

Ways to Enliven Your Teaching

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Do you sometimes feel as if you're in a rut? Do you wish that you had some new ideas or techniques to help you get through to students who "just don't seem to get it"? Do you dread facing the same old boring lesson plans every year, the same schedule, the same subject matter to be taught in the same way?

Don't despair! This issue will help you discover some new ideas and techniques to try. The suggestions made by our authors will spark your creativity, prevent burnout, and increase your effectiveness with students of varying abilities and backgrounds who learn in different ways.

The ideas in this issue range from an overview of a variety of techniques by William Green, the issue's coordinator, to cooperative learning by Phil Bassett, integrated thematic teaching by Tom and Kathy Roosma, Shirley Freed's interview with a teacher who uses a direct-instruction approach, and a potpourri of suggestions for the small school by Larry Burton.

One of the most exciting ideas, and one that is being received with enthusiastic support in several North American conferences, is teacher study groups. Rita Henriquez-Roark and a number of her teachers in the Carolina Conference report on their experience with this method, which provides teachers with hands-on instruction in new techniques, after which they practice the new approach in their classrooms. They then report to the study group on how it worked and discuss any problems that they encountered. As a bonus, such study groups provide collegiality and personalized support.

The teaching styles in this issue were selected by and reported on by education professors who have studied the research attesting to the effectiveness of the techniques, and by classroom teachers who have actually used them. In addition, the suggestions have undergone scrutiny to ensure that they are compatible with Christian ideals and principles. Many of them specifically stress character education and higher-level thinking skills, and incorporate some of the same techniques used by the Master Teacher.

Perhaps you feel concerned about how your board and constituency will accept new practices in the classroom. This can sometimes create anxiety for both parties. Most important is to know your people, and to present new ideas to them in a way that is comfortable and non-threatening. Work with your superintendent and principal, and keep channels of communication open to the board and parents. For some teachers, it is best to discuss the new techniques with them immediately. In other cases, it may be better to wait until you have some positive results and improved student work to display.

But do try some of these new ideas! They will enliven your teaching, and help you to better meet the needs of your students—from at-risk to those for whom English is a second language.

Of course, in so little space, we can only whet your appetite. You will want to explore and expand your repertoire of techniques by further reading, enrolling in seminars, and sharing ideas with other teachers. But even if you start small, wonderful things can happen. Not only you, but also your students will find school more stimulating and exciting.—B.J.R.