

*Can you feel the hearts of the children . . . aching for home, for something of their very own . . . reaching hands, with nothing to hold onto, but hope for a better day . . . crying, "Jesus! Help me! To feel the love again . . .!"*¹ 

¹Prayer of the Children, by Karl Bestor, 2003

Judy's roots are in the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania, but Guatemala has been home since 2004. She tends flowers and chickens and dogs and neighbor children, and teaches EFL to community children and adults.

What My Struggling Learners Have Taught Me | Bethany Beidler

Working with various needs in the classroom over the past years has taught me many things. I have often been the slow learner, groping for the best way to help a struggling child. Here are some things I am still in the process of learning.

1. I need to have my struggling child working at a level he can handle.

Sometimes a struggling learner gradually lags further and further behind his grade. Finally, we realize that we are trying to build new concepts onto a missing foundation. Because he has not mastered previous concepts, he is not prepared to master today's.

I remember facing this with a third grader. It felt as though each day I was leading her up to a ditch she could not jump and prodding her to try anyway. Of course, she "fell in," so we had to pull her back out. "How long can I keep up her enthusiasm for 'ditch-jumping'?" I wondered. Surely a whole year of repeated failure in her lessons would be very bad for her morale. After

discussing it with the board and parents, we concluded that second grade was the place for her. She needed to be at a level where she could taste success.

Even if a child must stay with the grade he is in, do not allow him to feel like a continual failure. Lessons can be modified to make them easier for him to handle. If we want him to be willing and inspired, we must give him work that he can successfully do.

2. I must give my struggling child the amount of work he can handle.

Without meaning to be unfair, we can be guilty of hitching our struggling students to a load they can hardly pull. Then we wonder why they seem so lazy and unmotivated. Remember that they often must work harder than an average student and with less success. Often when I cut a struggling child's workload down to something he can better handle, I reap these rewards: He cares more about details and accuracy, and he is more motivated and eager to please. Conversely, if he is

always snowed under, will he care about quality? There is no time to care.

Occasionally for a very overburdened, weary child, it can be helpful to make very large assignment adjustments for a short time. Once when I did this for a child who by all appearances was failing in math, I made a discovery. She did not need to have easier math if I just gave less of the hard math for a while.

Where should assignments be adjusted? Sometimes for a child who needs more practice in foundational subjects, I cut out science or social studies. Perhaps he will join us for class but not do the work, or maybe he will only do even numbers. For a dyslexic child who struggles to find answers in a story or text, I might aid his search with paragraph numbers. In reading, I might put Xs on parts or numbers he may skip, such as allowing him to do just two sentence answers for Part C instead of six or seven.

Work with the school's and parents' expectations, but hopefully, your struggling student can enjoy some homework-free days every week. Remember that sometimes less is more.

3. I must take my struggling child at a pace he can handle.

Sometimes lessons become a treadmill that do not allow a struggling learner to catch his breath—such as a third grader who does not know the facts in the 3 and 4 multiplication families and is supposed to be learning the 5 family multiplication facts today. Days do not stop, lessons do not stop, and the rest of the class does not stop. Sometimes you can keep moving forward and still redeem the situation with plenty of drill. However, beware of plowing on and on and piling confusion upon confusion. Stop and drill if you can. If the rest of the class must move on, perhaps you can stage extra drill at home. Or perhaps another subject could be trimmed to give time for practice in the trouble spot.

Pre-teaching hard concepts can also be a proactive approach to this problem. Make it a habit to work ahead instead of working behind. Look ahead in your books and attack difficult new concepts several days in advance of the lesson. By spending just a few minutes demonstrating a concept each day, you can clear away much of the confusing newness before he meets it in his lessons.



4. I must teach my struggling child good work ethics just like any other child.

Perhaps this is the balancer for the preceding three points. Make sure you have given this child a fair load. Then require him to pull it. He will be tempted to laziness just like any other child. Though the work may be difficult for him, this does not give him license to shirk. He may need to accept that he will have to put more effort into learning than his classmates do. Perhaps he will need to study his spelling words at home when his classmates do not, or do extra flash card practice that they do not need.

The good news is this: If he knows that you are proportioning a fair and possible workload, quite likely he will be willing to work hard for you.

5. I must not allow my struggling child to become a habitual guesser.

Some children simply do not ask enough questions. Perhaps because they are so often confused, they hardly differentiate between truly knowing and just guessing. Sometimes you might see a math fact sheet with twenty or thirty wrong, or an English diagram with words parked randomly in any open parking spot. Likely this child has quit trying to find logical answers and is simply guessing.

Try to nip it in the bud quickly. Paying attention to the first three points I have mentioned is a big part of the solution. Beyond that, work to make guessing an unnecessary option for them. Help them to find step-by-step solutions. Give them a place to look for the answers they do not know. Teach them to ask questions.

6. I must give my struggling child plenty of feedback, and much of it should be positive.

Praise for effort and improvement, even when the final product leaves something to be desired. Try to mix praise with direction for improvement. Stop by the child's desk and say, "Excellent job in Part A! Now would you look over Part B and see if you can spot any fractions that still need to be reduced?" Such comments give the message that you notice and care about what they are doing. The fact that the teacher notices should be something the child enjoys and values rather than something under which he cringes.

7. I must teach my struggling child in a way he can understand.

Do not confuse this child by immediately teaching him about all the different roads that lead to the same destination. But if you have persistently tried one way without success, perhaps a different approach will help. Check out other curricula for helpful methods for teaching a concept.

Do use visual aids! Draw pictures. A simple chalkboard sketch can illustrate United States geography from east to west or make a poem in reading suddenly become clearer. When my fifth graders studied Indian history, I used a white pencil crayon to draw a large map of North America on the board and divide it into sections for the different tribes. (This drawing can later be removed from the chalkboard with a pencil eraser.) As we studied the various tribes, volunteers drew small pictures of the Indian homes in each section. They also added other small pictures to illustrate key facts that we wanted to remember. I was pleased with the way the struggling fifth graders responded to this method. It seemed to rivet the main points better than the model Indian homes we had built the year before.

Sometimes instead of diagramming a given sentence, let your children build a sentence to fit a diagram skeleton that you provide. Coming at it from the opposite angle can take some of the fog out of diagramming.

8. I must not give up on drill too quickly.

Drill is not necessarily ineffective for a struggling learner. Perhaps he only needs five times as much. Figure out where he began to lose out and start from there. Give tiny baby bites, like one or two trouble facts at a time. As much as possible, keep it friendly, interesting, and low-pressure.

Before recess, smile: "Andy, what is 5×9 ?"

After recess, smile: "Andy, do you still remember what 5×9 is?"

Remember that miracles in a child's education often happen slowly through much effort. There are not often quick and easy fixes to learning difficulties. Sometimes time and diligent attention to detail are the best solutions. 

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MOUNT TAMBORA

THE MOST POWERFUL VOLCANO IN HISTORY

Sara Nolt

Powerful volcanoes have made massive marks on world history. Mt. Vesuvius wiped out the Italian town of Pompeii in A.D. 79, becoming one of the most well-known volcanoes of all times. Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980 and earned its fame for being the most destructive volcano in the contiguous United States. But strangely, the world's most powerful volcano in recorded history is not as well known. In 1815, Mount Tambora erupted, killing thousands of people and disrupting weather patterns around the world for several years.

Mount Tambora, located on the small Indonesian island of Sumbawa, used to be 14,100 feet high. In 1814, ten thousand people lived on its slopes in a town called Tambora. A small island. A small town. Not an especially large mountain. But they were about to set a world record.

In 1812, the mountain belched black smoke and rumbled from deep within. Over the next three years, the mountain erupted a few times but never forcefully enough to disrupt life on Sumbawa. On April 5, 1815, the volcano spewed hard enough that ash rained onto the island. This was the biggest blast to date, but it was only a foretaste of what was to come.

Five days later, on April 10, 1815, soldiers on the island of Sumatra heard a blast and thought it was cannon fire. It wasn't warfare. It was Mount Tambora—1,600 miles away—erupting in a super-colossal explosion that blasted 5,000 feet of rock and earth off its top. An estimated 24 cubic miles of *pyroclastic flow* (liquid rock, hot gases, and trapped air) shot into the air, some of it reaching the stratosphere. The volcano measured 7 out of 8 on the Volcanic Explosivity Index, the scientific scale that measures the strength of volcanoes. For comparison, the Tambora eruption was 100 times bigger than that of Mount St. Helens.

The massive volcano decimated the island of Sumbawa, killing the Tambora tribe who lived on the slopes of the mountain. For a full week, ash and other volcanic matter rained onto Sumbawa and neighboring islands. Tsunamis were triggered by the force of the blast, causing 4,600 deaths. Smaller eruptions continued throughout the summer—at the end of August, black smoke still hung around the mountain.

But the destruction reached far beyond Indonesia. The massive amount of matter blasted into the atmosphere would send devastation's ugly fingers around the globe.



Because it erupted in the days before instant communication, the rest of the world didn't immediately know what had happened. One of the first signs that something cataclysmic had occurred were the brilliant sunsets seen around the world, caused by the volcanic particles in the atmosphere. Even during the day, the skies were gray or oddly colored. Paintings from this era often include yellow or gloomy skies.

But the particles that gave beautiful sunsets also blocked the sun's rays from reaching the earth, cooling the earth. Historians call 1816 "The Year Without a Summer," and for several years after that, the climate worldwide remained affected. In the summer months of 1816, rivers in Pennsylvania froze. Children in Virginia went sledding in June, and on July 4, people moved indoors by fires to warm themselves during the celebration. The soil stayed frozen or snow-covered until midsummer in the New England states. At least one Vermont farmer froze to death in June during a snowstorm. Parts of Canada had a foot of snow in June.

John Quincy Adams spent the summer of 1816 in England and wrote on July 19: "The weather throughout the day was cold and showery; and the Season has been so unusual, and constantly cold, that fires have been kept without intermission in almost every house—I have not yet ventured to throw aside my flannel waistcoat, nor as yet for one night to discard the blanket from the bed."¹ He continued by saying that an Italian weatherman had predicted the end of the world would come on July 18 because of the death of the sun and had been imprisoned for causing alarm. "The churches and chapels have been unusually crowded."

Others recorded similar reports, such as Hannah Dawes Newcomb in New Hampshire, July 6, 1816: "Weather continues very cold. All nature appears encircled in gloom. Grass very thin. Corn so backward it does not appear probable there will be food sufficient for man or beast."

In India, excessive rain fell, washing into the Bay of Bengal and changing the ecology enough that cholera broke out. Other countries also had flooding followed by disease: in Ireland, rain fell for eight weeks straight, followed by an outbreak of typhus that killed 40,000 people. A Chinese poet who lived in that time wrote about the troubles of China's Yunnan province. Yunnan was a prosperous agricultural area, but it suffered from three years of crop failure following the volcano. As a result, many people resorted to growing poppies, a hardier plant than rice, and soon Yunnan became known for *opium* (an addictive drug made from poppy seeds).

For three years, unusual weather and poor harvests affected the world. With crop failures, hunger increased and riots broke out in Europe. In the United States, many New England farmers moved west, searching for better farming possibilities. In other areas of the world, people starved to death.

Mt. Tambora erupted again in 1967 and made rumbling sounds in 2011. Because of this, it is considered an active volcano, but seismologists do not expect it to ever erupt as violently as it did in 1815. ²

– Reprinted from *Homeschooler's Friend*, Summer 2026

The loudest sound ever recorded was the volcanic eruption of Krakatoa on Rakata Island in Indonesia on August 27, 1883. The explosion reached an estimated 310 decibels and was so powerful that it was heard 3,000 miles away. The eruption destroyed over 70% of Krakatoa Island, generated massive tsunamis over 90 feet tall, and caused more than 36,000 deaths.

– Encyclopedia Britannica, Wikipedia



1 <https://www.primarysourcecoop.org/publications/jqa/document/jqadiaries-v30-1816-07-p020—entry19?navmode=chronological> Primary Source Cooperative at the Massachusetts Historical Society. John Quincy Adam's Digital Diary.

Effective Feedback | Jonathan Erb

“They just took it from me,” Jeffrey wailed. “I went in to get paper towels to wipe the swing seats that were wet from last night’s rain. Till I got back, they didn’t want my paper towels, and they never even gave me a turn before the bell rang!”

First-grade teacher Ms. Lilly didn’t know what to do. Jeffrey was uncharacteristically upset, and she suspected mistreatment. Mikey and Richard were squirming in their seats and obviously knew something about it. In fact, all of the other first graders could tell those two were somehow connected to this thing.

So instead of devotions that morning, Ms. Lilly decided to unravel the case. Mikey and Richard claimed innocence, Jeffrey blamed them for his tears and felt deeply mistreated, and the whole class watched the drama. Indeed, it was quite an ordeal, with one student crying and the other two exchanging guilty grins.

Till the story was out in full and dealt with, the normal time for devotions had been spent, and so was Ms. Lilly. Jeffrey was still sniffing, Mikey and Richard were miffed, and the rest of the students were unnerved. Ms. Lilly wearily wondered what she had done wrong.

Giving correction is an important task of teachers. When children get together, someone needs to be the adult and call out improper social behavior. Here is a list of other chronic situations that often make up a teacher’s day and require direction and feedback.

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ▪ Forgetfulness | ▪ Noisiness |
| ▪ Laziness | ▪ Poor attitudes |
| ▪ Inattention | ▪ Not following directions |
| ▪ Pestering each other | ▪ Sloppy desks |
| ▪ Not helping to sing | ▪ Poor sportsmanship |
| ▪ Not raising a hand to talk | ▪ Not sitting still |

One trouble spot in the difficult task of guiding youngsters is the desire to be the student’s friend. While this desire is better than the alternative—not caring about a nurturing relationship—giving this notion an unhealthy amount of control creates situations where the tail wags the dog. Because of role reversal, some teachers have lost their authority and the respect required for classroom management.

Strive to be friendly, but not a friend on the students’ level. You are, after all, the only adult in a room full of juveniles. Most students are busy enough managing their own friendships without you being awkwardly in the mix. The teacher’s role actually excludes you from being a buddy on their level. You see, teachers must give grades, and BFFs simply don’t grade each other.

Here are four steps¹ to use when giving feedback or correction. Use them to address situations such as upset students who lost their spot on the swings, exclusion of others, not taking turns, missing assignment papers, or any other less-than-acceptable behaviors that require a teacher’s response.

These steps will help to give feedback in a brain-friendly, nonthreatening way. If students feel threatened, they will move into withdrawal or defensiveness. This position, of course, significantly limits the possibility of an effective outcome of your directives.

First step: the micro-yes.

Ask short but important questions. For example, “I have some ideas on how we can improve things. May I share them with you?” In the case of the stolen swings, it might be “Would you be ok with dropping this for now and going on with devotions? Great! Let’s do that, and we will figure it all out later.”

Asking for micro-yes has several effects. It lets the other person know that feedback or correction is coming and establishes that you are going to take action on the matter at a pace and time you determine. Also, it creates a moment of buy-in. In most situations, students will agree to a reasonable micro-yes question, provided it hasn’t already escalated into something enormous.

Second step: the data point.

Here, you should name specifically what you saw or heard, cutting out any words that aren’t purely objective. For example, “The assignment was due Monday morning. Today is Wednesday morning. I still don’t have it.” Or “You did not share the swings after Jeffrey went in for paper towels.”

Data-point type of feedback is different than “You aren’t

being reliable,” or “You shouldn’t be so selfish.” While those judgment calls might be true enough, they do not qualify as data-point statements and will likely turn your hearer into a defensive one.

The effect of providing clear data is that the focus shifts to factual information about behaviors that need to be changed. Making sweeping generalizations blurs the message, and the receiver likely won’t have sufficient clarity or agreement to change anything.

Third step: the impact statement.

In this step, you identify exactly how the data point has impacted you or others. “Since Jeffrey was really trying to help you, it made him feel bad when you wouldn’t share with him.” Or “Because of the lack of oral hygiene, people don’t enjoy being around you, and you take offense when they back off.”

We all crave understanding and the why behind a situation. The impact statement creates a sense of purpose, communicates meaning, and highlights the logic among the discussion points. It helps the receiver take control of the situation because now they understand what was going on and why there’s a problem.

Fourth step: wrap-up question.

Great feedback givers finish with an invitational question such as, “This is what I’m thinking we should do, but what are your thoughts on it?” Or “Does this explain it?” Or “Do you know what to do now?”

A wrap-up question invites a response of commitment rather than mere compliance. It opens the door to more problem-solving, if needed.

Effective teachers know how to give effective feedback. By following the steps given, students sense they are in caring hands. The teacher maintains the amiable authority required to lead students into further learning and growth. Don’t side-step these opportunities for significant learning! 

¹ Adapted from Ted Talk by LeeAnn Renninger, posted Feb. 2020

Father of five, Jonathan and his wife Ellen live in southwest Montana. As a former teacher, he agrees with the saying, “A teacher can leave the classroom, but the classroom never leaves a teacher.” He works for Christian Light as a school rep and is passionate about encouraging communities and teachers toward sustainable school efforts.



© 4x6 / Getty Images



Oh, the predicaments we sometimes get into . . .

A School Rep's Blunder, Redeemed | Ken Kauffman

Six months after visiting the Larimore school, I received a handwritten business letter from a Timothy Stoltzfus. He requested several copies of *LightUnits* for *Across the Ages* and *Neighbors in Latin America* as well as some history about Christian Light with a picture of the printing press. The letter struck me as fairly elementary and a bit strange, but I obliged the request with the help of the customer service department at Christian Light. Since the letter didn't include a phone number, I wrote a follow-up letter in which I apologized for taking so long and also explained that unfortunately I couldn't send him everything he requested.

When I began planning for school visits this winter, I recalled the letter from Timothy. Assuming that Timothy was either the school board chairman or the treasurer, I looked for a phone number to arrange for a visit. When I couldn't find one, I called the school to get his number. When the teacher answered, I explained who I was and who I was looking for. The teacher paused, then asked, "Well, how long will it be?"

I laughed and responded with, "Why do you ask that?"

She replied, "Well, he's in my classroom. Would you like to talk with him?"

I said, "Yes, please" and assured her it wouldn't be long. I thought—*what a devoted school board member—he's actually at school! This is great!*

After a little wait, a boyish voice answered, "Hello. This is Timothy."

Stammering, I said I was looking for "maybe his dad or Uncle Timothy?"

He replied, "This is Timothy."

"Hmm. I am trying to get in touch with a Timothy Stoltzfus

who wrote a letter asking for some information about Christian Light materials," I explained. "I wanted to make arrangements with him for a school visit."

He paused, "That was me. In our (Rod and Staff) English, we were supposed to write a business letter to someone. I chose you. My dad, Carl, is on the school board. You can call him. You want his number?"

"Sure," I sputtered. I was glad Timothy couldn't see my red face.

I wrote down the number and called Carl and explained all. He laughed and suggested that this will make Timothy's day! *First, he gets some books in the mail from Christian Light, then a follow-up letter from the rep, and now a phone call!*

Turns out that Timothy (13) was adopted from a foster situation and had been having severe relational issues and some troubles at school. His dad arranged that we meet and talked while I was there. I pray that this rep's clumsy blundering will turn out to be a blessing to a struggling teenage boy.

His teacher later explained she was delighted that all three of the seventh graders decided to write their business letters to educational publishing houses—Eastern Mennonite Publications, Rod and Staff, and Christian Light. She noted that all three organizations responded but only Christian Light followed up with a phone call, and a visit. ■

Names have been changed.

Ken is the husband of one, a father of six, a grandfather of fourteen, former school rep, services manager at Christian Light, and is the editor of LightLines.

Pedagogical Meanderings

The Dock

An Anabaptist Resource for Teaching and Learning

Named after pioneer Mennonite teacher Christopher Dock, thedockforlearning.org website provides resources and advice for conservative Anabaptist teachers, board members, and administrators. The website contains a forum, blogs, video series, and hundreds of documents and recordings, all available without charge

Federal School Tax Credit

Education Week reported that 31 states are on track to participate in the new Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA), a federal school scholarship tax credit program offered by the Trump administration. This program begins Jan. 1, 2027, and lets taxpayers donate money to an approved scholarship-granting organization (SGO) and then claim a federal tax credit of up to \$1,700. The SGO then disperses the monies to eligible K-12 students. For private school families, the scholarships could help pay for tuition, tutoring, classroom supplies, and other education costs. The program may also cover some homeschool expenses if states allow it. Supporters say the program will give families more education choices and lower costs. Critics say it could weaken public schools and shift federal tax dollars toward private and religious schools.

—Newsweek.com | EdWeek.org | CNN.com

Another Mouse Plague in Australia

Did the Outdoor Classroom article in the 2025-2026, #3 issue of *LightLines* about Australia's mouse plagues interest you? If so, read on. Mice are overrunning barns, pastures, houses, and roads in what is called the worst mouse plague in

western Australia's history. Investigators found eight thousand mice per hectare (2.5 acres), ten times the number required to declare it a plague. Heavy rains in April accelerated crop growth, which created the ideal environment for mice to multiply. Next summer is expected to be dry and hot as usual, which will likely end the mouse plague. In the meantime, in May farmers started using double-strength bait to keep numbers under control.

—phys.org

Imagine a School Without Teachers

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools has been promoted and praised by the Trump administration, but researchers say there's limited evidence the model works. Alpha School, a pricey private school based in Chicago, says it works. Using AI to instruct students with only software (no textbooks or homework), traditional teachers are replaced with "guides" who motivate students as they complete their virtual lessons. Alpha boasts that its model helps students excel in learning and also gain a general affection for school. In a survey of its thirteen Alpha schools around the United States, 94 percent said they "love school," with 60 percent saying they would rather go to school than on vacation.

—blockclubchicago.org

Mississippi Miracle

A surge in reading scores that has propelled Mississippi from last in the country in literacy to near the top. Experts point to a number of factors including phonics-based instruction, strong teacher training, high-quality pre-K programs, and a willingness to retain third graders who do not read at grade level, sets up young readers for success. 

—the74million.org



Ask Another is a question-answer space for teachers. Teachers are invited to pose questions on school-related subjects, offer responses to questions, or reply to responses. (LightLines will occasionally assign questions to experienced teachers for their qualified response.) Send questions or responses by email to lightlines@christianlight.org or by mail to LightLines Editor, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. (Try to limit responses to fewer than 400 words.)

How do you deal with feeling overwhelmed? How do you prevent burnout? (I do not have much mental space and have a low social battery.) What are some things you do to keep yourself motivated and inspired? — submitted at a teacher workshop

One common problem of burnout is focusing on what doesn't work and what all has to change. If we take notice of the good choices others still make, or the blessings God has given, we find a greater joy in being in the service of our Lord.

— Nova Scotia

Ideas:

- Be inspired by the songs you sing. Find the simple nuggets of truth God has there for you, for this moment.
- Trash some "extracurricular" papers after awhile if they haven't been checked.
- Do some extracurricular activities sometimes, even if you think you're past your limits.
- Think of what you would like others to do for you and then do it for others!
- Discuss problems with someone who understands you, keeps you on track, and brings you back time and again to God and His Word.
- Choose a diversion and discipline yourself to stop thinking about the problems at night and go to bed.
- Choose cheerfulness! Smile at the students, even when you feel otherwise.

- Remember, this may be the most influential day in one of your students' lives.
- Don't dwell on the fact that you are busy; much busier than many folks who fuss about being busy. Rather, thank God for work and the ability to do it.
- Instead of having a pity party when you feel peopled out, reach out to others. Choosing to do good changes attitudes. Resentment fades when I look for ways to bless. 

— Pennsylvania

Next Question: *I will be taking off a week for my sister's wedding. Any tips for securing a substitute? Any suggestions for preparing a substitute for effective teaching and ensuring things are in order when I return? (Supposing she's had very little teaching experience.)*

Please reply by September 25. Answers will be printed in a future issue of *LightLines*. Please respond with answers or new questions by email to lightlines@christianlight.org, by fax to 540-433-8896, or by mail to LightLines, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.

LightLines is published four times each school term by Christian Light, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22803-1212. (540) 434-0768. Ken Kauffman, editor.

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