

It cannot be said that Edwards intentionally applied baroque characteristics to his preaching, because there is no record of his awareness of the term. Suggesting so would be impossible; it would be anachronism at its worst. The term baroque was only identified as applying to the stylistic characteristics a century later, long after the greatest demonstrators of baroque art were dead. However, like Rembrandt, Bach, and others, Edwards did use certain characteristics in his preaching that were later identified as baroque. It is helpful to recognize that, in order to retrieve from Edwards' homiletical use of imagination.

However, the attempt to characterize Edwards as a baroque figure is less convincing. In reality, this classification was not crucial to the core of the book, as it appears only in a few chapters. The author emphasized the importance of reconnecting with Edwards's imagination and how it could enrich preaching in the twenty-first century, without relying on the label "baroque." I would describe Edwards as a biblical, Reformed, revivalist, and expositional preacher, but I remain unconvinced that he should be labeled a baroque preacher.

Overall, this was a fascinating book full of thought-provoking, stimulating information on evoking the imagination, especially in preaching and sermons. Preaching could use a little more imagination, and that is the point of Van Bruggé's book.

—Allen M. Stanton, PhD
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

Van Wyk, John R. *To Understand Things as Well as Words: An Examination of Jonathan Edwards and His Pedagogical Methodology*. Pickwick, 2025.

John R. Van Wyk is a former doctoral student of noted Edwardsean scholar Douglas A. Sweeney, who brings both historical acumen and theological sensitivity to a topic that has received surprisingly little sustained attention in the vast corpus of Edwards scholarship. While there exists an almost unbroken stream of works on Edwards's metaphysics, ethics, theology, and many other topics, few have considered how he taught or conceived of teaching. Van Wyk's study attempts to fill that gap by illuminating Edwards "as an educational theorist and as an educator" (263).

Van Wyk acknowledges the difficulty of his task as: “evidence is frustratingly scant regarding the origins and development of his pedagogy” (152). Given the state of evidence, he necessarily builds his case through deduction, contextual reconstruction, and, at times, assumptions. The result is a richly detailed intellectual tour that situates Edwards’s pedagogical instincts within the broader philosophical and theological currents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first half of the volume is devoted to tracing Edwards’s intellectual influences, a section that is both illuminating and, at times, disproportionately long. Van Wyk examines with care the impact of Lockean epistemology, Newtonian physics and optics, and the moral philosophy of innate ideas on Edwards’s understanding of knowledge and instruction. These pages demonstrate his immense knowledge of Edwards’s intellectual world, though the connection to pedagogy sometimes feels indirect.

Despite these challenges, Van Wyk succeeds in demonstrating that Edwards’s pedagogical impulses were primarily grounded in Scripture. The Bible was not only the chief content of education but also its governing framework. Edwards’s early domestic environment, especially a well-educated mother and sisters, and being steeped in biblical literacy, prepared him to view the mind and heart as integrally united in the pursuit of divine truth. Van Wyk identifies four key secondary influences that reinforced this scriptural centrality: the theocentric idealism of Malebranche, the practical piety of Baxter (whose dialogic method Edwards admired), and the educational reformers Comenius and Francke, whose commitment to coeducation and the moral formation of students resonated deeply with Edwards’s own aims (153). Through these figures, Edwards’s pedagogy emerges as a blend of Reformed orthodoxy, Enlightenment empiricism, and pietist practicality.

When attention turns directly to Edwards as educator, Van Wyk draws from surviving records of the Stockbridge mission school and Edwards’s own family practices. From these sources, Edwards emerges as an educator who valued both intellectual rigor and spiritual vitality. Foundational to Edwards’s instruction were the Bible, psalter, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism—texts designed to cultivate literacy as a means of biblical comprehension, a central Puritan ideal. Yet Edwards was not a dry taskmaster. As Van Wyk observes, Edwards sought to remove the “dull, wearisome task” of rote memorization (210), favoring instead an engaging, dialogical mode of learning that invited active reflection rather than mechanical recitation. His pedagogical method thus combined the cognitive and the affective, aiming to transform both understanding and desire.

Two features of Edwards's approach distinguish him as a pedagogically progressive educator. First is the dialogic character of his teaching. Influenced by Baxter's conversational style and by the Puritan emphasis on catechetical discourse, Edwards viewed dialogue as a means of eliciting thoughtful participation and guiding students toward internal appropriation of truth. Second, and perhaps most striking, was Edwards's commitment to equally educating both boys and girls. In an eighteenth-century colonial context where formal education was often gendered, Edwards's practice stood out. While he certainly distinguished between levels of intellectual ability and between contexts—training frontier youth versus mentoring ministerial candidates—he remained consistent in his insistence that everyone deserved and benefited from equal opportunity to learn (211). Van Wyk persuasively situates this conviction within Edwards's theological anthropology: all humans, as image-bearers, were rational and moral beings capable of knowing and glorifying God.

The discussion of Edwards as mentor is among the book's most engaging sections. Following his notoriety as a revivalist, Edwards became a sought-after mentor for apprentices and theological students who frequently lived in his household. Van Wyk's portrayal of this domestic seminary—an antecedent to the "Log College" model later expanded by Edward's student Bellamy—reveals how Edwards's influence extended beyond the pulpit into the intellectual and moral formation of future leaders. Among his pupils, Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803) stand out as particularly significant, shaping the theological, cultural, and institutional contours of early American evangelicalism. Through this lens, Edwards's educational legacy appears both immediate and enduring.

A noteworthy shortcoming of the book, at nearly 300 pages, often reads more like an extended course on Edwards's thought than a focused monograph on his pedagogy. Van Wyk devotes roughly forty pages to defining Puritanism—material that, while accurate, feels tangential to the stated aim. The core discussion of pedagogy does not arrive until Chapter 6, "Jonathan Edwards's Pedagogical Method," on page 196. Readers may wish that the author had condensed the contextual background to allow more sustained analysis of Edwards's educational theory and practice. Additionally, the inclusion of subject and author indexes would have enhanced the utility of references for researchers.

Nevertheless, the book's exhaustive scholarship is undeniable. Van Wyk's command of primary and secondary sources is impressive, and his synthesis of intellectual history with educational theory offers a genuinely

new vantage point for understanding Edwards. What emerges is a portrait of a man who viewed education as a holistic, transformative endeavor. True education, in Edwards's vision, informed the understanding, shaped the will, and directed the affections—all for the glory of God. Learning was thus inseparable from sanctification, and the classroom a site of spiritual as well as intellectual formation. In recovering this vision, Van Wyk provides not only a valuable historical study but also a model for contemporary Christian pedagogy (see contemporary application 275–77). Like many studies of Edwards, this book underscores his complexity: a mind of vast range, influenced by multiple traditions yet driven by a Godward view of all things. Though occasionally overextended, *To Understand Things as Well as Words* succeeds in drawing attention to a neglected dimension of Edwards's genius and invites further exploration of the Puritan divine as teacher.

—Chris S. Stevens, PhD
Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, Mississippi