Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

BOOK REVIEWS

Developing a faith-based education: A teacher’s manual

Barry Hill
Director of Education, South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Wahroonga, NSW

Barbara Fisher, in this work written with three co-authors, states in the introduction that it is a textbook “oriented towards those engaged in nurturing children’s spirituality and faith formation from ages 0–12.”

In looking at the introduction and table of contents, the reviewer wondered how much the book was meant to reach beyond Biblical Studies. A reading of the book however gave the feeling that there was much that could apply beyond Bible teaching to all teaching.

The scope of the book
The book divides into three sections. The first describes the 21st Century teacher’s worldview. Then Section 2 presents information for teachers preparing to teach a faith-based education. This is really a set of six curriculum elements to consider when teaching faith. With the exception of Chapter 12 the third section on activating faith-based education seems directed at the preparation and delivery of Biblical Studies lessons. The “4 H” framework introduced in Chapter 10 of this section is effective.

The chapter sequence is logical and the content is sufficiently comprehensive to be helpful to undergraduate and other teachers. The structure works well overall but there could be more clarity about the divide between Sections 2 and 3. The difference seems to be that while both focus on attitudes and skills necessary to make effective faith-based teachers, Section 3 deals more with actual lessons.

One anomaly occurs in Section 1, The 21st Century Faith-based Teacher. The section seems misnamed because its single chapter Worldviews and 21st Century Teachers deals much more with the nature of worldviews than teachers. However this chapter does effectively summarise core elements of worldviews and provides a good framework for examining them.

Theoretical model
This is a book about faith-based teaching. While faith itself is an underlying theme, faith is a complex concept, so there is need for a theoretical framework to tie the book’s conceptual ends together. The author could have used a stronger theoretical framework for the book, some model involving faith. A possible framework for this task could be the nature of faith itself because, among other things, faith is actually comprised of values, character, worldview, and spirituality, and further is a life-orientation.

There is a good distinction between three of the book’s critical elements, namely faith, spirituality and character, but this distinction could go further still. Given its importance, the concept of faith could be explored in more detail. Elsewhere some terms such as “salvation” could be defined more.

Structure
The book is structured well. Its format is practical and mindful of teacher needs. Each chapter starts with an outline and overview. Then interspersed throughout the text are focus discussion questions, scenarios to consider, tables to illustrate key concepts and summary questions at the end of the chapter. This approach means that practical suggestions and questions assist student readers before they get too bogged down in theory overload.

Content
Overall the author has selected content judiciously. While drawing on theory, chapters are practical and teacher-friendly. Each chapter of the book pursues key objectives and includes a useful set of content areas whose scope is sufficient to give undergraduates and all teachers considerable help in teaching faith.

Given the complexity of teaching faith, there could be more material in some sections. For example there would be a benefit gained from a more extensive exploration of teaching values, character development and social/emotional learning. Also a more practical ‘how to’ section on teaching worldviews could have capitalised on the good foundation in Chapter 1. The ‘wish
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list’ above serves to illustrate the difficulties faced in writing a complex book and the reviewer acknowledges that any book has limits on content.

It is commendable to see the author address assessment in the faith domain. Chapter 11 effectively explores practical ways to assess the learning of faith. While this breaks some new ground it could still go further. For example there is a cognitive component of the affective valuing domain that could be pursued. Assessment tasks can be set on criteria for making judgments, on value ranking priorities, on reasons for making choices, on evaluating moral authorities, and so on.

Style
The writing style is clear, direct and succinct. The teaching of faith is complex and the book does well in summarising many key concepts and themes and simplifying a lot of theory. Further, the reader does not perceive any significant stylistic disparity between chapters and this fact is commendable considering there are four authors.

Every book strikes a compromise between its length and selection of content. Although this book does well with linkage overall, occasionally there could be more introductory explanation of how a chapter or a section within a chapter, is structured and linked. One example is on pages 102–3. The four elements of Figure 7.3 are briefly introduced on page 102, followed by a list of the strengths of teaching Biblical Studies according to faith, and then without further comment the list of the four elements. There could have been more explanation of the model, more linkage between the two elements on pages 102–3 and with the related planning overview wheel on page 110.

Conclusion
In summary, this manual presents many creative suggestions for teaching faith, so that any Christian teacher will find plenty to assist his/her teaching. The book fills an important niche in the educational textbook genre and is something the world of Christian teacher education has been awaiting for some time. The manual makes a valuable contribution to faith-based education in teacher education courses and an additional resource for professional development activities for practicing teachers in Christian schools.

Daniel Reynaud
Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Avondale College, NSW

What’s wrong with Anzac? The militarisation of Australian history

Zombie myths of Australian military history

Two books with overlapping themes, both from the University of New South Wales Press, offer teachers of Australian history a refreshingly sound corrective look at aspects of the Anzac legend. Lake and Reynolds’ work explores the development of the Anzac myth, exploring parallel histories that have not been mythologised and questioning the embroidering of the Anzac story. The four main authors, highly respected historians, are particularly severe on the politicisation of the Anzac legacy and the entrenchment of a military story as the key to the development and understanding of the national ethos.

In Stockings’ volume, ten noted military historians tackle ten Australian military myths that will not die, from the frontier wars of colonial Australia, through Breaker Morant, Gallipoli, HMAS Sydney and on to more recent wars such as Vietnam and East Timor. The facts they offer are contrasted with popular beliefs that assume the status of history. For example, they address issues such as Breaker’s actual status and behaviour, the strategic unimportance of the much-hyped Kokoda campaign of World War Two, and that Vietnam was arguably a very necessary war for Australia, and not merely one fought because of the Americans.

Both books are powerful correctives to the runaway Anzac legend that is consolidating its hold as the unquestioned ‘truth’ on which all other aspects of Australian nationalism are founded. Christian teachers in particular should welcome perspectives that question Australia’s
Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

Finding David

Karen Collum
Teacher and children's book author, Brisbane, Qld

For high school student, David, life has become a series of changes. His mum no longer lives in the family home—for reasons initially undisclosed—the rest of the family has had to move to a run-down, shabby house in another town, and David and his sister, Jess, have had to change schools. To make matters worse, half of David's belongings are yet to arrive at the new house, including his beloved surfboard.

The story begins with David facing the daunting first day at his new school. Things don't go well as he lands in dog poo on the bottom of a stack of boys in a random game called "Deathball" and then he gets his first English assignment: presenting a three-minute talk about his family. This is David's worst nightmare, not because he doesn't like public speaking but because he's terrified someone will find out the truth about his mum.

The novel continues with an exploration of family dynamics between David, his father and sister and illustrates a family under pressure. The tension is balanced as David develops strong friendships with James and Sai, two boys from school. Surfing and mountain-bike riding, a good dose of humour and an ongoing theme of adolescent male competitiveness provide a realistic and humorous backdrop for an otherwise serious story. Elements of faith are woven into the narrative but in a subtle and often indirect manner.

As David tries to navigate his way through his new life, he also gets the opportunity to be involved with the school's mentoring program for boys, RiskMEN—Resilience, Integrity, Self-discipline, Knowledge Mentoring. Run by one of the most popular male teachers at the school, RiskMEN provides a therapeutic edge to the novel and illustrates the positive potential of a group of young men working together and the importance of a 'significant other' adult in children's lives, in this case, teacher Mr Jones. Through RiskMEN, David is challenged to step up and deal with his circumstances no matter how frightening they may be. He sets himself the goal of improving his relationship with his parents.

Throughout the book, snippets of information about David's mum are given until finally her secret is revealed: mum is in a psychiatric hospital after a nervous breakdown. To reconnect with his parents, David must first confront his own fear, anger, hurt and issues of faith.

Finding David is written in accessible, modern language and provides a realistic but optimistic view into the inner world of teenage boys. It particularly lends itself to use in the personal development curriculum. Goal-setting, mentoring, risk-taking behaviour and mental illness are all avenues that could be explored after reading the text. It would also provide a wonderful springboard into an exploration of services in the local community for people suffering from or living with someone who suffers from mental illness. Parents may also gain insight into the mind of teenage boys through the novel.

Complete with genuinely funny humour, believable dialogue and a solid storyline, Finding David is an excellent read. Never clichéd, it presents a Christian world view through contemporary eyes and doesn't back away from the hard questions. With surfing and mountain bike riding as key components and just a hint of romance, Finding David will appeal particularly to teenage boys in grades 8–10. The pace is fast, the characters engaging and the writing tight. Watson combines skilful storytelling with top-quality prose, which puts Finding David among my favourite contemporary Christian novels for young people.
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new secular religion of Anzac. The books allow students to examine aspects of historiography, as required by the various national and state history syllabi. Since the foundation of a Christian education is to challenge narrow and fallacious thinking, these texts are highly recommended and will prove useful in the school library, as teachers broaden the sympathies and understandings of their students.

**Finding David**


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Teachers are representatives
We are ambassadors for Christ—2 Corinthians 5:20

Louise Starrs
Prep Teacher, Calvary Christian College, Townsville, Qld

Time flies when you are having so much fun loving God and people. It is hard to believe that it was sixteen years ago that I had the opportunity to sit with my first class of five-year-old children and share the love of Jesus. Every year since then I have told the same story to my class about how Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me”. He did not turn them away and he welcomed both them and their families. For the last sixteen years I believe that it has been my mandate to share this great love with the children and families that God puts in my life. I am a representative of His love.

In that first year I taught and loved with all of the passion and enthusiasm that a beginning teacher could muster. I reached out to the families of the children in my class and communicated the good news of Jesus with both the adults and children that I came in contact with throughout the year. I remember the joy the first time a parent said that they could see that there was something in me that was different and that they wanted to love people like I did. I introduced that parent to Jesus and the affect on her life was incredible. Her self-confidence blossomed, her marriage improved and she began to love her family in a new and wonderful way.

This great mandate has never changed. Over the years experience has taught me well that there are ways that are better than others to perform this commission, but the joy of reaching out to those beautiful children and their families with the love of God has always been my great reward. Tomorrow morning I will look out across twenty fresh-faced ‘cherubs’ and they will look back with the excited anticipation of feeling loved and cherished by their teacher. It’s something they have grown to expect, and I could not be prouder to be a representative of the love of Jesus in their lives.

“I believe that it has been my mandate to share this great love with the children and families that God puts in my life."

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Avondale COLLEGE
Isn’t it great that sustainability has now become a mainstream issue within society? Could you even imagine environmental policy being at the forefront of an election campaign in 2000? For schools, the often-overlooked bi-product of being ‘green’ relates to the amount of money that can be saved through basic awareness of the resources they’re using—and how careful use can help them stay in the black.

In Australian schools, Information Communications Technologies (ICT) usage is reaching a point where average sized schools are managing as much hardware as reasonably sized businesses in the corporate world. This means that schools need to exercise as much diligence as possible to ensure they’re running a tight (and energy efficient) ship.

To help schools stay in the black, I’ve included five simple tips that schools can follow to save cost, minimise wastage and reduce energy usage.

1 – Turn your computers into sleepy heads!
Make sure your school has a system where all PCs/laptops switch to power saving mode during periods of inactivity. Windows 7 makes it easier to manage on a school-wide basis. Annual energy savings of $20 per PC add up to $10,000 per year when you have 500 PCs!

Comment: This is easy to implement and the savings are well worth it. They’ll appreciate the rest too.

2 – Green really is the new black!
In 2007, a blogger proclaimed that Google could save 750,000 kilowatt-hours a year if the homepage was changed from white to black. This is because standard LCD and CRT screens use less power when displaying black backgrounds. Following on from point 1, a solid green policy within your school would ensure that colourful screensavers are shelved in favour of black, hibernated screens.

Comment: Although this is a small saving, every amount counts.

3 – Digitise where possible!
The traditional way of distributing class materials and internal communications has always been by using a photocopier. It has often been used to print out daily notices, memos, messages and classroom handouts. With the accessibility of technology, schools can realise huge savings by changing practices and communicating digitally where possible. For example, a small school used the web to deliver internal communications and it saved them 8,000 pieces of paper throughout one year! This amounted to a reduction of 95kg in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, 2560L in water consumption, and one less tree felling—plus reduced printing expenses.

Comment: In 2010, this is type of saving should be readily valued and easily implemented.

4 – If you must...
If the only feasible option is to print, make sure your school has a photocopier that allows double-sided printing. Most major providers offer this feature. However, using recycled paper through your photocopier is not advocated because this could affect your school’s warranty service agreement.

Comment: Being ‘green’ still means thoughtful policy and logical practice. Don’t go overboard!

5 – Use laptops instead of PCs
It’s clear that a major factor to consider in the laptop or PC war is the former’s superior mobility. However, a point rarely raised in this fight is the fact that laptops use significantly less energy than most desktops. Studies have found that, on average, laptops use 50% less kWh/year than PCs. If a school chooses 500 laptops, the annual savings can be significant.

Comment: Smaller is better!

In terms of simple-to-adopt strategies, these five measures are some of the best examples of procedures to follow.

However, there are more complex strategies that schools are undertaking by utilising current best practice in ICT. This includes strategies such as ‘virtualising’ their servers, outsourcing their data storage and using virtual desktops.

In summary, it’s clear that schools can save wastage and costs by following simple steps. The key principle to energy conservation is making incremental improvements over sustained periods of time. It’s obviously a team game and everyone needs to be aware and involved.
Clarifying Chemistry

What is motivating?

Graeme Perry
Former Chemistry Teacher, Cooranbong, NSW

Geology ‘Rocks’! In Junior Science it was fun and presumed to be motivating to use this cryptic as a title for a unit, or as an interrupting exclamation in class. Creativity did not provide a similar positive motivating phrase for Chemistry, from my recall. On ‘bad’ days students opined its ‘confusing chemistry’ or ‘chemistry stinks’! What about ‘Chemistry is crackers’! Does a one liner motivate enough?

In-service days in Science were valuable events when curriculum concepts were unpackaged and better explanations modelled, learning tools were shared—I loved mnemonics, like ROYGBIV and LEO goes GER—and as well assessment strategies were devised and procedural consequences compared. But, why was it only on those days that this seemed to happen? School days seemed usually to be too busy, boring and barren for sharing these insights.

Gregory Smith (2009) in a phenomenological study of 15 high school science departments within the Queensland state education system has noted that while the Professional Standards of Queensland’s teachers indicate that teamwork is critical to teachers’ work, “the research findings highlight the non-supportive team and teamwork policies, procedures, and structures in the schools and identify the lack of recognition of the specialised skills of science teachers” (Abstract). He describes schools as “support vacuums” and identifies four impediments to teamwork in schools:

• Non-social relationships to science teachers;
• School policies and structures;
• Lack of school policies and structures; and
• Vulnerability and low self-efficacy. (p. 228)

Smith models relationships between these factors, increasing the number of variables considered (pp. 218–235), and claims Science teachers expound a unique conception of teamwork.

The science department provides a space where teachers can ‘weather the storm’ of being undervalued, frustrated, unappreciated, and demoralised together. The team identity generated by the teachers provides support as they are bombarded by a deficit view of science teaching. The science department provides a strong collective bounded by the discourse of science and social relations. It is also central to science teachers’ identity as it engenders a sense of worth and value...In the development of their own team model, science teachers illustrate their own shared mental models of teamwork...The ‘ask-and-receive’ relationship is a space in the subject team, and is a unique contribution to team literature. (pp. 237–238)

Colleagues in Science are usually sympathetic to mutual need. Managing the wide variety of equipment, imminent danger and content variation accentuates the need of short timelines and immediate solutions. If you ask science teachers, someone will usually respond, but often only if you ask. It’s about busyness but also an acknowledging of professionalism and specific past professional training.

Clarifying motivation: Gold still glistens!
Present when my eldest granddaughter returned home after her first Chemistry lesson, my curiosity demanded I ask what her lesson was about. "It was amazing! We turned small copper coins into gold ones—and they used to do it to two cent coins and take them down to the canteen coz they looked like two dollars, so that’s why we had to use one cent coins.” Now, I was interested in the Chemistry rather than the ethical implications, "So how did you do it?” I was thinking electrochemistry of some form. “We just dipped it in things and then heated it.” "So, what happened—how?”, I asked. "It just went gold. It was a great lesson. Here it is.” The coin was glistening in the palm of her hand. Would she let me touch it?

Here is the quick method. However, use the reference list to gain clear statements of resources, danger assessments and some alternative chemicals. Place a ‘copper’ coin in a solution of sodium zincate that is in contact with zinc metal in the solution. The coin is coated with a silvery metal at this stage. Take the plated coin in some tongs, wash, and then heat it in a Bunsen flame for a few seconds. The coin now appears gold. Rinse the coin to cool it before handling it. The gold ‘coating’ may flake off.

Clarifying the chemistry
Zinc and compounds of zinc are amphoteric meaning they react with both acids and bases. The zincate solution can be formed by reacting zinc metal, with caustic soda solution (3M) while it is heated to boiling, a reaction summarised by the ionic equation

$$2\text{H}_2\text{O}(l) + \text{Zn}(s) + 2\text{OH}^-(aq) \rightarrow \text{Zn(OH)}_2^{2-}(aq) + \text{H}_2(g)$$
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The copper coin in contact with metallic zinc forms an electrochemical cell with the two half equations:

\[ \text{Zn(s)} \rightarrow \text{Zn}^{2+}(aq) + 2e^- \]

\[ \text{Zn(OH)}_4^{2-}(aq) + 2e^- \rightarrow \text{Zn(s)} + 4\text{OH}-(aq) \]

and a summarising ionic equation

\[ \text{Zn(s)} + \text{Zn(OH)}_4^{2-}(aq) \rightarrow \text{Zn}^{2+}(aq) + \text{Zn(s)} + 4\text{OH}-(aq) \]

The zinc on heating, forms an amalgam with the copper which when it solidifies (Low M.P. = 900–940°C) is termed brass. This is the gold colour.

The pedagogy

This activity includes many concepts to discuss, depending on the level at which it is introduced. Some suggest that third graders can carry out the experiment. Is it appropriate to use significant experiments that support the development of deep concepts as ‘wow’ factor, unexplainable demonstrations in earlier years, often ignoring dangers? For all students the phenomenon will deepen the wonder about chemical composition and reaction. Early concepts include the states of matter, mixtures and the properties of matter.

An associated project could investigate the physical properties and uses of brass. Senior chemistry years can consider amphoteric properties, electrochemistry, complex ions, forms of equation writing with assigned questions potentially drawn from any, or all these areas.

“So do you think you will like Chemistry?” “Yeah, of course.” It wasn’t just the coin that glistened. There was a sparkle in her eyes and controlled excitement in her voice.

References


Lithium, N. B. (n.d.). Turn Pennies to Silver and Gold (Chemistry Trick). Nerdrage. Video retrieved on the 22nd October 2010 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_ml8tAnWE


It’s not about me

David Arthur
Head of ‘A’ Level Studies, International School, Shenzhen, China

“Do you know which poster I like the best?” Meg* was always willing to discuss things at a deeper level.

“It’s the one just below the clock,” she said. It was my own personal paraphrase from the book Education. “The true aim of education is to teach students to think, and not just reflect the thoughts of others.”

Posters of meaningful expressions around the room are but one strategy to integrate faith and learning.

But should I even try this while teaching Economics in a very results-driven secular senior high school in China? Add to this a background as one of the sceptics of the concept in the early 1980s as well as the fact that there are only two ‘active, full time Christians’ on a staff of close to one hundred teachers. How audacious!

On arrival in the school five years ago, the meaning of life for this ‘chalkie’ was a bit hazy. Oh yes, I was there to teach a subject to students and from within the context of being a witnessing Christian. After all, what other choice does a Christian have? However what it is really all about has only become clear during the last couple of years.

Jeffrey*, one of the Chinese teachers, and the other active Christian has become a true friend and ‘comrade’, and the journey thus far has been a real growth experience for both of us. Our weekly lunch and prayer time, and brief chats in between times have helped us to build our faith and think of ways to quietly assist the small number of Christian students that have made themselves known to us. This mostly happens when we notice a cross hanging around a neck, or when we are tipped off by someone else. The Lord is leading us to where He is working—slowly, and at His pace. Our plan is to provide strong support and encouragement for these students as they witness in each of their classes.

So what is the strategy in the classroom? One of the themes that is introduced at the beginning of each course is the idea that each student is ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’, and that they owe everything they know and are to someone else—family, friends, teachers, and significant others. A response to this is encouraged.

A second theme arises from these probing questions: “Do you want to simply make lots of money, or do you want to make a difference in your world?” and “What does it matter if you become the richest person in the world but lose your life (and/or the quality of your life) while doing it?”

Thirdly, they are reminded that good stewards make the most of their talents, and may even take calculated risks to improve them. A pithy expression displayed on the board at the beginning of every class and the resultant discussion usually become variations on one or more of these main themes. The aim is to challenge their thinking. Do they know I am a Christian? Maybe, but maybe they do not. They certainly do know that I am different from the other teachers. They themselves have often told me that in my classes they learn about life and not just about Economics.

The whole process is an attempt to pass on the inspiration that Spirit-filled ‘significant others’ have injected into my own life. These are the giants on whose shoulders I stand, and in particular those teachers who have had a powerful influence over the years. It is also worthwhile to remind students that what we choose to do (and equally what we choose not to do) affects many people—perhaps thousands, even future generations. The really interesting part is that neither Jeffrey nor I know the ultimate results of our efforts. We plant the seed and sometimes we even get to water it, but it is God who makes it grow. We must never forget this reality.

Teaching in this school is a real challenge for both of us. Not necessarily in the subject matter, or even the difficult tasks we have to accomplish. The real challenge is to be people whose approach is positive (when things do not go our way!), who act with integrity, and whose manner is kind and caring.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are not working for the owner of the school, but for the Master, and that our entire modus operandi is to bring glory to God. One of my very clear memories from the past occurred more than thirty years ago in my first year at Avondale, indeed probably in the one of the first Education I classes. Dr Trevor Lloyd put a quote on the board that has never been forgotten. “One short life, ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last”. What a challenge! And what a supreme privilege to be working for such a magnificent employer!

David notes that the answers to these ‘foreign’ students’ questions are still the same: “Yes—Australia is a beautiful country”, and “Yes—I like Chinese food!”

* Names have been changed.