

My Top Shelf

A Christian educator recommends their top shelf books for an area of Christian education.

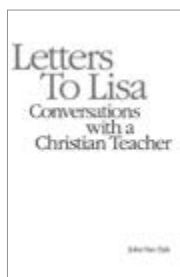
For the last 15+ years I have had the honour and privilege of working with teachers new to Christian education. The induction journey has always involved drawing on the great thinking and experience of key writers like Blomberg, Edlin, Fowler, Van Dyk, and Smith. Those teachers who have gone on to read works like these for themselves have always greatly benefited in their understanding of the theology, philosophy, and practice of Christian education. But let's face it, when you are new to a Christian school—whether you have taught before or not—who has the time to read all the 'classics'? I offer two things below for teachers new to Christian education: first, I offer my top shelf of four books to read (maybe one per term?); second, if this is still too much, I offer an eight-step reading plan (maybe two short readings each term?).

By Chris Parker

1

Letters to Lisa:
Conversations With a Christian Teacher
John Van Dyk (2011)

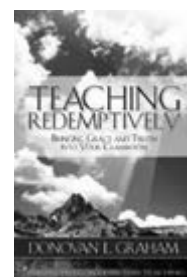
This would easily be my first go-to book for teachers new to Christian education. The book is structured as a letter exchange between Professor Van Dyk and his daughter, Lisa, who has just started teaching at a Christian school and has many questions for her father. This is a highly readable and practical book. Despite some topics raised being clearly shaped by key educational questions at the time of publishing, I guarantee Lisa asks many of the questions that a current new teacher would be wondering about.



2

Teaching Redemptively:
Bringing Grace and Truth into Your Classroom
Donovan L. Graham (2003)

This is a comprehensive book. It is not a heavy read, but it does take the reader into a consideration of the theology and philosophy of Christian education. Graham explores the foundational beliefs: about purpose; about the learner; about the teacher; about the learning process; about the curriculum. All exploration is done from a redemptive framework and encourages a redemption-focused practice that seeks to bring grace and truth to the classroom.





3

Beyond Control: Heart-Centred Classroom Climate and Discipline

Alan Bandstra (2014)

Books on Christian education can frequently have an emphasis on knowledge, understanding, and curriculum design, with classroom culture and behaviour management taking second stage. Not this book. Drawing from his rich experience and personal reflection, Bandstra explores for us nurturing a classroom culture that is 'heart-centred' and shaped by grace. "The point is that a truly Christ-centred education ...", suggests Bandstra, "... includes more than simply the type of language teachers employ. It permeates the 'air' students breathe, as well as the knowledge they are fed" (p. 9).



5

Reading Plan

Following is a possible reading plan from these four books if a full reading of each was not possible in the first year.

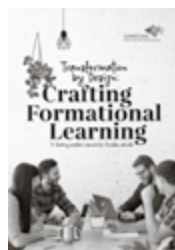
- Term 1**
1. **A TRACK to Follow** from *Transformation by Design: The Big Picture* (pp. 4-14)
 2. **Beliefs about purpose** from *Teaching Redemptively* (pp. 51-75)
- Term 2**
1. **How Important is the Atmosphere in my Classroom?** from *Letters to Lisa* (pp. 81-93)
 2. **Heart-Centred Teaching** from *Beyond Control* (pp. 33-75)
- Term 3**
1. **Beliefs about the learning process** from *Teaching Redemptively* (pp. 145-188)
 2. **Beliefs about subject matter** from *Teaching Redemptively* (pp. 189-208)
- Term 4**
1. **Formational Teaching and Learning Practices** from *Transformation by Design: Crafting Formational Learning* (pp. 139-178)
 2. **Guiding With Grace** from *Beyond Control* (pp. 75-84)

4

Transformation by Design: The Big Picture Transformation by Design: Crafting Formational Learning

Dickens et al. (2015), Hanscamp et al. (2019)

These two publications from Christian Education National are not so much books as practical resources for teachers. *The Big Picture* focuses on curriculum design within the Christian school and *Crafting Formational Learning* delves specifically into the formational practices and learning design within the classroom. Both volumes provide tools, templates, and examples and are a must-read for teachers new to Christian education—they should be on every teacher's easy-to-reach shelf.



Chris is a classroom teacher at Wycliffe Christian School. He is also the editor of the *Christian Teachers Journal* and associate lecturer with the National Institute for Christian Education. Chris and his wife Coco live in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. They have two children, four chooks, one cute kitten, and too many ukuleles.

