
One of the largest tasks a teacher of special education students in Christian schools has today is that of integrating not only faith and learning, but faith and life for the students in his/her care in ways that promote individual and communal flourishing. Having a solid Christian worldview undergirds that task, but deep reflection on living it out is much more difficult than agreeing with a precept. David Anderson challenges that difficulty in this book, while also giving consideration to the complex web of difficulty that classroom teachers must face.

Anderson’s book is a collection of thematic chapters and some previously published papers that explore the theology and practice of special education. From a solid scriptural foundation, the popular myths and realities of inclusion in the classroom are debunked, and newer considerations for true inclusion are posited. Since the book is a collection of papers, the format provides good fruit for staff discussion; as a “whole read,” the book does repeat many key concepts and drives them home.

For those unfamiliar with Christian education and its principles, this is an easy read that does not leave theology in the territory of church service, as a noun, but rather sees Christians as educators who offer different reasons for how and why they equip students to live life, seeing theology as a verb. Arguments around current inclusion practices as being “non-inclusive,” distinctions between jobs, calling, and mission as terms of practice, and themes of spiritual warfare, reconciliation, inclusion, interdependence, hospitality, and justice become the landscape for discussion.

A theology of special education is not something on which most Christians who teach children with special needs have given serious thought.... Reflecting theologically on how their faith informs special education—or on being a special educator—is not something at the forefront of their thinking.... We live in a culture that tends to define people by what they do rather than by who they are (Anderson xiii).

The quote above serves as an introduction to the purpose and tone of Anderson’s work. For teachers and teacher candidates interested in being informed regarding the battles surrounding special education, this is one of the books that falls into the inspiration category as a “must read” rather than a “could read.” It raises the issues many books omit.

As in a movie trailer, I shall not spoil the ending for the reader, but will comment on some of the key thoughts in the book that resonated with me as a professor in a Christian university, and also provoked further thought on my behalf.

In chapter 7, “Inclusion and Interdependence: Students with Special Needs in the Regular Classroom,” Anderson notes that even within inclusive classrooms, students with special needs are often excluded, and goes on to deconstruct the topic of inclusion. The problem he sees is that “attempts to promote inclusion have brought physical access to a free and more appropriate education by opening [the] door to the regular classroom for many students with disabilities” (146), thus removing a physical wall, but the student is still not accepted as a viable person within the classroom community. Anderson sees the lack of interdependence and the language of special education as being problematic here, and in later chapters, provides what he feels would be a more just model of practice (the spoiler I referred to earlier).

Upon reflection, in this chapter, and in other chapters, the term “special education” bothers me as a university educator because, as Anderson rightly claims, this term may defer to a supposition that others are not “special” or are differently valued and thus sets up a paradox. The term also bothers me because no other is suggested to replace it.

Upon contemplation of this dilemma, I have come to the conclusion that I prefer the term “differently-abled.” We are all, as humans, what I like to call “extra-grace required” at some point in our lives.
like to call “extra-grace required” at some point in our lives. I have an interest in language and literacy in looking at the role culture plays as it intersects with worldview and education; thus I have noted that the terms used to describe what it means to be human—and in any way afflicted—in picture books, media, and movies can serve to further the separation between inclusion and exclusion (Belcher 2008; Belcher and Maich 2010; Maich and Belcher 2012). I would like to have seen more in terms of definition and language with regard to “differently-abled-ness,” since words are so important to the theology and gospel of Christ. It is paramount that all teachers consider how culture affects our living of the Christian life as we strive to improve teaching and learning to bring healing to brokenness. Anderson made me think even more deeply about that as well as the words we use, and for that I am grateful indeed.

I highly recommend this book. I am sure anyone who reads this work will also be provoked—in a good way—to apply it to his/her personal life and role as an educator in a fallen but beautiful world. May we join Anderson’s call to use a theology of interdependence as a Christian hermeneutic to provide “a foundation for reinventing education through its emphasis on community” (154), allowing all students to be “receivers of and givers of support” as we engage daily in the joy of education.

Works Cited


Belcher, Christina, and Kimberly Maich. “Seeking the ‘Me’ in ASD through Children’s Picture Books.” Teaching with Compassion, Competence, Commitment 4.2 (Fall 2010): 20–32.


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