

# Journal of Education & Christian Belief

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## Book Reviews

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*Faith and Doubt: Secularisation in Literature from Wordsworth to Larkin*

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*The Lantern and the Looking Glass – Literature and Christian Belief*

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*Entry Points – for Christian reflection within education*

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*Changing World, Unchanging Church? An Agenda for Christians in Public Life*

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*Priorities: Grounds for Fresh Thinking in Education*

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*The Cause of Christian Education*

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*Values Education and Values in Education*

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*The Future of Religion in Irish Education*

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*Faith and Understanding*

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## Editorial

FROM TIME TO time in the discussion of educational issues, new frameworks, metaphors and sets of categories emerge.

For quite a while, the distinctions between aims, content, method and contexts have been widely accepted as a framework for discussions of aspects of education in the West. Another example of such influential frameworks is the result of analysing kinds of knowing into 'knowing that', 'knowing how' and knowing with a direct object (of a person or place).

Many of us have accepted such frameworks at times fairly unthinkingly as we have tried to reflect upon education. They easily become that which we observe and comment *from* without *themselves* being observed and commented upon. They form what Michael Polanyi would term a 'tacit dimension' for our knowledge in education. They come to 'indwell' us, to inhabit our knowing as a background, a kind of wallpaper which is always there but no longer noticed.

Frameworks in general are essential to our thinking and discussing of issues in education. Particular frameworks may be very helpful but if we, at no point, hold them open to question, they can also become quite restrictive. They may even lock us into particular underlying views of the nature of reality and particular sets of values.

It can therefore be very helpful when the frameworks are themselves subjected to critical scrutiny. For example, contemporary discussions in language teaching are increasingly questioning the way in which we tend to use terms like 'method'. Thinking of what we do as a teaching *method* may unconsciously bring with it assumptions about its being value-free or scientifically grounded and repeatable in any context.

Another example is the introduction by Doug Blomberg, in the Spring 1998 issue of this journal, of a very important kind of knowing: *knowing when*. In his article on the practice of wisdom, he set out the contours of what he saw as a biblical alternative to rationalist accounts of knowledge, an account of knowing as historical, experiential, responsive to created order and open to mystery.

A set of categories that has been quite influential in some recent discussions of the integration of Christian faith and education has been the distinctions between compatibilist, transformationalist and reconstructionalist strategies. It was developed in a book edited by Harold Heie and David L. Wolfe, *The Reality of Christian Learning*, and, in particular, in the concluding paper by Ronald R. Nelson whose tragic and untimely death, sadly, preceded the publication of the book in 1987.

In this issue, Andrew Wright enters this discussion with a paper in which he defends what he terms 'a transformative theology of Christian education' against 'reconstructionist alternatives'. He seeks to move the arena of the discussion from philosophical epistemology in which it has tended to take place to that of theological ontology where alone, he argues, the debate between rival strategies can properly be resolved. In presenting his case, he suggests that Lutheran doctrine and attendant 'dualism' supports reconstructionism but that it fails to provide a theological foundation for thinking about education.

Signe Sandsmark responds to Wright's article with a defence of her Lutheran position against the charge of dualism. She argues that, properly understood, Lutheranism does not fit any of the three categories of compatibilism, transformationalism and reconstructionalism and suggests that this may be because, in their turn, these categories are rooted in a more Reformed (Calvinist) perspective.

Not only do sets of categories indwell our discussions of education, so also do our metaphors. It has been increasingly recognised that metaphors are not mere ‘ornaments’ that make our ‘factual’ language and thought more attractive but that they pervade the whole of our language and thinking in a very deep way. An example is of the way we view argument as war and therefore talk of ‘attack’ and ‘defence’ (as indeed we have ourselves in the preceding paragraphs!), of ‘winning’ and ‘losing’, of ‘opponents’ and ‘gaining ground’. What we have is not something peripheral to the real business but, to borrow the title of a book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson which discusses this example, ‘Metaphors we live by’. How different, as they say, would be the whole business if we viewed argument as a kind of dance!

Neal Lawrence’s article takes several different metaphorical perspectives on educational organisations: cultures, organisms and brains. He suggests that, in a Christian context, a way forward may be to view educational organisations as ‘learning cultural organisms’. His article raises the possibility of the non-neutrality of the metaphors we live by in education: perhaps some are more Christian/biblical than others?

A controversial metaphor for education – which some have opposed to it – is that of nurture. Mark Steed relates this to contemporary discussions of the place of worship in education and makes use of the idea of religious integrity in support of a particular approach to worship in church schools.

Arthur Rowe’s article asks how we will see Biblical Studies if we take an evangelical Christian framework for our approach to the subject. This has evident implications for Religious Education and, indeed, for the possibility of distinctively evangelical approaches to the teaching of other subjects in the curriculum.

In a plural context where there is ongoing discussion of such issues as the role of faith-based schools or the relevance of spirituality to the whole curriculum, these frameworks, metaphors and categories are not just an innocent backdrop but should be brought clearly into the foreground and openly rethought.

We hope that this issue of the Journal will contain something of value for all our readers and, as always, welcome your contributions in the form of letters (or e-mails) to the editors, articles, responses to articles (short or longer) or any comments you have on the contents. We also welcome notes of conferences, publications and other items that we could include in our *Notes and News* section.

***John Shortt & David I. Smith***