

Founder's Address: Putting Workpants on Your Worldview

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Abstract

This essay outlines the importance of the ICCTE, as a memoir in a keynote address at the 2022 ICCTE conference at George Fox University.

Keywords

ICCTE, people, conferences, journal, profession

ICCTE 2022 Founder's Address: Putting Workpants on Your Worldview

Christina Belcher, Redeemer University

In 2005, Harro Van Brummelen and Dan Elliott posted an essay on the introduction to what was then the CTE, in the first publication of what is now the ICCTE Journal, Vol.1(1). Now, 27 years later, this Founder's Essay continues that tradition, noting again the contribution of founders and members with passion in enlarging what is now ICCTE, from the perspective of an educational journeyer, one ordinary professor, carrying on the story of the original founders. This address was given at the 2022 ICCTE conference at George Fox University, furthering the historical record of growth as an organization that is more than a structure of presence, but a beacon of worldview, activity, and support. The ICCTE community is a place in which to be, to become, and to belong.

Introduction

Since this is my address, it may be helpful to begin by knowing something about me as a Christian educator who has been involved with ICCTE since its beginning. Many people have assisted in forming the foundational moments of my journey, and since I am a people person whose mantra is to bring wonder, truth, justice and reconciliation into my pedagogy and practice, I do name some of these trailblazers. We are fully human, but we fail in often telling others of their precious part in our own journeys. This address will unfold my personal journey, ponderings, and reflections since I first began to come to ICCTE planning events for assisting teachers to teach Christianity in 1992.

This journey will unfold the following:

- My personal worldview

- Founders and Scholarship: Past and Present
- ICCTE conferences and professional development
- My Teaching & Learning: Looking Back and Moving Ahead,
- The ICCTE journal
- Future Ponderings about ICCTE

Considering Christian Education: Captivated by Scripture

King James Version: 1st Peter 2:9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, **a peculiar people**; [the NIV changes this wording to a chosen people], that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;

We are human beings with human doings. We do something in the world based on our calling. Peter calls us to be and to engage the world as "peculiar" (KJV); a chosen people (NIV). We need to put workpants on our faith centered worldview and lean into life from that foundation. Hence, I have grounded this address for us all as peculiar people under the question:

How do you put workpants on a worldview?

Beginning with who I am:

In my early days as a Christian, I remember wondering what made Christian education and its

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people “peculiar”. At the ripe old age of 29, and a newly minted member of the family of God, I decided to put workpants on my worldview and check it out. I had previously been trained to teach in a public institution, but had never experienced a Christian one, so I enrolled for a Masters in Worldview Studies at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. I had many great mentors whose influence assisted in forming my view of Christian educators.

Some are no longer with us, but their words live on in my soul, such as the late Albert Green, Louis Smeedes, and Gordon Spykman. I also am blessed with the gift of being able to share discourse with living mentors of Christian education in my educational pursuit of what it means to teach Christianly. Ken Badley, Harry Fernhoudt, Jim Olthius, Cal Seerveld, Neil Postman, N. T. Wright, and Brian Walsh were my teachers. In them I saw a different worldview than the one I had formerly experienced; one that produced great joy and at times great disequilibrium, as we are all human! My classmates from my ICS years, David I. Smith, Samson Makado, and James A. K. Smith shared my experience there. Al Wolters, who later became my colleague, was also central to many of our conversations.

That worldview, which I first experienced at The Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto, of Christ being central to “every square inch” of education, is immersed within this address. My journey flows from a past, present, and future lens. It may perhaps bounce about a bit because it is a reflection, a truth, and a journey of my impressions of ICCTE, and its importance. So be forewarned.

The ICCTE audience represents a body of Christian educators who work with souls seated in chairs or at desks from kindergarten to their PhD’s, and who strive to represent the presence of God within teaching, spiritual and intellectual growth, professional and personal learning, and scholarship. You hold the souls of the future generation in your hands.

Teaching and Learning: Looking Back and Moving Ahead...

My working relationships as part of Christian educational institutions are divinely appointed for

a purpose and a plan, and I have been blessed abundantly by mine. One of these human blessings is Dr. Bev Norsworthy. In 1997, the Lord called me to work with Bev in New Zealand at MASTER’S Institute. We had met at the International Christian Conference in 1996 in Australia and were immediately connected by our common beliefs and passion regarding Christian education. Working with Bev was the formative highlight of my life, both personally and professionally. She is a born leader, a wonderful visionary, and most of all, has a heart that is full of the love of God. She is a consummate teacher, a mentor, and I learned, and continue to learn, so much from her. Bev and I also attended the last conference at Mount Vernon University together, and we, with our spouses, enjoyed a longer visit of fellowship.

Between 1998-2002, I also was blessed by working with Dr. Richard Edlin in Australia, as part of N.I.C.E., where I taught courses on Biblical worldview. Richard’s sense of humor, and the many road trips with Richard, Ken Dickens, and Rod Thompson added insight to my thoughts about future endeavors in Christian education.

In 2002-2008, I was called to Trinity Western University (TWU), where I worked with Harro and Ken Pudlas. These were formative in the fire years. I learned a great deal about myself, about life in Christian work, and also made a friendship of four women who continue to be lifelong friends. We called ourselves “The Thinklings” – a pun on C. S. Lewis, - and we met monthly to share and write papers together. We also began a Women’s Group and the Gender Institute at TWU, and here, my love for scholarship really blossomed.

From TWU, God called me to Redeemer University. Here, I have collaborative engagements with my peers, Phil Teeuwesen, Sean Schat, Terry Loerts, and Lisa Devall-Martin. I am grateful for still being invited to faculty lunches, brain storming sessions, and writing partnerships. I love my colleagues deeply and am grateful to be with Lisa and Sean at this conference, while also collaborating on presentations with my other two colleagues, Phil and Terry, who cannot attend in person, and with one of my former students, whom I now mentor. ICCTE has become a whole department affair in the Redeemer School of Education. I thank God for that.

Early Founders of ICCTE – We Are People with A History

My introduction to ICCTE emerged through one of my instructors in professional development when I was an elementary teacher. In my first course at ICS, I met Harro Van Brummelen. Harro was a founding member within the body of Christian educator gatherings. We started a friendship that lasted many years, crossed many continents, and led to my being a member in ICCTE. Harro began as my professor and ended up as my boss while at Trinity Western University! We now offer the Harro Van Brummelen Scholarship for new Scholar's in his memory. But I want you to know why. To know why, you need to know more about Harro.

This Harro Van Brummelen Scholarship creates a space for Christian educators for generations to come to hone their craft, find fellowship, and engage work with those who also desire to further the fingerprint of God into their educational practice. But many who did not know Harro, may not know that he contributed to us all in as many ways as he did. He was not perfect. He was authentically human. And he was a faithful force for Christian education. He put his thoughts onto paper, publishing nine books between 1986-2002. Each of these offered a lens of intentional focus for a Christian-minded educator. From each of these books, I gleaned precepts for Christian education that have served me well, and hopefully, have also encouraged those whom I have taught. I am sharing these with you.

1986 – *Telling the Next Generation: Educational Development in North American Calvinist Christian Schools* – a publication of his Ed. D. thesis – focused on the significance of having a history in North America. I knew little about that history in my past educational background. I came to learn that many Christian educators have never experienced Christian education. That is why I chose to be educated from both perspectives. I wanted to see how “peculiar,” chosen people, educated others. The precept this book provided to me was we are all living history. We play a part in Christian education, and we should write that down for others.

1988 – *Walking With God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Learning and Teaching* – provided teachers with a frame of mind for seeing God in all they do as they instructed children, in order to teach from the foundation of their faith. And this begins with a mindset for learning from which one can teach. The precept I received here is that having a framework; a call for teaching, is very important to our practice. That is why I constantly revisit my metaphor for teaching of bringing wonder, truth, justice, and reconciliation to education – the links between God and his creation – to my mind and practice.

The first edition did receive an upgrade to a second publication in 1998. Interesting to me was the change in the subtitle: *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Teaching and Learning*. This text provided Christian teachers with a framework for thinking about the whole person being central to education in the classroom, focusing on metaphors for teaching, curriculum planning and a focus on student learning. It connected aspects of pedagogy to human development. The precept I have taken away from this publication is that once learning is intentionally foundational to our teaching, our teaching should match our framework, purpose and metaphor for how we teach. Teaching itself is a worldview platform.

1990 – *Christian Schooling: Education for Freedom* – was written with John Van Dyke and Stuart Fowler. This book focused on the spirit and intentionality of Christian education for pursuing what was good and restraining what was not. The precept I gleaned from this was that spirit and intentionality are a force for public good, and to bless the world through education is a noble goal for a teacher.

1994 – *Stepping Stones to Curriculum: A Biblical Path* – 1st Edition – put focus on worldviews and knowledge. This came out following a course I took with Harro. I had some work published in this version. The precept I found here is everyone has a worldview, and we cannot take it for granted, as it will permeate practice and what is valued as knowledge.

In 2002, *Stepping Stones to Curriculum: A Biblical Path* – 2nd Edition – focuses more specifically on

curriculum and design, with questions to guide reflective practice. It contained vignettes of teachers rather than curriculum examples, which were more appropriate to the time. Steve Baily and I made suggestions about revisions to this edition. The precept I gleaned here is that reflection and honest scrutiny of our teaching through reflective practice is essential to how we design our teaching, and how we engage others to think.

1997 – Harro wrote *The Ideal of Christian Schools* with Arnold De Graaff, and Henk Van der Laan. This book was a short follow up from an early Christian conference. This book formed the precept that Christian conferences were worthy of being written about! We should write, as well as teach.

1997 – *Nurturing Christians as Reflective Educators*, written with Dan Elliott, was a compilation of papers given at the 1996 International Christian Education Conference, in Sydney, Australia. I have fond memories of that. It ranks as the best conference I ever attended. The precept I received from this conference is a spiritual family who sings, prays, agrees, disagrees, and loves in spite of it can be life changing. This remains as the best conference I ever attended and was truly of international focus.

Overall, these experiences have shown me the power of like-minded gatherings by a group of people who want to include God in their everyday acts of seeing and being as they lean into life. I hope that more scholarships that further any of these precepts may emerge in ICCTE. Feel free to donate on behalf of one or be the founder of a new one.

Present Founders and ICCTE Conferences

Ken Badley, Scot Headly, Beverly Norsworthy, Linda Samek, and others, by grace, continue to mentor me (even without their knowledge or constant presence), within ICCTE conferences, with their allegiance to Christian teacher education. You continue to further my professional thinking. My journey reflects the inner drawing that ICCTE has instilled in me regarding embodiment of fellowship within a worldview that resonates within professional development and faith. ICCTE conferences are not

just “professional” development. They are relationship and soul food as well.

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I have been to many other conferences that purport to be professional development that but did not really develop me in much.

Many consisted of racing between buildings, watching the clock, and becoming lost, (a spiritual gift of mine it seems!) - with no time for fellowship at all. ICCTE conferences value relationships and fellowship with people in the body of Christ. Meals are not the only time for fellowship. A time for fellowship is built into the conference. As we are learning in this digital age, face to face engagement with people matters. The people of this ICCTE community have provided wonderful memories of fellowship within a Christian community of faith. I fondly share a few personal examples of that!

At an early ICCTE conference in California, I met Linda Samek and Eloise Hockett. I have looked forward to seeing them at each conference since. We shared a wonderful trip to the botanical gardens in Pasadena, eating in a café with roaming peacocks between the tables, and travelled the pier at the end of Route 66 to Malibu Beach. I have the sun hat I bought there with me! Linda inspires me as a role model in her quiet grace, boundless work ethic, timely response to any inquiry, and generous spirit. Eloise emits peace, patience, and time for others. I hope to grow up to be just like them, but it may be a little too late for me to do that!

When at the conference at Le Tourneau in 2010, I held my first alligator, and Ken Pudlas took the photo to prove it. Ken and I have shared wonderful road trips to many conferences and have been firm friends both during and since TWU. Bill Boerman-Cornell, our current president, and I have served on other boards together, and share a love of language, books, and storytelling.

In my experience, ICCTE conferences gave me a place to feel at home; to nourish my soul, to pray together, and to continue to discuss what is significant within and about Christian education. We all have mentors with a pen, those who have gone before us, whose readings also shape our souls, and bring to our minds how to wear a worldview. But I found people who put workpants on their faith-centered worldview here at ICCTE.

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To date, there have been 16 ICCTE conferences. I attended every ICCTE conference but two

between 1992-2022. These conferences informed my journey as a primary school teacher, a Tertiary educator, and a professor of education across three land masses. Now, retired, I am simply, but exuberantly, a “peculiar” Professor Emeritus.

ICCTE Journal:

In 2009, Scot Headley and I found common bonds around the ICCTE Journal. Under his guidance I became editor from 2009 – 2016, and as a Professor Emeritus, I remain Book Review editor at this time. In 2009, Scot was a saint in allowing this person of little experience to take the reigns as Editor of the journal with his help. Over time, I became more proficient, (thanks to the iron sharpens iron input of others!) and greatly enjoyed my time as journal editor. I wish Sean Schat, my colleague, and our current ICCTE Editor well in his journey through the same blessing!

One thing a profession over time does, is it gives you a sense of place in your service to God. I love to write. This does not mean I excel in it; it just means that when I write I feel God’s presence as a conversation in my thinking. This emerges from reading and reflecting on Scripture. It was there that I really understood the power of the written word over time. It was in God’s word, that the beauty of re-reading first came to light, and the power of how words affect a life and prayer came into reality. If one’s words can spark hope, inquiry, agreement, or disequilibrium in a reader, they are a gift.

I write in hopes that someone is uplifted in some small way by insights, foresights, disequilibrium, or hind sights. I confess to being very eclectic in my work, as there are so many topics to be interested in! I do not only write in research mode, but try to tether writing philosophically to life, and its implications to the next generation. I write about children’s literature, technology, culture, autism, worldview, picture books, tech-fictive literature, multiliteracies, higher education, and thinking. Education is supposed to teach others how to think, so I must keep leaning forward in that regard. (I confess that I am a luddite by choice and have decided to not pursue great ventures into digital otherworlds! Sunshine Sullivan, you have those gifts, and I will definitely be calling on them in the future!)

Overall, ICCTE has served to engage me with a body of people, places, conferences, scholarly development, and rich conversation. From it, I have learned how to push myself to learn more, how to develop and maintain friendships over time and across distances, how to see with an editorial eye, and how to shepherd new scholars.

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Ponderings and Future Considerations for ICCTE

One thing Bev Norsworthy and I endeavored to do over the last four years or more on the ICCTE board is to introduce ICCTE to others beyond the U.S.A. We have had some success, within Canada and Oceania, but COVID – 19 hindered us in many ways. During that hindrance, I considered something else. We likely have 120 or more members in ICCTE. If we all asked even one new person every year to join us at a conference, we would have an amazing rise in numbers. Bev and I have been active in acting on this insight. I have invited a former student to do a presentation with me this year. Even though she cannot attend as a first-year teacher, I believe she will follow the journal. When we have new staff members, I invite them to join us. We all have to do our part consistently. I know that the best way to grow is by personal invitation. Take up the challenge. And bring someone to the next conference.

We can submit our papers to ICCTE, but for some reason, not as many do as I would hope, or as Sean would hope for that matter. To all of you here at this conference, submit your work as a paper. I

know many choose higher tiered journals to send their work to. We read journals that have a connection to us, and to our fields of interest, so we may begin to make more connections. As Christian educators, we need to support our work in this field of scholarship by at least making one offering to the ICCTE journal. I am not saying “send your papers only to ICCTE”. But one from each person here would be nice! Individually, we can be proud of promoting our ICCTE conferences, calls for papers, etc. in our own institutions regularly. If we say we promote Christian education, surely, we can consider sending our work to the very well established ICCTE Journal.

We could also apply to host a conference. Many attendees at ICCTE conferences come after being at a conference in their area. Promoting the Harro Van Brummelen Scholarship to new professors or making a donation to ICCTE for future work would be a wonderful gift (and of course, a tax credit to those frugal in their mindsets!).

In closing, I would like to leave you with a blessing and a challenge. My challenge is to keep being a learner, a reader, a writer, a leader in Christian education where you are, and a supporter and a friend to ICCTE. My desire is that since you have blessed me over the years, may God continue to bless you and your work from this day forward to join me in the journey to bring wonder, truth, justice, and reconciliation to higher education.

Know your calling.

Serve it.

Speak it.

Share it.

Put some new workpants on your worldview.

Be exuberantly peculiar.

God bless you all and thank you for sharing the time life is made of with me.