

Negotiating Adolescence:

The Real Challenge For Catholic Educational Leadership in the 21st Century

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Introduction

Despite John Howard's billions and Kevin Rudd's vocational pledges, I would like to convince the sceptics that in an educational context there is something even more important than teaching Maths, English, Science and obtaining high scores in the HSC. Using research from the social sciences, I will highlight a current "crisis of identity" that requires our collective attention. By collective I am referring to parents, teachers, educational leaders, the wider community and government.

This paper will explore the role of Catholic educational leadership with regard to the perceived moral, spiritual and philosophical "identity crisis" associated with young Australian people. Using contemporary sociological research the paper will outline the extent of alienation and suggest that the primary cause of disaffection and isolation is the incapability of the individual, within their nurturing environment, to successfully negotiate a series of adolescent identity issues.¹

Drawing upon psychological research, predominantly Erikson's Psychoanalytic Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory within a particular Catholic pastoral paradigm of education, the paper will explore the link between unresolved identity issues and the significant practical challenge for catholic educational leadership in the 21st century'.²

The paper will finally argue that supporting young people through what is perhaps the most traumatic stage of human development, the 'identity crisis associated with adolescence', (moral, spiritual and philosophical) requires Catholic educational leadership to:

¹ A sample of recent research includes: (i) *Catholics Who Have Stopped Going to Mass*, Summary Report, October 2006, Bob Dixon. See also ACBC website. (ii) *The Future of the Catholic Church in Britain*, Tom Howard. A 260-page report that shows that mass attendance has slumped by 40 per cent and Catholic marriages by 60% over the past 30 years. In the report, Tom Horwood says: 'The Church in Britain is suffering from a terminal decline in membership, irregular commitment among the remnant, and the wake of persistent child-abuse scandals.' Horwood calls for 'more effective leadership from bishops,' accusing them of 'inability to set a clear direction, and emphasise the need for straight-talking honesty, reactionary, defensive tactics have failed'. (iii) 'The Mental health of young people in Australia: key findings from the child and adolescent component of the national survey of mental health and well-being'. Research and Evaluation Unit, Women's and Children's Hospital, North Adelaide, South Australia, Australia. Michael.sawyer@adelaide.edu.au. (iv) 'The Main concerns of Young Australians', Mission Australia Research, 2006. (v) 'Spirit of Generation Y', Final Report of a three-year study, Executive Summary, June 2006. Michael Mason (ACU National), Ruth Webber (ACU National), Andrew Singleton (Monash University) Philip Hughes (Christian Research Association) (vi) *The Catholic Community in Australia* (Openbook, 2005). www.ppo.catholic.org.au

² See Erikson, E.H. (1950) *Childhood and Society*, New York: W.W. Norton Erikson, E.H. (1968) *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York: W.W. Norton; Bronfenbrenner, U (1986) Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*; Bronfenbrenner, U & Morris, P The ecology of developmental processes. In w. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (5th ed., Vol.1 New York: Wiley; (1998), Bronfenbrenner, U (2000), *Ecological Theory*. In A. Kazdin (Ed.,) *Encyclopaedia of Psychology*. Washing ton DC, & New York: American Psychological Association and Oxford University Press; Bronfenbrenner, U (2004) *Making human Beings Human*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- acknowledge and articulate with clarity the existing reality;
- formulate a pastoral vision with regard to identity issues (moral, spiritual and philosophical);
- negotiate the future practical challenges.

Childhood Development

Human growth follows a pattern of change that begins before we are born and continues until 'we depart this mortal coil', as Peter Cook once said to Dudley Moore. Thinking about childhood development has taken place throughout history; theologians and philosophers have speculated about the nature of childhood and how children should be "brought up". One could be forgiven for thinking that childhood development is something adults "do" to children. The famous maxim attributed to the Jesuits illustrates the point, "give us the boy of six and we will give you the man."

Notwithstanding the nature / nurture debate with regard to child rearing, traditionally there have been three 'schools of thought':

Original Sin
Tabula Rasa and
 Innate Goodness

The first according to Christian tradition is personified in the writings of St Augustine, namely the doctrine that all children are born into **Original Sin**. With a propensity towards evil, children enter the world corrupted by the sexual act of their parents. The purpose of child formation in this context demands that educators (Church, teachers and parents) lead the children out of the darkness of sin and into the light of the Church.

The second 'school of thought' can be traced back to Aristotle.³ The **Tabula rasa** refers to the epistemological thesis that children are born with a clean slate; in other words, their entire knowledge derives from their environment or nurture. Knowledge is built up gradually from their experiences and sensory perceptions of the outside world. Aristotle's understanding of the "unscribed tablet" was planted in medieval thought by St Thomas Aquinas.⁴ This notion sharply contrasted with the previously held Platonic belief that the human mind as an entity pre-existed somewhere in the heavens. The modern idea of this position is mostly attributed to the 17th century English philosopher John Locke. Building upon Lockean empiricism, each one of us is free to paint our own canvas, although our basic identity as a member of the human species cannot be altered. A mind born blank emphasised the individual's freedom to paint his or her own soul.

The third school of thought concerns a concept advocated by the French Romantic philosopher Jack Rousseau: he believed children are **inherently good**. Therefore they should be allowed to grow organically with minimal monitoring or constraint from parents or teachers.⁵ This amounts to an existentialist educational paradigm, one that is popular within certain contemporary educational

³ Aristotle, *De Anima* or *On the Soul*, 3.4.430a 1

⁴ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.79.2. But the human intellect, which is the lowest in the order of intellects and the most removed from the perfection of the Divine intellect, is in potency with regard to things intelligible, and is at first "like a clean tablet on which nothing is written".

⁵ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Chapter One

frameworks. Rousseau argued that children are inherently good, but become corrupted by the evils of society. Children could achieve more intellectually and morally, if they were allowed to be in their natural state. Individuality was a virtue to Rousseau and social conformity stifled that virtue. In Chapter One of *Social Contract* he argues, 'Man was born free, and is everywhere in chains'. Interestingly Rousseau believed that people entered into a social contract amongst themselves, establishing governments and educational systems to correct the inequalities caused by the rise of civilization. Indeed, the difficulty of negotiating adolescence corresponds with the young person coming into closer contact with the outside world. The nurturing environment of the family begins to make compromises to accommodate the influence of culture. Its as if two great rivers meet on their way to the sea. The fusion creates instability, counter flow and uncertainty. A crisis in negotiating adolescence is inevitable.

Negotiating Adolescence and Identity

Before I move on to suggest possible methods to enhance the bio-directional flow, and the corresponding issues relating to negotiating adolescence and identity, it may be useful to first outline the case with regard to identity and identity crisis within a contemporary context.

Eric Erikson (1902-1994) is often referred to as the “father of psychosocial development” and the architect of identity. His special interest was the influence of society and culture on child development. Erikson is credited with popularising the term “identity crisis”; he believes identity formation is the most important factor in healthy human development. Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory maintains that developmental change occurs throughout the life span. Human development entails negotiation of eight developmental stages; each of the stages contain a unique developmental task.

Erikson’s Eight Life-Span Stages

Erikson’s Stages	Developmental Period
Trust vs Mistrust	Infancy (first year)
Autonomy vs shame & doubt	Infancy (1 to 3 years)
Initiative vs guilt	Early childhood (3 to 5 years)
Industry vs inferiority	Middle and late childhood
Identity vs identity confusion	Adolescence (10 to 20 years)
Intimacy vs isolation	Early adulthood (20s, 30s)
Generativity vs stagnation	Middle adulthood (40s, 50s)
Integrity vs despair	Late adulthood (60s onward)

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological study, which I will highlight below, builds upon and enhances Erikson's research. Both psychologists agree that early experiences and family relationships are crucial for conscious and unconscious identity development. Erikson believes that identity crisis is the most important conflict human beings encounter as they journey through the eight life stages.

For Erikson the "identity" has two aspects:

The first is a subjective sense how we actually feel in ourselves; the second contains an objective observable quality of sameness and continuity, together with some shared belief in the sameness and continuity of our world image.

Identity issues usually emerge in the early stages of secondary school. According to Erikson only those young people who succeed in resolving the identity crisis will be ready to face new challenges of identity and relationships in later life. Advances in modern technology and the ever present media intrusion into the Microsystem ensures that the identity crisis may well be a recurring event in the life of the young person as they struggle to keep pace with the ever changing demands of living in contemporary culture. In other words today we require the capacity to constantly redefine ourselves and test our self-hypothesis against the 'spring board' of stable relationships. Crisis occurs when the required interaction within the Microsystem does not materialise.

Erikson suggests young people experience issues of identity crisis when they lose a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity. Post-modern culture appears to offer little in the way of sameness and continuity; our time is characterised by polarisation and pluralism, change and uncertainty, an environment almost designed to confuse even the most grounded of adults. In this sense it is possible to recognise the enhanced vulnerability of adolescent young people as they search for a sense of belonging in a world of constant movement and change.

Each of Erikson's eight stages of development are characterised by a different psychological crisis, which must be resolved to allow the individual to move to the next stage and successfully negotiate the changing environment from the Microsystem through to the Macrosystem. Failure to successfully negotiate the crisis will result in the young person not being fully equipped with the skills or psychological ability to deal with later crisis negotiations. Erikson characterises the fifth stage (adolescence Age 12 – 18 approximately) of his theory as 'identity verses role confusion'.

Description: This is the time when we ask the question 'who am I?' To answer the identity question adequately requires successful negotiation of the previous stages. Was it possible to obtain a strong sense of trust from stage one? A level of autonomy and independence from stage two? A level of balance between adventure and responsibility from stage three? A level of confidence in our own ability from stage four?

If adolescents are equipped with these attributes from previous childhood conflicts, then Erikson believes they are in a strong position to successfully negotiate the single most difficult conflict a young person must face. Today this stage takes on greater significance; personal skills need to be transferable. In other words, young people are constantly required to test identity issues of value, spirituality and philosophy outside the Microsystem.

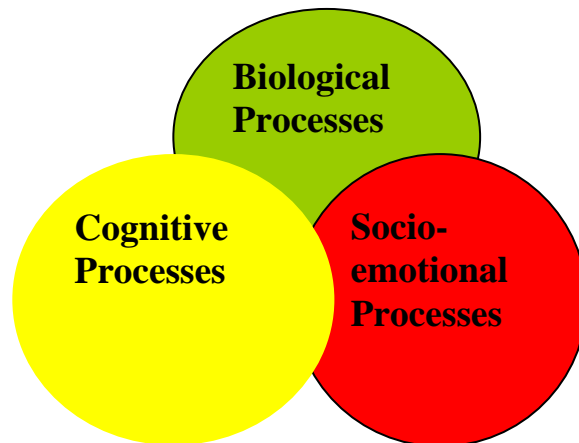
Failure to negotiate this crucial hurdle may lead the individual into identity confusion, with the corresponding difficulties associated with decision-making, especially about future careers, long-term relationships, ethical decision-making, and a sense of belonging to organisations outside the Microsystem. A positive outcome from this conflict will equip the young person with a strong sense of identity and a sense of belonging within the Microsystem. From this position of security the young person can move beyond this layer with a renewed sense of confidence. A foundation of personhood has been established, which is secure enough to face future identity challenges of intimacy versus isolation, generativity (the ability to look outside oneself and care for others) versus stagnation and integrity versus despair.

The Nature Versus Nurture Debate

The nature versus nurture debate is extremely significant with regard to forming a secure identity and successfully negotiating adolescence. Obviously proponents of *tabula rasa* favor "nurture", while proponents of original sin and innate goodness doctrine favour nature. Nature refers to an organism's biological inheritance, nurture to its environmental experiences. Nature theorists claim that the most important influence on development is biological inheritance. Nurture theorists believe that environmental experiences are the most influential. With reference to the Parable of the Sower, the nature theorists maintain that a seed (the human being) grows in an orderly way unless it is 'choked by the thorns', or overcome by its environment. The range of environments can be vast, but the nature view maintains that the genetic blueprint produces commonalities in growth and development. Certainly today we are witnessing the expansion of genetic technology, modern genetic research finds that genes have a significant effect on personal characteristics. Genetic scientists refer to the sex gene, the addictive gene, the warrior gene and even the religious gene. There can be no doubt that the prevalence of particular genes strongly influences human development.

However, the pattern of human development is multifaceted. It is the development of three complex factors: 'biological, cognitive and socioemotional processes.' These processes interact as individuals develop. The biological processes refer to change in an individual's physical nature. Genes inherited from grandparents / parents, the development of the brain, height, weight, changes in motor skills, the hormonal changes of puberty and even cardiovascular decline. When I visited my first Australian doctor she seemed more interested in the health of my parents rather than my own and for good reason. Cognitive processes refer to development in the individual's thought patterns, intelligence and language. While socioemotional processes involve change in our emotions and personality, which affect our relationships with our parents, siblings, friends and lovers.

Biological, Cognitive and Socioemotional Processes:



- Biological Processes – changes in an individual’s physical nature.
- Cognitive Processes - changes in an individual’s thought, intelligence, and language.
- Socioemotional Processes – changes in an individual’s relationship with other people, emotions, and personality ⁴

Today, with a fair degree of confidence we can assert that genetics play a significant role in childhood development, but non-genetic factors are also important. A particular gene won't automatically make us a good sportsman, or a religious fundamentalist - driven to acts of terrorism. John Santrock highlights an important consideration in childhood development ‘ each of us develops partly like all other individuals, partly like some other individuals and partly like no other individuals. All of us in some way are unique.’⁵

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological System

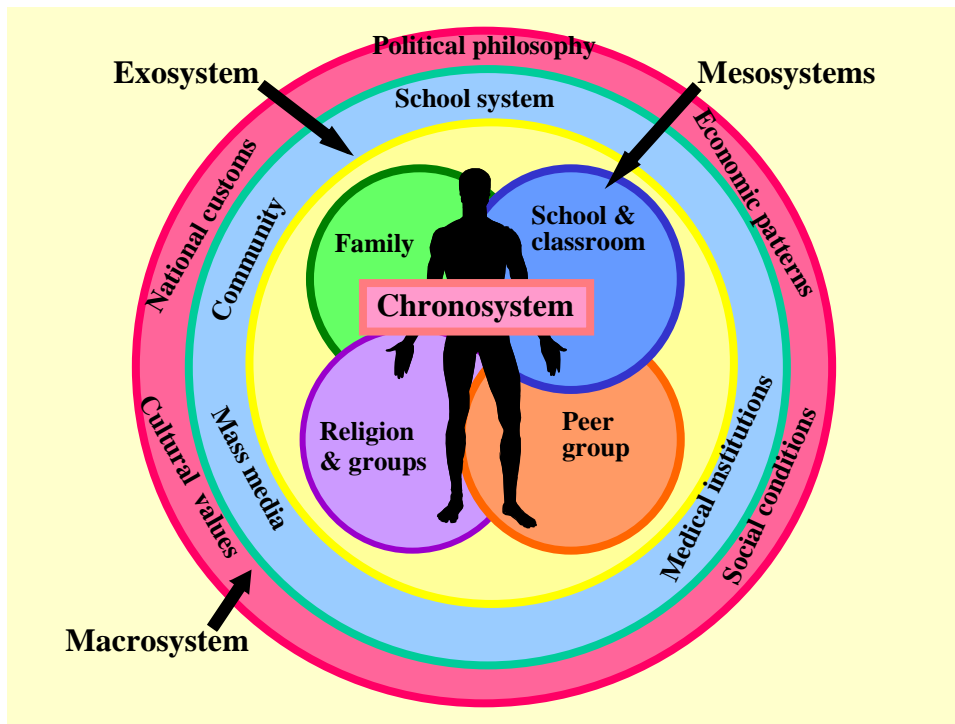
Our “Uniqueness” derives from our genetic inheritance, synthesised with our environment. The developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner stresses the significance of the environmental system of development in what he has called the “Bioecological theory. It consists of five environmental systems ranging from precise target based programmes, such as initiatives found in the home and school, through to wider cultural interactive dynamics. Bronfenbrenner believes there are two environmental conditions that are necessary for human development:

- The first is that one or more adults must love the child unconditionally;
- the second is that the adults must encourage the child to engage in activities in and outside of the home environment.

⁴ John Santrock, (2006) *Life Span Development*, Tenth Edition, McGraw-Hill, 16

⁵ Santrock, 17ff.

Consider the following layers of influence:



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development ⁶

The Microsystem is the environment in which the person interacts on a daily basis. This is the layer closest to the young person. These contexts include family, friends, teachers; The Microsystem is considered to have the most influence upon the development of young people.

The Mesosystem includes interrelations between Microsystems or connections between contexts. This system involves the relation of family experiences to school experiences or school experiences to parish experiences. It also includes the relation of family experiences to peer group experiences.

The Exosystem describes the larger social setting, in which the young person does not have an active role. This level impacts on the child through interaction with the Microsystem. For example work-life balance of parents or community based family resources.

The Macrosystem is often described as the culture or sub youth culture in which the young person lives. This level operates at the outermost layer of the environment, and comprises of cultural values, customs and laws. The effects of the Macrosystem cascade through the previous layers to influence the life development of the young person; for example, the belief that it requires the work of the entire village to raise a child in comparison to the view that it is the sole responsibility of the parents. This in turn affects both societies attitudes towards

⁶ Santrock, 52

resources and the parents ability to earn a living, pursue a career and bring up children. Government support for childcare is a contemporary illustration that outlines the significance of the Macrosystem on the Microsystem. Bronfenbrenner emphasises the importance of both in supporting the development of a young person.

The Chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time and historical events that may impact on a young person's life. World War Two is a prime example, resulting in separation, trauma and death. The influence of these events pass down through the generations and directly impact upon relationships within the Microsystem.

Bronfenbrenner's theory is known as the **Bioecological System**, which amounts to a synthesis of the young person's biological nature with environmental forces. The two come together to shape the child's development and assist in identity formation and adolescence negotiation. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological System focuses upon the quality and context of the young person's environment. Obviously as the child matures, the interactions with the other layers of the system become more complex, even to the extent of influencing physical and cognitive structures. Bronfenbrenner's theory allows researchers to clearly distinguish between issues of concern in the bi-directional flow process.

The Microsystem cannot be examined in isolation from the other four interactive layers, indeed external cultural influences mediate throughout this layer paradigm. Yet within the Microsystem it is evident that there are two primary environmental factors that lay the foundation for identity and adolescence negotiation through 'identity crisis':

1. The Family Environment &
2. The School Environment

The Family Environment & the Bi-directional flow

Most sociologists agree that the demise of the industrial age and the advancement of the technological age, within an Australian context, has not had the predicted positive outcome on the family environment. Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum 'that there is no such thing as society' resonates throughout our contemporary cultural fabric. Work-life balance may be a politically correct catch phrase, but family life has been sacrificed on the high altar of economic expediency. Our value systems have been rewritten in this regard and economics became the sole arbiter of government policy decisions. Research shows that we work longer hours,⁷ we suffer from ever increasing family breakdown and child "self-rearing".⁸

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics: 'Very long hours of work (50 hours or more per week) have become more common for full-time workers since 1985, particularly for men. In 2005, 30% of men worked very long hours, 50 hours or more per week, up from 22% in 1985. Women working very long hours continues to increase, from 9% in 1985 up to 16%, working 50 hours or more in 2005.' (<http://www.abs.gov.au/>) (46% of adults work more than 50 hours)

⁸ Family breakdown: 22.5% of Australian children live without one natural parent. In 2003, just over 1 million children aged 0–17 years lived with one parent and also had a natural parent living elsewhere. In the same year 403,000 fathers were non-resident. Source: Australian Social Trends, 2006 (cat. no. 4102.0).

Depression and anxiety rates continue to climb⁹; child abuse is at an all time high;¹⁰ and the suicide rate amongst young men is one of the highest in the developed world.¹¹ In short, objective evidence suggests that an ever increasing

⁹ Depressive disorders are now the most disabling illnesses in Australia and make major contributions to premature death by suicide, injury and cardiovascular disease or other health problems. Community knowledge about the key risk factors, protective strategies and effective self-help or medical treatments for these disorders is limited. About half of those affected do not seek medical care. In the longer term, depression can reduce social and vocational opportunities for young people as a result of early school dropout and sporadic employment opportunities. Depression and anxiety appear differently at different stages of the life cycle. The teenage years are a key stages of life to watch out for depression and anxiety, often the onset occurs in the teenage years. Women from puberty onward, are twice as more likely to experience depression than men. Around one in six Australian men suffer from depression at any given time. This may be associated with loss of energy and social withdrawal but may also result in disruptive behaviours or substance use (drugs and alcohol). Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems in young people. At any point in time, up to five percent of adolescents experience depression that is severe enough to warrant treatment, and around 20% of young people will have experienced significant depressive symptoms by the time they reach adulthood (National Health and Medical Research Council. *Depression in Young People: Clinical Practice Guidelines*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1997). For relevant statistics see: www.mja.com.au. See also 'A National Depression Index for Australia', Andrew Mackinnon, Anthony F Jorm and Ian B Hickie. *Depression Statistics: The rate of depression is doubling every 20 years and, according to a Harvard Medical Centre study, the rate of childhood depression is increasing by 23% a year. Preschoolers are the fastest growing market for antidepressants. Depressive disorders affect ~18.8 million American adults or about 9.5% of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year. Everyone will at some time in their life be affected by depression--their's or someone else's, according to Australian Government statistics. (Depression statistics in Australia are similar to the US and UK.) According to the World Health Organization depression will be the second largest killer after heart disease by 2020--and studies show depression is a contributory factor to fatal coronary disease. 80% of people who see physicians are depressed and studies are increasingly linking illness to depression, including osteoporosis, diabetes, heart disease, some forms of cancer, eye disease and back pain. Depression results in more absenteeism than almost any other physical disorder and costs employers over US\$51 billion per year in lost productivity alone. 30% of women are depressed. Men's depression rate was assumed to be half that of women, but new estimates are higher. 41% of depressed women are too embarrassed to seek help. 54% of people believe depression is a personal weakness. 80% of depressed people are not currently having any treatment.*

¹⁰ It is generally accepted that there are four types of child abuse, sometimes referred to as child maltreatment. These are physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, and neglect (Physical Abuse 28%, Emotional Abuse 34%, Sexual abuse 10% and Neglect 28%) Compared with the distribution of family types in the Australian population, the 2002-2003 AIHW (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare), statistics found that children who were the subject of a substantiated report of child abuse were over-represented in single-parent, female-headed families (but the parent with whom the child is living may not have been the person responsible for the abuse) and in two-parent blended families. In contrast, a relatively low percentage of the children resided in two-parent intact families. The most recent national figures from AIHW indicate that in Australia during 2002-2003 there were 198,355 reports of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect made to state authorities. This figure has risen significantly over the last five years from 91,734 reports in 1995-1996. These figures do not necessarily mean that the actual occurrence of child abuse and neglect has increased over this time, but they do show that the reporting of cases to child protection services has increased. The AIHW statistics can be found at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/childyouth/childprotection/index.cfm>.

Nationally, the number of children in out-of-home care rose each year from 1996-2005, the period for which national data have been collected. The numbers in care increased by 70% from 13,979 at June 2005

¹¹ ' In spite of increased community awareness of youth suicide through the national suicide prevention strategy, suicide continues to be a major public health issue and social concern. The numbers of suicides in Australia have decreased in recent years following peaks in 1997-1998, however despite the decreases, suicide remains a major cause of death, and is greater than the

number of young people are struggling to find meaning and identity both of which are mediated by “belonging to.” The corresponding consequence of “not belonging”, is a form of identity crisis; we define who we are by relational criteria. The home, extended family, school, church, cultural influences and public policy are not sustaining young people’s sense of belonging. There is an elephant in the room and we need to acknowledge it.

It appears clear that the family as an “institution” is facing an unprecedented threat from the attitudes and ideologies of contemporary culture. Such ideologies include religious and secular polarisation,¹² material escapism, egotistical contentment and isolationism. The sustaining bi-directional flow of the family into broader society appears in terminal decline with catastrophic consequences both for the family and society. Catholic church attendance is in serial decline, fewer people than ever before belong to trade unions, support charities, or join political parties and parishes.¹³

Catholic social teaching has long seen the family unit as the bonding agent that forms personal identity and holds society together;¹⁴ the adhesive is the young people who go out from the family into the broader environment and consequently determine the future directional flow of culture. Bronfenbrenner believes the crisis in family life is a direct result of economic rationalism. Children in contemporary Western culture frequently fail to receive adequate quality interaction with significant adults in long-term binding relationships. According to the Bioecological Theory, if the relationships in the Microsystem fail or are perceived as inadequate, the young person will not generate the tools and coping mechanisms to successfully negotiate adolescence. Consequently when the young person ventures forth from the Microsystem, they are ill equipped to process the variety of data emanating from the other layers of the Bioecological system. Issues of concern include: ethical positioning and personal values, dependence and independence, healthy relationships and personal identity.

The task of bringing up children has never been the sole responsibility of the parent, despite assertions from right wing think tanks. Sending ten year old

number of deaths from transport accidents. Youth suicide is a particularly complex and sensitive issue, and its effects are devastating for entire communities, especially the family and friends of the victims.’ Facts include: ‘Suicide is the largest external cause of death in Australia. Every day 7 Australians take their own life. Suicide ranks in the top 10 causes of death in most western countries. In Australia, suicide is now the leading cause of death by injury, ahead of car accidents and homicides. Among adolescents (12-24 years), suicide accounted for 25% of all male deaths and 15% of female deaths in 2002. Suicide is a prominent public health problem in Australia. Over the past decade, more than 2000 people have died by suicide each year.’

Source:http://www.spinneypress.com.au/253_book_desc.html, *Youth Suicide Prevention*, Volume 253, *Issues in Society* Editor: Justin Healey, 2007

¹² See further : Cardinal Murphy-O’ Connor, *The Tablet*, April 6.07

¹³ Bob Dixon, (2005), *The Catholic Community in Australia*, (Openbook. See also www.ppo.catholic.org.au.

¹⁴ The Catholic Church has consistently taught that Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened by the Church and state. See *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998) and *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003). See also www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk

children to detention centers as Peter Debnam insisted is not the answer. Parents need the support of the entire moral and political village to rear their children; central to this philosophy is the school. The school's position in forming identity and negotiation of adolescence has taken on greater significance, it is challenged to function in areas far beyond the curriculum and traditional competences outlined in teacher training programmes.

The School Environment & the Bi-directional flow

In an average school week teachers spend a substantial amount of time with young people operating within the Microsystem. No doubt in many instances some teachers spend more quality time with young people than their actual parents. Bronfenbrenner adopts the phrase "bi-directional" to describe the influences that take place between the teacher, children, and parents. The child also influences the teacher and parent in this free-flowing relationship. Bronfenbrenner reminds us that all relationships are bi-directional, for example, a child with aggressive behaviour or learning difficulties will not elicit the same response from a teacher as a child who is intelligent, clean and well mannered. Biological and social influences, which characterise the teacher's response to the pupil, may play a considerable role in contributing to the young person's self image and future identity.

The school cannot and should not replace the family. Teachers are experiencing considerable strain due to increased workload and longer hours. And yet educational leadership cannot ignore the implications of family breakdown and absent parents due to social upheaval and work commitments. These are political questions for government, which go beyond our educational discussion. It is in the interest of society in general to morally and financially support the two crucial environmental factors (family + school), which empower young people to successfully negotiate adolescence. Failure to do so will continue to drive a wedge between the generations and other groups within society; increase adolescence anti-social behaviour; and engender further youth alienation and latter adult disaffection.

Bronfenbrenner believes the instability and unpredictability of the family has dire implications for the practice of teaching. Political and educational leadership cannot ignore what they know. Here we move into a controversial area. The Federal government have offered funding for schools to employ Chaplains,¹⁵ to

¹⁵ The Australian Government has announced that schools will be eligible to receive grants of up to \$20,000 per year to employ chaplains. \$90 million has been allocated over three years to the national School Chaplaincy Programme, which will be open to all schools. Schools that already employ a school chaplain will also be entitled to apply for funding under the programme. The aim of the grant programme is to provide supplementary funding to assist students in crisis situation and to encourage 'the ethical and spiritual health' of students. While chaplains will be able to provide spiritual guidance for students, there will be no requirement for the chaplains to have a religious background. Chaplains will also be required to work with school counsellors to support students in crisis. Some critics of the proposal have claimed that the programme is inconsistent with the secular nature of government schools, and that all of the funds would therefore be allocated to non-government schools, particularly Christian schools. Other critics have claimed that the requirement under the programme for school chaplains to be approved by the Australian Government will lead to increased government interference in schools. Finally, critics have claimed that the funding breaches the division between church and state. However, both the Federal ALP and the Victorian Minister for Education have indicated that they support the chaplaincy programme, provided that it takes into account religious diversity within schools. The Australian Government will release guidelines for the programme by the end of 2006, and it is expected that the programme will

assist teachers in the pastoral care of their students. Many Catholic schools have refused to accept this funding. Teacher representatives continuously point out that teachers are expected to go beyond their professional competences. Yet it seems clear that it is now necessary for schools to provide stable and long term relationships, to assist young people in their quest for belonging and identity. As Bronfenbrenner has shown, this relationship must be fostered within the immediate Microsystem of the child.

I am not suggesting this is an ideal situation. In theory schools can never play more than an important secondary role of primary care or love for the young person. Although evidence suggests this may be the only stable relationship many young people experience. Within a Catholic education framework, the reality of family instability provides one of the most serious challenges for Catholic educational leadership in the 21st Century. As a consequence, the inadequate bi-directional flow between the young person, teacher and parent within the Microsystem remains a primary challenge for educational leadership. It is, I believe, a concern that directly impacts upon a young person's ability to successfully negotiate adolescence and subsequent questions with regard to personal value and identity.

Towards strengthening the Microsystem as a foundation for future identity resolution within an educational paradigm:

1. Educational authorities, schools and teachers must support the primary relationship and nurture an environment that places the family at its centre. Positive activities which bring the primary carer/s into the school environment should be encouraged whenever possible. The role of the extended family, grandparents for example, should not be overlooked.
2. Schools should set about the task of challenging the Bioecological breakdown. One in five Australian children attend a Catholic school; this is both an exceptional opportunity and a Christian imperative to support young Australians in successfully negotiating adolescence and issues of identity crisis.
3. Schools should continue to devise strategies that explicitly recognise the importance of the family. Utilising the bi-directional flow the school should continue to be a place of parental learning, particularly with regard to adolescent identity issues and work / life balance of parents. Parents should be encouraged to engage in 'parent craft', or at least become informed with regard to adolescent issues of identity and crisis management.
4. Catholic educational leadership should develop strategies to foster long-term stable relationships that realise the potentiality of bi-directional flow between parents, teachers and students. All teachers, but particularly teachers in leadership positions, should implement or continue to build long-term professional relationships with parents.

commence in 2007. The programme has been based upon programmes already existing in Queensland and Western Australia. Go to www.dest.gov.au/schools/chaplains to access further information regarding the Programme and go to www.pm.gov.au/news/media_Releases/media_Release2208.html to access a copy of the Prime Minister's speech.

5. Schools should continue to dedicate resources to spiritual and personal formation of young people – ‘the whole person’ educational paradigm.

Successful initiatives include:

- a. Spiritual retreats – identity is also a theological and philosophical question
- b. Fathers / sons and mothers / daughters relationship building camps / exercises
- c. Peer group ministry and support
- d. Role models –observational learning - learning by imitation or modelling. Politically correct or not, more men should be encouraged to become / remain classroom teachers¹⁶
- e. Schools and parents should respect the desire of young people to form their own positions on beliefs values and practices. Only mutual dialogue, which respects autonomy, will be effective in supporting identity formulation.
- f. All adolescent children should engage in works of charity - but not necessarily fundraising – young people need to work practically with people. In building a strong sense of care for the other, children should be empowered to become aware of context – their own and others. This enables diverse relationships to form and allows insight into contexts beyond the student’s own environment and comfort zones. (A particular example of this is the Sony sponsored Children’s Camps for children with mental and physical disabilities)

Conclusion

¹⁶ Schools and teachers could support their students by recognising the significance of Bandura’s social cognitive theory in relation to the Microsystem. This is learning by observing what others do. Bandura argues that young people cognitively represent the behaviour of others and then sometimes adopt their behaviour. The adolescent girl observes the sarcastic behaviour of her teacher and models this form of social engagement with her younger brother. The boy witnesses his fathers aggressive behaviour at home and recognises that it is a strategy that achieves results. It becomes a method of persuasion he uses in the schoolyard, consequently he is branded a bully. Social cognitive theorists believe young people acquire a wide range of thoughts and feelings by observing others and that these observations form an important part of the process in forming a young person’s self-identity. In a positive context, a young person witnesses a teacher dealing compassionately with a fellow pupil with regard to the death of a pet dog, the behaviour is internalised and stored for a suitable occasion when it will be retrieved and used appropriately. The Year 10 pupils witness the year 12 students working with children who have special needs, they internalise the care and compassion and resolve to imitate the practice when they reach Year 12

The misplaced desire for money, sex and power appears to be at the centre of human existence. Quite possible this ill-conceived desire is responsible for issues of identity crisis and the psychological turmoil under which our contemporary society suffers. By building long-term stable relationships, not least with God, at the centre of human existence, young people may successfully place the desire for money, sex and power in their proper perspective. Understanding oneself as a purposeful human being can go some way towards alleviating the emotional uncertainties which create identity crisis, compulsion, addiction, depression, irrational fear and even suicide.

Living and working within the Microsystem parents and teachers sometimes forget the impact we have on the development of meaning in the minds of the young people in our care. It is too easy as a parent and a teacher to get caught up in the stresses of the day. At times during interaction with young people we are not fully conscious of what may be taking place during the bi-directional flow. We can spend an inordinate amount of time in 'drift' i.e. not fully present to the concrete reality. All of us benefit from being reminded about the significance of appropriate role models for young people. We are the role models. We need reminding that teaching is more than a job; it is a spiritual vocation to build future generations. Not simply in an intellectual mode, but also via long-term mutually enriching relationships that empower young people to negotiate successfully issues of identity and identity crisis. Young people remain practical and hands on – they are less inclined to passive theorising, more inclined to interaction and respond to practical long-term commitment, like the majority of adults they respond to witness.

The good news is that schools can, working closely with parents and backed by government initiatives, reverse the Bioecological breakdown. There seems little point in teachers claiming that their role is simply to teach the curriculum, in reality, Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights that the influence of the school / teacher environment goes far beyond the curriculum. Indeed this raises the not insignificant question with regard to teacher training and competences required to educate the whole person, body, mind and spirit. In a spiritual context the evidence suggests that most children will only hear of Jesus and the gospel from a teacher in the classroom. In a social-political context, governments need to reassess the crucial role of educational leadership in building a cohesive, productive and compassionate society.

And yet, an individualistic education system which views people in economic rationalistic terms is bound to fail. Young people require an educational philosophy that empowers them to discover personal identity while challenging contemporary notions of success and failure. Often, only in old age do we discover our true identity and point to relationships as our most cherished value.

“Too late, I wish I had spent more time with the people I love!”

Viktor Frankl postulates a will to meaning, from meaning comes identity. Bernard Lonergan taught us that reality is mediated by meaning. Each of us struggles to learn the meaning of life. Meaning allows young people to discover the quality and purpose of life. Frankl points out that our basic motivation in life is neither pleasure nor power, as Nietzsche, Freud et-al predicted, but rather the pursuit of love and relationships, the ultimate source of identity. The will to meaning is to discover the meaning of life and then fulfil it. Each young person requires the support of a nurturing, loving environment to achieve this potential. During World War II Frankl survived four concentration camps including Auschwitz. In the camps, most of the

prisoners experienced hopelessness, yet Frankl continued his search for meaning. He confided to his fellow captives that his search for meaning led to an understanding of identity, identity in relationship. Meaning came from his belief that ultimately someone loves us unconditionally, a wife, children, friend, parent, and God. Frankl taught that it was not “us” asking the meaning of life - but rather life asking “us” the meaning of our existence.

What Frankl experienced in the concentration camps contradicted Nietzsche and Freud's theory with regard to human nature and identity. He witnessed starving people share their last piece of black crust with strangers. Others who organised religious ceremonies, which resulted in execution if they were caught.

Catholic educational leadership must contain within itself the courage to act counter-culturally. A pastoral and practical educational paradigm must be based on the fact that young people are self-transcendent beings; contemporary education models that view young people as self-contained economic units are bound to fail. Frankl's famous analogy of the human eye illustrates the point: the purpose of the eye is to transcend itself. A healthy eye does not see itself. The more it self-transcends, the more it actualizes itself. Only when there is a problem, such as glaucoma, does it notice itself. Self-transcendence empowers the young person to overcome contemporary nihilistic expressions of solitary existence, and move into the realm of relational being, from this relational being derives identity.

People actualize themselves in the same way. Self-actualization is possible only as a side effect of self-transcendence. People are most human when they are occupied with something other than themselves - when we are serving the needs of others. Albert Schweitzer came to the same conclusion. Man neither lives by himself nor for himself. A person who views himself or herself as a self-contained being is bound to live in despair.

Catholic educational leadership must be grounded on the irreducibility of the unique human person and the self-transcendent nature of persons. Only then will young people discover identity grows out from meaning. Young people discover in the process that life expects something from them. This realisation also assists in the formulation of identity, identity in relationship.

Educational leadership needs to be constantly aware of the serious consequences of educational reductionism. Successful adolescent identity negotiation has the potential to personify in the 'being' of the young person a challenge to cultural reductionism, and reinstitute the significance of relational identity in a variety of spheres ranging from the Micro through to the Macro layer. Successful negotiation of adolescence will lead to young people being empowered to formulate and answer questions of personal identity; it may also lead to young people making a significant contribution to our world, a contemporary world that remains characterised by identity crisis.

