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Dr Marian de Souza
A few weeks ago, Jan 26th, Australians celebrated Australia Day. A quick search on Google had numerous entries about how one could join the celebrations. A key event on this day is that many new Australians become citizens in ceremonies around the country. Thus, the essence of the day is about unity in diversity – that Australians, today, come in all different shapes, sizes and colour; that we are one; we are Australian. And yet, we were also reminded, as a result of the rather sensational reporting of the Tent Embassy protest in Canberra, that there are still too many people who are too often ignored and left out of the equation. In a VicHealth report (2011) on the Freedom of Religion and Belief, it was claimed that those most likely to be affected by discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, culture and religion are Indigenous Australians and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. This is a concern for all educators whose classrooms reflect a multitude of cultures and races. In particular, many religious educators constantly seek ways to address problems associated with teaching children to be inclusive, empathetic and compassionate. It can, indeed, be challenging in a society where such values are spoken about but not always acted upon. While individual teachers often succeed in instilling in their students respect for and acceptance of others within the religious education classroom walls, the obvious clash between the respective cultures of classroom and society is more than likely to create confusion and tension for the student who may become uncertain about the living in a particular religious way in a religiously diverse society.

The contributions to this issue of the journal reflect the problems of teaching religion in a diverse culture, especially when religion becomes the focus of political manoeuvres. We start with Hyde’s discussion on religious education in early childhood which reports on research into how children learn using a dispositional framework. He uses a voice centred relational method in a longitudinal study with thirty teachers which highlights the importance of learning stories. Next, Ang considers the impact of the contemporary culture on adolescents and proposes four elements which he believes are essential to effectively engage students in secondary classrooms: Knowledge, Authenticity, Relevance and Relationships. Buchanan challenges the reader with the question: What has faith to do with classroom religious education? Undoubtedly, the problem of how religious education may be structured from faith and/or educational perspectives so as to achieve a balanced curriculum continues to attract differing opinions and Buchanan proactively contributes to this debate.

The next three articles by Rossiter, English and Sullivan respectively, focus on some generational aspects pertinent to religious education. Rossiter offers a particular perspective on children’s spirituality in the cultural climate of today and investigates the implications for Catholic primary religious education. English examines transformative learning theory and aligns it with religious education pedagogy for women. Sullivan’s article is generated by Newman’s concept that interconnectedness should be a goal in Catholic university education. Accordingly, he argues that integration should be a key element in the learning that takes place in a Catholic university. The role of faith in religious education classes is the subject of the next article by Diponegoro and Waterworth. In particular, it highlights how this is played out in the different religious and political cultures of Indonesia and Australia. Finally, the impact of politics and social change is a feature of Meredith’s article on a Christian Ethics programs in the Ukraine and he shows correlation between normative instruction and positive social change. Thus, the writings are reflections on diversity which is a feature of so many educational communities today, locally and globally and the writers examine various implications and offer inspiring insights for the religious educator in contemporary classrooms.

Marian de Souza
Editor
Reference
NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

2012 is a new year for the Journal of Religious Education in more ways than one. To begin with, I would like to welcome Dr Jan Grajczonek into the new position as Sub-Editor. Jan brings a wealth of academic and professional experience which will be of real benefit to the journal as we move forward with our plans for future growth and development.

Secondly, many of you have been enquiring about the subscription notices for 2012 which we did not include in the final issue of 2011. Instead, we did give you advance notice that this year, we will be going online to make the journal more accessible. We are hoping to have the website up shortly and all annual subscriptions will be paid online from now on. We will continue to post out the journal to subscribers and all subscribers will have access online to the current and past issues of the journal. However, there is also an option for subscribers to only access the journal online if they prefer not receive the printed copy.

Thirdly, we have made a decision that subscriptions will be maintained at the same rate that we have had for the past three years. Instead, we plan to have three issues per year. This decision has been made in light of the increasing costs of printing as well as our efforts to continue to maintain a high standard of content and presentation for the journal while keeping our subscription rates down.

We thank you for your ongoing support for the journal and hope that you will continue to find it informative and inspiring for your research and teaching.

NOTE FROM THE SUB EDITOR

I thank Dr Marian de Souza for her welcome and would like to add how much I am looking forward to being a small part of the enormous and important contribution made by Marian and the previous editors, the Editorial Board, Consulting Editors and Editorial Advisory Committee of this journal to Religious Education. The Journal of Religious Education has maintained a significant readership not only here in Australia, but also across the world since its first inception as Our Apostolate in 1952 and then Word in Life in 1978. 2012 sees our journal expand its significant influence as it enters a new era with its online presence.

Religious Education includes a broad cross-section of areas and issues from around the world. Whilst each one of us involved in Religious Education has our own particular context, the many scholarly issues and interests published in our journal continue to assist us to remain well informed in our discipline. To have this opportunity of actively participating in the publication of the Journal of Religious Education is a privilege which I accept humbly and enthusiastically. Thank you.
LEARNING STORIES AND DISPOSITIONAL FRAMEWORKS
IN EARLY YEARS’ RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Abstract

This paper presents an initial report on a longitudinal project in which 30 teachers are tracking their students’ learning in religious education in the early years’ utilizing a dispositional framework (as opposed to a learning and teaching framework) in two Victorian dioceses. Dispositional frameworks place emphasis on the processes by which students learn rather than on the achievement of learning outcomes, and reflects approaches to curriculum which are being used in early childhood contexts. The notion of learning dispositions in religious education are detailed, as is the notion of a learning story – the tool that teachers are using in this project to track their students’ learning. The voice-centred relational method used to analysis the transcribed interviews with early years’ classroom teachers in this project is also detailed. Four steps typically comprise this form of analysis, and each is detailed by considering the transcripts of two particular interviewees in this project. The analysis of these transcripts reveals the complexity of the participants’ experience in utilizing the learning story – a combination of frustration, struggle, and excitement.

Introduction

Early childhood educators have for some time now questioned approaches to education that focus solely on the development of thinking and rational cogitation, and have begun to favour dispositional frameworks in preference to learning frameworks (Perkins, Jay & Tishman, 1993; Brooker, 2002; Fisher with Claxton & Price, 2006). For although the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities is an essential facet of education, contemporary research indicates that the act of learning extends beyond rational thinking and concerns other non-cognitive dimensions (see for example de Souza, 2006; Buchanan & Hyde, 2008; Groome, 1998; Palmer, 1998). However, there is little evidence to suggest that dispositional frameworks have been utilized in religious education with early years’ students in Catholic primary schools. This presents a challenge for contemporary religious education in the early years’ classrooms in which outcomes based philosophies focus upon demonstrable competencies as opposed to the processes or dispositions students utilize in their learning.

This paper reports on some initial findings of a longitudinal research project in which teachers in early years’ classrooms in two Victorian dioceses are tracking students’ learning in religious education in the early years’ utilizing a dispositional framework. The particular tool which is being used by teachers to track students’ learning is known as the learning story (Carr, 2001; see also Walker, 2007). The research questions centre on whether teachers find the learning story an effective tool for tracking students’ learning in religious education, and the insights they gain into the processes and dispositions utilized by their students in the act of learning. The paper briefly describes both the dispositional framework as it applies to religious education and the learning story tool. It outlines the research process employed and presents an analysis of two of the first series of interviews with the early years’ teachers who are utilizing the dispositional framework using an adaptation of the voice-centred relational method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2006).
Deficiencies of outcomes-based approaches – the need for an alternative structure

Concerns in relation to outcomes-based approaches to religious education generally have been raised previously (see for example Ryan, 1998). However, in considering religious education in early years’ contexts, there are some particular issues which also need to be articulated. Outcomes-based approaches privilege particular forms of knowledge (to the exclusion of other ways of knowing) which, it is assumed, can be measured, as well as promoting deterministic thinking which serves to create categories into which learners can be placed, accepting labelling of the Other as a natural occurrence (see for example Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Hyde, 2011). Such approaches, therefore, do not align with what is known about the ways in which young children develop. Early childhood literature maintains that children’s development occurs along unpredictable and uneven trajectories (Cupit, 2007; Walker, 2007). Children develop at their own rate and in their own time. Since outcomes-based philosophies seek to impose standards, deemed to have been achieved by the reaching of “progression-points”, such an approach is inappropriate for early childhood contexts. It fails to acknowledge the different rates and ways in which young children learn. An alternative approach to the outcomes-based philosophy is required when religious education in early years’ contexts is being considered. A dispositional framework provides one such viable alternative.

Learning dispositions – an alternative framework

The concept of a disposition comes from developmental psychology. In common parlance, it is seen as a quality possessed by a person, and is often used to signal temperament, for example “she has a cheerful disposition”. Such attributes have been variously termed dispositions (Katz, 1993; Perkins, Jay & Tishman, 1993), orientations (Dweck, 1999), and habits of mind (Costa, 2000). However, Carr (2001) notes that when, in relation to learning, the notion of motivation is considered in the description, learning dispositions comprise a set of participation repertoires from which the learner recognises, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities. Put another way, learning dispositions indicate that a learner is “ready, willing and able to participate in various ways: a combination of inclination, sensitivity to occasion, and the relevant skill and knowledge” (p. 21). In drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Comber (2000) argues that young children bring with them to school their “economic, cultural, social, symbolic and linguistic capital and their habitus, sets of dispositions acquired in daily life, that incline people to act in particular ways” (p. 46, my italics). Although children bring these sets of dispositions with them to school, Claxton (2008) argues that education can and should influence the development of these particular inclinations, as well as influencing the development of the knowledge and skills associated with different curriculum subject areas. Further, Claxton and Carr (2004) argue that when learning dispositions form the basis of an educational approach, such a framework draws attention to the long-term trajectories, rather than to the accumulation of particular bodies of knowledge, skills and understandings. In fact, Claxton (2007) goes so far as to argue that when educators think only in terms of teaching skills, or problem-solving competencies, while neglecting the need to cultivate dispositions, they often find that any apparent gains in acquiring such skills and competencies are relatively short lived – they fail to “last, spread or deepen” (p. 6).

It is pertinent to note then that a dispositional framework does not negate the teaching and learning of particular content, knowledge, skills and understandings. These are deemed as necessary and important, although they are viewed as one part of a much larger picture. A dispositional framework, then, is concerned not so much with the short-term aim of having students acquire particular content knowledge, skills and understandings, as it is with the long-term trajectory which includes the habits and orientations towards learning in general which are strengthened (or perhaps weakened) in the learning process. It is concerned with how students learn – the process – rather than with what they learn, since these processes can be applied across disciplines. A dispositional framework then shifts attention towards the process of learning, and the ways in which students’ learning dispositions are growing and changing (Claxton, 2007).

In her work in early childhood contexts in New Zealand, and linked to the strands of the national early childhood curriculum Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 1996), Carr (2001) identified five particular
domains of dispositions: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, communicating with others, and taking responsibility. The dispositions identified by Carr are intended to contribute towards the development of orientations, or habits of mind, across a range of discipline areas comprising the early childhood curriculum. In drawing initially upon the work of Carr, and through reference to the literature in both education generally and religious education specifically, Hyde (2010) refined these domains of learning dispositions for religious education in Catholic schools with early years’ students, identifying the following five domains of learning disposition: curiosity, being dialogical, persisting and living with uncertainty, meaning-making, and taking responsibility³.

Table 1: Learning Dispositions in Religious Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Cues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CURIOSITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of wonder and awe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capturing interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being drawn towards story, Liturgical action, symbol, sign, gesture, ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the familiar, enjoying the unfamiliar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEING DIALOGICAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue as play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue partners in a game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in dialogue with Self and Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being playful with others and/or materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in dialogue with story, Liturgical action, sign, symbol, gesture, ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSISTING/LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying attention for a sustained period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting with ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep questioning and wondering about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEANING-MAKING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being moved to express (verbal and kinaesthetic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal and non-verbal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersed in ‘deep play’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive response beyond words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering/unpacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-creator/constructor of the Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of meaning – making meaning visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAKING RESPONSIBILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking action that matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking the learning through into action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owning the learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower/commitment to a sense of justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a difference for the good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hyde (2010)

Table 1 presents a summary outline of these five learning dispositions, together with a series of descriptions of cues which serve to both describe each of the five dispositions as well as to indicate their possible manifestation amongst learners. For a more detailed discussion of each of the five learning dispositions, as well as the literature which informed the development of these, see Hyde (2010). These five dispositions – curiosity, being dialogical, persisting and living with uncertainty, meaning-making, and taking responsibility – form the framework around which the longitudinal research project described in this
paper is based. The means by which to ascertain the dispositions which students bring to the act of learning in religious education, and by which to track their learning, is the learning story.

The learning story: A tool for tracking students’ learning in religious education

The capability of stories to highlight critical incidences of children’s learning in early childhood contexts are well attested to in the literature (see for example, Dunn, 1993; Gettinger & Stoiber, 1998; Lyle, 2000; Walker, 2007). Situating her work within this field, Carr (2001) presents the notion of learning stories, maintaining that they are similar to narrative style observations, but with greater structure since they are organized around each of the five domains of learning dispositions. They are observations carried out in everyday settings which, over time, “provide a cumulative series of qualitative ‘snap-shots’ or written vignettes of individual children” (p. 96) displaying one or more of the identified domains of learning dispositions. A single, isolated learning story may be of limited value. However, a series of learning stories, over time, begin to build a picture of the processes – the dispositions – each child brings to the act of learning. Learning stories may begin with a focus on one domain of learning disposition. However, Carr’s research suggests that other dispositions are quickly brought into focus through such observation, and that overlapping – the process in which related domains work together – occurs. The critical point to note here is that the learning story is process-oriented. Its focus is not the learning outcome(s) which may or may not have been achieved, but rather the dispositions, orientations, or habits of mind which the child brings to the act of learning. In other words, the learning story attempts to describe how the child is disposed to learn.

A second important (and practical) feature of learning stories is that they are not intended to be lengthy. They comprise short, “snap-shot-like” descriptions of the observation. Brevity is of the essence. Key words and phrases are recorded which capture the kernel of the incident being observed. They may be accompanied (with the child’s permission) by a photograph or sample of work which exemplifies the disposition(s) displayed in the observation. As well, it is not intended that one learning story be completed for each child every week. Rather, they are compiled over time. Two learning stories for each child each semester/half year is a more realistic undertaking. This renders the use of the learning story tool practical in situations where class sizes are large.

As a documented series of anecdotes, learning stories provide a valid and reliable record of children’s learning. Using contemporary educational jargon, it may be said that learning stories provide the necessary evidence of the learning that is occurring. Teachers can then justifiably draw upon these when reporting on student progress in a variety of ways, including reporting to parents in parent-teacher, or indeed parent-teacher-child interview situations.

The project reported in this paper has utilized a single page learning story proforma structured around the five domains of learning dispositions in religious education outlined by Hyde (2010), presented in Table 2(a) below. The teachers participating in the research have agreed to document two learning stories for each of the children in their classroom each semester/half year. Also included on the proforma in Table 2 (b) below is an opportunity for teachers to decide upon how particular dispositions might be further enhanced or developed in the light of the learning story which has been written.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples or cues</th>
<th>A Learning Story (including evidence if appropriate – photographs, sample of artwork, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CURIOSITY</td>
<td>A sense of wonder&lt;br&gt;Capturing interest&lt;br&gt;Being drawn towards story, Liturgical action, sign, symbol, gesture, ritual&lt;br&gt;Recognizing the familiar, enjoying the unfamiliar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEING DIALOGICAL</td>
<td>Dialogue as play&lt;br&gt;Dialogue partners in a game&lt;br&gt;Engaging in dialogue with Self and Other&lt;br&gt;Being playful with others and/or materials&lt;br&gt;Deep listening&lt;br&gt;Engaging in dialogue with story, Liturgical action, sign, symbol, gesture, ritual&lt;br&gt;Trusting others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSISTING/LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY</td>
<td>Paying attention for a sustained period&lt;br&gt;Sitting with ambiguity&lt;br&gt;Deep questioning and wondering about…&lt;br&gt;Problem solving&lt;br&gt;Lateral thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEANING-MAKING</td>
<td>Being moved to express (verbal and kinesthetic)&lt;br&gt;Verbal and non-verbal communication&lt;br&gt;Immersed in ‘deep play’&lt;br&gt;Intuitive response beyond words&lt;br&gt;Discovering/unpacking&lt;br&gt;Co-creator/constructor of the Tradition&lt;br&gt;Making meaning visible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAKING RESPONSIBILITY</td>
<td>Taking action that matters&lt;br&gt;Thinking the learning through into action&lt;br&gt;Owning the learning&lt;br&gt;Commitment to a sense of justice&lt;br&gt;Making a difference for the good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2(b) Learning Story Proforma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Term Review</th>
<th>What Next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question: What learning did I think went on here (i.e., the main point(s) of the learning story?)</td>
<td>Questions: How might I encourage this interest, ability, strategy, disposition, story to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be more complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appear in different areas or activities in the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might I encourage the next ‘step’ in the learning story framework?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research process

The project reported in this paper presently consists of 30 early years’ teachers in six Catholic primary schools – two in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and four in the Diocese of Sandhurst – using the learning story proforma (and the dispositional framework which underpins it) to track and monitor their students’ learning in religious education. After some professional learning sessions with the researcher concerning the notion of a dispositional framework and the use of the learning story, the early years’ classroom teachers in each school have begun to write learning stories for each of their students. The researcher will then interview each of these teachers twice a year (once in June, and once in November, using audiotape to record the conversation) over a period of three years. A semi-structured interview guide will be followed in order to ascertain whether these teachers have found the learning story useful, and to determine what they may now know about the processes their students bring to the act of learning. The first series of these interviews have been conducted, transcribed, and an adaptation of the voice-centred relational method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2006), also known as the listening guide, has been drawn upon to analyse the content of these interviews. The following section details each of the steps involved in applying the voice-centred relational method as a means of analysis in this research project.

The voice-centred relational method

As described by Gilligan et al. (2006), the voice-centred relational method of analysis recognises that each person’s voice is distinct. Each person’s voice may be regarded as “a footprint of the psyche, bearing the marks…of that person’s history, of culture in the form of language, and the myriad of ways in which human society and history shape the voice” (p. 253). It is influenced by clinical psychology, literary theory and reader response theory, as well as by the language of music: voice, resonance, counterpoint, and fugue. As such, this method of analysis follows the lead of the person being interviewed to discover the associated logic of the psyche and the construction of the mind. This method has been drawn upon in the research reported in this paper because it brings the researcher “into relationship with a person’s distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person’s expression with her or his experience” (p. 225) in relation to a particular context or phenomenon, in this instance, the use of the learning story and the dispositional framework which underpins it. The method comprises a series of sequential listenings, each of which requires the researcher’s active presence and desire to engage with the unique subjectivity of the research participant. The transcribed texts of the interviews are read through multiple times, with each listening tuning into a particular aspect. Each step is referred to as a “listening” rather than a “reading” since the process requires the active participation on the part of both the teller (the interviewee – in this instance, the early years’ classroom teacher) and the listener (the researcher). As well, each listening is not merely an analysis of the text, but rather is intended to guide the listener “in tuning into the story being told on multiple levels” (p. 256). Four listenings, or steps, typically comprise the analysis. These are detailed below considering, for the sake of ease and clarity, the texts of two particular
interviewees in this project.

**Step 1: Listening for the plot**
The first listening comprises two parts – listening for the plot and the listener’s response to the interview. The transcript is read with the researcher attending to what the interviewee is saying and to the story which is being told. In this step, the researcher also attends to her or his own response to the narrative, explicitly bringing her or his own subjectivities into the process of interpretation. In qualitative research, a researcher is not, and can never be a neutral or objective observer (see for example, Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Morawski, 2001). Following the principles of reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998), the researcher then notes her or his own social location in relation to the participant, and the nature of her or his relationship with the participant.

In the two excerpts of the participants’ transcripts that follow, both participants describe aspects of their use of the learning story in their early years’ classrooms:

I found there was blurring of the lines, especially between curiosity and persisting and living with uncertainty. Perhaps these need to be spelled out a bit more. And...I find this hard to do for each child on one topic because you don’t get a chance to spend that much time with each child during it. In other subjects you spend more time with each child, and you get to find out what’s going on in their minds. But I don’t get to find out all that stuff in RE with these children. Usually with RE you take all the kids together and don’t focus on individuals...You have to have the learning story right in front of you. If you had a folder and you saw something a child was doing, you could write it down quickly. I would use a highlighter to mark the cues on the learning story...

So, maybe a clearer definition under each of the dispositions would be really good because I look at this and even now think about what it really means. Like, the cues are there, but a description might be helpful too. Looking at the cues now, they could actually be used as comments in a report form. So, yeah, I never thought about that. You could actually use the cues for each disposition as a tracking tool. I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report, for example “Christian was drawn to story, or symbol”. How beautiful and insightful is that for a parent to hear? Yeah, I am feeling that there is no need for standards. The dispositions are much broader. These become a working document...

In listening for the plot, the researcher was aware of the way in which both of these participants had engaged with the learning story, and of the challenges and opportunities the learning story might present for two teachers who had not used this type of tool previously. In response to the two narratives, the researcher became aware of his own feelings of empathy with these two teachers in using a new and perhaps unfamiliar tool. Regardless of the possibilities using this might bring, the reality was that these teachers generously agreed to participate in this research and were now being faced with a difficult challenge amidst their already busy daily schedules.

**Step 2: I poems**
The second listening involves focusing on the use of the first-person pronouns in the transcript, and from these, constructing “I poems” (Gilligan, et al., 2006, p. 259). The purpose is to compel the researcher to listen to the participant’s first-person voice, and to hear how this voice speaks about her or himself. To begin, the researcher underlines or colour-codes each first-person “I” within the text, as well as the accompanying words which seem important. Secondly, the researcher then extracts each of the underlined or colour-coded “I” phrases, keeping them in the order that they appear in the text, and places each phrase on a separate line, so that they appear as lines in a poem. Often this process results in the I poem capturing something not directly stated, but nonetheless central to what is being said, although it may not always render such a theme. In any case, the I poem “picks up on an associative stream of consciousness carried by a first-person voice, cutting across or running through a narrative rather than being contained by the structure of full sentences” (p. 260). This enables the aspect of the subjectivity of the participant to be
foregrounded, thereby providing the listener an opportunity to attend to the rhythms and shifts in the participant’s usage of “I” in her or his narrative.

Two examples of I poems from the research reported in this paper are given below. The phrases have been extracted from the larger transcript excerpts above, and have been lined up, like the lines in a poem. The first appears as such:

I found there was a blurring of the lines…(between the various dispositions)
I find this hard to do for each child on one topic
I don’t get to (find out all that stuff in RE with these children)
I would use a highlighter

In listening carefully to this I poem it would seem that the participant has experienced some challenges in using the learning story and the dispositional framework underpinning it. The blurring of the lines between each of the dispositions was experienced by this participant not as an instance of overlapping, as Carr (2001) described it (and as detailed earlier in this paper), but rather as something frustrating. As well, the “I” voice which is foregrounded expresses the difficulty experienced – I find this hard…I don’t get to – and so forth. There appears to be a sense of both difficulty and challenge in using the learning story. However, there is also a hint of the willingness to nonetheless persevere (I would use a highlighter). As this was the first interview with this participant, it will be both interesting and valuable to compare this first-person voice with later I poems which result from subsequent interview transcripts with this same participant to see whether there are shifts in this person’s narrative.

The second example, presented below, reveals quite a different and contrasting first-person voice:

I look at this and even now think about what it really means
I never thought about that. You could actually…
I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report…
I am feeling there is no need for standards...

The first-person voice being foregrounded in this particular I poem appears to be one of wondering and possibilities. In this passage the I poem highlights a different experience in using the learning story. While the listening reveals that this participant did experience some challenges (I look at this and even now think about what it really means; I never thought about that), it is also possible to see the shift in the participant’s usage of “I” in this narrative towards the possibilities which using learning stories in religious education might bring (I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report…I am feeling there is no need for standards). The last line of the I poem is particularly interesting. The participant is intuiting, feeling that the use of learning stories in religious education may render the need for standards in religious education (consistent with the outcomes based philosophy) obsolete. In other words, this participant may see the learning story, with its focus on the way in which students are disposed to learn, as providing more information about the student than the indicating of an achieved outcome. It will be interesting to see whether other I poems from this participant composed from the transcripts of future interviews continue to reflect this perception.

Step 3: Listening for contrapuntal voices

This step offers a way of listening to and developing an understanding of the different layers of the participant’s expressed experience in relation to the research question. The rationality behind this step is drawn from the musical notion of counterpoint, which consists of “the combination of two or more melodic lines” (Piston, cited in Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 262). In a musical score each melodic line has its own particular rhythm, but these are played simultaneously, and move in relationship with each other, sometimes resulting in harmony, sometimes in discord. Listening for contrapuntal voices enables the researcher to listen for the counterpoint in the texts being analysed – the multiple facets of the story being told. Gilligan and her colleagues have utilized this step in relation to individual participants. This involves reading through the interview transcript of the individual participant several times, each time tuning in to one particular aspect of the story being told – to one voice within the person’s expression of her or his own thoughts and feelings.
experience. However, it is also possible to understand this step in the process as applying to all of the participants collectively. That is, it is possible to tune into particular aspects of the story being collectively told by the participants. The research reported in this paper viewed this third step in both of these ways, as pertaining to the individual participant and the participants collectively.

The second of the I poems above provides an example of listening for the counterpoint in an individual participant’s expression of her or his experience. This participant’s first person’s pronoun reveals the emergence of two contrapuntal voices. First, there is the “I” that is challenged in relation to using the learning story (I look at this and even now think about what it really means; I never thought about that). This is the “I” that struggles to use the learning story in a meaningful and useful way. However, even within the few short lines of that I poem, it is possible to detect the emergence of second voice which seems to be excited by the possibilities presented by using learning stories in religious education (I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report; I am feeling there is no need for standards). There are two possible contrapuntal voices here – a voice of struggle and voice of possibility. In the counterpoint between these two voices it is possible to hear this participant’s own struggle and excitement in using the learning story. Rather than having to choose which voice best characterizes what the participant is expressing, it is possible to listen for the relationship that exists between these two voices as this participant’s struggle and perseverance in using the learning story results in some excitement at the possibilities that the use of the learning story might bring.

If both of the I poems are considered as a collective it is also possible to tune into particular aspects of the story being collectively told by the participants. The first I poem depicts a voice of frustration in relation to using the learning story (I find this hard; I don’t get to). Yet, this participant continues to persevere. The second I poem, as discussed above, reveals a voice of excitement at the possibilities that the use of the learning story might bring. Both of these participants’ voices reveal the complexity of the experience of working with and using the learning story. This is expressed in the relationship that exists between these two voices as the participants struggle, experience frustration, persevere, and possibly experience a sense of excitement in relation to the possibilities that might present themselves in using this tool in the classroom context.

Step 4: Composing an analysis
In the final step of the process, the researcher brings together what has been learnt from each of the listenings in relation to the research question. An interpretation of the interviews or transcripts is developed that synthesises what has been discovered. Through the analysis of the descriptions of the two participants considered in this paper, and in particularly through the I poems constructed about each, it is possible to hear the sense of frustration, struggle, and excitement experienced at the possibility of using learning stories in religious education. The complexity of the participants experience is foregrounded. It is not frustration, or struggle, or excitement that is experienced, but rather a combination of each of these experienced at different times.

Conclusion
Since the first round of interviews have only just been completed, and the teachers involved in this project have only just begun to utilize learning stories (and the dispositional framework which underpins them), it is too early to draw any definitive conclusions, particularly in relation to whether or not learning stories enable these teachers to gain insights into the processes and dispositions utilized by their students in the act of learning in religious education. At this stage, and as the I poems above suggest, the teachers are still becoming acquainted with the learning story tool, and experimenting with its usage. Their responses remain at a pragmatic and practical level in terms of their experience in using this tool. As would be expected, they are not in a position at this point to determine whether they have acquired insight into the processes and dispositions utilized by their students. Nonetheless, this study presents a challenge for educators to move away from the narrow confines of an outcomes based philosophy, with its emphasis on
cognition and demonstrable competencies, towards a wider series of horizons and perspectives in forging new pathways, frameworks and openings for more holistic curriculum development.

One of the strengths of the participatory nature of the research methodology being used in this project is that it honours the narrative conversations of the participants and offers a sensibility in listening to the vantage points, attending to the multiple voices of the participants and the resultant movements in their narratives. In giving visibility to such voices, the initial analysis does make clear the complexity of the participants’ experience of working with and using the learning story. It will be interesting to see whether, given the longitudinal design of the project, the nature of this complexity changes, and whether teachers report positively in terms of gaining insight into the ways in which their students are predisposed to learn in religious education.

It is hoped that the utilization of the dispositional framework advocated being used in the study reported in this paper will make a valuable contribution to early childhood religious education and curriculum study. It is also hoped that the voice-centred relational method employed in this study will make a timely contribution to contemporary and scholarly inquiry about new research modalities and processes – and the trustworthiness of such practices in qualitative research in both religious education, and education generally.

References


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1 A possible exception here would be the recent work of Eaude (2011) who advocates the use of attributes and dispositions in religious education generally.

2 The project reported in this paper is funded by the Victorian Bishops’ Grant for Excellence in Religious Education. The author acknowledges the generosity of this funding body in enabling this project to advance.

3 I am in debt to my colleagues at the Catholic Education Office Melbourne for much discussion and debate which enabled the refinement of these five particular learning dispositions in religious education.

4 The same semi-structured interview guide – an interview with an agenda, yet utilizing open-ended questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Smithson, 2000) – will be utilized on each occasion the researcher meets with the teachers so that it may be possible to track, to some extent, the development and changes in the teachers’ responses as they become more familiar with the dispositional framework and the learning story proforma.

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ENGGANG THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
CLASSES: THE FOUR ESSENTIALS

Abstract

This conceptual article explores how the secondary school Religious Education teacher can successfully engage students so that effective learning can take place. For this to occur, it is argued that teachers firstly need a broad understanding of the nature of today’s secondary school students in terms of the prevailing youth culture. In terms of how young people think and learn, it needs to be remembered that most secondary students are going through the particular stage of human development called adolescence. This is a critical time in the lives of students when patterns of thinking and behaviour are established. Finally, four essentials needed to engage secondary school students in Religious Education classes are proposed and discussed. These are: knowledge; authenticity; relevance; and relationships. If these four essentials can be achieved in the classroom, students will be engaged in their learning, which in turn will lead to higher quality intellectual work and a more enjoyable and productive educational experience for both the teacher and the student.

The Nature of Secondary School Students

For secondary school teachers, engaging students is a necessity for effective learning to take place. This is especially the case for teachers of Religious Education, where students sometimes have difficulty seeing the relevance of the subject in their busy academic timetable. To determine appropriate ways to successfully engage secondary school students in learning, teachers need to have a picture of both the broad concept of the prevailing youth culture of the time and an understanding of how students think and learn. Consequently, this first section of my article examines the prevailing culture of the present day Australian secondary school student and then examines the nature of adolescent learning.

Youth Culture

Most secondary school students range in age from 12 to 18. In comparison, the average age of teachers in Australia is 45 (McCrindle, 2005). For teachers involved in engaging young people, it needs to be noted that the gap between teachers and their students is constantly growing. “School students are always aged 5-18 but we are getting older, so we must work harder to understand them and so remain relevant” (McCrindle, 2005, p. 1).

Whilst the media often gives attention to the youth of today and their links to drugs and violence, the reality for most young people is more mundane. Engebretson (2001) argues that “in general they lead their lives with family and friends, and their interests are in school, work, socializing, shopping, sports and music” (p. 90). Based on this, it would seem that most are not very different from older generations and their relationships with these older generations are mostly harmonious (Brienen, 1998). Most young people think that school is a good thing and they are quite conservative on issues of law and order. They are interested in issues, but not necessarily in the political systems that underlie these issues. Young people are increasingly concerned about the environment, racism, prejudice, economic rationalism and the artificial values espoused by the world around them. Whilst they are motivated for particular causes they will not radically challenge the system (Brienen, 1998).
Whilst teachers of the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964) were influenced by the coming of TV, Rock and Roll, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, decimal currency and the threat of nuclear war, today’s student population who come from Generations Y and Z have lived through the age of the internet, cable television, globalisation, Facebook, and a growing awareness of environmental issues (McCrindle, 2005). Sharing these experiences during one’s youth can unite and shape a generation. The old saying that “people resemble their times more than they resemble their parents” rings true for today’s secondary school student.

Experiences that occur during the formative childhood and teenage years also create and define differences between the generations. These social markers create the paradigms through which the world is viewed and decisions are made. (McCrindle, 2005, p. 2)

The Australian Lifestyles Questionnaire 2001 (McCrindle, 2005) has revealed that Australian teenagers are spending more time watching TV today compared with four years ago, with figures up from 2 hours 16 minutes per day to 2 hours and 20 minutes, a growth of 3.6%. If we add in internet and video games use, they are now approaching 4 hours screen time per day. For Engebretson (2001, p. 91) “this is the first generation to claim the computer as a birthright”. For many young people social reality is being constructed from the messages they are incessantly exposed to by the commercial media and the Internet.

So what are the values largely held by today’s secondary school students? If we can understand what today’s youth most value, this may help us to determine how to most effectively engage them in our schools. For McCrindle (2005) this can be broken down into three areas: relational concern; bigger meaning; and trusted guidance. In terms of relational concern, young people are “seeking community: to be understood, accepted, respected, and included” (McCrindle, 2005, p. 3). They work hard to live up to what their peers expect of them, and their self-esteem often rests on how well regarded they are in their group or sub-culture. In terms of bigger meaning, this generation has observed their parents getting the rewards of hard work: houses, cars, and material wealth. Therefore, they are looking for more than just continuing the consumerism experiment. Indeed, when deciding to accept a job, salary ranks sixth in order of importance after training, management style, work flexibility, staff activities, and non-financial rewards (Manpower ™ Incorporated Questionnaire, 2000, cited in McCrindle, 2005). They are on a search for fun, for quality friendships, for a fulfilling purpose, and for spiritual meaning (one in three claim to regularly take part in a religious service of some sort) (McCrindle, 2005).

There are more voices than ever trying to win over a cause-seeking generation. Whether it is social justice, environmentalism, or volunteering, young people are getting increasingly involved. The third area is that of trusted guidance. Research shows that the third strongest felt need Australian teenagers have is for guidance or direction in their life that is trustworthy (Manpower Inc Questionnaire, 2000, cited in McCrindle, 2005). There is much advice on offer but not much of it is believed by this sceptical generation, and McCrindle (2005) believes this is rightly so.

By the age of 18, the average young person has viewed over 500,000 TV commercials, in addition to countless Internet, radio, and outdoor ads, much of which is pure hype. This generation wants guidance in the form of a navigator, not a street directory. They are looking for real life role models and mentors who not only know the way, but also go the way, and can show the way. (McCrindle, 2005, p. 4)

**Adolescent Learning**

Most secondary students are going through the particular stage of human development called adolescence. These are the years between middle childhood and young childhood (Chadbourne & Pendergast, as cited in Pendergast & Bahr, 2005, p. 23). So much of secondary schooling “should be regarded as adolescent-specific .... adolescent-centred, adolescent-focused, adolescent-led” (Chadbourne & Pendergast, as cited in
Hargreaves and Earl (as cited in Hill & Russell, 2004) argue that the main characteristics and needs of early adolescence can be summarised as requiring adolescents to:

1. adjust to profound physical, intellectual, social and emotional changes;
2. develop a positive self concept;
3. experience and grow towards independence;
4. develop a sense of identity and of personal and social values;
5. experience social acceptance, affiliation, and affection among peers of the same and opposite sex; increase their awareness of, ability to cope with, and capacity to respond constructively to the social and political world around them;
6. establish relationships with particular adults within which these processes of growth can take place. (p. 3)

Hill and Russell (2004) further suggest that adolescents should learn to think in ways that become progressively more abstract, critical and reflective, gain experience in decision-making and in accepting responsibility for these decisions; and develop self-confidence through achieving success in significant events. “Although adolescence is a physical, emotional and cognitive reality, it is, in part, shaped by the social context in which young people live” (Hill & Russell, 2004, p.4).

Adolescence is the time when each person experiences the development of his or her self in relationship with others. It is also a time when the virtues of responsibility, concern for others, respect for people as individuals, respect for oneself, compassion, self-control, mature decision making, a willingness to listen to and share time with others, must be developed if the young person is going to be able to form honest, committed and faithful relationships in adult life. (Engebretson, 2001, p. 97)

For Jackson and Davis (2000), the main purpose of high school education is to promote the intellectual development of young adolescents.

....to think creatively, to identify and solve meaningful problems, to communicate and work well with others, and to develop the base of factual knowledge and skills that is the essential foundation for these ‘higher order’ capacities.

(Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp.10-11)

Adolescence is a critical time in the lives of students. It is a time when patterns of thinking and behaviour are established. They learn to question and seek answers in a way more profound than ever before. It is also a period of extreme physical and emotional upheaval where their engagement in schooling inevitably decreases (Kimber & Deighton, 1998) and so the effective Religious Education teacher needs to finds ways to increase this engagement. Engaging students in learning about various social justice, ethical and human rights issues in Religious Education classes is one way to deal with this period of profound change in their lives. Such learning can help facilitate the development of a student’s own identity as well as personal and social values (Ang, 2010).

Four Essentials Needed to Engage Secondary School Students

Given this understanding of today’s youth culture and the nature of adolescents in our schools, how can the Religious Education teacher successfully engage with his or her students? In answer to this question, I propose four essentials needed to effectively engage today’s students:

1. Knowledge
2. Authenticity
3. Relevance
4. Relationships
I have put these four essentials in the form of a spiral in Figure 1. This visual image suggests that there is no hierarchy in the four elements of student engagement, nor is the process linear. Each element of student engagement has its value and the distinct elements do not stand alone, but rather intermingle and support each other to effectively engage today’s secondary school students. I will now elaborate on these four essentials in more detail.

Knowledge

This can be broken up into two types of knowledge: pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical learner knowledge (Ryan & Grajczonek, 2007).

The first type of knowledge is that of pedagogical content knowledge. As is true of all subject areas, the engaging Religious Education teacher needs to have a sound knowledge of the content of his or her discipline. Ryan and Grajczonek (2007) go further and define pedagogical content knowledge as the knowledge needed to present the content knowledge effectively. For Ryan and Grajczonek (2007), the religious educator in a Catholic school, has “a responsibility to know and understand the essential tenets of Christianity” (p. 39). Do they have a strong faith background? Are they a practising member of a faith congregation? It is hard to engage students in learning about a subject if your own knowledge is limited on that subject. A teacher’s own upbringing and lifestyle is important in developing this knowledge, but to some extent, it can also be established during the pre-service teacher’s tertiary studies. Have they undertaken specific Religious Education qualifications or accreditation? “One way to develop your skills and competence in religious education is to undertake further study in religious education” (Ryan & Grajczonek, 2007, p. 187). It also develops “on the job” as a teacher is asked to teach in areas that he or she is less familiar with. Background study and research is needed to ensure that you are “on top of” the content and issues that you are asking students to engage with.

The second type of knowledge, pedagogical learner knowledge, concerns the pedagogical skills and classroom strategies needed to teach in any discipline. This can also be considered the “deep knowledge teachers have of their students that enables them to provide the most effective teaching and learning strategies and activities” (Ryan & Grajczonek, 2007, p. 76). It is one thing to know the content of a subject,
but a completely different thing to be able to settle a class of 28 young adolescents and focus their minds so that they are ready to engage positively in a Religious Education lesson. The basic skills of teaching can be effectively learnt by a pre-service teacher during undergraduate or post-graduate teacher training at University, and especially when on teaching rounds. But, as with all professions, knowledge of the skills of teaching are cumulative and develop with experience when working in the profession. Trial and error in the classroom and observing other teachers and the strategies they employ are both commonly used methods to improve a teacher’s effectiveness to positively engage their students.

For Pearsall (2010), the first few years of teaching can be likened to an apprenticeship, “an opportunity to work with more experienced teachers, trying out different teaching techniques as you hone your own personal style” (p. 7). A teacher’s commitment to the profession and to their students is moral and deeply personal. How to get the most out of that commitment in the classroom is really about developing a bank of skills and strategies (Pearsall, 2010). Often the most capable teachers are ones who see themselves not as experts but as lifelong students of teaching; constantly exploring different strategies for supporting young people.

It is also essential that teachers keep abreast of the latest developments in education and that they put these into practice in their teaching wherever possible. As stated by Ellington (2000) “the key to this process is a commitment to continuing professional development, reading books and articles, attending conferences and seminars, and generally taking an interest in what is happening to your profession”. By joining and actively participating in professional associations and networks of religious educators such as the Australian Association for Religious Education (AARE), religious education teachers can pursue their interests in religious education and increase both their pedagogical content knowledge and their pedagogical learner knowledge.

**Authenticity**

Students can quickly tell if a teacher doesn’t want to be in the classroom with them or if Religious Education is not their preferred subject. Students can sniff a phoney from a long distance, especially in an RE classroom. To engage students, the teacher must be authentic. To be an authentic Religious Education teacher, you must want to teach Religious Education. In terms of pedagogy, rather than a rehearsed talk, or a manufactured spiel, students want teachers to be spontaneous. The more interactive teachers are in the classroom, the less intimidated, and more open students will be (McCrindle, 2005).

Not only must the teacher’s style be credible, but the communicator himself/herself must be also. Students don’t expect us to know all about their lifestyles or to embrace their culture. They are simply seeking understanding, and respect. If we have a hidden agenda or are less than transparent, it will be seen. They have been educated to be critical consumers of education.

**Relevance**

The first aspect of “relevance” relates to content. The content of what we are communicating has to be of relevance and interest to engage students. Indeed, the challenge for Religious Education teachers is often to communicate to students how some of the topics we are studying have relevance. For Rossiter (2002), “appropriate content selection is fundamentally important for making religious education a subject that can challenge students to think critically” (p. 55) which is of great importance in establishing the relevance of the content for students. Students want the content of Religious Education classes to be about real life or contemporary issues rather than institutional maintenance. They want to be engaged in “the points where young people touch the spiritual and moral dimensions of life” (Rossiter, 2002, p. 55). When starting a new topic in a Religious Education class it is good teaching practice to spend some time explaining to students why you are studying that topic, how it is relevant to today’s society, and what they, as a community or as individuals, can learn from it. The teacher also needs to try and inject enthusiasm into the class for the topic by saying how interesting it will be and how fascinating it will be to investigate issues involved.
The second aspect of relevance relates to style of presentation. With knowledge of the influences and characteristics of today’s visually educated and entertained secondary school students, educators need to determine the best ways of communicating with them. The traditional teacher “chalk and talk” will not work effectively with this generation. Our communication style is structured; they want freedom. We stress learning; they like experiencing. We focus on the individual; they are socially driven. But rather than being the “sage on the stage”, today’s teacher needs to be the “guide on the side”, employing engaging teaching strategies. In explaining the dynamics of tasks that motivate the youth of today in all subject areas, Marzano (2003) believes that such tasks have three characteristics. Firstly, they present manageable challenges for students. Tasks are engaging to the degree they challenge the individual’s present capacity, yet permit some control over the level of challenge. Secondly, tasks that are inherently engaging arouse curiosity. This can be achieved by “providing sufficient complexity so that outcomes are not always certain” (Covington, 1992, p. 160). Finally, engaging tasks involve fantasy arousal. Covington (1992) describes fantasy arousal as the “creation of imaginary circumstances that permit the free and unfettered use of one’s growing abilities” (p. 160), and gives the example of classroom simulation games, where students role play particular scenarios. Instructional games like these are not only intrinsically motivating to students, but can also develop self-reflection skills, effective group behaviours and critical enquiry skills (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). The teaching of Religious Education certainly lends itself to all three of these characteristics.

Needless to say, it is absolutely vital to keep up to date with the latest developments in information and communication technology if you want to be an engaging teacher. New delivery systems such as multimedia, the Internet and interactive whiteboards are currently revolutionising education. If teachers don’t use these to their advantage, they will soon be left behind by those who do (Ellington, 2000).

**Relationships**

No matter what discipline area, teaching is all about relationships. Relationships need to be developed with students both in the classroom, and outside of the classroom. There are also relationships to be developed with colleagues, parents and the wider school community. For Pearseall (2010, p. 45) the “greater part of teaching is about building and sustaining relationships, and a solid relationship with a student is often enough to overcome all kinds of potentially confrontational situations in the classroom. Small investments in time in getting to know your students and building up a rapport can be enormously rewarding.”

Teachers who have built a strong personal rapport with their students can challenge unproductive work practices more effectively, encourage students to set challenging goals for themselves and enjoy the confidence of greater classroom efficacy. Teachers routinely acknowledge this in the everyday when they seek advice from a colleague about a student who they are finding difficult to support but with whom the colleague has a close and productive relationship.

When communicating with today’s students we need to be open, vulnerable, show genuine interest in those we are trying to teach, and above all else, understanding. The more relaxed the environment, and the more socially conducive to discussions, the better will be student engagement and the quality of the learning. As the educational saying goes “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care!” In relation to the education of young people, McCrindle (2005, p. 5) states:

> .... a quality outcome is dependent on our understanding of them. Once we have a foundational grasp of their characteristics, communication styles, and social attitudes, we will be well equipped to effectively impact this enormous and emerging generation.

(McCrindle, 2005, p. 5)

The old adage of a teacher not smiling at his/her class until Term 2 should no longer be realistically considered, if indeed it ever was. Students want to know they are developing a relationship with a person, not a robot. Sharing some aspects of your own family, your personal likes and dislikes, your attitudes and beliefs, can all help to establish a positive relationship with your students. As stated by Chadbourne and
Pendergast (as cited in Pendergast & Bahr, 2005), positive student-teacher and student-student relationships can increase student engagement with school tasks, which will in turn lead to higher quality intellectual work.

As noted by Loughran (2010, p. 19):
“Although to some, teaching may look easy, the reality is that it is a complicated and complex process, largely because it is problematic. The problematic nature of teaching means that the how and why of teachers’ professional judgements matter and those judgements form the foundations for their understanding, development and use of knowledge of practice”.

Conclusions

To be an effective Religious Education teacher, you must engage with your students. This doesn’t mean you have to try and be one of them, or like everything they like, or be knowledgeable on all of current youth culture (they might see that as “tragic”). Rather, you need to let them know that you like them, value their interests, and enjoy being with them. Students work for teachers that they like. Be a teacher of young people first, and of curriculum second.

For teachers to successfully engage students today, they first need to have a clear understanding of both the nature of the prevailing youth culture, and an understanding of how young people think and learn during adolescence. It is during this critical time in the lives of students when their patterns of thinking and behaviour are established. Armed with this knowledge and understanding, the secondary school teacher, then, needs to achieve the four essentials needed to engage students: knowledge (pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical learner knowledge); authenticity (not only must the Religious Educator’s style must be credible, but the communicator himself/herself must be also); relevance (of lesson content to the lives of students and style of presentation); and relationships (the greater part of teaching is about building and sustaining relationships).

If these four essentials can be achieved in the Religious Education classroom, students will be engaged in their learning, which in turn will lead to higher quality intellectual work and a more enjoyable and productive educational experience for both the teacher and student. Teaching is a profession where success usually comes in very small increments. But the reward for such hard won success is that it resonates in the students’ lives long after a lesson or year is concluded.

References


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**Michael T Buchanan**

**WHAT HAS FAITH GOT TO DO WITH CLASSROOM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?**

**Abstract**

Curriculum framework documents in religious education from various Catholic dioceses throughout Australia have in recent times sought parity with state and territory curriculum frameworks (National Catholic Education Commission, 2008). This has been done even though religious education is not part of the learning domain of state and territory education systems or curricula. This quest for parity has resulted in greater emphasis on the “educational” focus of classroom religious education and a downplaying of the attention given (if at all) to the faith dimension in Catholic schools. This paper proposes a rethink of the emphasis attributed to faith in classroom religious education by drawing on perspectives of faith in religious and secular contexts.

**Introduction**

In recent times there has been much emphasis on an “educational” dimension for classroom religious education in Australian Catholic schools. “Educational” in this context refers to the teaching and learning that primarily determines the level of student learning according to the achievement of knowledge centred learning outcomes. There are several justifications for this emphasis. For a number of decades diocesan leaders have focussed on ensuring that classroom religious education is an area of learning that has parity with other curriculum areas. They have generally expected the same accountability and integrity required of other curriculum areas to be applied to classroom religious education (National Catholic Education Commission, 2011). A recent investigation by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) found that in general the approaches taken to teaching classroom religious education in Australian Catholic schools was reflective of the respective State and Territory curriculum frameworks (NCEC, 2008). It has been argued that the design of classroom religious education curriculum frameworks that draw on similar educational approaches found in state and territory curriculum frameworks would add to its credibility as a learning area (Engebretson, 2002). Furthermore an exaggerated educational emphasis on a small excerpt from a large document written by the Congregation for the Clergy’s (CC) document titled *General Directory for Catechesis* may also have attributed to the contemporary emphasis on this educational parity between classroom religious education curriculum and state and territory curriculum frameworks.

It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines, but rather it should engage in a necessary inter-disciplinary dialogue. This dialogue should take place above all at that level at which every discipline forms the personality of students. In this way the presentation of the Christian message influences the way in which the origins of the world, the sense of history, the basis of ethical values, the function of religion in culture, the destiny of man and his relationship with nature, are understood. Through inter-disciplinary dialogue religious instruction in schools underpins, activates, develops and completes the educational activity of the school. (CC, 1998, # 73)

A survey of *Religious Education in Dialogue: Curriculum around Australia* (NCEC, 2008) would support the contention that less emphasis appears to have been placed on the introduction to Article 73 of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (CC, 1998) which emphasised a faith or catechetical dimension to religious education (religious instruction). “Within the ministry of the word, the character proper to religious instruction in schools and its relationship with the catechesis of children and of young people merit special consideration” (CC, 1998, # 73). With little attention given to the introductory statement which actually sets the context for # 73 (CC, 1998) the educational dimension pertaining to classroom religious education has been emphasised.
and this has been reflected in many curriculum frameworks across many dioceses throughout Australia (NCEC, 2008).

Religious education in Queensland has been drawn upon as an example to illustrate this point. The Archdiocese of Brisbane has sought to address this dichotomy between faith and religion as an educational enterprise in its document titled Religious Education: Guidelines for the Religious Life of the School (Barry & Brennan, 2008). This document ultimately is concerned with the formation of the whole person. The document indicates that the Catholic school community is an environment where people are taught to be religious in a particular way and that the classroom religious education is the environment where “teaching and learning of religion” (Barry & Brennan, 2008, p. 8) takes place. Furthermore an entire document entitled, Religious Education: Years 1 to 10 Learning Outcomes (Barry, Brennan & Sunter, 2003) was dedicated specifically to classroom religious education. While the document acknowledged the distinct but complementary educational and faith dimensions of religious education, it emphasised the educational dimension as paramount to classroom religious education.

This document is focused on the educational dimension of religion teaching and learning in classroom settings. It is based on an outcomes approach, emphasising the educational alignment between this key learning area and other key learning areas in Queensland. (Barry, Brennan & Sunter, 2003, p. 1)

In contrast, Church documents emphasise the complementary nature between education and faith and/or catechesis (CCE, 1988, #66-70; CCE, 1990). However the emphasis in contemporary classroom religious education appears oriented towards a distinction which emphasises the educational dimension. Given the emphasis here it is debateable whether classroom religious education should be retitled Religion Education to comply with the language use in both documents.

If this quest for parity between state and territory curriculum frameworks and classroom religious education becomes all consuming in a Catholic school, then the aims of religious education may appear confused. This could lead to disorientation between the intended ecclesial aims of religious education according to the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) and a schools understanding of its aims.

Without entering into the whole problem of teaching religion in schools, it must be emphasised that, while such teaching is not merely confined to "religious classes " within the school curriculum, it must, nevertheless, also be imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner to prevent a distortion in the child's mind between general and religious culture. The fundamental difference between religious and other forms of education is that its aim is not simply intellectual assent to religious truths but also a total commitment of one’s whole being to the Person of Christ. (CCE, 1977, # 50)

From the perspective of the CCE (1997) religious classes not “teaching and learning of religion” (Barry & Brennan, 2008) form part of the school curriculum and these classes should, as previously stated, be oriented to a “commitment of one’s whole being to the Person of Christ” (CCE, 1997, # 50). If this premise is to be considered plausible then faith must also have a part to play in the religious education of children in classroom religious education and broader school context. Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (CEE, 1982) calls for teachers to be witnesses to faith and, although the CCE (1982) seldom makes a distinction between the role of the lay Catholic educator and the lay Catholic religious educator, the concern for the inculcation of students (and teachers) into the faith must have prominence in both the religious education classroom and the religious life of the school community.

It therefore stands to reason that the classroom religious education teacher has a responsibility to be attentive to the faith dimension of each student’s experience of learning. This point is emphasised by the Congregation for Catholic Education.

Religious education is actually a right - with the corresponding duties - of the student and of the parents. It is also, at least in the case of the Catholic religion, an extremely important instrument for attaining the adequate synthesis of faith and culture that has been insisted on so often. Therefore, the teaching of the Catholic religion, distinct from and at the same time complementary to catechesis properly so called, ought to form a part of the curriculum of every school. (CCE, 1982, # 56)
The recent emphasis on classroom religious education being oriented towards seeking parity with other key learning areas (NCEC, 2011) has contributed to downplaying the faith dimension that has a rightful place within classroom religious education. An emphasis on religion rather than religious education may run the risk of orienting classroom religious education away from appropriate attention to the faith dimension which is a mandate of the Church (CCE, 1982). A place for the faith dimension in classroom religious education should be considered and reconsidered constantly.

Emphasising the faith dimension in contemporary religious education classrooms may seem problematic given the composition of students populating contemporary religious education classrooms in Catholic schools. Many students in religious education classes are not from Catholic backgrounds, some are from other religious backgrounds and others have no religious background (Liddy, 2002). In fact in some Catholic dioceses in Australia more than fifty percent of the student population in Catholic schools are from non-Catholic backgrounds (Healy, 2011b). Against this reality many educators would argue that the faith dimension should be downplayed in the teaching and learning approach and development of classroom religious education curriculum (Healy, 2011a ; see also Barry & Brennan, 2003). To downplay an appropriate emphasis on the faith dimension of in the religious education classroom in order to achieve parity with other key learning areas runs the risk of the faith dimension becoming a hit and miss area with the potential of only impacting on those students inculcated in the Catholic faith tradition and open to catechesis. This risk has been emphasised in scholarly debate:

.... in a school setting ... the pupil’s range over a whole spectrum of commitment: some will come from very committed Christian Catholic families and some may be theirselves committed; others, the exact opposite. When, therefore, religious education is presented to pupils of such wide-ranging commitment, it will be received in different ways; some will receive it as ‘catechesis’, some may be evangelised by it, and others will hear it simply as religious education. (Purnell, 1985, p. 74)

It is possible to live up to the mandate of the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) where expectations of careful attention to the total formation of the human person include the faith dimension even in religious education classrooms with student populations from diverse religious, cultural, social backgrounds.

Furthermore it is an expectation of the Congregation for Catholic Education that lay Catholic teachers teaching in non-Catholic schools still be open to the possibility that students may still encounter a genuine synthesis between faith and culture.

Lay Catholic teachers should be influenced by a Christian faith vision in the way they teach their course, to the extent that this is consistent with the subject matter, and the circumstances of the student body and the school. In doing “this, they will help students to discover true human values; and even though they must work within the limitations proper to a school that makes no attempt to educate in the faith, in which many factors will actually work directly against faith education, they will still be able to contribute to the beginnings of a dialogue between faith and culture. It is a dialogue which may, one day, lead to the students’ genuine synthesis of the two. This effort can be especially fruitful for those students who are Catholics; it can be a form of evangelization for those who are not. (CCE, 1982, # 49)

Given that such expectations are placed on lay Catholic teachers in non-Catholic schools it would be difficult to argue that religious education teachers in Catholic schools would appear justified in ignoring a responsibility to acknowledge and attend to addressing a faith dimension in classroom religious education. How teachers actually do this could be the focus of another paper.

Having established a premise for attention to a faith dimension in classroom religious education it is vital to explore how this might be achieved in a way that is sensitive to a diverse student population while at the same time respecting the aims of Catholic education which adhere to the evangelising mission of the Church (Second Vatican Council, 1964). The research of Fowler (1981) and Dantley (2005) may prove helpful in contemplating a way forward in addressing a faith dimension in religious education classroom populated by students from diverse backgrounds. Fowler (1981) sought to research the faith development of people by
interpreting the life stories of three hundred and fifty-nine research participants aged between three and a half years and eighty-four years. The interviews took place between 1972 and 1981 and he drew in structural and developmental psychological theorists (see Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1969; Maslow, 1968) to identify certain stages of faith in the life of an individual. These stages were related to experience and to cognitive and personal development. It was generally accepted that Fowler’s research on stages of faith transported understandings about faith development beyond the constraints of religious contexts. That is, faith development was not perceived as exclusively the domain of religious contexts. While this concept may help to contribute to the argument about to be put forward, it should be noted that ninety-six per cent of the people who participated in Fowler’s study were from Judaeo-Christian backgrounds. In fact ninety-seven point eight per cent were white Americans, eighty-one point five per cent were Christians, eleven point two per cent were Jewish, three point six per cent were Orthodox Christians and another three point six per cent were not specified as having any religion (Fowler, 1981, p. 315). Fowler’s (1981) theory on stages of faith development has been applied to non-religious and religious contexts of education (Engebretson, de Souza, Rymarz & Buchanan, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Learning strategies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-stage: Primal Faith (Infancy)</td>
<td>Gained from interaction with primary care giver which exposes the infant to experiences of trust</td>
<td>Learning about eco-spirituality students could learn about dependency and commitment in nature by looking at animal nurseries e.g. visit a zoo, a children’s farm, a dog or cat shelter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Interactive-Projective Faith (Early Childhood)</td>
<td>Meaning is made mostly through intuition and imitation. A tendency to copy and reproduce patterns of behaviour closely related to adults.</td>
<td>Students could imitate scenes from the bible e.g. the nativity scene, Jesus at the temple as a young boy etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Mythic-literal Faith (Childhood and beyond)</td>
<td>Sorting out the difference between real and make believe. Reality is seen as something that can be seen, touched, heard, tasted or smelt.</td>
<td>Students could be introduced to signs and symbols in the Church and learn to distinguish between what can be seen (crucifix), touched (holy water), smelt (incense), tasted (Eucharist) etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional Faith (Adolescent and beyond)</td>
<td>Individuals conform their thinking and acting to the expectations and concerns of others beyond their immediate family e.g. school and social net works.</td>
<td>Students could use graphic organisers to identify how they would respond to a given situation depending on those who are present. They should then be invited to reflect on their responses noting any similarities and differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Individual reflective Faith (Young adulthood and beyond)</td>
<td>Individuals take responsibility for their own commitment, beliefs, values and attitudes</td>
<td>Students could be encouraged to keep journals that allow them to record their own thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes toward particular issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith (Early midlife and beyond)</td>
<td>Individuals come to terms with their own past and rework it to find new meanings and multiple ways of making meaning.</td>
<td>While this stage is generally presumed to occur beyond school years. Senior students should have opportunities to engage in retreat like experiences and learn about the benefits of spiritual direction as an option as they journey through life and faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6: Universalising Faith (Mid-life and beyond)</td>
<td>Individuals have reached a stage of unity with the ultimate. No longer do they see themselves as the centre of the universe. They have put the universe at the centre instead.</td>
<td>Students could learn about people who are perceived to have reached this stage of faith and reflect on the significant attributes and contributions such people have made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fowler (1995) argued that faith in the universal sense can be experienced by the underlying formation of beliefs, values and meanings. His research has been considered both within and beyond religious contexts (Fowler, 1981). His stages of faith development can be drawn upon as a means of addressing a faith dimension in classroom religious education - especially classrooms populated with students from diverse backgrounds.

The Table above provides an overview of Fowler’s (1991) stages of faith and how they may be used to attend to the faith dimension of religious education. Incorporating learning strategies that may help one become attentive to the faith dimension may at a later stage lead to the individual encountering a synthesis between faith and life in their own life (CCE, 1982).

In recent times Dantley (2005) has explored expressions of faith in secular contexts and the growing willingness amongst populations to talk about and publically express faith. He claimed that recent tragedies such as major acts of terrorism and natural disasters have unlocked those inhibitions that once held back members of secular society from talking about faith. Faith has become very much “an integral part of our secular life as it is the religious” (Dantley, 2005, p. 6). In fact, coping with serious tragic encounters produces populations of people who are all too aware of the specific reality of tragedy and disaster and it is something people come to terms with by drawing upon faith. Faith enables them to contemplate a better future. One that may not yet be fully realised or as Dantley (2008) indicated “our faith releases us to envision a better future that leads to our acting and constructing assiduously, a new reality that can be replete with changes grounded in justice, equity and morality” (p. 8).

A recollection from a past tragedy is drawn upon here to illustrate Dantley’s point. On the 7th day of February 2009, news telecasts brought to the attention of the whole world the devastating loss of life and destruction of homes resulting from the bush fires in Victoria, Australia. The fires surrounded and engulfed a very large portion of the state. For most of 2009 (and particularly the early part) the Victorian community was grief stricken. The outpouring of raw emotion and the experience of individual and communal vulnerability was beyond the comprehension of this population which had not previously encountered such devastation and loss in its own backyard. However many stories of hope for a brighter future were shared. One particular story involved a fire fighter and a Koala. In the midst of fighting the bushfires a fire fighter saw a Koala with burnt paws walking across burning ashes. The fire fighter became oblivious to all around him except his focus on rescuing the Koala. The fire fighter helped the Koala to drink water from his water bottle and the Koala placed her paw on the fire fighters hand to support herself while she drank from the bottle. Footage of this amazing event can be found on YouTube, Koala saved after bush fires (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUk0EjDNA-k&feature=related). The Koala was given a name (Sam) and taken to an animal shelter to recover from the injuries she received from the bushfires. Sam received worldwide media coverage and populations of people affectionately envisaged a brighter future for Sam. Another YouTube film clip titled Koala Rescued from Bush Fires, originally reported on Sky News in the UK (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp_7GopNMso&feature=related) highlighted the concern for the survival of this poor creature. Sam captured the hearts of many. She had survived the bush fire, she was reported to have found love in an animal refuge with a male Koala and while we celebrated her hope for a better future, many people were saddened to learn that she had to be put to sleep due to other health complications. However, many rejoiced in knowing that everything possible was done to give her a better chance at survival and eventually a dignified death. According to Dantley (2005) human intervention such as the one portrayed in this example, which is oriented towards a envisaging a better future, is an expression of faith in a secular context.

Faith expressed in the secular is reliant on the hopes of individuals and communities to envision and hopefully bring into reality a better future. Expressing faith in the secular can be associated with a natural theology that holds at its core that human beings are ultimately responsible for visualising and creating a better future. Dantley (2005) suggested some human characteristics such as hope, justice, compassion, and co-creation are drawn upon to express faith in secular contexts because they help people to envision a better future. He also purports that faith is such a significant attribute to knowing beyond the measurable that it is able to affirm
the existence of truth without physical validation. Many people who had lost everything in the Victorian bushfires continued to look towards a better future without physical validation of their vision (YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaalUctj1JU&feature=related).

Drawing on Fowler (1995; 1991; 1981) who illustrated stages of faith in a universal sense beyond the scope of religious constructs (though relevant to religious contexts) and Dantley (2005) who argued that faith is very much a part of our secular life (as well as religious), it would seem a negligent act on the part of educators to not give appropriate attention to the a faith dimension in classroom religious education. In the context of Catholic education systems that accommodate student populations from diverse backgrounds (both religious and non religious) in classroom religious education programmes, the mix of students should be no justification for ignoring a faith dimension. All students have a right to classroom learning that incorporates a faith dimension as faith is not exclusively expressed by religious people (Dantley, 2005; Fowler, 1995, 1991; 1981). Classroom religious education in a Catholic school is an appropriate place to be attentive to the faith dimension. Furthermore it is the mandate of the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982, 1977), the Congregation for the Clergy (1998) and it plays an essential role in helping the Church to achieve her mission (Second Vatican Council, 1964). It is also a human experience obtainable by all (Dantley, 2005; Fowler, 1995; 1991; 1981).

For centuries, the Christian Tradition and the Catholic Tradition have understood that certain characteristics of faith, like Dantley’s (2005) analogy of faith, call human response and experience beyond the measurable and truth, are not dependent on physical validation. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) (1994) there are six key characteristic of faith. They are:

**Faith is a Grace**
Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him. “before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the mind and ‘makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth” (CCC, 1994, # 153).

**Faith is a human act**
In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: “Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace” (CCC, 1994, # 155).

**Faith and Understanding**
... methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner does not override moral laws, can never conflict with faith, because the things of this world and things of faith derive from the same God” (CCC, 1994, # 199)

**The Freedom of faith**
The act of faith is of its very nature a free act. ... Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but he never coerced them (CCC, 1994, # 160).

**The necessity of faith**
“... without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life ... “(CCC, 1994, # 161)

**Perseverance in faith**
To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must beg the Lord to increase our faith, it must be “working through charity” abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church (CCC, 1994, # 162).

**Faith – the beginning of eternal life**
Faith is the beginning of eternal life ... we walk by faith, not by sight ... (CCC, 1994, # 163 & 164)

These characteristics of faith in the Catholic Tradition should be introduced and reinforced through classroom religious education. They help young people in Catholic schools who are very much a part of the secular world know that faith can be experienced beyond the concept of human relationships. It has the potential to help them connect with, and nurture their relationship with God.
Conclusion

Faith is expressed by human beings in religious and secular contexts. In a secular country such as Australia, where the vast majority of Australians identify themselves as belonging to a particular religious tradition, there is an obligation on educational institutions to be attentive to a faith dimension. In Catholic schools it should be perceived as more than an obligation to enable every student to be attentive to a faith dimension in their own lives and communities. Classroom religious education has an obligation to be vigilant in exploring ways and means of nurturing a faith dimension in the lives of students. Attention to this requires a rigorous and vigorous critical evaluation of the emphasis on the educational focus of diocesan curriculum frameworks. The analysis should be critiqued in the light of a relook at the relevant documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education and scholarly perspectives on faith in the universal (Fowler, 1995; 1991; 1981) and / or secular (Dantley, 2005). An audit of current curriculum frameworks pertaining to classroom religious education in Catholic schools should be undertake to identify the proportion devoted to attending to the faith dimension. A hit and miss approach similar to that conveyed by Purnell (1985) is an abrogation of responsibility to fulfil the mandate of the Congregation for Catholic Education which is at the service of the Church’s mission (Second Vatican Council, 1964). Closer attention to the faith dimension in classroom religious education may require a rethink and reconstruction of many diocesan curriculum framework documents. It would also require some creative thinking about appropriate classroom strategies that give suitable attention to incorporating the faith dimension in classroom religious education. However, this is not the domain of this paper but rather a recommendation for future consideration and further research.

References


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Graham Rossiter*

PERSPECTIVE ON CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY AND CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A KEY STARTING POINT FOR REVIEWING ISSUES IN CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

Abstract
Much has been written in the academic literature in recent years about the place of wonder, awe, the experiential, imagination, playful learning etc. in children’s spiritual development. This makes a valuable contribution to understanding the natural ‘human’ dimension to children’s spirituality at both pre-school and primary school age levels. But what seems to be neglected, and which warrants more attention, is the primal socialisation into the spiritual that young children absorb from their parents/guardians. In other words, a key to interpreting children’s spirituality is the sort of spirituality exhibited by their parents. And for many Catholic children entering Australian Catholic primary schools, their parents have a relatively secular, individualistic, subjective and self-reliant spirituality – which is not particularly religious. Their children’s starting, pre-school spiritual baseline does not include any reference to God and religion. From this point of view, an attempt will be made to interpret the apparent discontinuity between children’s and adolescents’ spirituality as part of a continuum. The perspective developed will be used in follow up articles to evaluate a number of issues identified in the literature related to children’s spirituality and content/pedagogy in primary school religious education.

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
   The earth, and every common sight,
   To me did seem
   Apparelled in celestial light, (1-4)
   . . . . trailing clouds of glory do we come
   From God, who is our home:
   Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (65-67)

   Shades of the prison-house begin to close
   Upon the growing Boy,
   ... the vision splendid. .
   At length the Man perceives it die away,
   And fade into the light of common day. (68-77)

William Wordsworth, 1804. Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

Introduction

Children’s spirituality and primary school religious education
Within the last decade, the extensive literature on children’s spirituality in books and academic articles paints a positive picture of children’s spiritual development both at early childhood and primary school age levels – to name only a few selected references: Adams et al. 2008; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008; Berryman, 2009; Nye, 2009. Collectively, this literature discusses the following aspects: spirituality in terms of ‘connectedness’ to self, others, world and the transcendent; wonder and awe as childlike expressions of spirituality; development and exercise of the imagination; experiential ‘hands on’ learning; constructivist learning theory with children as active agents in their own spiritual learning – that is, children having their own ‘voice’ in learning and not just being passive receivers of beliefs from adults; learning through play. Nye (2009)
summarised this thinking under the acronym SPIRIT – space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy and trust. This discourse makes a valuable contribution to exploring and understanding the natural ‘human’ dimension to children’s spirituality in psychological terms. The interpretation of what might be called a ‘basic human spirituality’ in children complements and informs thinking about religious development and the growth of a personal religious faith (Dillen, 2007; Roehlkepartain et al. 2006; Sullivan, 2011.) The discourse readily gives an impression, that as far as fundamentals are concerned, children’s spirituality is not problematic. They are as spiritual as they ought to be. It could be expected that the literature of Australian Catholic diocesan and school Religious Education documents, where they are concerned with children’s spiritual development, have a stronger focus on personal faith, theological content and desired religious practice; but it is beyond the scope of the article to analyse this literature.


In the light of these developments one could surmise that the ‘state of play’ in children’s religious education at primary school level is healthy. Anecdotal evidence from early childhood and primary school religious educators, would suggest that this optimism is prominent in practitioners, notwithstanding the acknowledged perennial need for further improvement. Children’s religious educators appear to enjoy their work; generally, they find children easy and agreeable to work with; and they consider that children are usually responsive and enthusiastic in their engagement with religious education. There appear to be no research findings that are discordant with this picture of children’s spirituality and religious education. This is also consistent with the impression given in educational literature that children can show natural energy and enthusiasm in a variety of learning areas (E.g. Australian Government Early Years Learning Framework, 2010, p. 34; Feehan, 2006.).

While there have been a number of informative, recent Australian research studies of the views of secondary teachers in Catholic schools (Finn, 2011; Kenyon, 2010; Wanden, 2011.), to date there has been no comparable systematic study of primary school religion teachers’ understandings of the nature, purposes and practice of religious education.

**Youth spirituality and religious education**

In somewhat stark contrast, the picture of adolescent/young adult spirituality and their disinterest in religious education is very different. Studies of youth spirituality over the last decade show that there is an increasing prominence of a relatively non-religious spirituality. While there are still young people who are overtly religious, a significant proportion have a spirituality that is subjective, individualistic, relatively secular, eclectic, questioning and self-reliant (Tacey, 2003; Smith and Denton, 2005; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Kay and Zieberts, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Mason and others, 2007; a general summary of contemporary youth spirituality is provided in Rossiter, 2011.). Even where they retain some sense of denominational religious identity, their religion may have little tangible influence on their spirituality. And as Hughes (2006) noted, religion tends to be regarded as an optional spiritual resource, and as an area of natural epistemological uncertainty such that individuals make up their own minds as to what it can mean and how it might or might not help them. Rossiter (2010A, 2020B) proposed that in contrast with a religious spirituality this could be interpreted as a ‘basic human spirituality’, without a cultural religious overlay, and which was not overt and easily identified but embedded and implied in the moral quality of individuals’ behaviour and relationships.

This sort of contemporary secular spirituality is not just a characteristic of youth. It fits the description of many adults – including a significant number who send their children to Catholic primary schools.

For those who teach religion to adolescents in Catholic schools, there is not the same glowing positive picture that tends to be painted by primary school religious educators. While some secondary students are
responsive and engaged by religious education, most anecdotal evidence suggests that the opposite is more common. Teaching religion in the secondary school has been described as a ‘health hazard’ (Kenyon, 2010; Rossiter, 2010B.) These teenagers may not be openly antagonistic to religious education, but they are often patiently and enduringly disinterested, even when they judge that it can be helpful for them personally (Maroney, 2008). Teachers’ awareness of this situation was also identified in the research of Finn (2011) and Wanden (2011).

**Perspective on interrelationships between children’s and youth spirituality**

**Does spirituality decline as children become adolescents?**

After reading the literature referred to above, one might begin to wonder: “Are we teaching different species in primary and secondary religious education?” While acknowledging that different content/pedagogies related to the distinctive spiritualities of children and adolescents are needed, it is equally important to “avoid creating an unrealistic divide between the two” (Rossiter, 2010B, p. 14). What is needed is perspective that shows how the two spiritualities are part of a single continuum of personal/spiritual development, always influenced by the contemporary socio-cultural environment. And religious education practice needs review in the light of such a combined perspective.

The first issue to be addressed is what might be called the ‘Wordsworth Romantic myth’ of childhood spirituality which has influenced thinking since the emergence of romanticism in the 18th century. Wordsworth’s Ode on *Intimations of immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* suggested that children seem to have an innate spirituality related to nature and the transcendent, which is gradually eroded as they grow older – particularly in the relatively harsh social environment of the newly industrialised and urbanised Britain of Wordsworth’s time. This same theme coloured the research of Edward Robinson in the Oxford Religious Experience Research Centre in the 1970s – evident in his book *The original vision* (1977) and which is still evident in some parts of the contemporary discourse on children’s spirituality and religious education. For example:

> Children tend to be more open to spirituality than adults because they draw upon their nonverbal powers of communication, whereas adults rely more upon their abilities to use words and language, which often cannot express the spiritual. (Hyde 2009 p. 39)

One of the problems with this thinking is that it vaguely implies that children’s spirituality is somehow more ‘pure’ than that of adults, as if it were ontologically superior. It suggests that the development of rationality and language ‘contaminates’ children’s spirituality, whereas it is proposed that the ideal for spirituality should be an ‘adult’ spirituality, towards which children’s spirituality should develop – while acknowledging that the latter has an integrity and an authenticity that should not be obscured by interpreting children only in terms of miniature, immature adults. The claim that adults have a diminished capacity for non-verbal and spiritual expression is disputed. Rationality, moral judgment, wisdom and sense of responsibility – as well as non-verbal expression – are proposed as desirable and essential elements of any healthy adult spirituality.

In practice, it is natural and to be expected that many, especially parents and teachers, will lament the passing of childhood while they are not actually subscribing to the romantic myth of children’s spirituality. Children in their simplicity, their vulnerability and naivety, their uninhibited and straightforward expression of feelings are naturally attractive, likeable and loveable. And usually people find adolescents and adults more problematic to deal with – most people expect that it is easier to teach children than adolescents. When adults/parents say about their young children “I wish they would not have to grow up”, this is a tender expression of their love for the distinctive childlikeness of their children at that age – but they do not literally believe that this is desirable. This natural nostalgia about children and childhood should not inhibit children’s growth towards adulthood by proposing an ideal for spirituality that gives an impression of wanting to ‘prolong’ childhood.

However, the reverse – accelerating adult development in children – is a more significant problem. One
example: The individualistic theme of ‘constructing your own meaning and identity’ has increasingly been applied by adults and teachers to children (E.g., in the religious education theory of Erricker & Erricker, 2000). And by implication they are being asked to take on what is a more adult task. Rather, it is more natural for them to accept relatively unquestioningly the meanings in life proposed by parents and community agencies (E.g. their religion) until they are old enough and wise enough to judge and decide for themselves (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006. p.459).

So it is proposed that there is not a ‘natural’ decline in spirituality as children grow into adolescents. But what will need further attention is the apparent decline in responsiveness to religious education coupled with their decreasing readiness to attend to the religious meanings transmitted by the Church.

**What is the principal starting point for interpreting children’s spirituality?**
The recent research literature tends to focus on children’s innate spiritual capacities as the main starting point for describing and explaining childhood spirituality. Expressions of awe and wonder and the exercise of imagination are like ‘proto-spiritual’ activities (E.g. in Nye, 2009). No doubt such a developmental approach is valid, and as noted above, it highlights the psychological dimension to spirituality. However, this literature seems to give little attention to the starting point that probably has most influence on children’s spirituality – the primal socialisation of the pre-school child into the spiritual from parents/guardians, whether this be religious or non-religious in orientation. In other words, the operative spirituality of parents/guardians/family should be a principal reference for interpreting children’s spirituality. Not to do this runs counter to both intuition and research indicating that in the earliest years, the influence of parents/guardians is both primal and dominant.

Before they get to school, young children in religious families often have a strong sense of God and of the practice of religion; while children from non-religious homes have a well established ‘child’s’ version of a secular, individualistic, self-reliant spirituality. Acknowledging that many children begin school with a comfortable secular spirituality is significant in resolving the apparent conflict between children’s and adolescent spirituality; it suggests that one of the most common, final, adult products – a secular individualistic spirituality – is already present in many children. It is not the product of secularisation during their adolescence.

At this point, attention will be given to the different spiritual dynamics that affect children in religious and non-religious homes.

**At home with God**
Take for example, a home where the family were practising Catholics. Very young children would readily absorb some feelings and ideas about God from family behaviour. There would be prayers each night where the child was helped to pray to God for family, pets, etc. by speaking directly to God who the family believed was listening to their prayers. The child’s notion of God would develop as they acquired a capacity for abstraction to understand how God was a spirit (that is non-corporeal) who authored and sustained the universe and who knew them personally and cared for them individually. In addition, they also prayed to Jesus who was God as well as being human. Crucifixes, religious pictures, and perhaps religious sculptures and small family shrines might serve as symbolic reminders and reinforcement of the family beliefs in God. Weekly visits to church would help imprint on children’s consciousness the centrality of religion and religious practices – with its architecture, symbols, rituals sounds, praying and singing, all in a context of a social event in a community of like-minded believers. For young children, it is difficult to underestimate the potential religious influence of the experiential and of the physical symbols.

For a child in this situation, it is likely that when they first go to school they bring with them a familiarity with God and religion. And this fundamental orientation will affect the way they both perceive and respond to the school’s religious education. It is important to note that what is written in current Catholic primary school religious education curricula presumes that this situation is the norm applying to all children.

But what of young children who grow up in a different home context where perhaps they have hardly heard
the word ‘God’ before they go to a Catholic school? Special attention will be given to this group firstly, because it now probably represents the majority of pupils entering Catholic primary schools and secondly, because it is considered that attention to the spiritual/religious needs of this group is central to the contemporary mission of Catholic schools – attention that does not necessarily compromise the needs of the religious children.

**Growing up in the ‘divine absence’ and hearing about God for the first time**

For children growing up in homes where a relatively secular, non-religious spirituality prevails, some may not hear the word ‘God’ until they go to school. Or perhaps they only hear it from their parents in the form of an expression of surprise “O my God!” when something unusual happens. In her research on children’s prayer, Mountain (2004, pp. 114, 141) showed that this expression sometimes confused children who wondered whether “O my God” was intended to be a prayer.

In contrast with the situation in a religious home, here there is a distinctive *divine absence* – that is, no words or behaviour that imply acknowledgment of the existence of God or of any place for God in the family’s human affairs. Similarly, with religion; they may learn something about God and religion from television but this would depend on what their TV ‘viewing diet’ was. The impression that these children would absorb when they first become aware of religion is that it is a cultural phenomenon that has little if any relevance for their lives; their family gets on well without it. And it is likely that for many, they will hear about the word ‘God’ for the first time when they go to their Catholic primary school. In this sense it is ‘outside’ information, not primal family information, and likely to be processed like other outside information – for example, new knowledge about their ethnic cultural identity that was not referred to in the home. And this has significant implications for content and pedagogy.

Table 1 (see p. 35) summarises some of the principal differences in the spiritual environment of young children in homes that are distinctively religious and those that are not. The latter are not strictly non-religious; the parents are theists; they themselves (or one of them), have had a Catholic schooling and they retain some religious identification with Catholicism; but they have no contact with a parish community and there is no mention or sign of God or Catholicism in their way of life – their home spiritual horizon does not include God or religion. But they believe that a Catholic schooling is desirable for their children and they are prepared to sacrifice to pay for that education. The prospect of their children’s Catholic religious education is usually not a problem; they think it could be morally and culturally beneficial for their children or at least that it could do little harm – and it is part of the package when one chooses a Catholic school.

In the non-religious family situation, children, even if they cannot articulate this at the time, will learn that if there is any spiritual dimension, then it is intimately connected with life. It would have to do with values and the moral quality of their relationships. Spirituality would not be overt but implicit in the way people acted and spoke – and hence naturally problematic to identify and interpret (Rossiter, 2010B, p. 8.). They would also learn that whatever others might say about God and religious spirituality, no matter how important, their home experience would tell them that it is not something really life changing, and that it warranted little attention; it was very much in the background.

Nevertheless, the religious knowledge acquired in their school religious education would become a cultural spiritual resource, their religious heritage, that may or may not become more important in their lives later. At least they were being educated spiritually and religiously in their cultural religious tradition – something to which they had a birth right. And this is valuable in itself, and one of the key objectives in the mission of the Catholic school. The Catholic primary school will significantly extend the spiritual and religious horizons of children beyond what they would normally experience at home. Extending children’s cultural horizons is one of the basic educational purposes of schools.

Young children from both religious and non-religious homes will readily accommodate to the religious world view and religious spirituality of the Catholic school. Because they naturally tend to be eager to discover the new, they will almost always show interest in religious education just as they would in any other learning.
They will learn how to pray and participate in religious rituals and Mass. They will demonstrate religiosity, and this may be interpreted by their teachers as signs of personal religious faith. Equally, they can comfortably move back into the spirituality regime of their own homes whether or not this mirrors the spirituality of the school. They can accommodate to different spiritualities in different contexts, just as they can accommodate to different behavioural regimes to that of their home (E.g. those that apply when at their grandparents or when at child care).

Table 1. Contrasts in spirituality between children growing up in homes with a religious spirituality and homes with a secular non-religious spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of God and religion in the home</th>
<th>Distinctively religious homes</th>
<th>Relatively non-religious, secular homes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At home with God – children growing up in a religious family with regular practice of religion at home and at church.</td>
<td>The divine absence – children growing up in a family with a relatively non-religious spirituality where God and religion are referred to infrequently or never.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| How children experience Catholic primary school religious education | RE experienced as affirmation, support, extension and enhancement of well-established personal / family belief and religious practice; it reinforces primal religious beliefs; it gives new information about their religion; may clash with parental religious views. | RE experience involves ‘hearing about God’ for the first time; experienced as new cultural knowledge that has vague and tenuous relationships with the ‘home view’ of God and religion. |

| The nature or quality of the religious knowledge acquired from religious education | In many cases, is naturally congruent with ‘inside’ family religious knowledge; acquired from teachers who represent their ‘extended religious family’; likely to be naturally affirmed at home. Where the parental religious views are fundamentalist / pentecostal / very conservative, there could be a strong clash between the religious perspective taken at school and that of the home. | Not congruent with the way in which religion fails to figure in the family social life; acquired from ‘outsiders’ (to the family) who nevertheless represent the cultural religious group to which the child’s family nominally subscribes; tends not to be consciously rejected at home but just ‘quietly ignored’. |

| How the religious knowledge might relate to personal belief | May be readily and directly related to a pre-existing personal faith. May challenge the faith of those who have fundamentalist beliefs. | May or may not remain at the level of knowledge of religious heritage; may prompt personal belief; or individuals may appear to affirm belief just because they show interest and do not overtly reject what they have learned, or because they think that affirmation of belief is required of them at school. |

Hearing about god for the first time – content and pedagogical implications

As noted above, children from religious and non-religious homes will perceive and respond to the experience of religious education differently. This is one particular case of what is a more general educational principal –
children’s own idiosyncratic response to teaching. For children from relatively non-religious backgrounds, their first knowledge of God starts within the school educational culture. Whether or not, and how such knowledge might develop into a personal belief, would be difficult to determine – even for the child him/herself. The path from cultural knowledge to belief and commitment is complex and obscure. And Christian theology says that the animating role of the Holy Spirit is involved. Also possibly influential would be children’s growing awareness of different racial, cultural and religious groups – especially through the medium of television.

Knowing that many of the children before them have no knowledge about the idea of God, the religion teacher should avoid an approach that presumes in advance that all the class are established believers and well identified as Catholics. In this sense, in the theme often taken in Catholic primary school religious education of ‘sharing our faith story’, the word ‘our’ does not strictly include these children. They have a tenuous Catholic identification and the approach that better addresses their situation would be to help establish for the children that they are part of a very old cultural religious tradition, and their school religious education will inform them about this heritage. This could help them to progress towards the stage of feeling that “yes, this is our religious story”. The better the sense of community in the school (a strong suit in most Catholic primary schools), the greater will be the plausibility and credibility of the teaching of the tradition. The theme ‘this is the story of your Catholic religious heritage’ would be more appropriate than the presumptive ‘sharing our faith story’. This is not just a matter of semantics, but precisely about how much to presume, and how objectively information is presented, and how this is reflected in content and pedagogy.

There is a need to establish for children through the experience of religious education that the Catholic primary school is a community of religious meanings, a community with a religious history that is there to provide them with educational access to their traditions – whether or not they are or will become members of a parish. To be properly educated in today’s Australian society, they need to learn the cultural meanings from their religious identification (Catholicism) just as they need to learn from other identifications (E.g. national, ethnic, civil, democratic and local social identities etc.). They need to see that their religious education is enhancing and resourcing their spirituality for life.

Being careful to strive for objectivity in the presentation of religious traditions is important for maintaining a vital feeling of inclusivity for the children coming from diverse spiritual backgrounds. They are invited to join and benefit from a religious education that does not discriminate with respect to their initial spirituality. This inclusivity is equally important for the children who are not Catholic; this has become a significant pedagogical issue for the increasingly high proportion of children who are not Catholic in Australian Catholic schools. For example: a recent comment was made about the 50% proportion of children who are not Catholic in Tasmanian Catholic schools in 2011 (Healy, 2011). Where teachers have consciously attended to this presence, they have reported that it often generates an unintended positivity. When children from other denominations / faith traditions, including non-Christian religions, were included in the classroom study and allowed to refer to their own traditions, teachings and practices, this has stimulated Catholic children to take a greater interest in knowing and becoming more literate about their own faith.

The Catholic Church has its responsibilities for educating its members so that the religious tradition can be handed on from generation to generation. However, excessive emphasis on the idea of socialising them into regular mass attendance is likely to be counterproductive.

**Progression from children’s to adolescent spirituality**

As regards their participation in religious practice and religious education in the primary school, practically all the children appear to be quite religious, even if the spirituality of many in their home situation would not be categorised the same way. Hence the transition from primary school children’s religious spirituality to the sort of non-religious spirituality and disinterest in religious education of many adolescents and young adults as described earlier is readily interpreted as a ‘decline’ in spirituality. And there are different views of what are the causes:- children succumbing to prevailing secularised culture; the Catholic Church not being relevant
enough to the lives of young people to retain their interest and commitment; ineffective religious education in the secondary school (Rossiter, 2010B, p. 14-15).

No doubt there is a decline in overt religiosity; and this is particularly evident in the numbers from religious homes who follow the same secularised path as those from non-religious homes. But this is not the complete story about what has happened to their spirituality. The following considerations suggest that a number of complex processes are involved.

For children from non-religious families, their basic spirituality was probably never strongly religious, even though they participated responsively in religion in the primary school. Hence the transition to adolescence has been accompanied by a falling away of the primary school religiosity that functioned like a temporary cultural overlay that was consistent with the religious orientation and identity of the school. Even to the end of their schooling in Year 12, it is likely that pupils in Catholic schools will retain some measure of respect for and identification with the desired religious spirituality of the school. At the end of Catholic schooling many students emerge with the same secular spirituality they absorbed as young children. Was their Catholic religious education therefore ineffective and useless? Certainly not, because they have been educated spiritually and religiously both in their cultural religious tradition and hopefully also in terms of their basic human spirituality such that they can better respond to the spiritual and moral dimensions of life they encounter (Rossiter, 2010B, pp. 9-13). Nevertheless, those who measure the ultimate value of Catholic schooling in terms of the numbers of past pupils who go to Mass regularly will not accept this as anything else but failure.

Everything that young children do at primary school can appear new and interesting. They are readily engaged and responsive, and this applies in religious education as much as in any other learning area. Hence it is easy to interpret their natural energy and enthusiasm in religious education as a positive religious response. They are also cooperative and ready to participate in prayer and liturgy. However, as they grow older they develop ‘interest filters’; they become more confident in discerning and choosing what interests them specifically and what does not. And their interest in religion and religious education quickly loses out. They can readily learn how to discern what is ‘cool’ from what is not; their interests can easily be swayed by groups of friends and even more so by what popular culture proposes as the sources of ‘feel good’. This issue begs for critical scrutiny by students in secondary religious education.

The overt religious spirituality of primary school children would be classified in terms of Fowler’s theory of faith development as vicarious and imitative (Fowler, 1981). This is not to say that it is superficial or not authentic. They readily assimilated the religious meanings and practices in the Catholic primary school whether or not they were congruent with their home spirituality. For those from non-religious homes, religion / religious education at school was like a ‘second language’ to that spoken at home. And as they became older the need for maintaining this ‘second language’ became less compelling. And by the time they leave school they have no need for it at all – in the same circumstances they were in before they went to a Catholic school. The argument for a relevant religious education would claim that learning this ‘second language’ has not just been about Catholic traditions but about discerning a spiritual/moral path through life whether formally religious or not.

The negative change in children’s thinking and feeling about religion as they move into adolescence is not necessarily a conscious anti-religious movement. For many of them, their cultural religious meanings just seem to fade into the background as they become more autonomous in their thinking and more self-reliant in their behaviour. Religious meanings are eclipsed by more immediate cultural meanings about lifestyle, feel-good, looks, friendship and entertainment. And at the very time when life seems to be opening up explosively for them, their religion appears to have little to say that is relevant to their concerns.

Another view suggests that children may build up an attractive experience and image of what religion is like for a child, and if this is not updated as they grow older, they may gradually detach from their childlike view. Religion might then remain like a pleasant childhood relic – while not relevant to the world of the adolescent
and the adult.

Conclusion
The argument and perspective developed in this article were intended to complement the view of children’s spirituality and Catholic primary school religious education reflected in academic writings over the last decade. In particular, it has proposed that much more prominent reference is needed to the primal spiritual socialisation of pre-school children in their homes as a key to interpreting how primary school religious education impacts on both their basic human spirituality and their religiosity. It also suggests that greater acknowledgment and acceptance are needed of the relatively non-religious, secular spirituality that now characterises most of the parents of children in Catholic schools. This is a reality that Catholic educators and clergy tend to fear because they feel it might weaken the rationale for the whole enterprise – because if the children are not very religious before they come to Catholic schools and are not very religious when they leave, then what is the point of having Catholic schools? However, this acknowledgment is a potent catalyst for reinterpreting the mission of the Catholic schools to enhance and resource the basic human spirituality of both students and their parents whether or not they are engaged with a local parish (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 428-433). And this mission is one that makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual and moral dimensions of Australian education and to the country’s common good (Rossiter, 2010B, p. 16).

The territory covered in this article has also proved useful because it helps give perspective to the range of questions about children’s spirituality and primary school religious education in the recent academic literature. In follow up articles, some of the key issues raised in this literature will be revisited. Comments will be directed to the following topics:- awe/wonder, imagination, engagement, play, stories, concept development, theology, religious literacy, prayer, and literal/symbolic interpretation of scripture.

References


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TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF WOMEN

Abstract

The author reviews the literature on transformative learning from both religious and adult education sources. Drawing on this literature, she highlights the issues for women, discusses implications for their learning, and notes that some religious educators have already integrated these insights into their teaching. The author concludes with specific suggestions for further research.

Brookfield (2000) tells us that “learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts. If something is transformed, it is different from what it was before at a very basic level” (p. 139); the process of being transformed demands nothing less than awareness of the fundamental premises of life and living. This is what many of us aim for in our work as religious educators: fundamental change in the learners and in ourselves as educators. Seemingly, religious educators, in general, have avoided intense engagement with this immensely helpful educational theory, and those with an interest in the religious education of women have not shown any degree of interest in it. This is surprising given transformative learning’s (TL) obvious linkages to the religious education of women; that is, the concern for change, embodiment, creativity, and imagination, which are integral dimensions of learning. In response to this lacuna, the author examines transformative learning implications for women. This essay starts by describing the critical literature selection and review strategy, then outlines the main themes from the review, and ends with implications for the transformative religious education of women. Critical areas for future research and exploration are identified. The focus here is on women since they are more strongly represented in religion or spirituality than men are.

The author attempted to determine a) the degree to which transformative learning theorists have been interested in women as a particular subject group, or in religious or spirituality education, implicitly and explicitly, and b) the degree to which religious educators have been interested in transformative learning theory (or its cognates conversion, transformation, adult development) or women’s learning in particular. Religious education is understood as intentional learning opportunities for adult women in places such as churches, synagogues and mosques (Regan, 2000), as well as spirituality centers and workshops.

The author reviewed the major publications in adult education and in religious education. The religious education journals included Teaching Theology and Religion, Religious Education and Journal of Adult Theological Education (JATE); in reviewing these the author tried to establish links among these seemingly disparate areas—women’s learning, transformative learning, and religion. The author also reviewed major publications in adult education and transformative learning (Proceedings of the Transformative Learning Conference, the Journal of Transformative Education, and the ERIC database), in order to establish links and connections among these seemingly disparate areas—women’s learning, transformative learning, and religion.

Transformative Learning Theory

The theory of transformative learning was articulated in a systematized and critical way by Jack Mezirow in 1978. His theory was based on a study of women returning to higher education after a hiatus of some years. Building on Habermas’ insights into communicative action, Mezirow proposed that the event of returning to higher education (the disorienting dilemma) caused some women to experience a change in perspective in terms of life view, relationship, and future plans (i.e., changes in meaning schemes and the larger meaning perspectives). He speculated that there were contextual factors that supported and limited this transformation and that understanding it further would lead to gains in education. Mezirow’s theory...
did much to advance the notion of personal or individual transformation (note, not social) and of critical rational thought (note, not feelings and emotions) in this transformation.

Although Mezirow laid the groundwork for much of transformative learning, many others have added to it, as well as challenged his primarily individualistic and cognitive rational approach to transformation (e.g., Cranton, 2006). More recent scholarship suggests that transformation is less linear than Mezirow envisaged and much more than connected with the extra rational. Cranton (2006) speaks of the slow creep of transformative learning that is “gradual and cumulative (p. 23), and Dirkx (in Cranton, 2006) recommends that educators move away from the “burning bush” expectation or phenomenon. Cranton and Dirkx’s version of transformative learning is more of a developmental journey that includes a holistic perspective of learning and which acknowledges the possibilities for transformation over time.

To capture some of the spectrum of works on transformative learning in addition to Mezirow’s, Cranton and Dirkx, Taylor (2008) developed a schema that laid out emerging conceptions of transformative learning. This schema allows for multiple ways of engaging learners, each of which has distinctly different outcomes: psychoanalytical, psychodevelopmental; neurobiological; psychospiritual; race-cultural; social emancipatory; and planetary. As Taylor shows, transformative learning not only promotes individual growth and development but also plays a significant role in promoting socio-cultural, political and ideological change.

**Transformative Learning and Religious Education**

Taylor (2008) observes that transformative learning theory has been developed in detail for the past 30 years, with theorists working with contexts and related themes such as critical social action, environmental change, and spirituality. Significantly, the latter perspective on spirituality bears few links to a religious context, except in a historical sense, and comes closer to what most would think of as holistic knowing (see English & Tisdell, 2010). Spirituality is seen as a learning dimension that must be recognized when working with adults.

When one considers that religious education literature has been concerned, at least in the past, with gender, feminism, and women’s learning, it is somewhat surprising to see how scant that literature is in relation to transformative learning. In the few cases where the theme of transformative learning is applied in religious education the results are quite helpful. Fleischer (2006), for instance, makes helpful linkages between Lonergan’s ideas on conversion and transformative learning. She shows that there can indeed be a creative integration of both bodies of work to help inform what she calls adult theological education. Similarly, Mercer (2006) draws links between transformative learning and theology and shows how this theory can be used practically and creatively to enhance practice. Yet, neither focuses on women in particular, nor does Regan (2000), who provides an extensive treatment of transformative learning in parish contexts. One might have expected to see literature that discusses how to facilitate and recognize transformative learning experiences.

**Transformative Learning and Women**

From a review of adult education and transformative learning, the author found that adult educators are generally not concerned with religious education or with women and transformative learning. Of those who are, the findings are marginal. Grant (2008), for example, writes about Jewish women’s learning and the implicit dimension of struggle with institutions. Though she does not deal in any substantive way with the theory of transformative learning, she does suggest the potential for development of opportunities to support this learning. A related study, albeit on spirituality and not religion, looks at finding “voice” and being transformed in the community. The author, Jeanetta (2005), reports preliminary findings from research on a WomenSpirit program, which is intended to foster women’s transformation, and show that “place, faith, focus, systems of support and ownership of the process” (p. 226) are important for transformation at the personal and community levels. When disadvantaged women are supported in their
basic needs and encouraged to take part in group initiatives that connect them to a larger social and cultural experience, Jeanetta finds that they are more able to experience transformation and to undertake community action. Grant’s focus on religion and Jeanetta’s on disadvantaged women and their spirituality is helpful to religious educators who have an interest in similar populations of women.

Many of the articles in the transformative learning literature, which concern women, build on the foundation of Belenky et al.’s (1986) work on women’s ways of knowing, which though accused of being essentialist, does draw attention to the aspects of voice, silence, and connectedness as integral to women’s learning. Belenky and Stanton (2000) bring this work up to date in 2000 and draw explicit links to transformative possibilities for women, including using the metaphor of midwifing, that is, educators can help women transform and become stronger, more confident, and more aware of themselves as people who have a contribution to make. Cranton and Wright (2008), in their work with eight female literacy teachers, also employ the metaphor of the midwife teacher to make the point that these female literacy teachers see their teaching role in a maternal way. As teachers, they build on their nurturing capacities to be a learning companion for the literacy learner. Although Cranton and Wright show how the gender of the educator affects teacher-learner interactions, they do not develop an analysis of gender that one might expect with this participant profile. Yet, the focus on friendship and relationship as facilitators of learning is instructive for adult religious educators who need to be aware that for many women learners a safe and supportive learning environment is important for them to learn new ways of being and seeing their place in religion, work, society, family, and the world. Some may indeed already practice this kind of adult education unknowingly.

Stromquist (2006) writes about global and transformative education (not learning) for women and is helpful in understanding women’s learning at the macro level and in orienting it to citizen engagement and participatory democracy. Arnot (2006) too writes about a related area of “transformative approaches” (p. 131) but again might be brought into direct conversation with the theory to show how women’s personal transformations may indeed be enjoined with collective struggle. This larger awareness about global concerns, our responsibilities as people of faith, and our need to broaden our religious commitments to care for the global community, is indeed a concern for adult religious educators who often struggle with the limits of an exclusively personally-focused faith. Indeed some religious educators may find in this literature that they are fostering this awareness, and in reading it, are able to name it as transformative learning.

Writing in Compare, McCaffery (2005) discusses the use of transformative learning in contexts as diverse as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Sudan. She is using the term in a social change sense, yet does not directly cite or engage the explicit theory of transformative learning. In their conference paper, Muhammad and Dixson (2005) look at race and how it intersects with gender in transformation of women’s experience. These researchers bring together gender and racial stereotypes and call for educators to help women, black and white, examine how these interlocking aspects of oppression affect their learning and their worldview. The authors help both black and white women challenge stereotypes and critically examine their social and cultural positioning. These studies are helpful in understanding how those religious educators who are working in international contexts can better see the links among race, class and gender, and become more attuned to the subtleties of their practice.

Lee and Na (2009), in a paper given at the Transformative Learning Conference, report on a study of married female immigrants and point to the nonlinear nature of their transformation, challenging the more rational and stepped process initially envisaged by Mezirow. The authors focus on the aspect of life struggles as farmers’ wives and immigrants in transformation. Lee and Na’s greatest contribution is that they have situated the TL theory within a multicultural environment and highlight the value of the family and significant others in the community in supporting transformation. Similarly, Kucukaydin and Flannery (2007) focus on transformative learning among eight Kurdish women, and point to both the material and subjective conditions for their transformation, noting that it may ultimately lead them to collective action and struggle (see also Hansman & Kollins, 2005). Their study points to the imaginative and symbolic dimensions of transformative learning that are also part of transformation for women, thereby extending...
the cognitive rational basis of Mezirow. Transformative learning can indeed occur in the midst of oppressive conditions, which is the site of much adult religious education. The literature gives voice to those who are working in marginalized communities in ways similar to these authors, to foster transformation.

Ettling and Guilian (2004) stress the incremental nature of transformative learning and its non-linear features. What comes through in their work is a combination of a social change perspective which is reflected in their attention to race and class, and the more essentialist view of women as caring and connected knowers (see also Johnson-Bailey, 2006). Their work refines Mezirow’s and highlights the tension that may always exist in discussion of women and transformative learning. Again, research such as this can help adult religious educators see that transformative learning is happening all the time, and that adults’ perspectives are often in a transformative mode.

Meyer (2009) looks at the use of practical strategies such as journaling and coaching to empower women and to help them make the transition to employment. This chapter is interesting because implicit in it is support for an emotionally sensitive and affective perspective in transformative learning as a means of helping individual women come to know their own voice, and shows a clear reliance on Belenky et al.(1986). Though the writer relies mainly on Mezirow as her source for transformative learning, her practices, processes and goals seem to challenge his more rational and logical approach and to be more consistent with Belenky and Stanton’s (2000) midwife teaching. Similarly, Wittman et al. (2008) discuss the transformative power of women being together, writing together, supporting each other, and being in relationship in a particular context—a retreat setting—which they see as key to their transformative learning. This has clear implications for the transformative learning in religious education, which often uses similar strategies such as journaling, although this may not be seen as facilitating transformation.

All in all, there are relatively few studies that engage women and transformative learning theory, and when they do there is little attention to the actual theory of transformative learning or to the education of women in religious settings. Yet, despite explicit work, the implications for religious settings are not difficult to imagine since many of the strategies for transformative learning—reflection, writing, critical questioning—are ones many adult religious educators use as well.

Implications for the Religious Education of Women

Offered here are some implications of this theory for the religious education of women, given with the caveat that they are suggestive only; attempts to stabilize and concretize how women learn are rightly dismissed as essentialism. These are based on the author’s review of the literature and are intended to confirm for many adult religious educators what they may intuitively know and challenge others to think about how they might incorporate them into their practice.

Friends, Mentors and Webs. Embedded in all discourses of transformative learning and of women’s learning is the importance of connection, of establishing relationship between the knower and the known, and of building on this relationship to increase learning. It seems that transformative learning can be fostered through these webs of relationship and that these are especially important for women. Mejini (2009; also Hamp, 2007), for instance, speaks of “transformative mentoring” (p. 277) which is an aid to women. Within religious settings, where women have sometimes not found their voice, these relationships may be especially important. Gradually, over time, women’s personal experiences, conversations and debates and conflicts with mentors and friends spark critical reflection on patriarchy’s impact not only on women as individuals, but the way feminism is defined and how religious organizations function. In order to inspire a feminist consciousness, educators need to more deliberately build opportunities for transformative learning into their organizational culture, drawing from perspectives other than the rational, constructivist model of transformative learning originally proposed by Mezirow (1978).

Transformative learning does take place informally and incrementally, as in many of the studies cited above,
and needs to be more consciously fostered and to have resources allocated in order to be effective. Mentoring, whether formal or informal, played a key role in women’s transformative learning. Strong female - mentors, employers, other members of their organizations, even friends – have a powerful impact on women’s experiences and learning. Women need to know about feminist role models because they are a source of inspiration and education. Recognizing the achievements of actual women, present and past, not only grounds feminist vision and goals, it provides concrete examples of what women are capable of, the kinds of lives that women can aspire to.

Relationships play a key role as has been identified in the literature on women’s learning, yet the role played by intimate others varies; seasoned guide as well as mentor and role model. While it may not always be necessary for these relationships to be unconditionally supportive it is important that women have them. In fact, change can occur because of friction and opposition. Adult religious educators need to be open to this possibility.

**Importance of Emotion and the Body.** Feelings and emotions are very much part of the literature on women’s learning and of transformative learning, though they did not play a huge role in Mezirow’s (1978) early conceptualization. It would seem that acknowledging and supporting women in their learning and in their use of emotion to access knowledge and to respond to learning is to be appreciated. While many religious groups still tend to stress the improvement of the mind (for instance, think of a typical school of theology) the mindset of transformative learning literature is open to the role of emotion for women in learning. It is open, too, to the body in learning, to the role of creativity and the arts, to acknowledging that we bring all of ourselves to our learning, and that any bifurcation is anathema to learning. Adult religious educators who have incorporated bioenergetics, Jungian psychology, and Reiki into their teaching and learning encounters are indeed attuned to this dimension, and others can benefit from knowing that research affirms their helpfulness for the transformation of women.

**Criticality and Social Awareness.** Clearly, discussions of women and transformation are not only concerned with individual experience; rather they connect to social change in the world and in religious institutions. Women influenced by feminism bring with them attention to critical issues such as race and class, and ask that the perspective of religion be broadened to all these issues (see also Forest, 2009). They are unwilling to allow the theory to wallow in individual change of perspective. Informed by feminism, women can see how they are simultaneously shaped and entrapped by dominating patriarchal narratives. Although some people do transcend early training and societal conditioning, we carry patriarchal assumptions and beliefs with us into all aspects of our lives, including the very spaces feminists have attempted to carve out for themselves. Adult religious educators need to strengthen women’s communication skills to reach diverse groups including the younger women in our midst. Dialogue and discourse that is more active and experiential, learning by doing and participating rather than just by hearing, is important to younger feminists. Educators need to work with ideas, concepts and things that are emancipatory and be open to the difference of the third wave feminists. This will also include being inclusive not only of ability ranges but also of color and ethnicity. Women’s learning may or may not have the overt political intent as feminism. We see in the literature the connections between transformation and the critical questioning that is necessary for women to become more aware of their relationship to their own religion, spirituality and world. Those adult religious educators who use a critical lens in their teaching are well supported by the transformative learning research.

**Critical Questions**

Since women comprise the largest demographic in religious education, both as educators and learners, transformative learning theory holds particular insight for an understanding of women and learning. This review of transformative learning is coupled with, and promotes, key understandings of women’s learning—role of body, emotions, connections, voice, silence, etc.—and strategic pedagogical practice for working with women in religious settings. Although this theory holds great insight for the religious education of these women, there are always challenges with working in institutions which have not always
been inclusive of women’s ways of knowing. This author advises care and cautious optimism in the struggle, and as well affirms that many who teach women already know at an intuitive level that women learn in particular ways and that fostering transformation is an integral part of working with them.

Closing and Areas for Research

This paper has attempted to address the connections between transformative learning and adult religious education for women. There has been little published research on these connections, though TL is a major concern for adult educators generally. The author identified, from the literature, three particular strategies for strengthening the possibility of women’s transformation: attention to a) friends, mentors and webs; b) the body and emotions; and c) criticality and social awareness. Indeed, some in religious education may already be integrating these strategies into their teaching. Yet, naming these as part of the toolbox of transformative learning is important as it increases the possibility for even more attention to this area. This information, drawn from the published research, helps those who are interested in improving their pedagogical practice.

Critical areas for future research and exploration are not difficult to identify. We need more qualitative exploration of the intersection of transformative learning and women in religious contexts. Because it has not been researched, it does not mean it has not happened. For instance, we might begin doing ethnographic research with women’s organizations in churches and synagogues, inquiring into the ways in which participation has fostered or limited women’s transformative learning. We need also to use emergent frameworks such as action research to deliberately work with insights of transformative learning theory so that we can understand more clearly why such transformation is important to religious contexts, and how it can be nurtured. This action research might involve implementing more creative and body/emotion-attuned strategies in adult education settings to see if they facilitate transformative learning for women. There are clearly many opportunities for development.

References


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NEWMAN AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS: INTEGRATION AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Abstract

Prompted by Newman’s advocacy of interconnectedness as a goal for Catholic university education, this article links integration as a major life-task with integration as a priority for university education. First, I explain what I mean by integration as a task for each of us before commenting on what Newman has to say about integration in university learning. Then I present five types of challenge that must be taken into account if integration is to be pursued seriously as a priority in university. Finally I indicate some of the ways that faculty might set about addressing these challenges.

I write as a committed (if sometimes uncomfortable and critical) insider to the Catholic tradition, aiming to draw out a particular implication of a Catholic worldview for the priorities addressed in university education. There is a legitimate plurality of views as to what are the key features of this tradition. Even when agreement can be reached as to the constitutive features, there remains a significant degree of disagreement, both as regards their relative priorities and as to how these priorities should be implemented in practice. Views about Catholicism are contentious, not only within the Church, but even more so within society more generally.

This applies to many students and staff in Catholic universities, only some of whom attend because they subscribe to the faith that is meant to underpin those educational communities. Present in the mix there will likely be people of many faiths and some people who do not subscribe to any form of religion. While some members of such universities do wish to deepen their understanding of and commitment to faith and therefore are open to faith development initiatives, many will be indifferent to these opportunities and some will resist them vigorously. Nevertheless, it remains the case that one can (and one should) draw out educational implications from the Catholic tradition and take steps to breathe life into them at Catholic universities, so long as these educational opportunities are offered and experienced as invitations, not as impositions. The particular educational priority that is the focus of this paper is one that is, in many respects, shared by Christians of different denominations and also by many Jews and Muslims.

The curriculum subject Religious Education (RE) can be distinguished from the various processes that are involved in faith education and development. The focus for RE is on literacy about religion, information and concepts; RE does not depend on prior commitment; it does not assume membership of any particular faith. Its goal is to promote understanding about religious matters: the stories, scriptures, beliefs, practices, traditions and customs associated with a religion, or, more often in recent years, religions in the plural. RE aims to promote informed and intelligent thinking about a religion rather than fidelity to it. It is led by the norms of education rather than by those of the Gospel.

When it comes to faith education, the phrase ‘educating faith’ can have two slightly different emphases. The first puts the focus on how a set of activities can make someone’s faith more educated in some way: for example, move from being accepted to being understood, from being passive to being more thoughtful, critical, reflective, better informed, more coherent, able to deal with objections. The second puts the focus on allowing one’s engagement in the life of faith to educate one: that is, to change one for the better, by crossing the threshold of revelation to see a new world, deepening one’s commitment, strengthening one’s character, influencing the whole person, not only the mind, but also the affections and the will, including how we treat the body. This is a different activity to RE, but one that can be at least partly assisted and prompted by it, for example by the critical questioning and deeper understanding of religious matters facilitated by RE. Similarly, engagement in faith development activities can provide experiences that can usefully feed into and be reflected upon in RE. I have argued elsewhere (Sullivan, 2010a) that one should
not turn the distinction between education and evangelisation into a total separation, indicating several ways that these two activities can mutually reinforce each other.¹

1. The task of integration
We all face the challenge of integration in our lives – becoming one, whole, comprehensive (catholic) person: ordering our drives, needs and desires; coordinating our gifts, inclinations and talents; integration through establishing a proper balance of attention both to self and to others; moving towards personal integration. Body, mind, emotions, conscience, spirit, intelligence – all of these need to be gradually built into one ‘building,’ a temple of God’s Spirit, oriented to God’s Kingdom, so that we grow ever more from being an image into a very particular and unique likeness of God.

Educational work for the church calls for both the example of personal integration (in our behavior and in our modeling of discipleship) and the facilitation of conceptual integration, where all elements of knowledge are shown to interact on each other, rather than offer a fragmented curriculum. For catechists, clergy, teachers and others there needs to be a blend or integration of intellectual development, spiritual development and professional/pedagogical development. Classroom and educational work needs to be envisaged in terms that can be integrated with Kingdom work, professionalism with discipleship. This applies as much in Catholic universities as in Catholic primary and secondary schools. Our personal and spiritual standards and yardsticks should mesh with, be displayed in, and find themselves integrated into our academic and professional standards and yardsticks; the personal/spiritual and the academic/professional should not operate in isolation from each other, nor, of course, should they work in opposition to each other. This will not be easy. On the way to achieving it there will be pain, difficulties and tension.

Education, throughout history, and in any culture, no matter which worldview prevails in a particular time or place, is about the capacities of human nature and how these are developed, oriented, ordered and integrated. These capacities include energy, emotions, intelligence, memory, will, conscience and wonder. While these elements within human beings may be understood differently at different times, and despite the fact that some elements may receive emphasis while others are relatively neglected, nevertheless, all necessarily play a part in our human condition and each of them will both exert influence and be subject to influence during any process of education, whether formal or informal. Even as we might focus, for example, in higher education, on sharpening the mind, on training the intellect, on prompting critical thinking, the faculty seeking to pursue such goals will themselves be people with a ‘hinterland’ of all of the other elements and capacities - other than mind or intellect - aspects of their being which simultaneously work to enhance and to obstruct, to filter and to modify what it is they are teaching. Who we are can get in the way of what we teach, with the effect that the message we seek to convey cannot properly be heard. On the other hand, even when our grasp of what we seek to teach is weaker than it ought to be, and when our professional skill-set and repertoire are more limited than they should be, the cumulative effect of all the other elements of our being can sometimes make up for these defects – again because who we are as persons conveys more than the sum of the verbal or intellectual ‘messages’ we try to transmit. In the armory of a wise teacher there must be self-knowledge and an awareness of how the content of her teaching is being mediated by the nature of her character and personality, for better or worse.

John Henry Newman was a strong advocate of the need to be alert to the multiple dimensions of our nature and attentive to the call of integration, in the ways I have indicated above. He contributed importantly to our thinking on such topics as how faith and reason are related, how historical appreciation and understanding of doctrine develops, how lay people have a crucial part to play in safeguarding the church, how we relate to God, how theology joins other disciplines in the university, learning from them but also contributing to their learning. He championed the sacredness of conscience and its role in helping us become tuned to God. He gave excellent advice about the importance of balancing the needs of the mind, the needs of our spirit and the needs of belonging to the community. He brought out some key features of an education that is worthwhile, that makes us better people, that equips us for the important things in life.
He was a strong believer in the centrality of personal influence, heart speaking to heart; he envisaged teaching as one life touching another life. “Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us,” he said in his Grammar of Assent, a book that continues to be very important for religious educators in the church (Newman, 1979, p.89). He would agree that the teacher needs self-knowledge. “To gain religious starting points, we must interrogate our hearts, our consciences, the God who dwells there,” he said in his letters and diaries. There is for him an intellectual component to faith, one that needs to be cultivated, but it is only one component, not the whole. He was deeply aware of the ‘hinterland’ within, the many dimensions of our lives that provide a foundation for our intellectual operations, operations that are never as autonomous or logical as we might like to pretend.

Newman is an exemplary defender of the essential unity of knowledge, believing that every area of investigation points to and depends upon its source and goal – God (Newman, 1912, pp.45, 47, 50 – 51, 99, 137). His ideal outcome from university education is

a true enlargement of the mind ... the power of viewing many things at once as a whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence (Newman, 1912, p.137).

Furthermore, a university

professes to assign to each study which it receives, its proper place and its just boundaries; to define the rights, to establish the mutual relations and to effect the intercommunion of one and all. To keep in check the ambitious and encroaching, and to succor and maintain those which from time to time are succumbing under the more popular or the more fortunately circumstanced; to keep the peace between them all, and to convert their mutual differences and contrarieties into the common good (Newman, 1912, pp.457-8).

Clearly, in this vision for a university, the pressures of the market must not rule the construction of the curriculum! For Newman, enlargement of mind and strengthening and deepening of spirit go hand in hand. He has a noble vision of education but also a realistic one. On the need for integration he still has much to teach us. He offers us a vision of an approach to education and to educating faith that is engaged, experiential and imaginative; it is concrete, rather than abstract; it is very much living and personal knowledge that he promotes. For him, we might say, religious education is in the business of realization, making real. In his life and writings we see intermingled and integrated the interplay of memory, habit, active and critical thinking, prayer, imagination, feeling, belonging, the voice of conscience, our aesthetic sense, the mysterious workings of grace and the part played by theology and doctrine and the church, plus the power of witness.

I have been arguing that education must support the task of personal integration and that to do so it must take into account the whole person.

An all-round education seeks to develop every aspect of the individual: social, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual. For there is an ecology of human growth which means that if any of these is overlooked, all the others suffer (John Paul II, quoted by D’Orsa & D’Orsa, 2010, p.177).

I have also argued that integration must be striven for both at the personal and the conceptual level. Thus, on the one hand, education should address, work upon and deploy the multiple dimensions of our personhood; on the other hand, it should assist learners (which means all of us) in relating the different kinds of truth we come to know. Without the first kind of integration, it is likely that many educational efforts will be unbalanced, unhealthy or infertile. Without the second kind of integration we gain at best a very limited, fragmented and distorted picture of truth. For Christians the salvific truth to be found in Scripture and in the life of the church must be related to all the other kinds of truth we find in the world.
There are three reasons that drive efforts to connect these different kinds of truth. First, our use of and response to the truths to be found in the world need to be illuminated and guided by God’s offer of salvation. Second, the religious truths we learn in Scripture and the church are not to be preserved for a precious, isolated and ‘holy’ part of life; they are to be applied and embodied in our negotiations with all aspects of our earthly existence and the truths associated with these aspects, material, economic, scientific, political, social, cultural and so forth. Third, the truths we learn from studying aspects of the world can illuminate and help us more effectively penetrate and appreciate the truths of salvation to be found in Scripture and the church.

2. Challenges
Any attempt to promote integration as one of the principal tasks of life must face the fact that we are confronted by compartmentalization. Alasdair MacIntyre comments on this feature of our existence:

Each of the separate spheres of activity through which individuals pass in the course of a day or a week or a month has its own distinctive culture, its own modes of relationship, its own specific norms. ... [A]s individuals pass from home and family to workplace to school to leisure-time activities and to political or religious associations, they become adroit in leaving behind the roles, norms, and attitudes appropriate to the sphere that they have just left and assuming those of the sphere that they are about to enter (MacIntyre, 2001, p.15).

He laments that, as a result of the pervasive effects of compartmentalization, it has become increasingly difficult for people to find a way to see life whole, with all its parts interconnected; there is no natural position from which to establish an overall perspective and to make evaluative judgments in relation to some architectonic, all-embracing (and external) standard. He wants students to be helped by their university education to integrate all aspects of what they are learning and all aspects of their lives. He takes into account their learning “in the language laboratory and in the chapel, on the basketball court and in the library, in the social relationships of the residence hall and in those of the philosophy seminar” (MacIntyre, 2001, p.18). A random collection of experts does not, in his view, make for a university as understood in the Catholic tradition. Jean Bethke Elshtain supports his advocacy of integration as a major goal in education: “the student who is formed within an integrative context can, if all has gone well, stand back and assess the standards of human flourishing she has absorbed. Integration offers notions of a plurality of goods as well as ways to evaluate these goods” (Elshtain, 2001, p.136.) For Elshtain, what is at stake here is the formation of the character of the student, what kind of person she is becoming. I will return to this in my final section.

Compartmentalization is a well-established pattern within our universities, partly an outcome of a very understandable division of labor between scholars. Aspiring academics learn to see the world through the eyes of their particular discipline and can, in the process, remain ignorant of, perhaps even dismissive of, the methods and insights of other disciplines. Jensen notes the “tendency of disciplines to overextend their valid scope and lose sight of the conceptual limitations built into their formative metaphors” (Jensen, 2009, p.44). He proposes five reasons for universities to strive to develop interdisciplinary and integrative work. I quote them in full to bring out the force of the case for integration. Without taking the full measure of the case for integration it would be only too easy to cave in before the very real challenges such integration is bound to face. Jensen argues against being only too satisfied with the current division of labor.

Even when disciplines are operating on their own turf – on the very problems and phenomena they are created to address – they still cannot offer an exclusive and exhaustive account of what they describe or analyze. 2) Academic disciplines are self-promoting institutions perpetually competing for resources and prestige. Even the research practices and root metaphors of these disciplines are apt to be affected by these dynamics. 3) Academic disciplines serve the broader society, or at least derive their ultimate significance through connections with society. Their structures are apt to reflect the sins and pathologies of the wider society of which they are a part. 4) Academic foundational metaphors are not conceived arbitrarily; probably without exception they reflect some valid and significant feature of reality in their very conception. But our world is complex and multi-dimensional; these metaphors are
not inevitable, and they are always subject to re-negotiation and improvement. 5) There really is such a thing as ‘methodological atheism,’ and some aspects of academic knowledge reflect a deliberate attempt to marginalize religious authority. Academic scholars should not simply take the workings of their own discipline for granted, and assume that faith integration is merely a special task for those interested in interdisciplinary research (Jensen, 2009, p.54).

In addition to Jensen’s cogent argument for integration in the university, John Paul II (1996, p.15) also claims that integration should be a key feature of a Catholic university (along with a dialogue between faith and reason, an ethical concern and a theological perspective). In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (p.6) he calls for scholars to relate all aspects of the truth they investigate to the supreme Truth, who is God. He wants students to develop an organic vision of reality and their teachers to demonstrate that they have integrated faith and life and linked professional competence with Christian wisdom (John Paul II, 1996, pp.18 – 19).

There are many challenges to be faced when one considers what is entailed in promoting integration in education. In this paper I briefly outline and comment on five types of difficulty or challenge. These relate, respectively, first, to the amount of subject matter to be covered, second, to relationships between the disciplines, third, to the multiple dimensions of being a person and how subjectivity impinges on scholarship, fourth, to theological differences among Christians, and fifth, to the need for what Newman called ‘elbow room’ or sufficient psychological ‘space’ and time for individual learning to occur in freedom.

One difficulty stems from the sheer amount of subject matter to be taken into account. There seems simply too much to get to know. Mastering a body of knowledge to a level where one may justifiably be confident that one can discern its essential features, key concepts, internal structures, modes of reasoning and approaches to testing for reality is demanding enough. Without that degree of knowledge one cannot claim to have entered in any adequate way into an academic discipline. If one then attempts to integrate even a single area of knowledge with another area of knowledge, no sound bridges can be built between them without solid foundations on both sides of the bridge. Is there time, in the relatively limited period of formal and accredited study, to do justice to two areas of knowledge, let alone more than two? In addition to the problem of time, this difficulty raises the specter that learning will be superficial, in that, inevitably, in order to make room for addressing more than one subject area, there will have to compromises with regard to curriculum coverage, compromises that put in jeopardy the attainment of appropriate depth of penetration.

A second kind of difficulty is that, if integration is taken to be an educational imperative, depending on their current position (with regard to prestige, funding and the potential rewards available), one discipline might slip into displaying an imperialistic attitude towards other disciplines, lacking humility and failing to display reciprocity in being willing to learn. If the relationship between disciplines turns out to be unilateral, with one subject area providing an agenda, or criteria for judgment, or key concepts, for another, this will reduce the scope for all to contribute as valuably as they might. It will be reductionist in another sense too, leading interpretation in one discipline or field to be carried out according to the canons, norms, rationality and priorities of a different one, thereby failing to respect the appropriate degree of autonomy of other disciplines. Ultimately, one cannot claim full autonomy for any discipline; conceptually, each one is interdependent on at least some others and speaking theologically, each, under God, has only a derived or relative autonomy (see Losinger, 1997).

Newman was well aware that, where there is no proper balance within the circle of knowledge, academics are likely to claim more than is appropriate for their own particular discipline and acknowledge less than is appropriate for disciplines outside their own. He argued that theology had a rightful place in the circle of knowledge, that when theology is omitted, other disciplines tend to exceed their jurisdiction. Of course, it is also possible that theology itself will act in an imperialistic manner, dictating to other disciplines, or at least unduly constraining them. Even in a situation where no single discipline dominates, the integrative imperative can be open to the danger that it invites undue competition and conflict between disciplines as they come together to produce a jointly constructed curriculum. Humility, restraint and openness to the
other are needed here, as well as well-grounded confident advocacy of the special insights and methods of any particular discipline (see Sullivan, 2010, 183 – 199).

A third kind of difficulty that can arise when academics aim to give high priority to integration in education is that they can be tempted to over-emphasize the conceptual and cognitive aspect of knowledge and neglect other dimensions that play a part in our coming to know. Also to be taken into account in the integrative process in education, there is the role of the body, affect, relationships, community, ways of living, the company we keep, aesthetic considerations and the sheer serendipity of experience. Knowledge has multiple strands, strands it is often almost impossible to unravel.

As scholars, each of us operates from a complex personal *habitus*. This *habitus* is an acquired pattern of thoughts, judgment, outlook, values, behavior and taste, a pattern that emerges gradually as an outcome of how we internalize standards and expectations from exemplars and significant others, but also from the culture around us and the social structures that surround us. Thus “our ideas and values are connected to each other in complicated webs of relation and reference that have as much to do with our autobiographies as with pure logic” (Jacobsen, 2004, p.56). Our interests, hopes and fears are intermingled with both our seeking and our finding. Our thoughts are influenced by our bodily and emotional states (Pelias, 2004; Springer, 2009). Our subjectivity saturates our scholarship.

To be adequately self-reflexive we need to work hard to detect how our attention, perceptions, thinking, priorities, judgments and evaluations are linked to our location and context, our commitments and aversions. Our priorities are modified by our allegiances and affiliations, and the arguments that we find persuasive are linked both to the worldviews we inhabit and the plausibility structures that are significant for us. Our practices carry the seeds of future knowledge within them; they are not simply applications of what we have already come to know. As Iain McGilchrist says, quoting Lakoff and Johnson, “our conceptual systems draw largely upon the commonalities of our bodies and of the environments we live in” (McGilchrist, 2009, p.149). There is an unavoidable interconnectedness between the different dimensions of our being and the complex ways we come to know. No one was more aware of this than the French Catholic lay philosopher, Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) (see Blanchette, 2010). In the midst of his huge panorama of the pilgrimage of the human spirit across creation towards God, Blondel points out that “matter is that which can be vitalized, life is that which can be spiritualized and the spirit is that which is capable of aspiring to God and can be deified by grace” (Blondel, 1935, p.263; see also Sullivan, 1988, pp.60 – 83).

It can be assumed too automatically that what is being integrated is faith and learning, with the intellectual dimension of both being intended. But there are other kinds of integration to be considered too: body and soul, learning and love, learning and hope, faith and justice, mind and heart. In the mix of learning we should aspire not only to equip students to become acute and discerning map-readers, capable of interpreting and using the accumulated knowledge made available through the various academic disciplines. We should also prepare them to become map-makers, stretching boundaries of knowledge, taking it into new fields and making new connections of their own. Integrative efforts in education can include linking critical appreciation of tradition with creative appropriations of it. Other kinds of integration seek to bring together faith and culture, knowledge and ethics, and coordinating the needs of individuals with the needs of society.

A fourth difficulty is to adopt too quickly some available strongly argued approach to integration, without taking into account possible alternative ways of envisaging the task of integration. It must not be assumed that there is only one, obvious approach to or paradigm for integration. Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen draw attention to the diversity of Christian models of integration, for example, Calvinist/Reformed, Catholic, Wesleyan, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Anabaptist, commenting that “some of the core theological concerns of non-Reformed Christian traditions simply do not translate into integration-speak” (Jacobsen, 2004, p.26). There is much scope here for ecumenical learning. Different Christian traditions relate doctrine and intellectual expression of faith, community, worship, and service in different ways, so that the
interaction of scripture, tradition, reason, faith, and action intermingle in subtle and complexly contrasting patterns. Given that revelation – its nature, scope and relationship to ‘ordinary’ knowledge - is understood differently in the various Christian traditions, it is inevitable that Christian approaches to integration in education will be affected by these differences of emphasis. In analyzing the way that different spiritual traditions have implications for academic life, the Jacobsens provide a succinct summary:

The contemplative tradition reminds us of the need to make room for divine mystery in our academic interpretations of the world. The holiness tradition points to the fact that the habits we cultivate have the potential to shape our scholarship in subtle ways for good or for ill. The charismatic tradition underscores the fact that reality can surprise us: miracles can happen. It also reminds us that one need not be a scholar in order to be used powerfully by God. The social justice tradition implies that virtually all our scholarship has ethical implications and asks whether our work truly benefits the poor and needy of the world. The evangelical tradition suggests that scholarship connects with faith most powerfully in the practice of apologetics – explaining the world intelligently in a way that promotes belief and submission to God’s will for our lives and for the world as a whole. The incarnational tradition encourages us to put academic resources to work in the service of ordinary human beings and to find the holy in the ordinary structures of the world (Jacobsen, 2004, p.93).

The Jacobsens point out that there can be close connections between an emphasis on worldview – marked in some Christian traditions, but not in others – and the place of theory within academic disciplines. The role of worldview features more prominently in many Protestant works on integration in Christian higher education than it does in Catholic ones; Catholic educators can benefit greatly by studying how such thinkers apply Christian faith in service of the task of integration in education (Claerbaum, 2004; Dockery & Thornbury, 2002; Dockery, 2007; Downey & Porter, 2009; Harris, 2004; Litfin, 2004; Sire, 2004). A person’s worldview influences what he or she notices, takes in, and accepts. It shapes how they perceive messages being sent to them by various individuals and groups. It orients what they care about. It helps them fit incoming messages or lessons from experience into what they already hold, know and are committed to and, indeed, what they do afterwards with what they are learning now. One’s worldview is about configuration, inter-connectedness and mutual reinforcement in those leading perspectives we have that function as the keys to our main perceptions of reality and our judgments.

However, the ideas and viewpoints that comprise our worldview do not emerge on strictly logical grounds nor do they get deployed on purely logical lines. Rather they are embedded in a pattern of behaving and belonging that ‘carries’ whatever reasoning goes into them beyond any strict remit that flows from reason alone. That is, people are formed (and sustained) in a worldview largely through the company they keep, the practices they engage in and the lives they lead. Their worldview gives them some kind of rationale for this and a picture of the whole and a sense of meaning within the flux and ambiguities of life. A worldview is, for most people, rough and ready rather than sharply shaped or clearly defined; it is often not reflected upon, nor articulated; it operates clandestinely rather than explicitly in many cases. It can contain irreconcilable elements, inner contradictions that do not get resolved, but which do not prevent us from living on the basis of the worldview. However, the Jacobsens rightly claim that “the integration paradigm often flounders when applied either to disciplines that are more neutrally descriptive or pragmatic in orientation or to disciplines in which issues of human meaning rarely enter the mix” (Jacobsen, 2004, p.27).

A fifth challenge relates to both psychological ‘space’ and to time. There must be room for individual growth and freedom. Too tight an integrative ‘script’ can be deadening or suffocating. This applies not only to the room required for experiment and for feeling their way among students, if they are to have a chance to own their knowledge, to assimilate it according to their own priorities and commitments; it also applies to faculty if creativity in their pedagogy is not to be stifled. Furthermore, the results of our educational efforts need time to incubate. Sometimes it will be years after a class or a course that what is learned flowers into life, expression or application. The initial impulse of learning can be separated from later fruition by many intermediary experiences and long periods that appear to be fallow, but where the duration of time allows a deeper level of internalization.
3. For further attention

From the first challenge indicated above, I take it that it is incumbent on faculty to identify the central values, key concepts and most important claims of their discipline with regard to contributing to the education of the whole person. Without maintaining a sharp focus on what is central, any negotiation within and between subject teams about what should be taught will be seriously hampered. Curriculum design and pedagogical planning cannot help but be ‘on the move’ because of changes in student and faculty composition, the availability of resources, external pressures and opportunities, and so forth; however, faculty should be reluctant to make too many changes too quickly with regard to what is considered ‘core’, even though there cannot be complete agreement about this.

As for the second challenge, universities can set about organizing things in such a way as to facilitate better understanding and mutual appreciation between disciplines. This might be via their systems of hiring faculty, of pump-priming interdisciplinary projects, of fostering joint seminars, of encouraging enriched programs of training for research students as well as through curriculum design for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses. Mechanisms for faculty evaluation and promotion too can reward engagement with the institutional mission to promote greater levels of integration in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, research, and outreach.

With regard to the third area of difficulty, I believe that there is much scope for stressing, much more than is currently the case, the need for self-knowledge as an important dimension of a university education. In the end it will be the student who does the 'heavy lifting' in integration – or fails to do so. “In accomplishing the unity of the university curriculum and the disciplines and knowledge within them, one becomes aware that genuine unity resides in the individual intellect of the student. The mere fusion of courses is no guarantee that such unity will take place” (Joseph, 2003, p.141). It should be possible to invite students to engage in structured reflection on how the questions of their courses relate to the questions of their lives, to model for them how to become aware of the ways that our respective lenses for seeing the world are ineluctably connected to our biology and biography, the company we keep, the pattern of life we are constructing.

Such self-reflection does not have to slip into narcissism or superficial navel-gazing. It can help students to avoid separating their inner and their outer lives, to bring into greater harmony the multiple dimensions of their being. It must be remembered that this task is elusive and unending. But the university can assist students in coming to recognize how their choices have consequences, positively and negatively, and to acknowledge that some choices make later ones much more difficult to make, while some others open the door for us and smooth our path towards building the kind of character that, while flawed (as we all are), nevertheless displays coherence and consistency, that shows what we stand for, that recognizes what undermines our best self and where help can be found in resisting such threats.

I find helpful here the picture of the human person given us by the orthodox theologian Nonna Harrison:

The human person is able to connect with the different levels of reality in the universe because he or she already participates in them. ... Our bodies have received protons and electrons from star dust, atoms from the earth, organic molecules from the biosphere, and genes from the animals. So we share in all the levels of reality in the universe, but on a smaller scale. This means that the human person is a microcosm, or a small world. Because [of this] the human being is able to unite things with each other and with God. Part of being in God’s likeness is to serve as a mediator. ... To mediate is to bring God to the world in blessing and to bring the world to God in receptivity and thanksgiving (Harrison, 2010, pp.127-8).

As people who are created from both the earth and from God's breath, our task, Harrison says, is: to live harmonious lives, holding together the parts of ourselves that connect us with different parts of creation. As we struggle for harmony within ourselves, we are also contributing to the accomplishment of a much larger task: bringing harmony to the whole of creation. We are called to
worship God on behalf of the created universe, but we are also called to become peacemakers within the vast and varied creation’ (p.131).

This notion of human beings as mediators between God and creation was central to the thought of Blondel. He too links this task with our identity as a microcosm (Blondel, 1973, p.95; Blondel, 1961, p.307; see also Flamand, 1969).

I stress the importance of promoting self-reflection as integral to university education because I believe that we should give very high priority to helping students think seriously about their vocation. I assume here that vocation is about God’s call and our response. Our response includes taking into account first, our attraction to a calling, second, our fitness for it, third, that the calling addresses a real need in the ecclesial or wider community, and fourth, that this calling is recognized or validated by those authorized to do so within this community. “A human being is called when desire and duty become one, when the source of one’s deepest longing is at the same time something to which one is obedient” (Schwehn, 2002, p.218).

For believers, their vocation is about who God wants them to be, rather than about any specific line of work. And, of course, the primary and enduring vocation of a Christian is to be disciple. However, even for non-religious students we can promote serious reflection about vocation in the sense of who they feel called to be, this calling being a blend of calling from within - to be true to themselves - and from without – to serve others. This entails relating a humble acknowledgment of our gifts and talents, together with a sound estimation of our strengths and weaknesses, to a considered evaluation of how we can best deploy who we are among our fellow human beings (see Miller, 2007). The question that should inform the central aim of a university is: what am I going to do with my life?

In order to address the fourth difficulty outlined above, what is needed is a deep commitment to both ecumenical and to inter-religious learning. This would be a way to enhance significantly the range of perspectives and ways of interpreting available to scholars and students, as resources for integration. I take it that there is bound to be a connection between ecumenism and education. Both endeavors involve building bridges: ecumenism aims to bridge differences between Christians who come from different parts of the family of faith; education builds bridges between the generations with regard to our cultural heritage. The bridge-building of education should contribute to ecumenism; the bridge-building of ecumenism should contribute to education. The inclusiveness of ecumenism is part of our appreciation of otherness and difference.

All of us – if we are to learn how to live in peace and harmony together – need to get better at appreciating our differences, how to learn from them, how to appreciate them, how to feel less threatened by them, how to grow through encounter with otherness. Indeed, having our worlds expanded is one of the benefits of university experience, and one of the best ways to have our world expanded is to meet with people who think differently from us – in matters of faith as in so many other matters. Our understanding of what is entailed by integration in education would be expanded by coming to an appreciation of how other Christians envisage this task and how they interpret the relationship between faith and the various types of knowledge we develop in studying. Inter-religious learning too has much to offer as a resource for greater integration in a university education. Islam, in particular, at this juncture of our history and culture, can be a valuable dialogue partner with regard to the circle of knowledge and how all things hang together in dependence on God as their creator.

As for the fifth challenge, this requires us, for all our seriousness about integration, not to press too hard, either our colleagues or our students. Invitation, not compulsion, should mark our style of approach to others. Example and encouragement, but not imposition and constraint, are what is needed. A good teacher knows intuitively, not only how to display passion for what he teaches, but compassion for who he teaches, and is aware when persistence can become oppressive of the spirit and an enemy of the lightness of touch that accompanies effective communication (a feature of teaching that Augustine called hilaritas).
I have not argued for any particular approach to integration. One might place one’s emphasis on how students can be helped to draw upon several disciplines, while ensuring they are rooted more deeply in one of them. One might concentrate instead on problem-centered learning that depends upon multiple disciplines. One might turn one’s attention to meta-cognitional skills, along the lines of the work of either Bernard Lonergan (1958; 1972) or Robert Sternberg (1997). Or one might focus on large themes in learning as a focus for integration, as does Martha Nussbaum (2010). An alternative approach to promoting integration in education would be to build on the work of Howard Gardner (2011) on multiple intelligences. In contrast, one might construct an integrated curriculum that engaged students in learning the relative scope and limits of experience, authority, intuition, and imagination in relation to various forms of rationality. I have done something much more limited here. I have merely proposed that integration should be a major task in education, as it is in our personal life-projects, outlined and analyzed several of the challenges such a task entails, before finally suggesting some of the lines along which these challenges might begin to be addressed within the university setting.

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Note

1 I am grateful for the comments of two referees who, apart from helping me reduce the number of shortcomings in the paper, also prompted me to clarify the assumptions on which the papers rests.

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TEACHING THE FAITH: CASE STUDIES FROM INDONESIA AND AUSTRALIA

Abstract

The teaching of a religion in schools not only epitomises but also denotes the beliefs and values of proponents of the religion being taught. The teaching of religion in state schools must be considered within the context of the social and cultural location of religion within society. The cultural contexts for the teaching of the Muslim faith in Indonesia and the Christian faith in Australia are vastly different. This study considered the experiences and perceptions that teachers of religion (in state primary schools) had in Indonesia and Australia. We collected data from four case study teachers from each country about their faith experiences and their experiences as teachers of religious education in lengthy elaborated interviews. We found that the expression of religious understanding and knowledge in educational settings was profoundly influenced by the teachers’ own spiritual development. The teachers from both countries had surprisingly similar spiritual journeys through childhood, adolescence and adulthood with a strong involvement with the mosque or church or their peripatetic organisations. However, the Indonesian teachers were teaching faith in a context which, outwardly and proverbially (at least) was overwhelmingly supportive of their role. The Australian teachers were teaching within a secularised cultural context that was ostensibly critical or at least sceptical of the faith base they represented. The Australian teachers saw themselves as counter cultural, minority believers attempting to re-establish a diminishing faith base of reducing relevance. Yet both groups articulated a similar motivation to teach the faith: to honour Allah or God, to reaffirm the Word and to clearly proclaim their belief in the faith basis of national life.

Introduction

Value systems (such as religious systems) are the operating systems of social formations. They are not external to social formations in readiness to be adopted, adapted or rejected. They are integral to the community to which they belong, prescribing beliefs, behaviours and the ways in which beliefs are to be conceived, interpreted and acquired. A religious education system encapsulates the way the younger generation of adherents or community members is to be imbued with the value system (Radcliffe, 2002). It defines what is to be learned and conceives the way it is to be learned which must be consistent with the conceptualisation of the belief system itself (Myers & Diener, 1995, Myers, 2004). National entities such as Indonesia or Australia are politico-cultural conglomerates of a myriad of value systems, which to a greater or lesser extent define and describe some kind of imagined national identity (Hanurawan & Waterworth, 1996). The national identities of newer nations like Indonesia are more contestable than those of older ones. Australia’s national identity is also hotly contended and constantly redefined. Even so, while it might be reasonable to claim that Indonesia’s national identity is confined within notions of what it means to be Muslim, this in no way adequately accounts for the ten percent of the population that are not Muslim or the shades of difference between expressions of the Muslim faith (Hanurawan & Waterworth, 2004). In numerical terms, there may be more Christian Indonesians than there are Christian Australians.

Religious education and sociological literature is replete with discussion of the impact of religion upon society and of the way in which religion is integral to the education of the young. This project set out to explore the nature of the teaching of ‘the faith’, through case studies of teachers of religion from each country. What was of interest to us was the ways the learning of religion in state (government or public) schools in majority Christian or Muslim societies differed or bore similarities.

Social and cultural contexts in religious education

While there is a great deal of literature on the roles, purposes and methods of teaching religious education,
there is sparse data on teachers’ own spiritual experiences as a motivation for teaching the faith. The literature that focuses on these broader issues is vastly different in Indonesia (especially that in the Indonesian language) and Australia. The debates in western literature focus upon the disenchantment many children and young people feel about the Christian church (Crawford & Rossiter, 2003, Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007, de Souza, Francis, O’Higgins-Norman & Scott, 2009). There is a strong focus upon the possibilities of reconfiguring the expression of religious response in young people in relation to their beliefs and practices and of disengagement from the old debates on the relevance of institutional religion to contemporary Australian life (Engebretson, 2002, Engebretson, 2004, Harris & Moran, 1998 Kay & Francis, 1996). Australian and other western research has given attention to the loss of religious literacy among the young (Mason, 2004, McQuillan, 2006), reconceptualisations of belief in God (Tacey, 2003), the decline in the institutions of society like marriage (Freitas and King, 2003) and of attempts made in religious education to contemporarise the curricula (McQuillan, 2006). On the other hand, research and writing in Indonesia on religious education has focused upon debates and mostly positivistic research on ways to traditionalise and reinforce belief and practice in children. The Indonesian literature is mostly based upon objectively devised research but unashamedly lapses into sermonising about taken-for-granted assumptions about religion. Surprisingly, literature on religious education in minority Muslim countries is thematically similar to the western literature but still does not lose its subjective value bias (Abdullah, 2005, Sharma, 2000).

There is strong theoretical evidence that pedagogy and the outcomes of educational episodes are shaped and constrained by external power structures (Carr and Kemmis, 1983 and Elliot, 1998). Within Australia, for example, religious education in public educational institutions must be contained within the context of not permitting the imposition of any particular religion nor for the imposition of any particular religious observance (Commonwealth of Australia, 1900). This constitutional imperative is derived in part from a similar group of limitations in the US First Amendment of 1789 and the US Supreme Court Ruling of 1947. Contemporary debates in the US on the status and function of religious teaching in state schools reaffirm that public schools are not the places for an imposition of any particular value system which might be implied by the holding of prayers with students or members of their families and the representation of faith in classes and schools (US Department of Education, 2003). By the same token and under the same rubric of the freedom of religion, schools in the US should not prevent the discussion of religious experiences by students.

Postcolonial education in Muslim South East Asia has sometimes been characterised as reclaiming the Muslim heritage so damaged by anti Islamic colonial educational processes (Anderson, nd). The western educational forms were thought to promote a non-Islamic philosophy that would mislead the people into questioning the basis of their religious faith. Moreover, it was thought to be not only non-Muslim but also anti Muslim in its tacit acceptance of a morality opposed to Islam (Anderson, nd). Whether this was the case or not, the need for an Islamic foundation for education was nevertheless asserted (Diponegoro & Hanurawan, 2004).

Contexts and frameworks for the teaching of religion in Australia and Indonesia

Religious education is not part of the compulsory curriculum in Victorian state schools. Although state legislation allows Christian Religious Education (CRE) to be taught in state schools, the curriculum is developed and religious education teachers are selected, trained and supervised by an interchurch organisation accepted under government legislation called Access Ministries (once known as the Council for Christian Education in Schools). Access Ministries develops an ‘agreed syllabus’ which is accepted by its subscribing churches as well as approved by other faith based groups in Victoria. Teachers of CRE must be approved by Access Ministries and must agree to teach the agreed syllabus. State school teachers are not permitted, under state legislation, to teach religion so teachers of CRE must not be employees of the state. They are instead, volunteers who have enough time to take classes during school time, so tend to be stay-at-home mothers, self employed people or retired people. Parents have the right to agree to their children receiving CRE or indeed to exclude their children from it. In some schools, alternatives to CRE are provided. In Victoria, 70 per cent of state primary schools receive CRE (Access Ministries, 2011). Students who are withdrawn from classes in CRE are set alternative worthwhile activities for the time CRE is being conducted.
CRE classes are generally 30 minutes in length and are taught once per week. There are continuing debates in Australia about the appropriateness of the teaching of Christian Education in state schools (Australian Association for Religious Education, 2011).

Religious education is a strongly supported element of the state curriculum in Indonesian state schools. The curriculum is based on Islam (alone) and it is taught in schools by trained religious education teachers who, like other teachers on the staff, are paid by the state education department. Staff who teach religious education do not generally teach other subjects in the curriculum. They go from class to class teaching only religion. The curriculum is developed and approved by the state and students are assessed in their progress in religion by country-wide external examinations (as are all other subjects in the curriculum). Children who are not Muslim may be permitted to attend religious education classes and participate in all religious activities in the school including the examinations. In general, only a few non-Muslim students would normally be excluded from classes. Majority non-Muslim districts in Indonesia such as Christian Papuan or Achenese communities or Hindu Balinese communities are not required to take Islamic religious education classes. Religious education is taught in two or more periods per week.

Research project

Methodology

A qualitative approach in research provides certain advantages in reflecting upon multiple realities in specific educational settings from the point of view of the respondents – the religious education teachers (Carr and Kemmis, 1983 and Elliot, 1998). It is not only descriptive but also explanatory (Punch, 2000) in seeking to develop systematically a grounded theory (Glaser, 1978 and Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In coding data, a multilayered approach was used in order to examine meaning from language, voice and context (Glaser, 1992). We collected data and developed theory at the same time in order to set up interplay between data collection, coding and analysis to permit not only an internal validation of findings but also a capacity to develop theory (Goulding, 2002).

Findings

Selection of case study teachers

We decided to select a small number of religious education teachers in each country who had fairly similar characteristics. We wanted to represent the mainstream of religious education teaching in both countries, that is, religion taught in state primary schools by teachers of religion. We chose teachers of religion who were non-ordained, of both sexes, teaching at state (public) schools with at least five years of experience in teaching religion. We hoped to choose teachers who were strongly dedicated to Islam or Christianity because we wanted to highlight differences as well as similarities in religious teaching. The selected teachers were to be typical of teachers of religion. We chose the Indonesian teachers from Sekolah Dasar Negeri (state primary schools) in Yogyakarta (Central Java) and the Australian teachers from eastern suburban state primary schools in Melbourne (Victoria). Pseudonyms have been used here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Years of teaching RE</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brendan Tilson</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Smoley</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert de Vister</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Spain</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutowo</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salima</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27 years</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umahat</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29 years</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syaiful</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We collected data from the teachers about themselves and their experiences as teachers of religious education in a lengthy elaborated interview with follow up discussion with the teachers at a later stage, as necessary. We recorded interviews and took extensive notes during and immediately after the interviews. Teacher’ responses were transcribed and sent to each teacher for confirmation by email (in Australia) and mail (in Indonesia). Teachers reviewed their responses and amended them or added further information as they felt necessary. The responses of the teachers provided in this report therefore were approved by the case study teachers. Indonesian interviews were conducted in Indonesian and the responses transcribed in Indonesian. Subsequently, responses were translated into English by the researchers and their assistants. Even at this stage of the research there was interplay of ideas between the researchers and the case study teachers. Data were sorted according to patterns, trends and repeated or disparate responses. Language was analysed in terms of cultural meaning.

Our interview was structured into a series of themes with a number of contributing questions for each. Questions were the same for each interviewee although they merely provided a framework for the discussion we had with each case study teacher. Our themes were

- the teacher’s own spiritual development and experiences
- motivations in teaching religion in schools.

### The teacher’s own spiritual development and experiences

The findings showed that each person had a significant faith experience as a child which, in most cases, was reinforced by parents (except for Jenny and possibly Robert). Organised religious activities formed an important part of their upbringing and these were mostly through children’s organisations associated with the church or mosque (except Jenny). There was an expected pathway of religious development that they all seemed to accept readily and spiritual growth was a natural part of growing up (except for Jenny).

I always attended Church along with my parents. As a young person I attended Christian Endeavour (an organisation for young people to teach them the Bible and encourage them in leadership roles) and Youth for Christ (a Christian organisation that has a service role in the community as well as an evangelistic role). There was never a time in my life when I made a conscious decision to be a Christian such as going forward (to the altar in response to a preacher’s appeal). I was baptized by immersion at 16 and I became a formal member of a Baptist church at 21. I attended many Teenage Bible Camps as a child and these had a strong influence on me. At university I joined the Christian group Evangelical Union (a conservative university Christian organisation) and Student Christian Movement (a more liberal university Christian organisation).

Brendan Tilson, 65, M

I wasn’t brought up in a Christian home. My first experiences of the Christian faith were through attending classes in RE in school as a child. I think that the teaching I received provided the groundwork for my later coming to faith. The seeds were sown there...

Jenny Smith, 48, F

I went to Sunday School and church and all those things when I was a child in Sri Lanka because my parents sent me. They were nominally Christian but did not have a commitment to the church. The stories were extremely beneficial when later in life I began to question my faith. I became an atheist about the age of 19 because I just couldn’t fit it all together. There was so much confusion in the world and too many conflicting beliefs and values – especially in Sri Lanka.

Robert de Vister, 58, M

Allah is one. I was born a Muslim but became a Christian at one stage in my life. When I was in elementary school, the PKI (communist) revolution was happening and many Muslims were killed because the teaching of Islam was being discouraged by the communist revolutionaries. Then Christian missionaries began to arrive in my area and I became a Christian. When I was a teenager,
many mosques were being rebuilt and a Taman Pendidikan Qur’an (a school for young children where religion is taught) called a ‘Sekolah Sore’ (evening school) was started. I attended it at about the age of ten and I came back to Islam because of the guidance of my teacher and my family too.

Sutowo, 44, M

I was in the Taman Pendidikan Al Qur’an (a school for young children where religion is taught) and my hobby was to read the Qur’an. I participated in (children’s religious activities which included) publicly reciting the Qur’an and once won the MTA (a competition in reciting the al Qur’an) in Sleman.

Syaiiful, 41, M

Later childhood and early teen experiences of faith helped to reinforce earlier spiritual growth. Para-church or para-mosque organisations took a greater part in training in later years (mainly for the Australians). Important markers of growth were experienced by the respondents (baptism for Brendan and Jenny, sickness and recovery for Jessica, devotional schedule for Umahat, reading and reciting the Qur’an for Syaiiful).

Some came to faith after a struggle of faith or conversion (Robert, through a pathway through atheism, Jenny, through a conversion from secularism and Sutowo in a pathway through Christianity). The others came to faith as a result of family encouragement or regular family religious observance.

All respondents emphasised the importance of educational processes in bringing them to faith. They had experienced religious education which worked well for them. Could this have been a significant reason why they saw the importance of their later-in-life commitment to religious education?

The Australian respondents seemed to emphasise personal commitment to God more than the Indonesians. Australian respondents used language indicating a ‘step’ towards commitment such as ‘There was never a time in my life when I made a conscious decision to be a Christian’ (Brendan) and ‘my … coming to faith’ (Jenny). However, the Indonesians used language indicating a continuance of a state or status such as ‘I was born a Muslim’ (Sutowo), ‘I attended… I followed’ (Umahat) and ‘my hobby was to read the Qur’an’ (Syaiiful).

How important was the element of choice in following a religious pathway? It may have been stronger for the Australians who all mentioned the importance of a personal decision to become a Christian. There was only one Indonesian (Sutowo) who mentioned the role of personal choice in his conversion to Islam. Maybe the median expectation in Australian society is to NOT identify oneself as Christian, but in Indonesia, the median expectation is NOT to identify oneself as a non-Muslim. If there were a difference in the importance of choice, we were not sure that it was demonstrated here.

All respondents saw their adulthood as a continuation of the faith commitment they had made in their early childhood (except for Robert, who had a late teenage conversion and Jenny, who came to faith after attending a Christian camp in her teenage years).

I didn’t have a major faith experience as an adult but I continued to grow in my Christian faith. I reaffirmed my faith at my marriage and as children were born into the family.

Brendan Tilson, 65, M

Later, as an adult, I joined the mosque’s adolescent female group organisation called Nasiyatul Aisyiah (Muhammadiyah Women’s Organisation)

Salima, 49, F

I hold classes in the mosque for housewives in recitation of the Qur’an. I also attend the Nasiyatul Aisyiah (Muhammadiyah Women’s Organisation) every 21st day of every month

Umahat, 53, F
Most respondents remained in or joined religious organisations and saw them as useful in their adherence to the faith. Prayer and reading the Bible or Qur’an were regarded as important. The major organisations of influence upon the Christian respondents was Youth for Christ (for teenagers and young adults) and upon the Muslims, Taman Pendidikan Al Qur’an (for children). These conservative organisations did not represent the religious right or even have a political agenda, yet their ideological and religious agenda was more likely to be traditional and conservative. They were both local or grassroots community based organisations.

All respondents, as adults, were active participants in the formal religion of their faith (except for Salima). Roles performed were quite specialised and roles were often in positions of responsibility and respect. Many of the roles were related to education or at least, propagation of religion.

I was a deacon (spiritual leader) at the local Baptist Church for a short time. I was a Sunday school teacher for more than 20 years at the local church. I participated as a member of a small singing group that performed at church services and I used to play the piano and organ for church services.

Brendan Tilson, 65, M

I’m currently on the Church Council (Church governing body). I’m the Faith Development Coordinator at the local church which involves me in planning and monitoring the Christian development programs of the people at the church (including children). I’m also a worship leader for Sunday church services and lead the congregation in singing and prayer... And, of course, I’m a regular worshipper at the church.

Jessica Spain, 43, F

I am on the board of the TPQ (Qur’an classes) of the Masjid Al-Fatah in Gedaren, Klaten Province and I often give the Friday sermon at the mosque.

Sutowo, 44, M

I am the official village Muadzin (caller to prayer); I teach the reading of the Qur’an and am the Khotib (Friday sermon reader/lay preacher)...I want the mosque to develop stronger devotion in the people, to guide children to read the Qur’an and for them to aspire to be the Muadzin.

Syaiful, 41, M

Roles performed indicated a significant commitment to the organised church or mosque and a deep commitment of faith. Both Indonesian and Australian teachers were exceptional in their service to their faith communities which would have far exceeded what their peers would have been willing to do. None of the Australians had any meaningful theological or teacher training (apart from Jessica’s teacher training) except the compulsory in-service training provided by Access Ministries.

Motivations in teaching religion

The decision to teach religion in schools is shaped by a number of factors. We attempted to gain some insight into the decision by asking respondents why they taught religion. The predominant response was that respondents taught religion because it was their duty as a Christian or a Muslim. Teachers often referred to the words of Jesus or the Prophet in demonstrating the imperative that the message be shared with children.

Because of the Great Commission to go and make disciples and teach them to obey God’s commandments. I’m not there to convert children to Christianity – that isn’t my job. The Holy Spirit may do a work in the lives of the children.

Jenny Smith, 48, F

Because it is a way of sharing the knowledge I have gained. It is also a Muslim duty to teach children about religion. I also teach to gain a salary to support myself.

Sutowo, 44, M
As a Christian, I like other people to gain an accurate understanding of Christianity (as well as other religions). I want the children to get an understanding of life from a predominantly Christian viewpoint.

Brendan Tilson, 65, M

Both Christian and Muslim teachers expressed the opinion that the message of Allah or God had to be shared because sharing it was an essential element of the message itself. However a further facet of this opinion was that the message could bring new insights to children or shed light on life.

I teach Christian education mainly because there is a lack of Christian teaching in the state school system in Australia. We are able to teach about the gospel of Jesus Christ where the children otherwise wouldn’t receive it even though we’re a Christian nation.

Robert de Vister, 58, M

Because it had always been my ambition to be a teacher of religion since I was a child. My family is a religious one and I received a religious education. I follow the Hadith (the Prophet’s moral explanations of the Qur’an) and try to explain its meaning in a simple (verse by verse) way to others.

Syaiful, 41, M

The teachers believed that the ‘gospel’ or the ‘message’ of the Qur’an could transform children’s lives and bring them into a stronger relationship with Allah or God. The Australian teachers seemed to lay greater emphasis upon this point. Others expressed the thought that the religious teaching children received enabled them to obey Allah or God: ‘teach them to obey God’s commandments’ (Jenny) and ‘a Muslim duty to teach children about religion’ (Sutowo).

There was also a strong emphasis from most respondents on keeping the religious or spiritual tradition going through religious education. Brendan, quoted above, was keen to pass on a Christian perspective while Syaiful wanted to keep the traditional parent-to-child learning process going. Others quoted above affirmed this feeling by stating that we need to address the ‘lack of Christian teaching’ (Robert), ‘sharing the (Muslim) knowledge I have gained’ (Sutowo), ‘daughters (or faithful women) should be teachers of religion’ (Salima) and ‘I myself like to learn and I thought it would be good to teach others’ (Umahat). The concept of the religious heritage being faithfully handed from the older to the younger generation was powerfully represented in these responses. All of the Muslim teachers made some reference to this point. There are strong inferences here that the role of the religious education teacher is that of the Muslim messenger or Christian missionary, that the role is a calling, and that there is honour implied and obligations accepted in following the call of Allah or God to represent Him in that role.

There were a number of other emphases in these responses. One was that the learning of religion was intrinsically good, worthwhile and enjoyable (Sutowo and Umahat) and another, that it was important to teach religion to enable the children to gain an accurate message, viz ‘an accurate understanding of Christianity’ (Brendan) and ‘trying to explain its meaning (Hadith meaning) in a simple (verse by verse) way’ (Syaiful).

Some gave responses on their motives in teaching religion that had little to do with spiritual matters. Sutowo was a teacher of religion to gain a salary and support himself, Salima had entered the profession because it was a well respected one in the community, Umahat had become a teacher of religion because her parents encouraged her to do so and Jessica began teaching to encourage more children to join the Sunday school at her local church. These kinds of responses were more common among the Indonesian teachers because their work as teachers was salaried whereas Australian teachers were volunteers and were therefore more likely to report altruistic rather than material motives in teaching religion.

Some teachers identified a spiritual connection between their faith and the pedagogical process. Brendan said that he tried to develop his teaching around the spiritual and intellectual needs of his children.
I’m versatile in my teaching …. I like to have a two-way discussion with my students where I encourage them to think. If the children ask questions, I feel I’m getting the lesson across. I like to load up the lessons with questions to get the children thinking.

Brendan Tilson, 65, M

Jenny was more direct in saying

I hope I project my faith in my teaching

Jenny Smith, 48, F

Robert referred to his desire to show commitment to his faith

I think passion is very important.

Robert de Vister, 58, M

Jessica indicated a dependence upon God in her teaching

I pray a lot about lessons I take as I prepare them. I believe in thorough preparation to ensure the success of the lesson.

Jessica Spain, 43, F

Umahat referred to a spiritual mentor as well as to her parents in setting the spiritual tone of her teaching

I think I’m a good teacher of religion because I’ve been well taught by my parents and my religion teacher (spiritual mentor).

Umahat, 53, F

Our analysis showed that motivations for teaching religion could be reduced to four major clusters of factors

1. I am compelled by the message and by the need to tell it (Brendan, Jenny, Robert Sutowo, Syaiful)
2. Allah or God gave me the gifts of spiritual awareness and vitality and others can receive those gifts too (Jenny, Salima, Umahat, Syaiful)
3. The community and nation needs a greater devotion to Allah or God to function better (Brendan, Jenny, Robert, Sutowo, Umahat, Syaiful)
4. I had a wonderful personal experience of Allah or God and others can gain that too (Jenny, Robert, Jessica, Salima, Umahat, Syaiful)

Teachers from both countries equally supported these contentions. Males were more commonly in support of the first and females the second. The third and fourth contentions were evenly supported by males and females.

Discussion

A major consideration in this research was the importance of the construction (or reproduction) of the gospel or the way in succeeding generations of the community. Religious education was sometimes conceptualised in the literature as a means of ensuring the maintenance of faith as a foundational aspect of local and national identity. The findings of this project showed that this happened in quite different ways within Islamic Indonesian and post-Christian Australian communities. Our case study teachers solidly asserted their sense of responsibility to teach the faith to the younger generation in as faithful a manner as possible (given their personal perceptions of faith). Both Indonesian and Australian teachers felt the urgency of this responsibility. But the social and cultural contexts within which these motivations were expressed were vastly different.
There was a distinct difference in the way the two groups articulated their reasons for teaching of the faith. The Indonesian teachers provided dispassionate and rational reasons for teaching the faith while the Australian groups gave impassioned, theological justifications for their roles in the Australian community. The Indonesian teachers were performing a role that conformed to community ideals while the Australians were performing a role that was transformative and challenging to community expectations. This difference was not simply a function of the difference between religious teachers within schools – the Indonesians as regular salaried teachers, wholly accepted within the staffing structure of the schools, the Australians as enthusiastic volunteers and visiting teachers on the fringe of schools operations – although this factor was important. It was more a difference in the social and cultural location of faith teaching in Indonesian and Australian social landscapes.

Surprisingly, despite this fundamental structural contrast, teachers from both countries articulated the cultural or heritage function of faith teaching in a very similar way. Individuals from both groups stated that the message needed to be relayed as a way of continuing the religious heritage of the country, as an essential element of belief and behaviour for children in the community, as a means of maintaining the faith component of the community and as a means of promoting a better, more accurate understanding of faith. The Christian teachers however tended to emphasise compassion and God’s love in these responses while the Muslim teachers stressed obedience, duty and service – those rather obvious identifiers of Christian and Muslim faiths.

Conclusion

We concluded that teachers of the faith in both places evinced the following characteristics.

- Teachers of the faith had an unwavering and confident personal adherence to the faith.
- Teachers of the faith commonly had multiple roles in the mosque or church and had performed those roles from their youth.
- Mentorship or respect for spiritual heroes had helped teachers of the faith to define their spiritual call to teaching.
- Reading and memorising Scripture helped clarify a spiritual call to teaching the faith.
- Formal religious adherence in parents was often a key factor in teachers of the faith becoming religiously conservative.
- Religious conservatism or fundamentalism in parents was a key factor in teachers of the faith becoming religiously conservative or fundamentalist.
- Teaching of the faith in schools and other compassionate community activities were strongly linked.
- Teaching of the faith in both Indonesia and Australia tended to be an activity carried out by conservative adherents of the faith
- The socio-cultural and politico-social environments of the community were powerful influences in creating motivations to teach religion.

Teaching of religion in schools occupied a very different social and cultural location in Indonesia and Australia. A mainstream activity generally revered by the community in Indonesia, the activity was marginal (and often marginalised) in Australia. Within Indonesia, the formalisation of the teaching of the faith in schools established the activity within mainstream cultural activities of the community – an activity supported, funded and monitored by Education Departments across the country. Within Australia, the contestability of the enterprise and the public scrutiny of the activity was in stark contrast to (or perhaps matched by) the ardour and compassionate commitment of the teachers to it. However, their dedication and sacrificial voluntarism only served to accentuate the marginalisation of the activity within the secular community.

It seemed therefore that the national perceptions of the role of religion in society were fundamental elements in creating an environment for the teaching of the faith. These perceptions not only created the
environment for religious teaching in schools, they also helped to create the individual religious identities, teaching personalities and religious motivations of teachers of the faith themselves.

Reference List


Australian Association for Religious Education (AARE) (2011) The place for a study of religious beliefs and practices in the national curriculum. A submission from the Australian Association for Religious Education (AARE) to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) April.


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Para-church organisation is not associated with a specific local church but an organisation set up by people from different denominations to support the church’s mission in general.

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THE PLACE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN UKRAINIAN EDUCATION

Abstract

The last twenty years have witnessed significant changes in the relationship between sacred and secular approaches to politics, and education policy has been part of that reconceptualization. Much of the debate surrounding normative instruction centers on definitions of goodness, and the kinds of situations that require commendable behavior. While many practitioners teach morality and ethics through explicitly religious content, a growing spectrum of applied ethics has emerged as well. This paper briefly compares political structures that allow for such instruction, and the problems it seeks to overcome in different socio-economic contexts in order to understand the curious case of Christian Ethics education in Ukraine. Ukraine is neither a mature democracy, nor has it experienced the horrors of AIDS or civil war, yet the government has endorsed and allocated scarce resources to overcome societal ills in part through moral education. This paper examines the evidence to show correlation between normative instruction and positive social change. Determining causality should be the next step in the literature.

The last twenty years have witnessed significant changes in the relationship between sacred and secular approaches to politics. The demise of communist ideology in Eastern Europe created new opportunities for the inclusion of moral concerns in political discourse. George W. Bush’s election to the US presidency in 2000 forced Christians around the world to reevaluate the relationship between “God and Caesar.” Chinese government persecution of religious groups, the pivotal involvement of Catholic and Protestant churches in the Northern Ireland Peace Process, and post-9/11 anti-Muslim rhetoric in Europe have lead to a resurgence of interest in academic studies of religion and government, ranging from issues of state-sponsored terror and peacemaking, to national identities and immigration policy. Education policy has also drawn increasing attention in those discussions.

Religious education, socialized ethics, and moral instruction each carry with it specific nuances, yet all focus on a few core principles: selfless action, personal integrity, and honesty in dealing with others. Much of the debate surrounding these educational approaches (herein collectively labeled “normative instruction”) centers on definitions of goodness, and the kinds of situations that require commendable behavior. Students engage those debates by examining realistic scenarios that challenge their preconceptions, and by connecting personal values to broader social norms.

However, the place of religious ideology in education engenders considerable debate by those who argue that its historical abuses negate any positive role in the public sphere. Accordingly, government funded education should remain free from any discussion of the merits of overtly religious moral instruction. Instead, individual families and/or religious organizations should teach the members outside of the public sphere in order to prevent groups with competing moral codes trying to usurp political power through the educational system. The absence of state endorsement eliminates the need for competition, thereby creating a neutral environment for the free expression of contending views within society at large. This allows individuals and groups to pursue the approaches they deem appropriate for their circumstances, while not forcing them into conflict with contending groups over scare public resources. Finally, any religious standards so taught must fit within the established parameters for acceptable social behavior determined by the state or its founding document/tradition, often loosely defined and limited in application.

Others argue that such general guidelines require further clarification because societies face collective problems that extend beyond the boundaries of personal responsibility, with groups often working against
each other’s common good regardless of their connection to the public sphere or state power in particular. This occurs through intentional rivalries, or as a result of unintended consequences arising from the very nature of communal existence; competition for resources causes conflict regardless of the specific character of interests at stake. In addition, since life consists of a multiplicity of social interactions, normative standards define how these interactions occur and therefore should be discussed in wider circles. Questions need to be addressed as to which approach works best in what circumstances – competition or cooperation, hierarchical or communal decision making, personal or collective goal-seeking, etc. Therefore, the state needs to create space either for a unified moral code that contains the core elements of the religious values within society, or multiple avenues for religious groups to express “truth” in the public sphere. This will keep society moving in the “right” direction, and thereby avoid moral relativism and the resulting greedy self-obsession that destroys social cohesion. By doing so, state oversight protects the integrity of the public arena, while maintaining the virtues of pluralism found in the most successful modern polities.

This paper presents an overview of several approaches and outcomes of the debate about positive and purposeful normative instruction conducted through educational systems, beginning with an analysis of the most common founding document for modern states – a written Constitution – and concluding with evaluation of the space created for religious norms, as well as the presence of approved normative instruction either through religious or state agencies. It also addresses specific challenges such instruction tries to overcome, ranging from AIDS to ethnic strife. This review creates opportunity to examine the curious case of Ukrainian normative education, revealing strong correlation between it and positive social outcomes.

Constitutional Opportunities, Social Needs, and Normative Instruction

Constitutions establish the rules of the game for a political system. They define the division of labor and authority within the government, and enshrine certain values as the defining principles of society. Democratic constitutions also define the boundaries for public and private spheres, ensuring limitations on government action while promoting citizen involvement in the political process. Education and religion receive varying degrees of emphasis, with some countries defining national identity along religious terms, as in Greece, Norway, and Costa Rica; while others establish little more than separate sacred/secular spheres of influence as in the United States and France. Across the spectrum though, democratic constitutions include education as a foundational process for building community, regardless of its religious or moral content. Some have also used explicit constitutional opportunities for religious education to positive effect.

Several issues define the parameters for normative instruction in general: 1) authority and responsibility for curriculum development and funding, and 2) the type of relationship between public (state-sponsored and managed) and private education. Curricular matters and financing tend to reside within federal institutions since many municipalities lack the money to fulfill constitutionally mandated levels of public education. National income and value-added taxes offer federal decision-makers greater flexibility to shift resources to needed areas, rather than rely on parochial interests that may not willingly release funds in favor of other localities. Income disparities between local communities also give greater impetus for centralized resource management.

However, federal oversight does not necessarily mean uniform curriculum. Brazil and Hungary give examples of balancing parental input with public funding for education. Both offer religious education options according to parents’ interest, while guaranteeing state resource allocation for it. Belgium takes it even further by providing salaries for clergy to teach those courses. Finally, US Charter schools structure that choice to a greater degree by guaranteeing free tuition to what would otherwise be private institutions. Accordingly, parents and charter school managers have a broad range of opportunities for religious and moral education at public expense.
Parental interest and state funding can result from different motivations ranging from personal conviction to social crisis. In the latter case, South Africa and Uganda have implemented normative instruction through schools and non-governmental agencies to combat the nation’s rampant AIDS problems. The governments of Northern Ireland and Rwanda have also used it in conjunction with religious groups to overcome widespread social and political conflict. Less violent cases in Latvia and Hong Kong show that normative instruction can also smooth political transitions and collective processes of redeveloping social identities.

These examples give a brief indication of the potential benefits from normative instruction, but questions remain as to why it should be overtly religious, to say nothing of explicitly Christian in many cases. In response, McDaniel et al. (2010) provide an excellent review of the psychological, sociological, and pedagogical literature addressing the sources of moral learning. Their emphasis on authority structures – family, spiritual and social/political – shows the impact of dysfunctional relationships on emotional-cognitive development, while emphasizing the importance of positive spiritual relationships for the growth of moral emotions. Teaching morals requires more than content instruction though, as Hill (2008) and Freytag (2008) show in their analysis of different pedagogical strategies. Accordingly, the most effective approach seems to be value-promotion that connects moral edicts with real world scenarios, whether imminent to the students’ personal lives, or approachable enough in a general sense that they can grasp its significance. Teachers must also model the same values in their treatment of students by creating an environment that establishes ground rules (core principles), while accepting the subjective nature of opinions and applications of those rules in different situations. (Hill, 2008) Personal attention and individuated assignments work best, but Hill and Freytag recognize the resource constraints many teachers face, thereby limiting the time they can give to each student on such weighty matters.

Christian ethics instruction works particularly well in these cases due to its focus on ideals that give meaning to life and purposeful action. The apparent limitation to one set of moral edicts can help students operate within a workable moral space, rather than become overwhelmed with the alternatives without a realistic means of adjudicating between options. In particular, De Ruyter (2006) points to the nature of the Divine in Christianity as a source for mercy, justice, kindness and hope. These characteristics remain moral “goods” in the exchange of ideas, so that even if they students reject the specific Christian nature of the material, they tend to hold to the principles over time. Wilhelm and Firmin (2008) confirm the inherent value of these principles in all forms of education, even if implicitly applied within such rudimentary aspects as case selection, assumptions within discussion scenarios, and evaluative methods. Astley (2004) compares the effectiveness of purposeful Christian ethics education and implicit instruction, showing that the latter can occur more generally while the former requires trained personnel, sufficient resources, political freedom, and social support often lacking in communities. As an example, Ukrainian teachers have the full support of their government to teach Christian Ethics, even if resources remain limited, and combined with the country’s recent political history, economic privation, and pervasive societal problems, this fact makes Ukraine an interesting case worthy of study.

Teaching Christian Ethics in Ukrainian Public Schools

Although it has the benefit of de jure democratic civil protections, Ukraine still faces many contradictory trends after the Orange Revolution of 2004. Past political transitions prompted by citizen activism and countered by unmet expectations have become the norm since the collapse of the old Soviet system, leading to conflicting forces of social apathy and frustration. Like many developing nations, Ukraine has also grappled with economic crises caused by corrupt business practices, declining work ethics, and low standards of living, yet it gained a positive growth outlook from the IMF in late 2010. In addition, the country confronts deep crises in public health, social violence, the decline of family integrity, and poverty despite improvements in the UN’s Human Development Index. Teen crime rates have declined in recent years, but remain high by European standards, and youth alcohol consumption is among the highest in the world, as is the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking. Yet unlike most nations facing those problems, Ukraine allocates precious resources from its national budget for preventive and treatment programs.
Former president Yushchenko claimed these contradictory trends amounted to a moral and spiritual crisis that required concentrated effort by state and social groups to overcome.\textsuperscript{xvii} One specific mechanism was the introduction of normative instruction in public schools. The resultant Ministry of Science and Education Decree No. 437 (July 25, 2005), in accordance with Article 35 of the Constitution, stipulated that municipalities must develop curricula for three types of ethics courses in public schools – Christian, Religious, and General Ethics – to prepare students to face and meet the nation’s challenges. They must also ensure effective training for teachers of those courses, and provide the resources should parents ask for any or all of them to be taught in their districts. Doing so enshrined parental authority over their children’s moral curriculum. This level of state support for normative instruction and parental choice in the midst of so many larger problems makes Ukraine an unusual case.\textsuperscript{xviii}

Begun locally in Western Ukraine in 1992 and officially sanctioned at the national level in 2006, Christian Ethics has been taught across all grade levels in public schools throughout the country.\textsuperscript{xviii} Developed with cooperation from Orthodox, Catholic, and Protest denominations,\textsuperscript{xix} these courses have shown potentially promising results in the development of moral and spiritual maturity to face the challenges of modern life. At a national conference on spiritual education held in Lviv in February 2011, teachers in attendance reported that those students who learn Christian ethics show

- improved mutual understanding among their peers and with teachers,
- healthier relationships with parents,
- better behavior in school,
- considerably smaller levels of violent behavior compared to peers that do not learn Christian ethics, and
- kinder attitudes towards younger students.\textsuperscript{xx}

The responses correspond well with two surveys previously conducted by the Ostrog Academy and Institute of Slavic Studies in 2002 and 2005. Completed at eighteen schools with nearly 550 student participants at the elementary (grades 1-3), secondary (grades 4-9) and high school levels (grades 10-11), the surveys showed between 70 and 85% of all students had positive views of the Christian Ethics material, while at least 50% acknowledged improvements in their personal behavior at school and among their families. Values they most often wished to develop and hoped to learn in their Christian Ethics courses included kindness, empathy, responsibility, and hard work. Elementary students emphasized these values most often of all age groups (70% compared to 56% for secondary and 49% for high school students.) Such results should give incentive to study the long-term effects of these programs, tracking student responses throughout their education and into their working years.\textsuperscript{xxi}

Beginning that process, Belkina and Sidanich (2008) surveyed nearly 1,500 teachers and parents in Kiev who participated in a three part effort to develop, implement and analyze a new course entitled “Christian Ethics in Ukrainian Culture” in 2006. Offered to primary school students in over 100 city schools, the course emphasized teaching Christian spiritual and moral values that are also deeply embedded in Ukrainian culture (e.g. human rights, mercy, respect for parents and older people, hard work, personal integrity, etc.). Objectives included helping students build effective foundations for their life priorities, and form individuated motivation systems that extend beyond personal gratification. These were meant to aid in the development of Ukraine as a society of spiritually healthy individuals with high levels of moral qualities, actively participating in the country’s democratic processes.

The findings reinforced the earlier studies conducted in Western Ukraine: 90% of parents were pleased with the content, methodology and results of the course. Positive outcomes in their children’s lives ranged from respecting peers (67%), obeying parents (80%), following teachers’ instructions (84%), to insulting others less often (70%). In addition, over 70% of teachers agreed that the course met the developmental needs of the students, fostered positive relationships between students, and that despite the lack of necessary literature at times, it should be taught long-term (87%).

Selection bias remains a potential concern as many participants (teachers, students, and parents) considered themselves Christian and were therefore predisposed to view the program favorably.\textsuperscript{xxii} Lahman
(2011) addressed that possibility by examining levels of aggressiveness in the Rovno school district, an area that has had Christian Ethics courses for several years. Surveying teachers and parents, she found that students who participated in Christian Ethics courses showed a reduction in aggression levels by over 50% compared to those who did not participate, despite that fact that the overwhelming majority of all students labeled themselves “Christian”.

Anecdotal evidence from the village school in Bugruvatske (Eastern Ukraine) confirmed Lahman’s finding on a small scale. In the summer of 2008, secondary school teacher Lubov Viktorovna Soloshenko attended a teacher’s training course for Christian Ethics in Sumy. She implemented the course in her class of seven boys and two girls, most of whom exhibited chronic behavioral problems: theft, public drunkenness, and violence against village children. Local police and school administrators considered placing them under permanent supervision to prevent further problems. Instead, Soloshenko taught the state-approved Christian Ethics course over the next three years, during which time she noted dramatic changes as the students no longer ran afoul of the law or caused problems in school. More amazingly, all of them graduated and matriculated into local universities, an extremely rare occurrence among Ukrainian village schools.

Soloshenko’s results are not meant to be exhaustive, but the accumulation of evidence seems to show that Christian Ethics courses in Ukraine have noticeable, positive outcomes. The lack of large-N, long-term studies certainly warrants further investigation, but the current programs ought to continue in the meantime. At the least, doing so will add to the sample size available to future researchers. At most, it could bring much needed social change to the country.

In conclusion, this emphasis on normative instruction does not make Ukraine unique, but places Ukraine within a small set of countries whose governments have developed specific religious curricula to meet their country’s problems, and support its implementation politically and financially despite otherwise scarce resources. In that regard, Ukraine has something of value to offer other countries struggling with youth crime, business corruption, domestic violence, and other societal ills. Modelling cooperation between the state and religious groups, as well as between different religious communities, the current Ukrainian program of Christian Ethics has the potential to help alleviate many of the nation’s problems. Ukraine could become a very different place in the next twenty years, and while Christian Ethics courses in the public school system will not unilaterally produce that outcome, the results thus far show it can play an important role along the way.

References


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ii This paper does not address the constitution formation process, but see Diamond (2010) and Linz (1996) for excellent evaluations of the challenges and possible solutions by different countries.

iii The seeming limitation to democratic polities actually includes most countries as the discourse of democratic governance has become the dominant terminology for nations to describe themselves, regardless of their actual democratic tendencies. This paper does not evaluate the veracity of those claims as they have little direct impact on the topic at hand.

iv Case selection is not meant to be definitive or exhaustive.


vii This paper does not enter the debate about US charter school effectiveness, rather indicating the use of normative instruction through certain examples to make comparisons possible. Two anecdotes do not show causality but can point to future comparisons. http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2010/0610/Graduation-rate-for-US-high-schoolers-falls-for-second-straight-year;


http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2008/jul/08073108.html;


ix Obviously, the same groups could be said to have precipitated the violence in Northern Ireland. See Southern (2006) for a treatment of the opportunities presented by religious education and peacemaking in Northern Ireland. Much of the article focuses on consistent peace overtures made by clergy, and the resistance they faced from unyielding church members. See also Gallagher (2003), Wardlow (2006), and UK Department of Education [http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/](http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/) for federal policy on Northern Ireland; Obura (2003), Mgbako (2005), Nantulya (2006), and Muir (2010) for work in Rwanda.
See the following for additional examples: Heim and Scovill (2010), Weisse (2009), and Schreiner (2009); Filipsone (2005) provides detailed analysis of the Latvian program, while Cheng (2004) and Leung (2010) detail the challenges to religious education after the PRC takeover of Hong Kong.

See Glazner et al (2004) for a solid analysis of practices in American universities. Those cases studies lie outside the range of this study, but Glazner’s work confirms the effectiveness of continued efforts after secondary education.


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Funding varies across the country, with Western Ukrainian regions providing the highest levels of support, southern Ukraine the lowest.

The Ministry of Science and Education reported that approximately 9,400 teachers in 8,300 schools taught the state-approved ethics courses to nearly 670,000 students nationwide during the 2009-2010 academic year. (Interviews, June 2011)


Data provided from representatives of the Ostrog Academy in the Rovno region (April 20, 2011).

Zakovych (2009) calls into question the generalizability of the surveys given their sample size, and more importantly, questions the confessional nature of Christian Ethics courses in light of specific European human rights principles. However, supporting evidence presented in this paper shows that Christian Ethics courses correlate strongly to tangible individual and social benefits, and fit into UN human rights principles that enshrine freedom of conscience, religious expression and cultural sovereignty. More to the point, this researcher has reviewed many examples of the curriculum and found it to be neither xenophobic nor discriminatory.

As one example, a survey of 200 children aged 10-13 conducted in Lviv in 2005 and published by the Lviv Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church found nearly 80% identified themselves as some form of Christian denomination and possessed a Bible in their homes. However, while 68% said their parents only attended church on “big” holidays, fewer than 40% had any interest in the teachings of Christianity. http://svitlo.orthodox.lviv.ua/2005/n10/05_10s7.htm.

Interview, May 2011, Sumy, Ukraine

The Sumy Regional Institute of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education taught Soloshenko and over 100 other administrators and teachers in the last three years. Informal interviews with graduates, students and parents in the region confirm the positive assessments presented in this paper. (Interviews conducted in September 2009, January and May 2010, Sumy Region.)

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IDEAS FOR PRACTITIONERS

“I CAN’T TELL ’EM THAT!”

USE OF DIRECT INSTRUCTION IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Context

Let me begin with an emblematic story. I was once observing a trainee RE teacher take a senior Catholic high school class. The topic this day was stem cell research, one lesson in a unit dedicated to “ethics in the modern world”. The class had a heavy focus on student centred learning. The main activity was students, working in groups, researching various aspects of stem cell research and then reporting back to the whole class. As I listened to these reports I noted that very few of the students seemed to realize the significance of the distinction between embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells. When I raised this with the teacher after the class she was adamant about her rationale. She saw her role as a teacher to facilitate learning and not to impose knowledge – indeed she commented, “I can’t tell ’em that!” It was, therefore, the students’ task to come up with crucial distinctions. This was seen as being a more pedagogically sound methodology as it was, amongst other things, much more likely to result in long term transformational learning. My point was that some direct instruction on the part of the teacher, in this case, pointing out to students some critical vocabulary and concepts such as the distinction between adult and embryonic stem cells far from inhibiting learning could actually facilitate it. My student teacher was sceptical and gently rebuked me for promoting an “empty vessel” approach to learning. This is a well known analogy where teachers are seen as filling up the vacant heads of students.¹

I think this narrative sets out some very important issues that are especially relevant to teaching in religious education. There is a great reluctance on the part of many RE teachers to use direct instruction in the classroom. Rymarz (2004) proffers a number of reasons for this and two of these will be mentioned here. Firstly, direct instruction can be seen as an educationally unsophisticated approach, more in keeping with bygone and outmoded instructional methodologies. Secondly, and related to this, RE teachers working in religiously affiliated schools in particular need to be vigilant about the dangers of imposing religious beliefs on students. This may be construed as a type of quasi indoctrination - also a feature of an era now passed.

Guidelines for use of direct instruction in the classroom

General rationale

A number of recent studies have pointed out that direct instruction in the classroom has a place in contemporary pedagogy in a number of situations (Mayer & Moreno, 2003; Kirschner et al., 2006; Gredler, 2009; Hattie, 2009). Many of these insights dovetail with established theoretical approaches such as the Vygotskian paradigm of scaffolded learning and teachers being the mediators of student movement into the zone of proximal development (ZPD)(Vygotsky, 1987). ZPD is the area between what students can do
unaided and the most difficult task that they can undertake (Karpov, 2003). Use of direct instruction is best utilized within a contextualizing framework such as the following principles.

**Lowering cognitive load**

If students lack strong content knowledge of a particular area then they find it difficult to orientate themselves to a new topic (Mayer, 2004). What can happen in these instances is that the amount of exogenous material that students encounter can severely restrict new learning. In these situations students have a relatively low saturation level, commonly understood as information overload. One such area is engagement with the basic contours of Christian belief and practice. Dean (2010) has pointed out that adolescents today have a poor grasp of the major tenets of the Christian narrative. In order to deal with this, teachers should be aware that students can very quickly become disorientated and disengaged, when doing topics with which they have very little connection. In these instances direct instruction can provide a mechanism by which students can enter into the conversation by at least giving them some key vocabulary and concepts.

None of this is supposed to override prior learning. Good teachers will always try to situate new learning within student prior knowledge. In some areas of religious education students will bring with them some misconceived ideas. These should be acknowledged and addressed, not as the final word on the subject but as a prelude to further learning. In Vygotskian terms this is the recognition that students often have spontaneous concepts which may be incorrect but, nonetheless shape student perceptions (Chaiklin, 2003).

**Time efficient and focussed**

Direct instruction (DI) needs to be focussed both in terms of the amount of time devoted to it as well as toward content objectives. Good use of DI is time efficient. It cannot be too long or used too often. In a similar way, it should focus on these key elements that students need to know and would have difficulty finding out on their own violation (Mayer, 2004). To illustrate, many RE teachers cover topics related to morality and ethics. A key concept in these areas, from a Christian perspective, is conscience. The elaboration of the notion of conscience is a complex area but some assistance in providing key terminology can be of great assistance. It can be too much to expect students to, say, realize the importance of Augustine in deriving the modern notion of conscience and then to discover his definition. A teacher can provide these as a context for further learning.

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**In the classroom: Signposting**

An effective DI technique is to give students a sense of where the lesson sequence is going. Take a complex topic like, “Teachings of Paul”. Teachers can signpost this topic by providing specific examples of key Pauline teachings. This gives students a sense of the scope and salience of Paul’s writing and also what they will be expected to come up with during the course. It can also include key ideas, themes and terms in Paul’s writings.
This sense of the teacher leading the way is very akin to Shulman’s (1986) notion of teacher competence. Here the teacher needs to have mastery of content knowledge in order to be able to generate the stories, metaphors and analogies that can engage students. This is a question of quality of information not quantity. It is the ability to identify what are the key mediators and roadblocks to future learning.

What comes before and after?

DI should always be seen as part of an overall approach to learning. Many of the fears of teachers about using DI come from experience of it being used as the sole or dominant form of instruction. University courses, for instance, make heavy use of DI in the form of lectures. There is ample evidence that this is an unsatisfactory pedagogical model. When using DI in religious education a critical question is, “What comes next?” DI needs to be integrated into a learning strategy that aims to have students participating in an involved and engaged capacity.

The problem with the stem cell lesson mentioned earlier was not that the teacher was relying on student directed learning. It was, to use a Vygotskian idea, that she was not providing sufficient support for the tasks to be meaningful (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). It would have been much more productive if students, after a range of teaching and learning strategies, including DI, were then encourage to explore the theme in a more self directed way.

References


\footnote{Let me note here that I was not convinced that the student teacher was aware of the difference between adult and embryonic stem cells. The issue of content knowledge of RE is perennial. No amount of discussion of pedagogical principles can distract us from the fundamental point that if RE teachers have poor content knowledge this will severely limit their capacity to teach well. Certainly self described discovery learning cannot make up for teacher deficiencies.}
ISBN 978 1 85607 7101, 145 pages

This book provides an examination of popular understandings of Mary in the Catholic tradition. It doesn’t purport to be a critique of Church teaching, doctrine and dogma which are usually quite limited, nuanced and sober. Rather it looks at how these have been received and influenced people’s spirituality, prayer, understanding of God and themselves and even gender roles. Renehan highlights that the Church, while proclaiming the dogma, doctrines in a clear, restrained way, does not always work well at correcting these excesses or distortions that develop.

Renehan’s aim is to advance a new methodology for categorising the complex layers that comprise the Marian tradition. She suggests that the figure of Mary may be subsumed into three Marian typologies, which comprise three key chapters in the book, namely Mary as Theatype, Mary as Christatype and Mary as Ecclesiatype.

The second concern of this book is to argue for the possibility of some theological agreement between traditional Catholic Church teaching and Christian feminist hermeneutics. The fourth chapter, “I am woman” discusses difficulties that many women have in relation to the patriarchal structures of the church which are perceived as in opposition to gospel values. The fifth chapter attempts a middle way, a theology of Mary that encompass both Catholic Church teaching and Christian feminist hermeneutics. The hope is that this book provides a possibility for continuing dialogue so that Christian feminists will not “stand outside of their faith tradition simply on the basis of the church’s patriarchal or hierarchical structure alone” (Renehan, 2010, p.137).

The theatypical approach concerns the deification of Mary. Renehan argues that popular devotion has at times bestowed on Mary god-like status, allowing Mariology to become Mariolatry. Apocryphal accounts of Mary’s early life, while not found in the canonical scriptures of Luke and Matthew, have influenced devotion and controversies. She provides examples from the early fathers of the Church and selected ancient and modern theologians whose writings, it is suggested, have contributed to elevating Mary beyond the parameters of orthodox Church teaching.

Themes and elements, that intentional or unintentionally at times have been misappropriated, that are examined in this book include the title Theotokos, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Mary’s virginal motherhood and aspects of her relationship with the Holy Spirit. These are discussed in some detail, and may make demands of some theological background for readers to follow fully. Though some may find her selection questionable, Renehan acknowledges that while there are many counter-arguments against the existence of Mary as Theatype, “given the evidence , particularly from the Middle Ages until today, total denial would be difficult to sustain “( 2010, p.39).

Renehan identifies that the Christatypical approach to Mary developed partly as a reaction to the distortions of Christ’s human image. At the time of the Black Death in Europe, Christ was portrayed as a harsh and severe figure associated with the Last Judgement. “As medieval thought progressed, even Christ the crucified one was now to become symbolic of the punishment and judgement of sinners”, (Renehan, 2010, p. 48). As Christ became a more fearful figure associated with divine wrath, the faithful transferred their trust, confidence and hope to Mary, seen as the mother who understands the failings of her children.

There is a valuable discussion of apparitions which Renehan links with the image Mary as warm and tender hearted “Mary took the trouble to appear to the poor, to the humble and to the downtrodden-she was
tangible where Christ was not” (2010, p.49). A strength of her treatment of apparitions is the clarity which she writes about the Church’s position:

Church teaching, for its part, holds its reserve about apparitions and treats them more as permissible pastoral and prayerful experiences rather than as doctrinal or dogmatic directives to the faithful. Nor do they convey new truths but stress Christian virtues rather than the faith of the Church.... In order for an apparition to be authenticated, a bishop must approve it, ensuring that the story does not harm the faith or morals of the Christian community at large. Although after investigation the bishop judges that the event is supernatural, the faithful are not and never have been obliged to believe that such an event ever occurred (Renehan, 2010, p.50).

Chapter 3 discusses Mary as Ecclesiatype, located as a human person within the milieu of the Church as the people of God. Beginning with Paul’s letter to the Galations (4:4), Renehan searches the writings of the early fathers, some ancient theologians and from the magisterium of the late twentieth century for evidence that supports the ecclesiatypical approach. The emphasis is on the humanity of Mary, her solidarity with all, “she suffers as the rest of humankind does and is, therefore, capable of empathising in every way with the trials and tribulations of those who follow Christ” (p.73).

Renehan details a strong ecclesiatypical orientation in the writings of Paul VI and John Paul II. There is recognition of the ecumenical sensitivity of Marian theology with reference to the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission.

This book contains a call to honestly and humbly recognise the reality of gender issues which are problematic for many within and on the margins of the Church in Chapter 4. Renehan does not avoid the contentious issue of priestly ordination and women. She clearly articulates the official Church position and provides a summary of some critiques.

In Chapter 5, Renehan proposes a way of imaging Mary that is an attempt to bridge official Catholic Church teaching and a possible mediatory theology for Christian feminists. Two authors, Elizabeth Johnson and Rosemary Ruether are selected on the basis that they provide sufficient Marian writings to ascertain a theology common to both Church teaching and Christian feminism. Renehan believes that the ecclesiatypical approach with its emphasis on the historical Mary, her faith and discipleship and her role as both model and mother enables Mary to be an encouraging and liberating figure for all women and men. This is a brave, yet carefully nuanced book. It offers a challenging, potentially enriching perspective for the theologically informed. In each chapter Renehan is vigilant in her consistent statements regarding the official church teaching about Mary, yet keen to bring to the fore the distortions and misappropriations regarding Marian doctrine that have allowed exaggerations in popular devotion to flourish.

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Reading the Bible, Transforming Conflict is aptly situated in the Theology in Dialogue Series. The co-authors have expertise in different areas and bring these areas into conversation. Dempsey’s background is in Biblical Studies while Shapiro’s background is in Communication Studies and their book is an interdisciplinary dialogue around the topic of conflict. An exploration of a range of biblical texts becomes the lens through which conflict transformation is introduced and studied. The aim is to provide insight into the varied elements of conflict and to assist the reader to develop skills in dealing with and transforming conflict. In the words of the authors themselves, ‘The overarching focus and theme of this book is “right relationships” — right relationships with God, with one another, and with all creation’ (p. 1).

In each of the twelve chapters, a biblical text is used as a case study to raise conflict issues for examination. The historical context of the passage is provided and a narrative analysis of the text explores the characterisation and identifies the aspects of conflict in the text. The tools of Communication Studies are then employed to educate in the dynamics of the conflict and offer insights into dealing with the conflict. A
theological reflection on the passage leads into a consideration of the ‘grace in the wilderness’ for each conflict situation. Finally, each chapter includes reflection questions which draw the reader into understanding the relevance of the material for their own lives. Additional resources and activities are also listed.

The creation stories of Genesis 1-3 provide the backdrop in Chapter One for discussion on justice, right relationship and the definition of conflict. The next three chapters draw on the Joseph narrative in Genesis. Chapter Two focuses on Joseph being sold by his brothers in Genesis 37. The story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39) features in Chapter Three, while the encounter of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt (Genesis 42-47) is treated in Chapter Four. The remaining eight chapters deal with the following biblical texts: Tamar and Judah (Genesis 38); Susanna (Daniel 13/ Susanna 1); Judith and Holofernes (Judith 10-15); Moses’ negotiation with God (Exodus 32); Jeremiah and Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37-39); David and Michal (1 and 2 Samuel); the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7); and finally, a few Pauline texts from Romans and 1 Corinthians.

These biblical texts have been selected because they are useful teaching tools for an examination of conflict and development of mediation skills. Exploration of these stories provides the opportunity to consider conflict dynamics and related issues, such as how context, culture and goals affect approaches to conflict; conflict styles; forgiveness; social exchange theory; power bases and resources; communication strategies; roles of third parties; negotiation; and managing tensions. The stories also provide examples of various types of conflict, including conflict within families and romantic relationships, social conflict, and war.

This book is described as ‘classroom-tested’ and the questions and additional references listed for each chapter do make it teacher-friendly. It is an important resource for teachers, students and, more generally, anyone wishing to develop their skills in living in right relationship with God, with each other and with themselves. Readers develop new insights into the biblical text as well as new insights into transforming conflict in order to be able to live in right relationship. The authors do not gloss over disturbing aspects in the biblical stories but rather examine the elements of conflict, empower readers to understand and respond to the conflict, and identify moments of grace within the difficult situations. A helpful feature is that metaphors for God are explained as human constructs which have been shaped by the historical contexts of writing.

Dempsey and Shapiro deserve to be congratulated for undertaking such an ambitious project and for producing this valuable resource. Drawing on a wide range of biblical stories, they demonstrate that the biblical text continues to speak to the human condition. The introduction of conflict resolution and communication theory equips the reader to approach conflict with new insight and work for transformation. This dialogue between Biblical Studies and Communications Studies has indeed borne much fruit.

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This book focuses on children and young people in the United States and the contributors clearly come from Christian religious contexts, nonetheless, the matters they are concerned with have applications for and relevance to children and young people in other western countries. A question posed in the introductory chapter to this text asks: What is at stake for the children and youth of today. (p. 2). The subsequent chapters, generated by the research of a range of academics in the US, set out to examine the lives and situations of children and young people. Many offer ideas and directions to move forward in ways that will provide strategies and environments that will be more effective in nurturing the spirit of our young.

The themes that emerge through the chapters are identified in the Introduction: Giftedness and the need for self expression and accomplishment; the influences of social and cultural contexts on personal lives; Longings and desires which result from the individual’s engagement with the social and communal reality
of their lives; Isolation – where our young have not been able to form health and life-giving relationship with others; the issues related to multiple identities where individuals attempt to be different people and wear different faces often in response to media and peer group pressures - thus, they are unable to discover their inner selves; the use of imagination to re-envision and create new life stories after experiences of great personal distress and strife; Kids in crisis who live with violence, poverty and other elements that threaten their wellbeing; and finally, the need for public witness – that is, the need for ‘advocates in all quarters of the community, including interreligious and ecumenical bodies, as well as the unique witness of each faith community’ (p. 11).

The first section focuses on children in a troubling world. Luther Smith Jnr and Bonnie Miller-McLemore’s chapters discuss the crises that face children in the public square. Miller-McLemore claims that children are being used by various agencies to achieve various political, commercial and religious agendas which have little concern for their wellbeing and that religious authorities or scholars have failed to address the situation adequately. Smith observes that when the church acts as a body, it forms a communal identity with a collective voice and resources. Echoing McLemore, he contends that, while the issues that impact on children’s wellbeing are the subject of discussion and concern for other groups and organizations, for instance, school boards and local governments, the Church has been remiss in recognizing and addressing them – ‘the church’s record is characterized by absence and silence’ (p. 16). He describes the wide gap between church teachings (word) and church actions (deed) for children and identifies it as a distinct challenge for people of faith. His argument is that when a church’s identity, mission and work is reflected in its involvement and concern for its children, it will, in turn, ‘receive blessings from children. Such churches are also able to extend their passion for children to the public square – a place that influences the wellbeing of the whole of society’. (p. 30).

Writing from a gender perspective, Katherine Turpin and Rodger Nishioka turn the reader’s attention to the insidious ways in which the materialistic values of contemporary society, accompanied by an intrusive media, shape the spiritual identity of children. In particular, Turpin draws on the Disney princess stories that influence the dreams of little girls, drawing them into a media-driven world which tends to distort the reality of their lives. Nishioka looks at the violence in society and the, often unspoken, Boy Codes that encourage boys to grow up in particular ways: keeping a ‘stiff upper lip’ and don’t show your feelings; its cool to be the tough guy; don’t be a wimp and so on. He reflects on the evidence that continues to show boys underperforming in schools and identifies related areas for further research. Joyce Ann Mercer provides a feminist theological lens through which to view the situation of fatherless children in today’s world which leads to ‘heightened financial stress in mother-only families to the flourishing of youth gangs and the increasing levels of disorder in public school classrooms’. (p. 78) In particular, she analyses Judy Pascoe’s novel ‘Our father who art in a tree’ to identify some dominant themes that emerge in relation to the impact of father-loss on adolescent girls. ‘Father-loss’ is a term Mercer uses to describe the girls’ experiences of a vacuum in their lives rather than referring to the actual location of the father, that is, whether they are present or absent. These three chapters offer some sobering reminders of the many issues facing young people today, even in the supposedly safe environment of school and should be useful, in particular, to classroom practitioners and student wellbeing officers.

The final chapter in the first section by Joshua Thomas reports on the findings from a research study that explored the impact of the experience of war and its aftermath on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. Given that many countries today have become homes for thousands of refugees and asylum seekers, Thomas’ work is extremely relevant for the many professionals who work with children and young people who have experienced such trauma.

The second section in the book provides a more hope-filled perspective and offers many guidelines for youth ministers, teachers and preachers alike. Mary Elizabeth Moore explores the hopes and dreams of young people which may sometimes remain unrealized because of specific aspects of their lives and circumstances. She identifies ‘yearnings’ of young people: Yearning for the Holy; yearning for community; yearning to understand the world; yearning for ethical guidance; and yearning to make a difference. In response, Moore offers the following themes to guide the work of youth ministers: addressing the search for transcendence; creating a vision of communion; developing wisdom to understand the world; offering ethical guidance that inspires faithfulness; calling and equipping young people in their vocation. Veronica Miles uses an interesting phrase ‘learning to live out loud’ (p. 138) to describe the experiences of young.
people when they learn to unmask the distorted representations provided by the media and when they discover a life built on authentic relationships with others. She recognizes that nurturing young people to ‘live out loud’ can be a lonely and difficult task but offers guidelines to assist those who wish to pursue such a course of action. Further chapters explore aspects of youth identity and self-knowledge; an unconventionally conventional’ (p. 136) way of ministering to young girls whose experiences include being victims of abuse, homelessness and attempted suicide; and the need to develop a variety of different approaches to youth ministry in order to address the cultural diversity which is the reality of young people’ lives in the United States.

The chapters in both sections of the book highlight many issues that face children and young people in countries which share a western lifestyle similar to that in the United States and, therefore, have relevance for professionals working in these other countries. However, I felt that a book that drew on such a variety of research to generate ideas and proposals for change would have benefitted from the inclusion of a summary chapter at the end. This would have served the purpose of drawing the threads together to show links and commonalities as well as divergences. The introductory chapter brought the reader’s attention to the content of the subsequent chapters. Likewise, a concluding chapter would have been a useful addition to identify parallels, connections and disparities.

Overall, while the book creates rather a dismal picture in its realistic portrayal of many serious issues that impact on the mental and emotional health of children and young people today, it also points the way forward by offering a vision of hope and positive, beneficial action that will foster the wellbeing of the younger generation and provide them with wisdom which will help them live meaningful lives. As such it is a valuable text for professionals who work in education, counselling and youth ministry.

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