

Review

VAN DYK, John. 2000. **The Craft of Christian Teaching: A Classroom Journey.** Sioux Center : Dordt Press. 289 p. Prys: Unknown. ISBN 0-932914-46-2.

Reviewer: *J.L. van der Walt*

(Faculty of Education. Potchefstroom University for CHE, Potchefstroom)

This book appears at an interesting point in South Africa's educational history. Curriculum 2005 is currently being implemented in schools. All those involved in its implementation are, however, waiting for the refinements to be proposed by the chairperson of the Review Committee, who has recently been appointed to a senior position in the national Department of Education. While she and those who assist her, are considering the finer details of a plan to make Curriculum 2005 more understandable, streamlined and easier to apply in actual practice, other role players in the field, such as teacher unions and publishers, are preparing materials and training teachers to cope with the demands of Curriculum 2005 as it stands.

The context within which the book was written, i.e. private school education in North America, differs from that in the RSA. Whereas a large percentage of parents and teachers in North America have lost faith in the ability of public schools to offer a Christian, Biblically-founded education and have resorted to an elaborate system of private schools, many parents and teachers in South Africa feel that there still is enough scope in public education and schools for a Christian, Biblically founded approach to education. This book was written with the former context in mind. The author, a professor of Education at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, is also the Director of the Center for Educational Services at Dordt College. In this capacity he spends a great deal of his time in schools as a teacher, but also as an observer and a consultant. The tone of the book clearly belongs to the atmosphere of explicitly Christian private schools. Many of the author's guidelines for effective Christian teaching will therefore not be directly applicable to situations in South African schools. Despite this difference in context, his exposition of a Christian approach to teaching and learning underscores the importance of at least considering the implications of an explicit Biblical approach.

This book will help teachers practising in South African schools to escape from the false impression that business as usual in the schools is the same as education founded on Biblical principles.

Afrikaans speaking teachers and parents will have another problem with this book. Van Dyk does not distinguish clearly between education in the sense of equipping (Dutch: *opvoeding*) in the broadest sense of the word, and teaching and instruction. Although it is clear from his discussions on various aspects of education that such a distinction can be made, he does not deem it necessary to make it here and commutes effortlessly among the three meanings. In the process, he confuses teachers trained to understand and to operate according to the different meanings. Once one understands that he does this, it becomes clear that the author regards even the most clinically didactical aspect as a part of the total process of equipping the learner. This stands in direct contrast with the opinion of others who regard didactical methods and other techniques as religiously and philosophically neutral.

The book covers the most important aspects of classroom practice, in the process devoting somewhat more attention to co-operative and collaborative learning. Having briefly treated the essence of teaching according to Christian principles, the author considers the various facets of the aims of this approach to teaching, and then discusses aspects such as learning styles and strategies. All these discussions are interwoven with brief expositions on a Biblical view of the human being, the structure of creation, and also brief sojourns into philosophical matters. Although the author refers to rather intricate technicalities surrounding, for example, collaborative and co-operative learning, he refrains from wallowing in such technicalities. His purpose is to show that such approaches to teaching and learning can promote a Christian way of teaching and learning. Teachers who require a more profound technical understanding of these approaches will have to resort to other literature. The same applies, for instance, to his discussion of aim taxonomies and multiple intelligences.

The book is clearly intended for beginner teachers who need guidance in mastering the challenges of the teaching-learning praxis. Also parents, who have not had any training as educators, will profit from reading the book. As was intimated above, the book will not really help them understand or cope with the demands of Curriculum 2005, but will assist them in understanding the injunctions of Christian education. The book is written in easily accessible English, is interesting and the challenges in it are compelling. The readability of the book is enhanced by the elementary sketches and the many practical examples which have been included.

This book is a welcome addition to the literature on Christian philosophy of education. It is especially welcome in South Africa, where we increasingly have to contend with the tendency to discontinue formal studies in the field of philosophy of education at teacher education institutions. This book illustrates (a) that one cannot avoid philosophical issues when discussing and evaluating education, (b) that philosophical foundations play an unavoidable role in education and (c) that these philosophical issues need not be taught or discussed systematically in a formal teacher education course. They can be inserted in places where they will be considered significant.

This book can be welcomed, not because of an earth-shattering contribution to our knowledge of education, but rather for its contribution to educational praxis (a meaningful mixture of theory and practice) and for the manner in which it inspires us to look differently at education in the classroom. A teacher who has read the book will not be able to resist the urge to look at what happens in the classroom from a Biblical perspective. Especially the sections on collaborative and co-operative learning are thought-provoking.