

# Voices

## The Teacher

PATRICIA M. DOMBART

### The Ultimate Punishment

I get a lot of mileage out of my days in Philadelphia Catholic schools. My public high school students are entranced by my stories about those days—about blue uniforms and white blouses, and no boys ever in the same classroom or even in the same building, and never any make-up or nail polish; about dances with priests and nuns as chaperones, and sewing sleeves onto strapless dresses, and swearing never to go to nightclubs in Jersey; about not talking during class changes and walking in two columns through the crowded halls with student council monitors every 20 feet or so to make sure no one broke rank; about immediate silence when a nun walked into the classroom, and standing to answer questions. My seniors love to hear it, and I even love to remember it.

Recently I remembered something else about those days: the ultimate punishment meted out to those students who refused to obey. They were sent to public school.

That's why I believe there is a certain poetic irony in former Secretary of Education Bennett's suggestion that Catholic schools take up the challenge to succeed where public schools have failed and welcome into their halls those who have dropped out or who are not achieving.

I love this plan. I like to fantasize about it, especially if the Catholic schools would have to operate under the same rules as those of us in the public domain. I'd love to see the skateboarder with the punk hairdo informing Sr. Tarcisius that he has five days to make up work for every day that he is absent, or that she can't turn him in for smoking because she didn't actually see him with the lit cigarette in his hand. I want to be there when Ashley explains to Sister that she will be missing two hours every afternoon because

of her Lamaze class and an hour every other morning because she has to go to her Drug and Alcohol Rehab group. I would be more than willing to teach all the nuns and lay teachers how to keep anecdotal records so that, if they ever have to go to an expulsion hearing, they will be able to handle the cross-examination of the student's team of lawyers.

I wouldn't even mind living with the stigma of failure, because if I could get rid of the students who miss three out of every five days, who consider their mere presence a reason for passing, and who challenge every rule, I could then concentrate on the majority of my students. I could give them enough writing assignments so that they become coherent writers and deeper thinkers. I could individualize; I could coach; I could teach.

I don't let my dreaming get out of hand, however, because I know that Bennett's suggestion will never work. Sooner or later Sr. Tarcisius would tire of catering to someone's civil rights and want to get back to teaching. And then she'd do what she always did—she'd send them to public school. □

Patricia M. Dombart is an English Teacher at Butler Senior High School, 106 Crosslands Rd., Butler, PA 16001.

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## The Principal

ALLAN S. VANN

### Let's Pull in Pullout Programs

For 14 years, I taught elementary school. During that time, I can recall no experience more frustrating than having to cope with pullout programs. We all know what these are: remedial, special, or gifted education sessions; band, orchestra, or chorus rehearsals; speech, adaptive physical education, psychological counseling; the list goes on and on.

All these programs are designed either to meet a child's present educational needs or to better prepare that child for schooling yet to come. It is extremely difficult to argue or find

fault with such goals.

As the '70s rolled into the '80s, attempts to provide for our disabled children—those with "special education" needs, suffering from emotional or learning handicaps—mushroomed in every school district in this country. About this time I moved from the classroom into administration, and I now see pullout programs from a different perspective. But the crucial question remains the same: How is the classroom teacher—who is held accountable for learning—to provide instruction, when children are constantly missing valuable instructional

time because of pullout programs?

Have we gone overboard—with the best of intentions, of course? I think so. We have provided remediation or enrichment to such an extent that we are depriving too many children of the richness of the classroom. Pullout children miss much of the interaction that goes on in a classroom—the "hidden curriculum"—which can be critical to children in their formative years. These children are usually pulled out during social studies and science lessons, thereby missing those subject areas that most often provide interaction; group project work; higher-order

thinking skills such as observing, classifying, and analyzing, and discussions about values, social issues, and interpersonal relationships. These subjects are invaluable in a child's education; too often the pullout child is not present when these lessons are taught.

How do we provide additional instruction to children in need without destroying the integrity of the homeroom class? Solutions seem to be in short supply. But there are remedies, however limited in scope. In my school, for example, we have heterogeneously grouped classes in all grades, but we departmentalize and ability-group for reading and math in grades 4 and 5. Research indicates that grade-wise ability grouping in one or

two subjects—with math and reading cited most frequently—has proven to be successful. I have combined my compensatory reading and math programs with this ability grouping, so that pullouts for reading and math no longer disrupt the homeroom teacher. The pullout children are now having instruction in these subjects at the same time as their peers. Another practice we follow is having band and orchestra rehearsals before school. We have also moved away from a narrowly defined "gifted" program to a broadly defined "enrichment" program, and whole classes or grades now participate in activities that previously engaged only a few pullout children.

Something's got to give! In trying to

help some children overcome problems, we fragment their days so much that we only create new problems. Whether the solution lies in ensuring smaller class sizes, providing instructional aides to work side by side with the teacher, brainstorming to discover new scheduling patterns, or simply realizing that classroom teachers can handle some of the needs for which we now pull children out, we need serious dialogue to solve this pullout maze. □

**Allan S. Vann** is Principal, James H. Boyd Elementary School, Elwood School District, 286 Cuba Hill Rd., Huntington, NY 11743.

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