Collinson is an Australian educationalist who has worked in Primary schools and served as Vice-Principal of a bible college. In this book, Collinson tackles the subject of discipleship as a Christian practice which is oft cited, but under-defined and often employed, but perhaps poorly implemented. This monograph is adapted from her doctoral research the aim of which was to enquire into “the nature of discipling and its congruence as an educational strategy with the objectives of modern faith communities” (p5). This is therefore a highly pertinent area for youth ministry, an area which the author has a stated concern.

The book is in four parts. The first section, comprising of the need for such a study and the scope and limitations are familiar to any dissertation and this opening section does set out the main store of the work well; which is that discipleship is a distinct from teaching as educational method, as the opening and working definition for discipleship suggests.

“Discipling is a voluntary, personal relationship between two individuals, in community or alone, in which the disciple commits him or herself to learn from the other, by imitation, oral communication and sharing the life and work of the discipler.” (p4)

The work then moves to expand and amend this definition. In part two, fore-grounded by a chapter on near-east educational practices, Collinson addresses Jesus’ practice of discipleship as revealed by the Gospels. Part two ends with a summary of main features of discipleship in each gospel and a refined definition

“Discipling is an intentional, largely informal, learning activity in which two or a small group of individuals, typically in a community holding the same religious beliefs, make a voluntary commitment to each other to form a close personal relationship for an extended period of time, to enable the disciple/s to learn from the other” (p.103)

Part three continues in this vain, examining discipleship in the early church as outlined in Acts and the Epistles. Though for some reason Collinson doesn’t widen the definition directly at this point.
Part four does take the definition forward. Collinson argues that a biblically generated definition needs to be re-situated so as to be meaningful in a contemporary context. She does this in chapter 10 through discussing general aspects of Christian educational theory, namely formal schooling, life related informal education and parental socialisation (p.145ff). To provide the understanding of discipleship against which congruence with practice will be measured.

“Christian discipling is an intentional, largely informal, learning activity. It involves two or a small group of individuals, who typically function within a larger nurturing community and hold to the same beliefs. Each makes a voluntary commitment to the other/s to form a close personal relationship for an extended period of time, in order that those who at a particular time are perceived as having superior knowledge and/or skills will attempt to cause learning to take place in the lives of others who seek their help. Christian discipling is intended to result in each other becoming an active follower of Jesus and a participant in his mission to the world.” (p.164)

This full definition is perhaps somewhat unwieldy and the method of development from version three (p. 103) to this final version is slightly problematic, a point to which I will return. However, what is more important is that such a definition looks very close to how one might try to define youth ministry! This makes both the biblical overview in the first parts of the book and the coming evaluation against Christian Educational theory of significance and interest for those who teach or research youth ministry.

This evaluation is encapsulated in the final three chapters. In ‘congruence with life and faith’ (chapter 11), Collinson attempts to situate the role of discipleship in the continuing role of a ‘creedal’ community of faith as a necessary and distinct aspect of the churches communal life. This brief chapter is extended a little further, in chapter 12, with data from other research on religion and education in Australia. This chapter principally identifies that discipleship is a significant ongoing method which has both a general function within the community and some specific models of operation – training colleges and short term communities (mission trips, activity holidays etc). Again, this addresses areas of specific concern to educational practice in youth ministry (for workers and young people). In the final substantive chapter (13), Collinson engages ‘classic’ Christian educationalists Westerhoff and Groome as well as a lesser known figure of Lawrence Richards (a fourth Ferris is introduced to evaluate vocational theological education) to establish whether a discipling model has congruence with contemporary