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K. Jo-Ann Badley and Ken Badley

Slow Reading: Reading along *Lectio* Lines

THE MEDIEVAL MONASTIC movement preserved and developed reading practices—lectio—from ancient Greek pedagogy as a slow, mindful approach to reading for formation. This ancient way of reading, now better known as lectio divina, challenges the fast, pragmatic reading so characteristic of our time. We propose that the present moment may be ripe for educators to appropriate again lectio-style reading as an educational counterpart to the Slow Movement, whose growth in recent decades may indicate cultural openness to the recovery of more reflective and located practice. We begin by noting tendencies in the academy and the culture as a whole that indicate the need for slower, more thoughtful reading. We then note the attention that several authors have recently paid to reading with attention and thoughtfulness. After reviewing the elements and purposes of lectio divina, we provide brief narratives of our own attempts to implement and assess more thoughtful reading practices in education and Bible courses, suggesting ways that others might realize more fully the principles of slow reading in their courses.

Introduction: A Contrast of Two Cultures

A half century ago, C. P. Snow titled his book *The Two Cultures* (1964) to point to the gulf he saw between the sciences and the humanities. We use the same phrase to point to a contrast between slow and fast, to a choice our culture and pedagogy especially must make between a kind of learning and reading that fosters deep understanding and potential character transformation, and another, opportunistic kind of learning and reading that appropriates sources to meet a deadline.

We have all heard the commonplace that computer and communications technologies have increased the speed of life for anyone living in a developed nation. Waiting and moving slowly have gone into exile. Educators know that this increase in speed has not stopped at our classroom doors. Educators at all levels participate in and serve as first-hand witnesses to an emerging culture that endures no waiting and has no patience for going slow. Largely wrought by communications and computing technology, it offers real benefits, including important e-mails, engaging course wikis, and easier access to formal study for students in remote locations. Technology also brings the demand that we deal with nuisance e-mails, with Facebook invitations that test our professional boundaries, and with open computers in classrooms that tempt students to do online shopping and play Freecell.

But technology is not the only source of the pressure to go fast. An increasing number of students work during the semester. At the graduate level, almost all

of them do, wedging their studies in where they can. Some regularly tell us their epic stories of the difficulties they face getting to class, let alone to the library, with the consequent pressure on professors to base course assignments only on course texts or online resources (some of those stories are told with warmth and humor by Klose, 2010).

Working within these constraints, students feel the pressure to rely on abstracts or published summaries and reviews, as well as to skim and plunder sources rather than treat them reflectively. As a result, they rarely enter the great conversation with the authors who have shaped whole cultures, and they may graduate unaware that such a conversation even exists or that the invitation for their own presence in that conversation stands open (Adler, 1990). Indeed, a quick Internet search on *skimming* will net the typical student advice on how to skim and plunder; somehow appropriately, that search will also yield articles about stealing credit card information. Searching for the string *essay writing service* will open to the student a world of possibilities that, while readers of this journal may find them repugnant, nevertheless are sustained within the academic culture in which some of us work, move, and have at least part of our being. A recent debate in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* describing the work of “the shadow scholar” reminds us how easily students can gain access to such services (Dante, 2010). Thus, the culture outside the academy should not shoulder all the blame if students take shallow approaches to reading; people inside the academy have contributed to this mentality as well.

The Slow Movement may offer educators a contemporary countercultural antidote to fast education. At this particular cultural moment, Slow may possess sufficient cultural cachet that educators are able to re/introduce a way of reading that students will perceive as an invitation or opportunity to read, study, and move at a different speed, even in a different direction. Our experience in the classroom suggests that educators can recover and usefully adapt the ancient practice of *lectio divina* as a framework for slow reading, offering students a taste of another world.

Italy gave birth to the Slow Movement in the 1980s when, in response to a fast-food chain’s plans to open a store close to the Piazza di Spagna in Rome, a journalist asked why, if there was fast food, there was not also slow food. Slow Food’s advocates view it as *pleasurable, unmediated, and sustainable* and realize it in such forms as organic food and local farmers’ markets (Smith & Mackinnon, 2008). Nearly simultaneously with the growth of the Slow Food Movement, Italians began the Slow Cities Movement, calling for cities to encourage tradition, quiet, dignity, hospitality, and self-propelled transport (Honoré, 2000). In the years since Slow Food and Slow Cities began, the values of Slow have spread, albeit slowly.

The spread of Slow has been especially slow in education. At the time of writing, for example, brief essays on slow reading appear on both the Slow Movement website and in Wikipedia. One accessible book, *Slow Reading*, based on the author’s master’s thesis (Miedema), appeared in 2009. A few websites have made their appearance in the last year, for example, the Slow Book Movement site (Olchowski, 2010), whose inclusion of the word *movement* in the name seems somewhat ambitious in light of its being largely focused on the work of the

lone author who sponsors the site. The Slow Family Online site, which appears to draw from a broader support base than the Slow Book Movement, includes a section on slow reading (Slow Family Movement, 2010). Despite the Slow Movement's steady growth in areas such as food or cities and its having issued a call for slow schools, educators have been hesitant to adopt Slow. "It's Time to Start the Slow School Movement," appeared in 2002 in *Phi Delta Kappan*, a widely-circulated educational magazine (Holt, 2002). This single essay has served since as the main reference point for the few other writers who have explored slow education (Dyck, 2004; McGill, 2004; Mitchell, 2003; Scherer, 2006). The author of that first essay confronted the reality that any educator must face when contemplating slow schools: an educational culture obsessed with standards and assessment. As school jurisdictions have busied themselves, their students, and their teachers by increasing the number of assessments that students at all levels must undergo, schools and teachers have correspondingly rushed or felt rushed to show what educational policy-makers commonly call *results*. In short, today's schools have been encouraged to produce, not to reflect.

In 2004, two years after Holt's call for slow schools, Harry Lewis, a dean at Harvard, offered students the perfectly titled essay "Slow Down: Getting More out of Harvard by Doing Less" (Lewis, 2004). One might rightly consider Lewis's letter to students and Holt's *Phi Delta Kappan* article the original two (contemporary) documents in slow education.

While the sources encouraging slow reading are few, a growing body of literature about the delights of reading informs our project. In addition, research in critical thinking, worldviews, reading pedagogy, and the assessment of learning all relate to this call for slow reading (Adler & Van Doren, 1972; Biggs, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Hermida, 2009; Sire, 1976). One will also find recent discussions of the spiritual and political dimensions of reading with some discussion of implications for pedagogy (Coleman, 2009; Griffiths, 1999, 2002, 2009; D. I. Smith, 2007). These more recent titles perhaps indicate that the cultural receptivity to Slow is also becoming evident in pedagogy, although their authors do not use the terminology of Slow.

For years, readers of *McSweeney's Believer* magazine were able to find out what books Nick Hornby—author of *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy*, and several other novels—had purchased and what books he had read, a distinction emphasized in his self-effacing wit. In *The Polysyllabic Spree*, he wrote about a phenomenon that many readers will recognize:

attempts at reinvention that periodically seize one in a bookstore. When I'm arguing with St. Peter at the Pearly Gates, I'm going to tell him to ignore the Books Read column, and focus on the Books Bought instead. "This is really who I am," I'll tell him ". . . and if you let me in, I'm going to prove it, honest." (Hornby, 2004, p. 35)

Undoubtedly, Hornby will not be alone in admitting that his reading ambitions outstripped his reading accomplishments. Hornby focuses more on the delights of reading than on slow reading per se, but readers of his essays gain a clear sense that he enjoys what he reads and that he would rather savor reading, even if do-

ing so implies never achieving the perfect alignment of his two lists. Hornby's column no longer appears in the *Believer*, but McSweeney's offers two delightful collections of his columns besides the one just cited (Hornby, 2006, 2008), and his columns are at home in a long tradition of writers who narrate their praises of specific works by other authors.

Several recent and contemporary writers speak of their formation in the tradition of delight. In *Crazy Talk, Stupid Talk*, Neil Postman (1976) included an "autobibliography" in which he briefly reviewed the nine most important books he had read and the impact of each on his thinking. Similarly, Bruno Bettelheim, the well-known advocate of reading aloud to children, wrote "Essential Books of One's Life" (1990), an essay in which he praised and reviewed several books that enlightened him about his "most pressing problems" and helped him "put [his] world in order" (p. 97). More recently, Alberto Manguel has shared his own love and joy of reading in a number of volumes, such as *Into the Looking-Glass Wood* (1998), *A Reading Diary* (2004), and, more recently, *A Reader on Reading* (2010). Those inclined toward historical detail will delight in Manguel's *A History of Reading* (1996).

James Sire's *How to Read Slowly* (Sire, 1978) is an example of a body of literature on reading reflectively and attentively, what some would call *perspectivally* or *worldviewishly* (many point to Harry Blamires's *The Christian Mind* [1963] as the beginning point of the contemporary conversation about reading and thinking from a Christian perspective). Sire's book also appeared for a short time under the title *The Joy of Reading* (1984). To Sire, the *slowly* in his title may be less his primary preoccupation and more his substitute term for *thoughtfully* or even *joyfully*, as in his short-lived alternative title. Nevertheless, reading slowly would certainly result as an early by-product of the kind of worldviewish and reflective reading Sire describes and prescribes. The enduring popularity of his title as a textbook in Christian worldview courses indicates that Sire struck a chord. This continuing conversation has recently taken a needed turn with the work of Steve Garber (2006), who links worldview to behavior, and the work of James Smith (2009), who points to the importance of desire and delight, both offering a counterbalance to the emphasis on cognition that characterized the early decades of this conversation.

Daniel Coleman begins *In Bed with the Word* (2009) with the story that gave birth to his title. On his second day at a missionary children's school in Ethiopia, a six-year-old boy does not appear for the morning attendance. The school officials find him in bed in his dormitory room, reading his King James Bible—as best he knew how, for he held it upside down. When they ask why he is not in class, he answers that he is in bed with the Word. We will not spoil Coleman's story further than we have, but his point is already clear: reading in particular ways produces particular ends—comfort and safety in the case of the boy in Coleman's story. Coleman situates his treatment of reading among the themes of contemporary culture, and his own themes are at home among those of the other books we have commented on herein: vulnerability, delight, reflection, and humility before the written words of others. Without reference to Slow, he offers his readers a warm invitation to slow and thoughtful reading.

In *A Theology of Reading*, Alan Jacobs (2001) responds to modern and post-modern approaches to hermeneutics by outlining a “hermeneutics of love.” In his effort to find right connections between knowledge and love, he creates conversation among such students of reading as Alberto Manguel, Jean LeClercq, Simone Weil, and Mikhail Bakhtin and argues for attentiveness and deep reverence for texts. In a later article that appeared in a special issue of this journal, Jacobs (2007) summarizes his book and extends its arguments from reading to classroom teaching. He again points to qualities such as attentiveness and practices such as relishing the text being read. While he does not make reference to the Slow Movement, he does refer to *lectio divina*, and, on our reading, his overall project fits perfectly with the goals of Slow.

Miedema draws readers of his *Slow Reading* (2009) into quite a different kind of conversation from that created by Jacobs. He speculates about the future of reading in a world where people increasingly read text from screens, noting at one point that “the essence of hypertext [is] to point the reader away from the page being read” (p. 28). That is just one of many insights Miedema offers. Interestingly, Miedema works in the world of hi-tech, and his book is not the jeremiad of a technophobic bibliophile. In just 80 pages Miedema offers direction to librarians and educators and encouragement to anyone who believes that Google is making us stupid (Carr, 2008) or that today’s professors are “the last professors” (Donoghue, 2008).

Paul Griffiths’s *Religious Reading* (1999) is particularly instructive for this project. He distinguishes between consumerist reading practices and religious reading practices, arguing that religious reading of the Bible is an integral practice for Christian formation. Religious reading is a slow reading that entails re-reading and memorizing the canonical texts of a religious tradition. He goes on to argue that this particular reading purpose has distinct implications for Christian institutions, especially for pedagogy and epistemology, but even for the kinds of books that are produced within such a tradition.

In effect, a discussion of slow reading, which the Slow Movement inspired us to consider for the classroom, exists elsewhere; it simply is not labeled under the heading *slow*. From Augustine (1996) to Manguel (2010), scholars and popular writers alike have addressed the question of how we will read from a variety of perspectives and with varied purposes. We join a long line of readers who invite others to delight in and be formed by such reading practices, recalling with them the importance of careful attention when we read.

The Ancient Practice of *lectio divina*

Lectio divina is an ancient Christian practice of reading. To use Leclercq’s description of the practice, the pray-er moves through an exploration of the holy words, using commentaries to understand (*lectio*), to saying the words, even repeatedly, so that they are remembered (*meditatio*), to be led finally to prayer (*oratio*) (Leclercq, 1958/1959). Alongside physical labor and the liturgy, *lectio divina* figured centrally in monastic life of the middle ages (Cummings, 1986). Leclercq argues that the “ancient Christian theme of Christ the Book” made *lectio divina* an appropriate monastic practice (Leclercq, 1984, p. 240).

There is evidence as early as the Rule of Benedict (who died in 547) that reading played an important role in monastic life, but its use became more standardized in the 12th century through the influence of *The Ladder of Monks* by Guigo II (on reading, see chapters 48–49 in Benedict, 2001; Guigo II, 1981). Schneiders (2002) suggests that *lectio divina* begins even earlier, with the desert fathers (Schneiders). However, reading in this way did not originate as a uniquely monastic practice but was modified from Greco-Roman educational practice; the classical myths were simply replaced with biblical texts (Marrou, 1982; Young, 2004). The term originally may have referred to the authoritative content of Christian reading—the *sacra pagina*, the Bible—but eventually it came to mean the process of Christian reading (Irwin, 1993, 2000). The purpose of such reading in either a Christian or a Greco-Roman context was formation by submitting oneself to the authority of the text, with the result that, as Leclercq (1961) notes, there existed within monastic culture a tension between “the study of letters,” and “the exclusive search for God” that called for complete detachment (p. 22). In the ancient world, one read to be persuaded to live in a particular way, in contrast to modern practices of reading where one typically reads to be informed. In either context, reading has a cultural agenda (Pike, 2006).

As the Christian church commonly understands it, *lectio* involves four steps. The first step, reading, involves coming to an initial understanding of the sense of the passage. The second step, meditating, implies attending carefully, even studiously, to each of the words. Thirdly, one enters into a dialogue with the words, a step often resulting in prayer. Finally, the reader allows the words to move him or her to contemplate God. As Cummings (1986) notes, the steps are better understood as “degrees of responding to [God’s] word” (p. 14). Schneiders (2002) describes it as “slow, leisurely, attentive reading” (p. 140). One can see how *lectio* built on ancient pedagogy, where all reading was done slowly and aloud, and where students learned to read by memorizing classic works, focusing first on letters, then on words, and then on phrases. In modern contexts, some add other steps to the practice of *lectio*, for example, choosing a comfortable place in which to read, and acting on one’s reading as the final step. But with four stages of reflection on a single text, *lectio* forces a reader to go slow. The books most often used in Christian practice are Scripture, but other important treatises are also read this way with profit (Gillespie & Ross, 2004). In the words of Michael Casey (1996), one is “choosing a companion for a long journey,” a description intimating that frivolous or shallow texts will be inadequate (p. 14).

Some advocates connect *lectio divina* with the fourfold meaning of Scripture, which distinguishes the literal sense of the text from its three spiritual senses: reading for faith (the allegorical sense), for love (the moral sense), and for hope (the anagogical sense) (Casey, 1996; Keating, 1985). This distinction may have been customary within monastic practice, but it is not essential to the reading method itself. In recent practice, *lectio divina* has seen a resurgence of use in a wide variety of applications ranging from parish work (Martini, 1987; Polan, 2003) and spiritual discernment (Bamford, 2006; Belmonte, 2000; Butler, 2000) to improvement of marital communication (McDonald & McDonald, 2009) and developing deeper understand of films (Pacatte, 2008).

Reading along lectio Lines: Adaptation of *lectio divina* to the Classroom

We have both attempted to adapt slow reading practices in our work with students, one of us in a seminary and the other in a school of education. In both cases, this attempt has implied close attention to “classic” texts, obviously the Bible in a seminary setting, but using other primary literature in philosophy of education courses.

Reading Classics in Education

At some point in their degree, students in the program in education in which I (Ken) teach must take three 1-credit courses focused on questions of faith and learning. Professors use these courses to treat a range of questions, from God’s existence, to technology, to faith and gender, to understanding faithful witness and teaching in public school settings. We include these courses in our curriculum to help our students—some of whom do not claim Christian faith—to think biblically and theologically about education. I view these courses as an opportunity for my students to engage in less mediated and hurried reading, in favor of more pleasurable and sustainable reading of materials with less pragmatic content. The courses can function as a green space in an otherwise packed and busy program focused on preparing educators. Given those departmental and personal course purposes, I have introduced *lectio*-like reading by requiring students to purchase and read just one textbook per course. In different iterations of the course, my students and I have read Rotelle’s translation of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* (Augustine, 1996), Salazar’s translation of Melanchthon’s *Orations on Philosophy and Education* (Melanchthon, 1999), and Cheshire and Heath’s translation of Erasmus’s *The Education of a Christian Prince* (Erasmus, 1974). As my students and I have approached these texts, I have stressed that we would read not so much for information as for formation and transformation.

To begin, students complete close readings of the text to gain an initial understanding. Ideally, their close reading, if done in an attitude of listening and humility, provokes questions and dialogue with their classmates, resulting in transformation of their thinking and being. I usually teach these courses in an online format, where I must work without the usual facial and bodily indicators of familiarity with the reading and engagement with the ideas. However, the discussion forums, written assignments and course evaluations indicate that at least some students have engaged deeply the challenges of such reflective work. I require students to complete a second reading in a dialogue with the text, remaining mindful of changes in their own dispositions. I continue to search for written assignments—whether summaries, responses, applications to contemporary settings, or essays about influences and implications—that assess these *lectio*-like approaches to classic texts more authentically.

Recognizably, this approach has its limitations. We need to choose texts worth attending to, a view in accord with that of Melanchthon (1999), who recommended study of “only the best” books (p. 72), what Griffiths (1999) calls a “stable and vastly rich resource” (p. 41). If we are to attend carefully to texts, they cannot be frivolous, shallow, or inappropriate texts; in fact, such texts probably

would not bear up to deep reading. In the semester during which I write these words, I required my students to purchase and read one of two possible titles by living Christian educators (Stronks & Stronks, 1999; Van Brummelen, 2009). I would not have chosen this semester's textbooks if I did not believe they deserved careful study, but I suggest that a *lectio* approach to reading is less appropriate in these cases, where, compared to works by Augustine or Erasmus, tradition does not recognize my choices as classics.

At the same time that I call for close reading and respect for the text, I do not want simply to reinforce the cognitive status quo or watch my students abandon their critical faculties; I need to remind students that critical thinking remains our concern even though the texts we read are among the most respected texts the tradition has given us. I expect students to read critically and, at points, to read against their texts (Ricoeur, 1957), even those texts which the tradition counts as classic. Tied to this concern, I have struggled to know what advice to give students regarding secondary sources. I want them to apprehend the primary source, in some sense, on its own terms. But, while some students benefit by placing themselves in the path of a classic author without guidance from secondary sources, other students benefit from translators' and editors' introductions to classic texts. Obviously, no one approach works best for all students, and I will continue to teach within the tension of knowing that commentators will open up the original text for some students, producing good dialogue and understanding, while possibly closing off a space of potential encounter for others.

Lectio-like reading of educational texts may produce good fruit, but both students and teacher must answer the practical question of assessment. Worded most bluntly, my question becomes, how do I assess slow reading or reading for transformation? As I noted, our degree requires these courses. I have offered a kind of *quid pro quo* where I ask students to read slowly and twice in exchange for a lower-than-usual total page count in the course. I have suggested that time often given to skimming and appropriating secondary sources for what many in education call the "lit review" (survey of research in the area) could be given over to repeated and more careful reading of primary sources. I have structured syllabi and class discussions to bring students back to a familiar text with a new question. And I have found in my courses the same distribution of students one might find in any course: some want to learn and even undergo transformation; others want only a credit, as easy a credit as possible in some cases.

Even in view of these concerns, I have observed that slow reading offers significant benefits to students and professor alike. Some students have reported changes to their worldviews as a consequence of their engagement with these texts. I have found new joy in reading my course textbooks. On the other hand, some students have reported that these courses simply do not work; they have found Augustine, Melancthon, or Erasmus only marginally useful to their thinking as educators. I will shoulder the responsibility for that failure rather than assign it either to the texts' authors or to my students. And I will continue to seek ways to adapt and implement *lectio*-style reading, even with works by contemporary authors and even in the three-credit core courses in ethics and in philosophy of education that I also teach in our program.

Reading Ruth

Students in the masters in divinity program in which I (Jo-Ann) teach must take a two-credit course to learn how to read Old Testament texts for Christian faith formation—for personal development, but primarily to teach and give leadership in Christian communities of faith. The curriculum specifies the Book of Ruth as the curricular site for this study. I have developed the course to encourage understanding, meditation, and dialogue with the biblical text, outcomes similar to the results of the first three steps of *lectio divina*. During the first class period, we read through the whole book aloud together from the Jewish Publication Society's translation (*Tanakh*, 1985). I chose this translation because my students are unlikely to be familiar with it, and the impact of another faith tradition on translation will help them encounter in a new light a story they may already know well. By highlighting the roles of different characters in photocopies of the story, I can assign different roles to various class members; reading the Book of Ruth aloud works especially well because so much of the story appears as dialogue. The students without reading assignments are invited to read along silently in their translation or simply to listen. As we make our way through the text, anyone can interrupt the reading to ask questions by raising a hand. We record these questions and may even have brief conversations about them to clarify the issues being raised. When students have come from very religious homes, this openness to a dialogue with the biblical text is an important initiation to a new way of reading. Most of the issues commonly addressed by historical-critical commentaries arise in this initial reading.

Over the next four weeks, students post observations and questions about the four chapters of the Hebrew text of Ruth, one chapter per week, using a class wiki. Some students make long posts and others just ask brief questions; I leave it open how much students must contribute, but every student is to make some contribution every week. The year I introduced the wiki I received several appreciative comments about the new technology, although these comments seem less of a novelty three years in. Certainly, required participation on the wiki ensures that students are prepared for class. For introductory Hebrew students, this is an opportunity to attend carefully to each of the words. The online component offers an opportunity for students to work in the Hebrew text alone, although that is not essential, and many students use a variety of translations, comparing the choices of different translators for Hebrew constructions. In class, we discuss the issues they have raised or I call attention to other matters that I consider important. I find this the most difficult stage to guide and monitor effectively; we would all rather move into a dialogue about the broader meaning and implications of the text. Perhaps in this we are truly children of our age.

The online/in-class dialogue also introduces each student to an expert reader. Each student chooses a commentator from a list of three that I provide to accompany their examination of the text. I want the students to think of their study of the biblical text as participation in a conversation within the Christian tradition, and reading the commentary provides them an opportunity to experience reading with a gifted reader. Using a variety of commentaries also provides the basis for a richer conversation online and destabilizes the impact of any single

commentator (Burdon, 1999). As we work through the book in class, we compile a list of themes that the Book of Ruth seems to address. This list typically includes themes such as the place of the foreigner in the community of faith, the relation of human effort and God's provision, the relation of grace to law, the character of an idyllic community, and the cost to marginal persons of sustaining such a community. The list varies somewhat from year to year, depending on the cohort of students, but students usually raise the themes that readers of the Book of Ruth have historically raised. As we work through each chapter, we note the words that substantiate or call into question particular themes. By the end of the semester, each student will document in a personal commentary the significant issues that have emerged in their own reading of Ruth as a permanent record of their work.

Another assignment in the class requires students to bring to class and briefly describe artifacts they have found in their own world that connect with themes or ideas from the Book of Ruth. Every year, students bring a variety of film clips and music, but we also have enjoyed discussions provoked by a brochure from a care-home for the aged, by the parallels between gleaning and dumpster-diving, and by blogs about infertility. This exercise presses students to identify the places where the biblical text creates dialogue with our culture, and it begins a discussion of how this text might shape our everyday life.

The major writing assignment in the class presses students further into a dialogue with this biblical story. I divide the class into three groups to study commentaries on the text by readers who self-identify as either Jewish readers, feminist readers, or postcolonial readers. Each student prepares a research paper that identifies both the principles that govern the way that the particular community reads and the results of that reading for the meaning of the Book of Ruth. This assignment is possible because plentiful secondary literature exists for Ruth. The students working within each tradition combine their results to create a panel for the rest of the class. Over three weeks of panel discussions, we gain clarity about how different readers of Scripture make decisions about meaning, and we form criteria by which we can judge good readings. For our class, this becomes an intense dialogical process, but it is a dialogue that is not possible without the detailed attention to the words that comes before it.

Using practices that encourage slow reading in biblical studies—especially a course where we are ostensibly studying the text in the original language—is a natural choice because the course focuses on one primary text. However, the Book of Ruth works especially well for several reasons. First, Ruth has the advantage of having been read for a long time and by a great variety of readers; anyone wanting to think deeply about this little story will find lots of help available. While secondary literature has the potential to detract from the process of slow reading, used well, it can contribute to a more reflective and located reading. Certainly the ancients used commentators to aid their understanding. Second, Ruth runs to only four chapters; by comparison, a similar curricular task using Romans works less effectively because we cannot as intentionally study 16 chapters in a 13-week semester. Third, Ruth is a narrative with all the ambiguities of a story, and thus, all its possibilities of meaning; a narrative is especially appealing for many of my

students whose first language seems to be cinema. Overall, it is a good choice as “a companion for a long journey” (Casey, 1996, p. 14).

The course learning activities have cognitive goals with outcomes that can be evaluated, but they are aligned with the first three steps of *lectio divina*. I am seeking to teach my students both skills and information because I think both are essential for formation of faith (Griffiths, 1999, p. 60). However, because I teach in a seminary, I work with students who begin with an acknowledged love of God (and Scripture), a love they tell me is deepened by this pedagogy. While I would be uncomfortable listing love of God as a curricular goal on a course syllabus—how would one assess it?—I welcome it as a course outcome all the same. As one student said as she left the classroom at the end of a recent term, “I’m changed.” For a professor, that is gratifying.

Conclusions

Our pedagogy proposals connect to a very old conversation within Christian education: how do we live well in our culture, receiving the gifts it offers while discerning and correcting for its shortcomings? The technology of our culture is here to stay. The pace of our society will require constant effort to temper. We suggest that slow reading encourages learners to take time to reflect on their place within this society by attending carefully to important voices from the past. This educational practice enhances our ability to clarify and focus on the Christian values we confess. When the monks reconceived Greco-Roman curriculum, they kept its practices. We now face the task of reconceiving educational practice to create learners who will live out of rooted reflections on perennial human questions and current culture. Ironically, recovering ancient ways of reading may assist us to do this. Reading slowly is certainly not the only possible avenue of response to the speed of our mainstream culture but it can guide educators to find more reflective approaches to the important texts of our disciplines. Our call for a return to slow reading, recollecting *lectio divina*, is really a call to participate in our culture in a way that discerns its strengths and weaknesses. Like the Slow Movement, slow reading brings more pleasure and helps sustain students as they, like all of us, negotiate the demands of contemporary life.

Several questions remain to be answered. First, there are pragmatic questions. How does this practice reshape our understanding of the reading process? Is the aesthetic character of reading an important educational value? How do we assess reading that is meant to form rather than just to inform? Second, if we assign course texts with sufficient gravitas to warrant this kind of reading, we will often discover a gap between the context of the writer and that of the reader. How do we teach into this gap so that we do not simply reinforce historically held conventions? Third, our experience with this approach to reading has opened for us the broader question of how teachers and professors use textbooks in general. When we tell students, “Please read chapters three and four by Monday,” how do we expect students to read? What kind of reading do chapters three and four deserve? In 1980, Stanley Fish famously asked, “Is there a text in this class?” In view of our attempts to use *lectio divina* type reading, we find ourselves glossing Fish’s question and asking, how is there a class in this text?

Finally, this kind of reading does not only form students. It also calls teachers and professors themselves to move into deeper levels of formation, transformation, and interaction with materials so that they can model deep reading with their students. In the end, we believe that this kind of reading will make a difference to our own engagement in our academic culture.

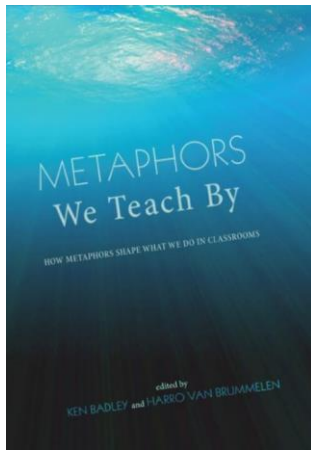
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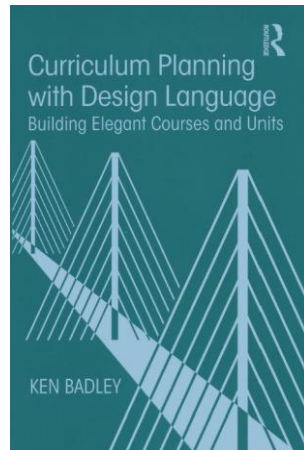
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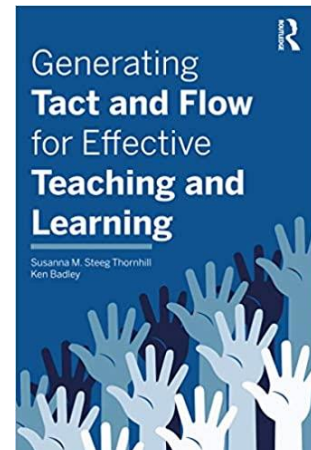
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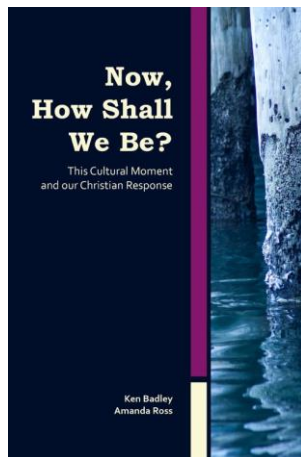
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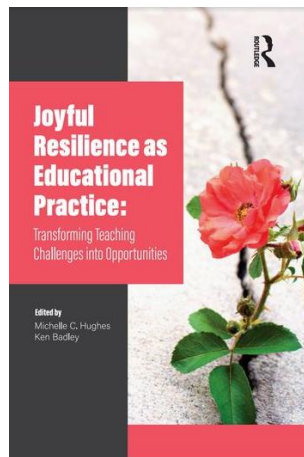
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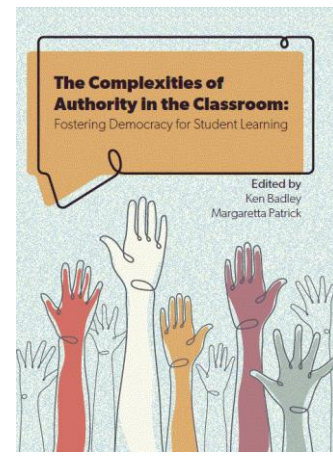
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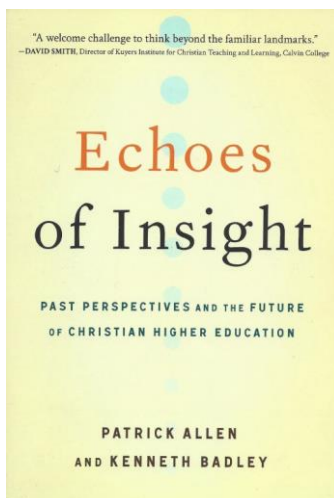


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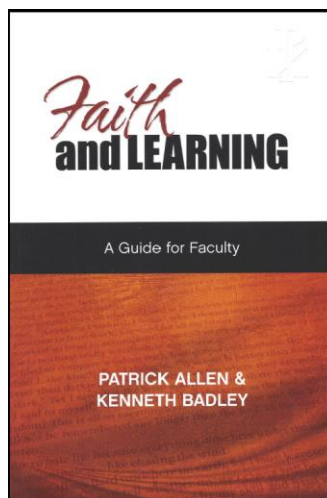


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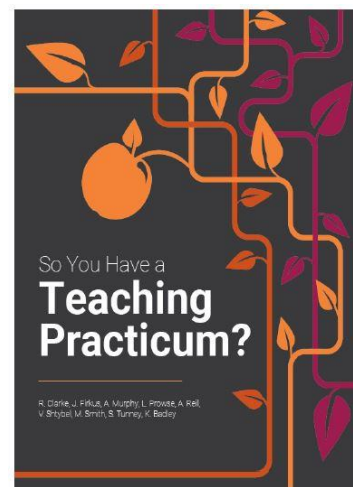


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