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Abstract

What is a nurturing, reflective, Christian teacher? An inquisitive group of teacher educator scholars from Christian colleges and universities sought to investigate this question during the 1990s. They wanted to better understand what it meant to teach in the image of the Lord Jesus Christ and follow His example. Jesus was thoughtful, reflective, and nurturing. Scripture tells much of his reflections about the world He was observing and the heart of humans. Therefore, these teacher educators aspired to better understand Christ-like reflectivity. The resulting conversation and investigation was an exciting one, but one not without some speed bumps along the way.

Christian, Reflective, and Nurturing: That Is Who We Are!

Daniel C. Elliott and Harro Van Brummelen

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Let us tell the story from the beginning. In April 1992, the Calvin College Center for Christian Scholarship sponsored a conference on teacher education in Christian colleges and universities that resulted in a book called *Educating Christian Teachers for Responsive Discipleship* (DeBoer et al., 1993). Two of the presenters (and chapter authors) were Gloria Stronks and Harro Van Brummelen. Afterwards, Gloria and Harro saw the need for holding more regular conferences for Christian teacher educators (as had been done sporadically in the 1970s). They set about to organize what they hoped would become a biennial conference, and had the moral support of Karen Longman of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. Without any organization to give formal backing, Gloria and Harro sent out and adjudicated paper proposals, prepared a program, invited Wheaton's stalwart Arthur Holmes to present the keynote address and managed to break even financially on a successful though fairly small conference held at Trinity Christian College in Chicago in May 1994.

Almost all attendees of this first symposium were teacher educators in member institutions of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. However, they came from varied backgrounds and the presentations shared were equally diverse. What they had in

common were their commitment to exploring and developing Christian approaches to teacher education.

At one point in the three-day meeting, Harro and Gloria called all conferees together and said that they felt it would be helpful to follow up the Calvin Center book and publish the presentations as a journal of proceedings. They asked for volunteers to serve as its editor and producer. The silence was deafening! But after a few minutes one person spoke up: Dan Elliott. His department chair and dean had sent him to the conference as a new faculty member and were encouraging him to present and begin to publish. At the conference he presented an investigative report "To Teach Christianly or to Teach Christianity: That Is the Question." In the meeting, Dan broke the silence by asking some questions. He was not volunteering to edit the proceedings, but he was curious about such a project and what would have to be done to make it a reality. Opening one's mouth has consequences, and within half an hour Harro had convinced Dan that he was the one for the job, despite his greenness in higher education.

Putting together a journal of proceedings is not a small task. Had Dan realized what it would require he would have just smiled and looked around like everyone else. However, several frustrating months did result in collecting papers from nine of the 36 presenters. The conference theme had been "Nurturing Reflective Christians to Teach," so that became the title of the book (Elliott, 1995). We worked that first time with the University Press of America. That required a purchase agreement for a minimum of 100 books by us as authors. So each author had to get his or her institution to buy about 10 copies. Dan ended purchasing a double amount to make it all work, but luckily his university agreed to sell them in the bookstore.

Arthur Holmes' presentation, "Teaching Teachers to Teach Christianly" became the first chapter of the book. Other chapters ranged from describing the

nature of a general curriculum course to learning, to investigating how to teach literacy and numeracy within a Christian framework, to reflecting on meeting the needs of exceptional children. In editing the contributions, Dan felt like Gideon who hid in a cave when God spoke and who said when called, "Who me? You can't be serious!" His career as a public school teacher, principal and superintendent had kept him in the practitioner side of education and not much on the theory side. Besides, even editing his dissertation had been a chore. So the fact that God used him for this task, Dan felt, displayed God's irony and humor.

Dan not only edited and published the proceedings, but also volunteered to host the next conference in 1996. (In the meantime, in order to keep the momentum going, Harro Van Brummelen organized a one-week workshop for teacher educators for the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities in August, 1995, held at a retreat centre in northwest Washington.) Dan and a committee organized the subsequent symposium in May, 1996, at Azusa Pacific University. Fifty participants attended this conference.

It was once again decided to publish the proceedings, with all 27 presentations (by 32 participants) to be included. Harro and Dan agreed to edit the papers, emphasizing that because of space limitations some papers would be considerably reduced in length. It is a tribute to the participants that all of them graciously agreed to what in some cases was "chainsaw" editing! However, we felt it was important to include everyone's thinking, not only because it was important for Christian teacher educators to have their voice in print, but also because everyone contributed something worth considering, something that challenged our individual and collective thinking. Dan set about the task of raising funds to produce the book ourselves. He invested \$5,000 of his own funds to do so-and lost \$1,000 on the venture. But he learned how to set up his own publishing company, which later published some of his other books.

This second volume, *Nurturing Christians as Reflective Educators* (1997), was much richer in its content than the first. The participating scholars were excited about building the literature pool for defining teaching from a Christian worldview perspective. Research, philosophy, and professional education methodology and content soon blended into a flurry of high minded

ideals about the possibilities for teaching and learning done from a Christ-centered perspective, even in public schools. One theme of the book became that teachers prepared from a Biblical-based perspective will tend to be more nurturing and more reflective about their professional practices and relationships.

Harro and I organized the book into five sections: nurturing to teach Christianly, foundational issues, nurturing for diversity, programs in practice, and experiences in the schools. Again, the spectrum of ideas and articles was broad. What was particularly rewarding was that the ideas of at least two contributions, by Donovan Graham and John Van Dyk, were later incorporated into full-fledged books relating to teaching Christianly, and that other articles continue to be quoted in various publications. Moreover, after Dan used the book in some of his philosophy of education courses, administrators contacted him for information from it to defend Christian staff members who were teaching in these ways in public schools but were being challenged by non-Christians for teaching religion.

In 1998, what was now called the Coalition of Christian Teacher Educators (CCTE) met at Wheaton College. Stephen Holtrop and Dan Elliot joined efforts in publishing the next proceedings. This time there were 75 submissions, so a blind referee process was instituted. In the end, 20 juried selections and two special contributions were selected. The lead-off presentation became Charles Haynes and Warren Nord work in connection with their new book, *Taking religion Seriously Across the Curriculum* (1998). The second special inclusion was by the Dean of Christian Heritage College in Australia. He had adopted our earlier books as texts in his institution. Though unable to attend the conference, he submitted his own analysis of teaching Christianly, and prepared a study guide posted on a website to go along with the book so institutions could do use the CCTE books as texts in their courses.

This third book, arguably the best of the three, was called *Nurturing and Reflective Teachers: a Christian Approach for the 21st Century* (1999). This time there was some financial help from two member institutions, but Dan still invested more than \$2,000 of his own money to publish the book. Dan was on a mission and wouldn't be dissuaded! However, after the next conferences at Covenant (2000) and Calvin (2002) no one was willing to pick up the torch to produce further

proceedings. However, the symposiums continue to be well received. As one regular participant has put it, "I need this biennial "fix" to be energized for the next two years."

The most recent symposium was held at George Fox University in Oregon. That conference, and especially the leadership of Scot Headley, has revitalized the CCTE. Scot had a vision similar to that of Dan and Harro, but recognized the potential of producing an ongoing refereed journal that could be produced electronically at a reasonable cost. The result is what you are reading right now! Dan and Harro express their gratitude to Scot and his colleagues at George Fox for re-lighting the torch and enabling its light to shine more brightly than before.

New CCTE participants have come along. Some of us 'oldies' have drifted into other ventures. But it is exciting to us to realize that the Lord was able to put into print a body of knowledge about nurturing and reflective Christians and how they can be best equipped as teachers. Interesting, some of the concepts about being nurturing and reflective are today also being discussed as "best practices" at secular research conferences and accreditation agencies. The CCTE, also through the present journal, has the potential to make a positive contribution not only to teacher education programs, but also to the wider conversation about teacher education and education in general. May God continue to bless the CCTE and its various initiatives.

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