

1999

Review of Harro Van Brummelen's Walking with God in the Classroom

Ken Badley

George Fox University, kbadley1@gmail.com

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REVIEWS

Harro Van Brummelen
Walking with God in the Classroom,
Alta Vista College Press 1998 pb 2nd.
ed. 242 pp ISBN 1-886319-07-3

For a decade, Christian teachers around the world have benefitted from the first (1988) edition of Van Brummelen's *Walking with God in the Classroom*. But new trends in educational thought, such as constructivism, have demanded response from Christian teachers, and

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have led to Van Brummelen's revising this popular work and adding some new material.

The original *Walking with God* carried enough theological, philosophical and practical heft to keep most Christian teachers busy for a long time. This edition retains the heft and adds several helpful features such as boxed chapter summaries and an up-to-date list of references specific to each chapter.

In the first edition, Van Brummelen had included many stories and vignettes to introduce or illustrate the variety of approaches educators take to the various subjects under discussion in his book. For example, the chapter on evaluation begins with two teachers in a staff room discussing their students' recent work and how the report-card grades should reflect that work. These two teachers take quite different approaches to grades and they define the meanings of grades in markedly differently ways. This fictionalised, but very typical, conversation appears in both editions of *Walking with God*. Several readers of the first edition have commented to this reviewer that the first edition was a service, in part because such stories made the philosophical debates of teaching more accessible. The second edition improves on the first by including reflection/response activities, in this case, to outline 'basic guidelines for a Christian approach to student evaluation'. The addition of these activities will receive a welcome from the many school staffs who use this book as part of their in-school teacher development program.

The theological, philosophical and practical heft I mentioned above characterise both editions of *Walking with God in the Classroom*. Although not a thick book by any means, Van Brummelen still manages to treat a variety of important questions quite responsibly. He begins with the foundational questions of the purposes of schools and the vocation of the Christian teacher. The core of the book is his detailed exposition of the character of classrooms, instruction, curriculum and evaluation. Many authors stumble when

they try to address both philosophical or theological issues and the practical issues of organisation, instruction and student assessment. Van Brummelen has succeeded. The foundational and practical aspects complement each other in this volume. Unlike many books about teaching, in fact, this one seems to connect the two without apparent effort or strain, and it gives the (correct!) impression that foundational discussion must be worked out in practice or it is useless, and teaching practice must be grounded or it is groundless.

The curriculum chapter includes Van Brummelen's discussion of constructivism, which did not appear in the first edition. He agrees with the constructivists' assessment of the shortcomings of traditional (and static) views of education and student knowledge. But he warns clearly about how constructivism removes any basis for a common moral vision.

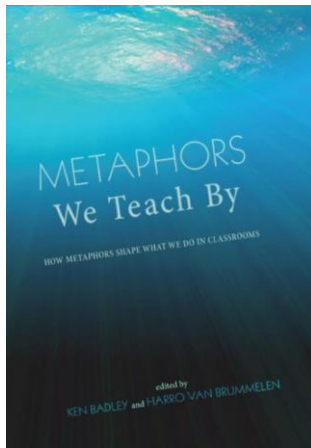
Both editions of *Walking with God* have as their penultimate chapter a treatment of the school as a learning community. Heavy revisions to this chapter have yielded an essay that teachers and entire staffs could read as a stand-alone essay on the school as a learning community.

Teachers in state-funded schools have used the first edition of Van Brummelen's book more than he had ever dared to hope. That welcome surprise has led to his including in the second edition a chapter specifically on the dimensions of teaching Christianly in state schools. This chapter, edited from a booklet first produced by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's Task Force on Education, offers some genuine insights into the situations contemporary teachers face, especially religious pluralism which it addresses in some depth.

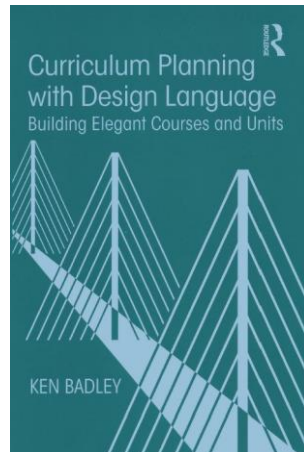
Should you buy this book if you already own the first edition? Yes. *Walking with God in the Classroom* has set a standard for a decade, and thousands have benefited from reading it (in several languages). The second edition offers teachers more of the same kind of valuable insight but makes it more accessible. Hats off to the author for bringing this title up to date.

Ken Badley

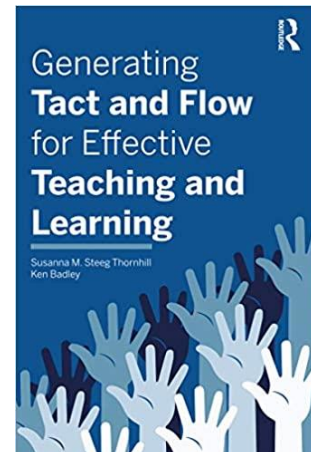
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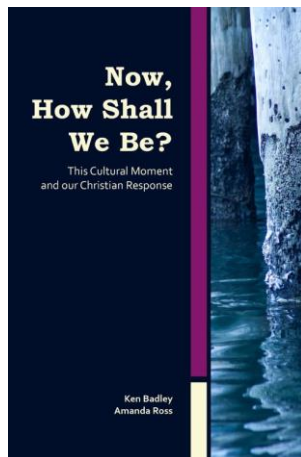
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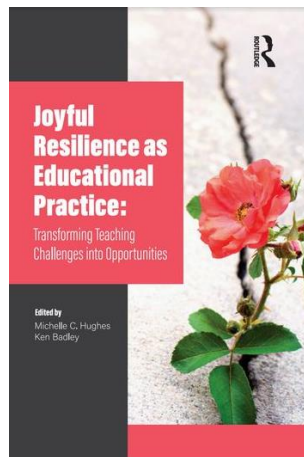
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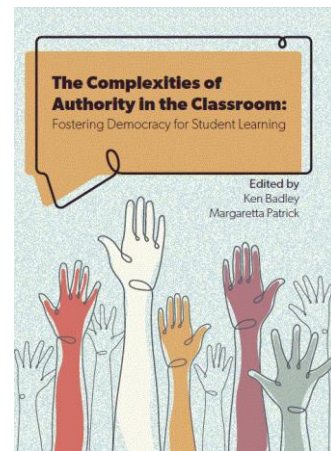
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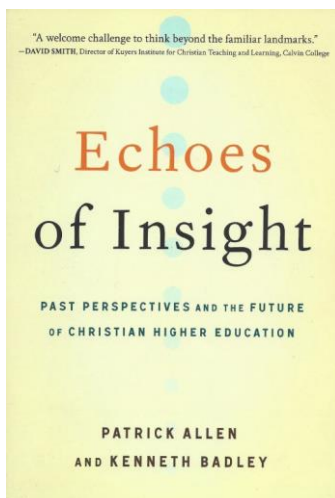


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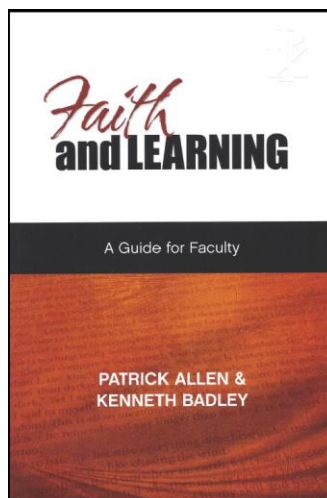


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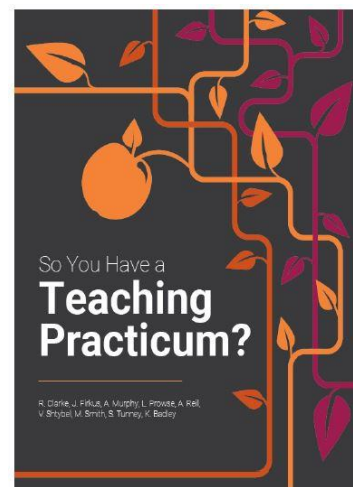


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