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Review of International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Beliefs

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International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Beliefs

Helenrose Fives and Michele Gill (eds), New York: Routledge, 2015, pbk, ISBN 978-0-415-53925-8, 514 pp.

This is the ninth title to appear in Routledge's Educational Psychology Handbook Series, and it is the first I have read. Its 500 pages are solid both in the word-count sense and in the density of the prose of the 60 contributors. Clearly, this book will serve for years to come as a reference volume that every education library and many education researchers should own. But it may also serve as a textbook at the graduate level, perhaps even as a demonstration of capable research writing.

Fives and Gill have organized it well, following their introduction with "The Foundations of Teachers' Beliefs Research" (chaps 2–4). At some points, Buehl and Beck's fifth chapter, "The Relationship Between Teachers' Beliefs and Teachers' Practices," echoes what one might read in this journal's pages about realizing a Christian worldview, a point to which I will return later in the review.

Section II, "Studying Teachers' Beliefs" (chaps 6–9), focuses on methodological questions, and Section III explores "Teachers' Identity, Motivation and Affect" (chaps 10–13). As do the chapters in all the parts of this volume, the chapters here offer the reader thorough reviews of the research relevant to the questions under discussion, and always in readable, engaging prose. Section IV, "Contexts and Teachers' Beliefs," reviews the research related to teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (chap. 14), classroom climate (chap. 15), assessment (chap. 16), and the school contexts in which teachers work. The last two sections of the book, "Teachers' Beliefs about Knowing and Teaching within Academic Domains" (chaps 18–23) and "Teachers' Beliefs about Learners" (chaps 24–27), continue in the same mode as the first four sections. The book does not taper off. Throughout, this *Handbook* shows evidence of careful editing. In short, order it today.

For educators in various Christian traditions willing to go on a bit of an adventure, this solid title will provide hours of interesting reading about teacher beliefs. I suggest the word *adventure* because nowhere in these 500 pages will a reader come across the word *worldviews*. A significant number of readers of this journal and its predecessor journals work with the concept of worldview as if it were a natural part of everyone's everyday lexicon. We often talk and teach as if teachers wake up in the morning and ask, "What ways can I realize my Christian worldview in my teaching practice today?" At that, when some of us think about worldview, we may

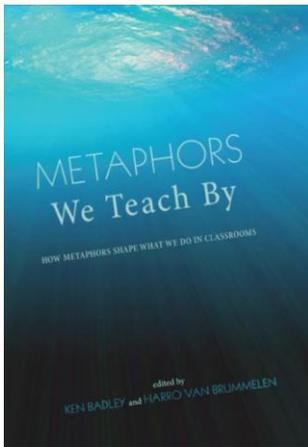
still be thinking mainly about epistemology, ontology, ethics, history and the like, the questions of being and meaning that James Sire identified decades ago in his first volumes. Much of the research reviewed and reported in this book makes clear that teachers are more likely not asking those questions (even if their practice implies that they have answered foundational questions in certain ways). For those readers open to new ideas, this book has the potential to clear up of some of our misconceptions about the importance of worldview thinking in short order.

But this *Handbook* reveals two more truths for Christian educators who love the concept of worldview. First, it shows that we may have sold ourselves short as Christian educators for failing to see that the field of teacher beliefs is both larger and more of a whole than we have seen. For example, those who work with pre-service teachers likely introduce Bandura's concept of self-efficacy to those we teach. His work is important, and we want teachers to understand it. That's all to the good. But do we treat self-efficacy beliefs as a stand-alone topic or do we see them as but part of a large cluster of teacher beliefs about curriculum, instruction, assessment, the classroom ethos, the political, social and fiscal settings in which educators work, and most of all, perhaps, about students? In response to seeing that question in this book review, we may be inclined to offer a quick, affirmative answer—that we see the big picture. But the chapters in this book will show us that we may not have recognized the actual size of the big picture. Or, to write confessionally rather than accusingly, at least I had not appreciated the size of the teacher beliefs big picture before reading this volume.

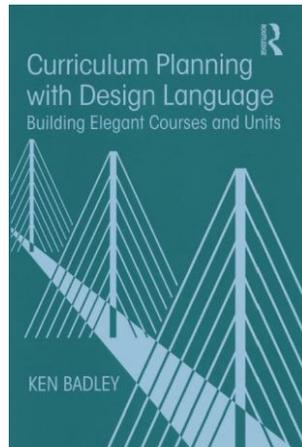
The second sobering truth is that the focus in some circles on teachers' worldviews—as understood narrowly—has perhaps reduced our contribution to the larger conversation about teacher beliefs. I stand with those who believe that we ought to think about the ultimate purposes of our work and the foundations on which that work stands. So, yes, let us remind people to ask the most fundamental worldview questions. But given that thousands of educational researchers and teacher educators worldwide identify as Christians, can we offer more cups of cold water to the wider educational community by conducting and publishing research related to the whole field of teacher beliefs? I don't personally know any of the contributors to this volume, and I recognize that some likely name Christ and already are doing what I have called for here. Whatever the number, I would love to think that more of us would contribute to this field.

The contributors to this solid volume offer riches for all educators. For readers of this journal, they also offer an invitation—to participate in a wider conversation about teachers' beliefs than we perhaps have been inclined to do thus far.

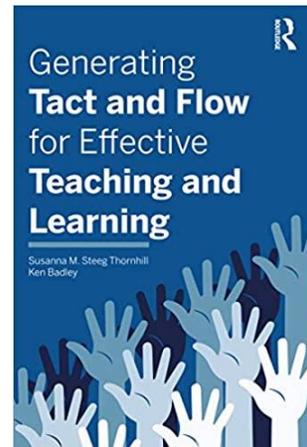
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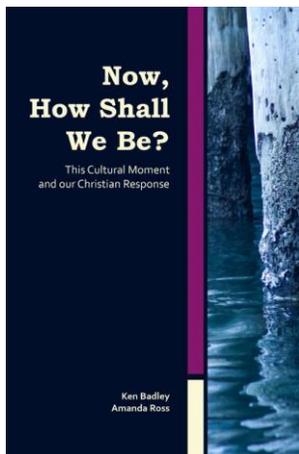
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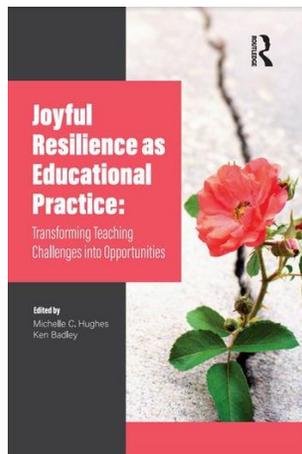
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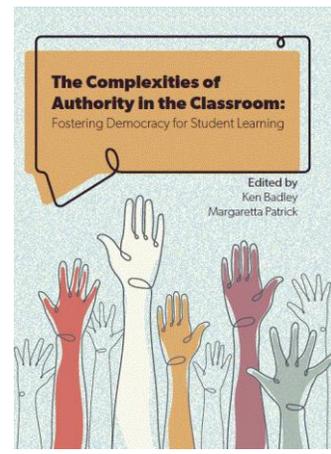
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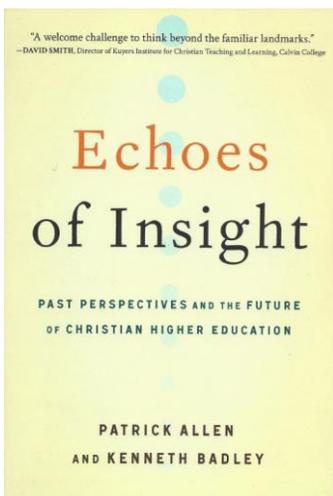


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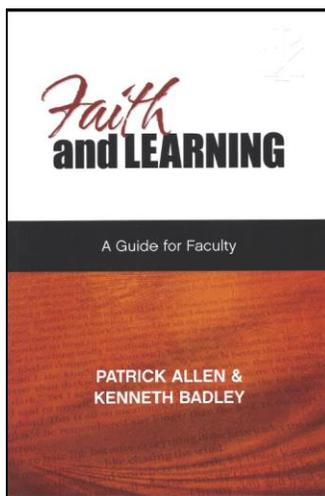


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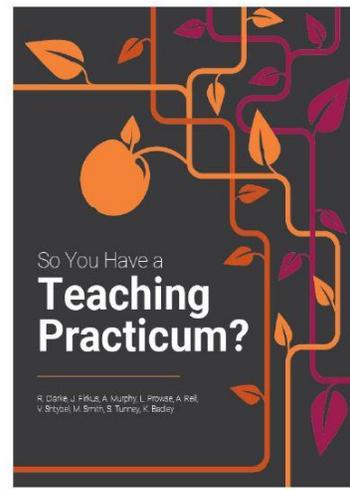


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