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EDITORIAL

Religious Education: Responding to a new generation in a globalized 21st Century

I recently attended the First Asia Pacific Conference on Children’s Spirituality held at the Centre for Religion and Spirituality Education at the Institute of Education, Hong Kong. It was the first time such a conference has been held in this region. Most interesting were the many presentations that provided us with a glimpse of how religious and spiritual education looked and felt in Hong Kong and mainland China. In his opening address, the Director of the Institute discussed reasons why this area of education was viewed as important today and, in so doing, identified certain problems that were evident amongst young Chinese people. This raised my awareness that many of the problems that concern Australian educators about young people and that are shared, respectively, by other educators in the western world, are also reflected by educators in Hong Kong and China, which had resulted in some attention being given to the religious and spiritual dimensions of education.

A common focus that runs through many religious and religion education programs in different parts of the world today appears to be how best can these programs promote the knowledge and participation of young people in their faith tradition and how can they support and respond to the faith needs of children and young people today. Some of these concerns and responses are reflected in the articles in this issue. For instance, Carmel Stuart discusses the concept of the domestic church and the role of parents as religious educators who nurture the faith of their young; she questions whether there is enough support being provided for parents in this challenging role. Chris Hackett presents some findings from research about what RE teachers say regarding the teaching of RE that makes it particularly special for them and my own research presents the other side of the picture, that is, what do senior secondary students say about their RE programs. A different but related perspective is offered by John Fisher who identifies the quality of the relationship of students and teachers to environment as one of the four domains which is important to their wellbeing. The other three are relationship to self, others, and/or with god. Drawing on his research, Fisher discusses the implications for teachers and students in the context of schools. Finally, we have an article from colleagues in South Africa, Charl C Wolhuter, Johannes L Van der Walt and Ferdinand J Potgieter who investigate whether religion and education can, potentially, increase social capital.

One of the serious issues for religious educators in Australian Catholic schools, given the pervading sense of relativity in society, is how do we convince students that learning about their own faith tradition is significant? In the pluralist context that shapes their lives, they need to have an awareness of the importance of religion and religious culture in the lives of many people. The importance of religion for many young people from other faiths is revealed by their deep knowledge of their traditions. Unfortunately, this is not always the case with Generations Y (born between 1975 - 1990) and Z (born between 1990-the present time) Australian Catholics so that if some young people get into discussion about their own religious culture, their conversation may often suggest a rather superficial understanding of their faith tradition.

The relevance of the structure and approaches of religious education programs, which were initially generated by twentieth century understandings and concerns, for the rapidly changing globalized world of today needs to be considered. Curriculum approaches that compartmentalize knowledge, emotions and spiritual experiences so that the aim is to treat them as separate learning experiences that are attended to in separate learning environments (such as in classrooms or as extra-curricular activities) fails to acknowledge the learner as a whole being, one whose learning involves thinking, feeling and intuiting. This last process is a result of thinking and inner reflecting when new conscious and non-conscious learning become integrated with previous conscious and non-conscious
learning, thereby providing an integrating factor which secures the learning and leads to transformation in the shape of creativity, new awareness and knowledge and problem solving. Certainly, this notion supports the argument that spiritual intelligence is the integrating factor for rational and emotional intelligence (Zohar & Marshal, 2000).

With new knowledge about the brain and about how an individual learns (for instance, see Winston, 2003; or Zull, 2002 for a discussion about the biology of the brain and its implications for learning), it is time that curriculum writers investigated different ways to teach RE. In particular, as many experienced practitioners know, there is a need to recognize that teaching affectively to promote cognition is, indeed, one way forward. Accordingly, if the emotions are involved, depth learning results and the knowledge gained becomes knowledge retained. For such learning to happen, attention must be given to the selection of multi-sensory classroom activities and resources that involve and engage the student at different levels of being, cognitively, affectively and spiritually. This, potentially, is a way forward for an effective religious education program for a new generation in a new century, one that is responsive to contemporary social and cultural conditions and one which should promote intensive and transformative learning in one’s own faith tradition.

Marian de Souza
Editor

References

Editor’s note:
This issue bring a new look to our Journal of Religious Education. This is merely a ‘face-lift’ with a new cover and typeset. As well, subscribers were notified at the end of last year about the slight increase in subscriptions to keep pace with the increased costs of publication and mail outs. In all other ways, including the content and substance, the journal remains the same.

I would also like to note that in the last issue of 2008, No 56(4), for the article: The Religious Participation and Spiritual Development of Young People in Catholic Schools: A Longitudinal View, the third author’s name, Brad Shipway, was inadvertently left off as e-mails were exchanged between myself in Dublin, Ireland, and my journal assistant in Ballarat Australia. It should have read

The Religious Participation and Spiritual Development of Young People in Catholic Schools: A Longitudinal View
by Richard Rymarz, Brad Shipway & David Tuohy.
Brad Shipway works at Southern Cross University, Lismore.
My apologies to Brad Shipway.
What is the Catholic Church saying about the role and the mission of the Christian family?

Abstract

Current theological insight into the Christian family is contained within the understanding, which emerged in the early Church, that the family is a domestic Church. The documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar documents speak of the Christian family as a true expression of Church. The task of the Christian family in the nurturing of faith cannot be ignored if it is to manifest the presence of Christ to the world. Through the ministry of catechesis within the home, parents invite the family to recognise within daily life signs which manifest the presence of God and to understand them with the eyes of faith. Catechesis becomes the means through which families can come to the understanding that faith is integrated with life experiences.

Context

The Second Vatican Council reawakened within the consciousness of the Church the vital role parents have in shaping the faith of their children. The documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar documents speak of the Christian family as a true expression of Church. Within the Christian family parents are the first and primary educators of the faith of their children. Catechesis becomes the means through which parents invite the family to recognise within daily life signs which manifest the presence of God and to understand them with the eyes of faith.

This article examines some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar documents which speak of the role of the family, and explores the theological underpinnings that the Church has named as essential to the process of sharing faith within the family.

The family as Domestic Church

Current theological insights on the Christian family is contained within the understanding which emerged in the early church that the family is a ‘domestic church’. A number of documents of the Second Vatican Council, post conciliar documents and theological writings since have revived the notion of the family as the domestic Church, the “foundational Church where holiness is nurtured and lived out” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.59). Groome (2001) suggests “this implies that the family, within its own life, and as appropriate, should carry on the standard functions of Christian ministry” (p.26).

The image of the family as ‘domestic Church’ has its roots in biblical references to the first Christian Churches and in the writings of the early fathers, like John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Contemporary theologians describe the ‘domestic Church’ as a way in which the family can embody Christ in the day–to–day experiences of life and are connected precisely as foundational Churches to the whole people of God (Heaney–Hunter 1996; Rubio 2003). "In principle, the domestic Church, ...

Several documents of the Second Vatican Council allude to the sacredness of the family and to the role of parents in the nurturing of the faith of their children. These documents include Lumen Gentium (1964); Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965); Gravissimum Educationis (1965) and Gaudium et Spes (1965). Within these documents the idea that Church is initiated and flourishes within the home is a noteworthy teaching. These documents recognise that parents are “the architect of family life” (Amendolara 1994, p.16). The documents “discuss in detail, ways in which Christian families function as domestic Churches and why this idea is important” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.63).

Lumen Gentium (1964, #11) declares parents as the first and foremost educators of their children; ‘pastors’ of the domestic Church. The document proclaims that Christian family life is prophetic (#35). Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965, #11) describes the Christian family as “the first and vital cell of society”. It claims that the apostolate of the Christian family is crucial in the Church and society and that family life is the basis for the formation of the laity in mission and ministry in the Church (Second Vatican Council 1965, #30).

Post conciliar papal writings echo the understanding that the family is the domestic Church and that parents are the first educators of the faith of their children. Paul VI refers to Lumen Gentium as the basis for his approach to the family in Evangelii Nuntiandi.

At different moments in the Church’s history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of the: “domestic Church”. (Lumen Gentium 1964, #11). This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. (Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, #71)

Paul VI, further, declares that the family is “where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates [and that] the parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them” (Paul VI 1975, #71).

John Paul II builds on these thoughts, particularly in his apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio (1981) where he presents a vision of the Christian family. He states that “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial community, and for this reason it can and should be called “the domestic Church” (John Paul II 1981, #21). Akin to Paul VI, he also declares that one of the primary functions of the Christian family is the transmission of Gospel values and the building of the kingdom of God (John Paul II 1981, #42). “The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life” (John Paul II 1981, #50). The image of the family as the domestic church is one that gives purpose to the mission of the Christian family in the world.

The Role of the Domestic Church in the Modern World

Over the years, much has been written and debated in the legal arena about the rights and duties of family, of parents and of children. For Christians the duties and rights are “primarily theological, and their theological formation is clear: ‘Follow me’ (Mark 1:17) that is, model your life after mine” (Lawler 2002, p.204). The call for parents to be the first educators of the faith of their children is based on Christian action more than “pious Christian talk” (Lawler 2002, p.204). The challenge of being a Christian family is “to provide active hospitality [and] to ‘promote justice’. The family is to manifest Christ’s presence in the world” (Lawler 2002, p.205).
The role of the contemporary Christian family is made clear in Familiaris Consortio (1981). John Paul II advocates that Christian families are not to think of themselves as an exclusive sanctuary “but as a community with a mission that goes beyond itself” (Rubio 2003, p.105). In this document the Pope defines the family as “a community of life and love” which has four key tasks that provide the basis through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of their children. These tasks include: 1) forming a community of persons, 2) serving life, 3) participating in the development of society and 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church (John Paul II 1981, #17). Each of these tasks has a community aspect.

The first task, forming a community of persons, calls the family to “guard, reveal and communicate love” (John Paul II 1981, #17). John Paul II considers that love is the beginning point of the mission of the Christian family because “love among family members is primary … because it serves as the foundation for the rest of what the family does” (Rubio 2003, p.106).

The second task, ‘serving life’ means more than procreating; it includes the transmission of life and the transmission of faith through education. Here the Pope calls to mind the responsibility of parents to serve life by nurturing children and by bringing them up within the world and not parallel to the world. Parents are reminded of their responsibility for the education of their children (#36) with the task of instilling in children “the essential values of human life’ (#37). The Pope insists that parents teach their children about the Gospel as the passing on of faith is as important a task as passing on life (Rubio 2003, p.106).

The third task to which the Pope calls the family is to participate in the development of society. This task indicates that families “cannot stop short at procreation and education” (John Paul II 1981, #44). This task brings to mind the call from Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965, #11) that the Christian family is “the first and vital cell of society”. The Pope declares that the Christian family is an experience of communion and sharing (John Paul II 1981, #43) and asks families first, to practise hospitality, open their table and their home to those less fortunate; second, to become politically involved, assisting the transformation of society; and third, to practise the preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged manifesting “love of all poor, … the hungry, the poor, the old, the sick, drug victims and those who have no family (John Paul II 1981, #47). The third task invites families to be actively involved in the political and social concerns of society.

The final task calls families to share in the mission of the Church. “He [the Pope] again places emphasis on the public dimension of the family’s call [and] suggests that families must serve the Church as well as one another “ (Rubio 2003, p.107). As a domestic Church the family evangelises its members (John Paul II 1981, #50–52), gives witness to the world (#53) and uses its home as a sanctuary (#55–62). Significantly, the document names family prayer, moral teaching, and witness of Christian love as means through which catechesis within the domestic Church is achieved. The final task of the family is to serve the wider community (#63–64).

These four tasks outlined by John Paul II are fundamental to what it means to be a Christian family in the modern world. “The genius of Catholic teaching on the family is that it refuses to limit families by telling them to just take care of their own”, the responsibility is to contribute to the ecclesial mission (Rubio 2003, p.107).

The Ministry of Catechesis

If the family is to be viewed as the domestic church and its task is to transmit the Gospel, then for the Christian family, the ministry of catechesis begins within the home. Family catechesis provides,
for Christian parents, a way of nurturing the faith of their children through the whole ethos of family life.

Within the home the parents are the catechists who activate, facilitate, lead and are the catalyst for the family community. It is through reflecting on experiences of daily life in light of the Scriptures, worship and acts of justice that the family discovers the presence of God. The Christian family is asked to give witness to the world and to use its home as a sanctuary. Huebsch (2003) comments that the catechesis within the home “is most powerful when parents take the time to explain to their children the religious significance or meaning of certain events including holy days and family moments, and of social, political or moral questions” (p.90). Family catechesis is therefore concerned with the maturing of faith within the context of the home. It focuses on the growth in faith within the family as a unit as well as each individual. The task of family catechesis is formative as it works on the principle “first practise, then talk” (Saris 1980, p.141).

In essence, family catechesis provides, for Christian parents, a way of nurturing the faith of their children through the whole ethos of family life. “One of the objectives of family catechesis is to enable families to discover that spirituality is inherent in family life. Spirituality in this context refers to the ... recognition of the extraordinary in the ordinary, the presence of God” (Gallagher 1982, p.167). It invites parents to recognise within daily life, signs which manifest the presence of God and to view them through the eyes of faith. A number of Church documents recommend that catechesis is the preferred means by which families carry out this task.

The first document, which is crucial in shaping a process for the sharing of faith within family life as a form of catechesis, is Catechesi Tradendae (1979). The essential understanding portrayed in this document is that “family catechesis ... precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis” (#68). It recognises that catechesis within family life is more effective when it is rooted in the experiences of family life.

Education by parents, which should begin from the tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to–day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. (Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)

John Paul II continued to encourage parents to nurture faith by setting good Christian examples to their children through living their own lives in a true Gospel spirit (John Paul I 1981, #17). He declared:

By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ – both the Eucharist and the ecclesial Body- they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of the bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit’s renewal flows from the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. ... The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #39–#42)

The understanding is that as these values permeate through the home they become the norm for daily living in the lives of their children.

A further document that explores the role of catechesis within the context of family life is the General Directory for Catechesis (1997). This document calls the family to catechesis rather than
religious education. The document describes the process for family catechesis as an on-going process which is grounded in the experience of family life.

It [family catechesis] is indeed a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured in periods. (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #255)

The General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy 1997) quotes from Catechesi Tradendae (John Paul II 1979, # 68) to remind the Church that the role of the family is about “transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values” (#255). The family is continually called to awaken within its members the sense of God through a means of catechesis which comes from within the experiences of everyday life.

This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #226)

If family catechesis is to be understood as being grounded in the everyday experiences of family life “there are few, if any, family faith sharing experiences which fail [as long as the] focus is in the sharing rather than doctrine” (De Gidio 1979, p.17). Family catechesis is therefore concerned with the maturing of faith within the context of the home. It focuses on the growth in faith within the family by providing opportunities for a family to understand and live the message of the Gospel through praying and worship together; and through serving, caring for and nurturing others.

Challenges to Being a Domestic Church

Church documents describe the role and mission of the Christian family with eloquence and passion. However, patterns of family life have altered and expanded over time. Structures that enabled parents to nurture and pass on the faith traditions in the past are no longer conducive to be an effective educational ecology for today’s families.

John Westerhoff identified six social institutions that have enabled parents to nurture and pass on the faith traditions.

(1) The community as a social institution in which [all denominations] lived and were nurtured in their homogeneous communities. (2) Stability, in which both parents were frequently home and shared family life and had the support of the extended family as there was little mobility. (3) School systems supported the Christian ethos. For most Catholics this was through the Catholic schools. (4) The parish was central to the local neighbourhood and all those who attended knew each other. A variety of social activities centred on parish life. (5) Religious publications were readily available which provided families with materials which promoted religious education within the home. (6) There was deliberate engagement in religious education, which for Catholics was mainly through classes run by nuns which were held in the parish. (Westerhoff 1976, p.13)

These six institutions intentionally worked together to produce an effective educational ecology” (Westerhoff 1976, p.15). However, today these six institutions no longer serve as the basis by which parents pass on traditions of the faith. Westerhoff’s patterns of family life have changed and diversified. The home is no longer viewed as the centre of religious activity. Societies which
parishes are a part of today have become heterogeneous and much more complex than in earlier times. The Church is rarely at the centre of the social and community life of people.

The composition and understanding of ‘family’ also have changed (White 1995; Drane and Drane 1995). Drane and Drane propose that “today’s families are ... striving to redefine what it means to be a family” (1995, p.20). The term ‘family’ has been extended to include divorced families, single parent families, blended families as well as the traditional heterosexual two parent families (Drane and Drane 1995, pp.20–36). By comparison, modern families have become smaller and more often nuclear (White 1995, p.209). The interaction with extended family is minimal compared to that of previous generations. Due to economic necessity in many families both parents work in full time employment outside the home. Interfaith marriages are more acceptable within a diversity of cultures. Many households do not have one set of religious beliefs that binds them. With the mobility of the modern family, the population is more transient and thus families are no longer rooted to one part of the world. State school systems have become religiously neutral and a falling percentage of children are attending parish schools. At the same time there is easy access to the secular media through technological information.

The religious profile of today’s parent has also changed. The parents of today were born after the Second Vatican Council, and many received their own religious education in a time when new curricula reflecting the renewal of the Second Vatican Council were being developed in the Church. Smith (1998) calls this generation the “fuzzy Jesus generation” because “they express confusion about how to integrate what they learned with the Church’s body of theology, moral and social teachings” (p.18). Many parents of this generation feel incapable, or at best not well prepared, for teaching faith to their children. In the lives of most parents today the home of their childhood was not seen or understood as central to the faith education of the young. The main educators of faith for many parents were the religious sisters or brothers within the Catholic school setting, or catechist within the parish setting.

Pastoral Implications

In order for parents to rediscover and reclaim their duty as first educators of their children in faith and have an awareness of the family’s role and mission of within the Church, parents need firstly to be secure in their faith. Curran (1980, p.38) suggests that the way forward requires a bridging process. As parents are supported by the parish community in nurturing the faith of their children they cannot help but grow in faith themselves. By supporting parents in coming to a deeper understanding of their faith a spark is ignited within them and allows them to recognise that faith is, above all, a gift coming to them through the initiative of God.

The parish has a major role to play as, pastorally, it is the ideal place for supporting family catechesis. Staffa Geoghegan (1993) proposes that one role of the parish “is the need to affirm families in their efforts to hand on their faith and values to their children” (p.299). Gregory (1988) suggests that when grappling with the issues of how families can be supported in their task of catechesis “the issue is not what the Church can do for the family; it is rather, how essential the mission of the family is to Church” (p.39). Pastorally what is of significance is how the Church can work in partnership with families “in order to guide them to understand their mission and to encourage them to fulfil it” (Gregory 1988, p.39). In Catechesi Tradendae (1979) John Paul II “affirms the responsibility for catechesis is carried by all members of the Catholic Church community, not only appointed officials” (Malone 1992, p.7). It places the family at the centre of the parish and establishes the primary settings for the nurturing of faith.
Encouragement must ... be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person–to–
person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to
perform their task: the service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price. (Catechesi
Tradendae 1979, #68)

Catechesi Tradendae (1979) represents a profound turning point in how family catechesis is to be
understood within parish life.

Much of the literature in the area of family catechesis advocates that the success of family
catechesis lies in “viewing (the) family as pivotal to all of our religious education” (De Gidio 1979,
p.81). Gregory (1988) emphasises that “in the parish opportunities should be found for nurturing
wholeness at each stage of life’s journey” (p.46).

All parishes, nevertheless, through their ministry network of worship, sacrament, education,
justice, and social concerns, and through their relationship to the local community, are in a
strategic position to respond pastorally to the developing family life–cycle. (Gregory 1988,
p.56)

Hence family catechesis is to be seen as integral to the parish and contributes to other aspects of the
life of the faith community.

Roberto (1984) calls for “a shift in paradigm” from the current parish structure to one that calls for
an integrated family perspective in all parish ministries whether or not their focus is family. Family
catechesis is to be at the centre of parish life.

[Family Catechesis] encourages parishes to move from the parish at the centre, to families at
the centre of Church and community, from administering to families, to ministering with
families, from families serving the parish to parish serving the family. (Roberto 1984, p.3)

Such a paradigm suggests the family perspective pervades all parish ministries and that all ministries
become aware of their impact on family life in the parish.

Every parish community must make it a priority to ‘nurture the nurturer’, providing families
with the resources, training, encouragement, and suggestions that they need to function
effectively as ‘domestic Church’. (Groome 2001, p.25)

Supporting Family Catechesis within the Parish

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) asserts that to support families in their responsibility as
nurturers of faith, the parish must be "the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis"
(Congregation for the Clergy 1997, #257). The Directory goes on to suggest that parishes need to
address the needs parents experience by promoting meetings and courses and providing adult
catechesis directed towards parents (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, #227). Gregory (1988)
claims that family catechesis is not an extra program but rather “a perspective from which to
examine everyday actions within family setting” (p.52). One of the aims of family catechesis,
therefore, should be to affirm parents in what they are already doing just by being a Christian family.

In order for the parish to become "the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis" the
community must restore the family’s desire and ability to be a focal point of religious activity
(Congregation for the Clergy 1997, #257). Kehrwald (2006) believes “every parish hold values and
beliefs about family, whether they are assumed or named”. Identifying these values and beliefs is
paramount to helping the parish community assist families in their task of nurturing faith.
The following are some practical ways a parish community can strengthen its support for family formation and practice so that families can function more effectively as domestic Church.

1. Formulate a vision for family catechesis for the parish by naming the values and beliefs the parish holds about families.

2. Make these values and beliefs which the parish holds explicit to all parish ministries whether they have a direct or indirect impact on family formation.

3. Acknowledge the diversity of families in the parish so that the community can address more effectively the needs of families in relation to faith formation.

4. Provide means of improving the family’s capacity to learn, pray, celebrate, serve and build community by making available suitable resources that encourage such activities.

5. Use the bulletin, newsletter or parish website to communicate with parents, resources and activities which may help parents in the task of nurturing faith and other parish events that might be of interest to them.

6. Use the parish website to provide weekly prayers and reflections which parents can incorporate into the family’s prayer time.

7. Provide families with a suitable prayer book as a means of encouraging family prayer.

8. Provide faith formation opportunities both within the parish and within homes to cater for the different parenting schedules.

9. Provide a variety of opportunities for parents to learn with their children.

10. Provide occasions for social gatherings in which families gather and share their experiences.

(adapted from Family and Faith: A vision and practice for parish leader, pp.152–160)

The following questions may be valuable in assessing where the community is at.

- Which of these strategies which provide support for family formation are currently in operation in the parish?
- What are some strategies that can be better utilised to resource and support faith building within the parish?

Such considerations can become tools for parishes to move towards a more systematic and pastoral approach in supporting families to understand and carry out their mission in the world. At the same time it can strengthen the parish community.

Conclusion

So what is the Church saying about the role and mission of the Christian family? With the renewal of the Second Vatican Council, the role of the family was made more explicit. Current Church thinking acknowledges that firstly, parents have the prime responsibility to nurture the faith of their children. Vatican II called parents to be firstly witnesses of faith for their children. It is through the Christian witness of parents that children learn how to live; to make the message of the Gospel a lived reality in their lives. The message of the Gospel as a lived reality is achieved through nurturing faith within the life experiences rather than solely through the teaching of doctrines. The Church calls parishes to support families through offering help and encouragement. The argument remains: Is the Church embracing this understanding to ensure this vision of nurturing faith is to be sustained?

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*Carmel Suart is a consultant for the Catechist Service Team within the Catholic Education Office of WA. She was co-author of the Catechist Program The Truth will set you free. This program is widely used throughout Western Australia as a valuable resource for those teaching parish based religious education. This program has also been adopted by a number of interstate dioceses for their own parish programs. Currently she is working in the area of family catechesis. She has considerable experience and skill in the area of adult education as well as domains of developing the faith within the family context. She has recently completed her doctoral thesis at the University of Notre Dame, Australia.

IN YOUR SHOES
INTER-FAITH EDUCATION FOR AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS

BY KATH ENGBRETSON
Published by Connor Court Publishing, Ballan, Australia

The book will be of great interest to
1. Religious educators from around the world for whom this is a topic of major interest at this time.
2. Students and lecturers in religion, religious education and theology in Australian universities
3. Postgraduate students conducting research into inter-faith education a topic that is considered most important in today's research climate
4. Primary and secondary teachers in all religiously oriented schools in Australia and beyond (for example the book would have a market in the UK where interfaith education is part of the secular curriculum).
5. Student teachers preparing for working in religiously oriented schools (wherever possible it will be used as a set text).


Chris Hackett*

What is the best and most special about teaching Religious Education?

Abstract

If you have taught Religious Education in a Catholic secondary school, then you may have you sat down at the end of the class or the school day and just wondered why you bothered. Before reading this article further, give yourself a few moments to reflect on this question: “What for you is the best and most special about teaching Religious Education?” How did you answer the question? Was your response negative or positive? Did you reach for the instant cynical remark, “When I finished teaching the class!” Or, did you imagine yourself taking great pride in accomplishing deeper understandings among your students? Maybe your response was one of mixed feelings. These responses are important because the disposition of a teacher towards his or her RE teaching is a key factor in the quality of Religious Education provided to secondary students in Catholic schools. This article outlines the findings of the second phase of a study about the teaching experiences of recently assigned RE teachers and the resultant changes in their outlook about RE teaching.

Introduction

The focus of this article is on recently assigned Religious Education (RARE) teachers in Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia. These are RE teachers who have begun teaching Catholic Religious Education with limited experience and training in this specific learning area. In Western Australia, RARE teachers are required to implement the Archdiocese of Perth RE Units of Work mandated by the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia. This article is a report on the second phase to the research on this group of teachers.

The Research

The purpose of the research was to explore the perceptions of RARE teachers about the implementation of RE Units of Work. An earlier article in the Journal of Religious Education reported on a survey of these teachers conducted during the late nineteen nineties as the first phase of this research (Hackett, 2008). The survey focused on three aspects of curriculum implementation described by Fullan (2007): changes to instructional resources, modifications to teaching approach and changes to beliefs about RE teaching. The survey indicated that there were a number of changes made by RARE teachers as a result of their experiences in teaching the RE Units which related to these three aspects. Two key findings emerged which suggested that teaching experience and ongoing formation were required for successful curriculum implementation among RARE teachers. There appeared to be evidence to suggest that teachers not only changed how they taught RE as they became familiar with the curriculum materials but also began to reassess the ideas about the way RE should be taught. Responses from the survey indicated that complex and personal concerns could have a significant bearing on the perceptions of the changes RARE teachers experienced, personally and professionally, in teaching the Units. To understand why such changes occurred and
whether these changes were ongoing, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of phase two of the research.

Second Phase: Literature Review

Interviewing teachers about their perceptions of the first years of teaching RE is not new. Engebretson (1997) reported using this approach in her research of novice RE teachers and their experiences of teaching Religious Education. She described how these teachers envisioned teaching RE and provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their subsequent experiences of teaching in this learning area. Engebretson (1997, p. 18) concluded that unless novice RE teachers developed a coherent understanding of the pedagogical and theological aims of RE, then the experience of teaching RE would be disheartening. Likewise, this article on the second phase of the research reports on whether recently assigned RE teachers in WA had similar experiences to those outlined in Engebretson’s study and if the teachers changed their beliefs about the purposes of RE teaching. Buchanan and Hyde (2006) have observed that there is limited published research on the role of the RE teacher and it is hoped that this article will add further to the body of knowledge about them and especially about teachers new to teaching Religious Education.

Second Phase: Methodology

An interview approach was used to explore in greater depth the teachers’ perceptions of the changes they experienced and their reasons and feelings for why they responded in particular ways (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 268). From the survey of 122 RARE teachers, 28 teachers were interviewed twice over two school years about their perceptions of teaching these RE Units. For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms are used in reporting findings. The teachers were purposively sampled based on responses to use of curriculum materials, teaching approach and perceived changes in teacher beliefs about Religious Education. This form of sampling was the means by which “researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of the typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 89). Purposive sampling was used as a means of selecting a sample group that reflected the range and diversity of feelings about the main survey areas. The sample group of RARE teachers was indicative of the range of teachers who responded to the survey. The sample consisted of subgroups of teachers who reflected highly positive, typical or critical perceptions in the three aspects – use of instructional resources, teaching approach and underlying principles (Fullan, 2007). The number of participants that were interviewed was drawn from each of the subgroups. Table 1 outlines the key characteristics of the 28 interviewees (see p. 14).

Semi-structured interviews offered greater benefits to the research than what could be achieved by another survey or approach (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.269). Through the interview, participants were able to reflect on and discuss their perceptions about implementing the RE Units in greater depth. They had more time (than in the case of the survey) to consider their perceptions and feelings towards their RE teaching. This reflection and discussion became a significant means by which to understand the rationale of the recently assigned teachers for managing the implementation process. In this sense, interviews allowed the possibility for unexpected responses to emerge (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.268).

Interview Findings

The first round of interviews reaffirmed the key factors to emerge from the survey: experience and familiarity in teaching the RE Units of Work. It was these two factors that recently assigned RE
teachers believed helped them to meet one of the key demands of RE teaching (Buchanan, 2006, p. 20).

Table 1  Background to the Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age Range (Years)</th>
<th>Main Area</th>
<th>Teaching Accreditation</th>
<th>RE Teaching Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>51-55</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>4(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>IP x</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
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<td>T &amp; E</td>
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<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
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<td>English</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>4(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>26-30</td>
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<td>6(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>SOSE</td>
<td>IP ✓</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓ x</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Science</td>
<td>IP IP</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
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<td>IP x</td>
<td>5(^{th}) year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>5(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>46-50</td>
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<td>IP IP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
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<td>Jessica</td>
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<td>Kate</td>
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<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) year</td>
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<td>3(^{rd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓ ✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>T &amp; E</td>
<td>x IP</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
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<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>4(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
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<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>5(^{th}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>H &amp; PE</td>
<td>IP ✓</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note:  
Involvement:  
- Did not participate in Second Round of Interviews  
Learning Areas (abbreviations):  
- H & PE = Health & Physical Education  
- LOTE = Language other than English  
- SOSE = Studies of Society & Environment  
- RE = Religious Education  
- T & E = Technology & Enterprise  
Accreditation status:  
- ✓ = completed  
- IP = in progress  
- ✕ = not begun  
RE Teaching Experience:  
- Only teachers with more than one year and less than six years responded to the survey.

While an understanding of the principles underpinning the Units was appreciated, the teachers described their own ‘code of practice’ and rationale for teaching RE as a part of their faith witness as being key factors. Ivers (2004) saw such an approach as an attempt by teachers to enact their understanding of implementing the RE Units of Work. What emerged from the first interviews was an expectation that the demands of teaching RE were going to change for them; many hoped that it was for the better. Such an expectation was a major factor in the implementation process of the Units. The purpose of the second round of interviews was to find out what changes had occurred in their perceptions of the demands of teaching RE and to examine more closely the interplay between the teaching of classroom RE and their personal and professional formation. Of significant importance, were the responses of teachers to the question: What is best and most special about teaching RE for you?

A repeated theme over the course of the interviews was the conviction that to teach RE, one had to be an authentic person of faith and a mentor to students. During the first round of interviews, RARE teachers were keen to teach RE and optimistically viewed the personal and professional challenges placed upon them by the RE Units of Work. Some recently assigned RE teachers had undertaken tertiary studies in Theology and Religious Education to fulfil Accreditation to Teach RE during their pre-service training. However, it would be misleading to assume that Accreditation, a mandatory professional requirement to teach RE in Catholic schools in Western Australia, was a guarantee of a deeper commitment to this learning area. While it may be the case that some recently assigned RE teachers were prepared to teach RE as a “filler” (Rymarz, 1999, p. 51), the personal and professional demands of the overall curriculum seemed to have had an impact on whether they continued to teach RE in the future.

Apart from their personal reasons for teaching RE, RARE teachers were faced with a question of professional priorities in order to survive their first years of teaching. To illustrate this point, the experience of one interviewee is recounted. Victor taught in a remote Catholic secondary school. A recent graduate, he was employed as a Physical Education teacher with one RE class to make up his teaching load. Victor was candid about where his priorities lie:

It’s not your priority, my main teaching area is Phys. Ed. and that’s where everyone sees you, see yourself, and that’s where you dedicate most of your energies too. But it’s nice to have that one RE class, I think it’s important to have a variety of teaching areas for your own motivation yourself. And it’s good to teach RE just for your own faith.

Like many RARE teachers, Victor was faced with developing his professional competence in his specialist learning area. Teaching RE was a part of his minor teaching load. Why would he want to
demonstrate a deeper commitment to teaching RE when he had more than enough to handle with his specialist learning area? While Victor placed his energies into ‘Phys. Ed.’, he acknowledged that RE was good to teach “just for your faith”. He also made the point of how valuable he found the professional development inservice courses in RE that the school provided (mostly over the weekend):

I think ongoing professional development is important. ... doing Accreditation [to teach RE] and doing [inservices on] a new [RE] Unit every couple of months over the last two years has really kept me on track. And then I’ve developed from there.

It was possible that, if recently assigned RE teachers were naïve enough to think they could teach RE and not be affected by its expectations, they were mistaken. Victor, for instance, seemed to be affected both personally and professionally as he taught the subject and appreciated receiving further training. Some of the RARE teachers interviewed seemed to arrive at a significant juncture in teaching RE after a few years. They began to realise that in order to continue to teach RE, they needed to form a deeper personal commitment towards teaching Religious Education. Such a realisation or ‘passion’ for the subject was a crucial part of their personal and professional formation. This passion was framed often in terms of a calling or vocation (Palmer, 1998, pp. 170-171). However, some of the interviewees felt so strongly about the division in their integrity between their fundamental aspirations as a teacher and their own assimilation of Catholic beliefs and practices that they stopped teaching RE altogether.

From the interviews, it became clear that recently assigned RE teachers sought to make their ‘mark’ on how to teach RE. Most were eager and passionate about teaching RE when they started. They hoped that within a short period, they would accrue enough classroom RE teaching experience and familiarity with the RE Units to feel competent in teaching RE. They were indeed hopeful and optimistic in the beginning! However, by the end of the second round of interviews – a period of almost two years – their perceptions of teaching RE changed. They were less enthusiastic and more aware of the increasing demands that teaching this learning area had upon them personally and professionally. For example, when Pippa, a young Science teacher who had not completed the study component of accreditation (see Table One), was faced with a new class, her prior experience seemed to be of no avail:

I’m feeling this year that I’m being quite influenced by the negativity of some of the students. Which is kind of making me think, why am I doing this?

Yes, they’re Year 11 and they’re just, you know, more concerned about TEE. I mean they just don’t want to do it. So they’re just being negative about everything I give them.

The feelings of exasperation were deep. No matter what she did for her class, she felt the students were not appreciative of her efforts and did not value what she presented to them. Some teachers felt like they were ‘hitting themselves against a brick wall’ at times to engage students in their learning.

Perhaps their experiences of teaching the RE units broadened the outlook of RARE teachers as to the demands of ‘what’ and ‘how’ to teach Religious Education. Certainly, they needed to know the content of the Units and how to teach this content using the strategies suggested in the teaching and learning program. However, as the interviewees reflected on their experiences since the first
round of interviews, it became apparent to them that the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching RE needed to be understood in terms of ‘why’ they personally were teaching Religious Education.

The teachers saw themselves as trying to engage students in matters of faith or spirituality. This attempt to engage students was seen as one of the best things about teaching Religious Education – perhaps one of those precious moments of evangelisation as contended by the Congregation for the Clergy (1997, para. 49). For Nancy, it was the opportunity for the teacher to help students find a Christian sense of identity and meaning in their lives:

Those are the best moments when I’ve got kids working in groups and I can get around and talk to them, one on one or one to three. And that’s when they’ll ask me more intimate questions and really talk to me about the things that are weighing on their minds rather than in the context of the class discussion....

To have someone who wants to talk to them about the faith, loves the faith and doesn’t mind being with kids, talking to them and engaging critically with what they’re presenting....

For teachers like Nancy, it was not the explicit aspects of teaching RE that were valued but rather the more intimate ones, where matters close to the heart were discussed. Heil and Ziebertz (2004, p. 219) refer to this interaction as “correlation...a key competence for religious education teachers” where the teacher attempts to link the students’ views with the Christian one. By engaging some of the students in meaningful conversations about the Christian faith while having the rest of the class working purposefully also affirmed the sense of identity and purpose of the interviewee as a competent RE teacher.

The teachers saw their RE teaching as an extension of their calling or vocation. They recognised that teaching RE could be challenging and exhausting. However, teachers were optimistic about the value and reward of classroom RE teaching because they believed they were seen by their students to be significant mentors or role models and even as strong Christian witnesses. As Rose related, teaching RE was her way of following the will of God:

Because I can get to know them beyond what can be done in other subjects, like I can support them, share part of my own Christian witness. They have someone the students can talk to about their issues and concerns.

... I feel called by God, in Year 10 I wanted to be an RE teacher, have this vocation. Had thought it might be a religious calling but no, as a [lay] teacher to ‘spread the Word’, ‘prayer’, ‘justice’, ‘relationships’, ‘getting to know God’. At the age of 18 being in a theology class, with seminarians, like something keeps me there. God just tells me to do this, have a constant dialogue with [God] to work this out. I let God speak through me, especially when praying.

For this teacher, teaching RE was an integral part of putting her faith into action, being able to serve God by witnessing her faith to students and teaching them something of what it meant to live a Christian life. An important component of sustaining the motivation to teach RE seemed to depend upon the depth and integrity of her personal faith formation.
In the second round of interviews, tensions emerged within recently assigned RE teachers about how and why they taught Religious Education. Many still felt a great sense of optimism, while others felt a sense of discouragement; and, for a few, a great sense of relief that they were not teaching RE anymore. What was apparent was that recently assigned RE teachers were coming to terms not only with the curriculum demands of the RE Units but also with their own personal and professional formation. They seemed to be facing personal dilemmas about their authenticity as persons and challenges to their integrity about the level of faith witness in their role as an RE teacher. Whereas in their main learning area they remained objective about the philosophy of teaching their academic subject, RE teaching demanded a personal faith commitment. Teachers found that they needed to reflect upon whether they were formed sufficiently to provide such a commitment on an ongoing, permanent, and genuine basis.

From the second round of interviews it appeared that recently assigned RE teachers did reach a point of decision that helped them to clarify their commitment to teaching Religious Education. For some teachers, the personal cost was too high and they decided to discontinue teaching RE classes. For most recently assigned RE teachers, the experience of implementing the RE Units had led them towards developing a deeper appreciation of their vocation as RE teachers. This deepening appreciation seemed to be an important aspect of the formation of RARE teachers. For some recently assigned RE teachers, although they did not realise it, it was possible they were influenced personally, professionally and spiritually by the demands of teaching Religious Education.

Discussion

There appeared to be two groups of RARE teachers emerging from the interviews: the majority who were relatively positive about their RE teaching, the ‘optimists’, and a minority group who could be termed, the ‘discouraged’. The ‘optimists’ saw their RE teaching as a means of actualising their desire to establish themselves as a competent RE teacher. They expressed the desire:

- for assurance (confidence, certainty, control) as they furthered their experience of teaching Religious Education;
- to be a ‘faith and life’ mentor that was to model to and advise the students;
- to develop and maintain a pastoral rapport with students;
- for collegial exchange on a formal and informal basis; and,
- to be passionate about teaching RE as part of their vocation or calling to teach in a Catholic school.

In contrast, the ‘discouraged’ saw their RE teaching as one where these desires had become frustrated or unable to be actualised due to:

- a loss of confidence because of inexperience or insufficient training;
- a lack of faith formation because of insufficient knowledge or overly stringent expectation of faith commitment;
- an inability to develop rapport because of expressed negativity or apathy of the students to the teaching and learning;
- feelings of isolation and expectations to conform to a rigid teaching and learning program; and,
- exhaustion by continually facing challenges from students related to teaching and learning and from questioning of the personal faith stance of the teacher.

The RARE teachers who possessed and sustained an optimistic view about their RE teaching tended to continue their involvement in Religious Education. They believed they were making a significant contribution to the religious and spiritual formation of their students. This belief inspired them to ‘do more’ and to ‘be more’ for their students. Treston (1997, p. 69) draws upon the work of Erikson
and uses the word “generativity” to describe the energy teachers applied to teaching their students. This generativity was the energy that came from within the teacher to fulfil their aspirations of becoming a competent RE teacher. When teachers became discouraged, their loss of generativity was evident in feelings of being drained and wanting to withdraw from teaching Religious Education.

These findings were significant because they came from the personal experiences of recently assigned RE teachers. Their perceptions were grounded in a tension between their personal quest for becoming competent RE classroom teachers and the frustrations of not fulfilling such a quest. The data exemplified an important relationship between implementing a curriculum and the need for teacher formation; one that strongly resonated with the work of Palmer (2004) in the professional and spiritual formation of teachers.

It was apparent from the interviews that the recently assigned RE teachers were on the cusp of deciding to continue to teach RE or not to teach the subject. Interviewees felt that RE teachers needed to make a choice as to whether they continued to teach the subject, especially if they felt they did not agree with the content. The interviewees’ feelings towards the subject were largely the result of their RE teaching experiences and its impact on their personal authenticity and spiritual integrity. RARE teachers like Edward, felt very deeply about the importance of the faith witness of the recently assigned teacher:

Most special thing for me is that it’s a way that I can... well I’m trying to follow the Lord in my life. And then there’s one way I can do that and that’s teaching RE. Because I’m not off helping the poor in Africa... .

The statement, “follow the Lord in my life” by Edward, heralds the sentiments of the advice of the Congregation of Catholic Education (1982) about the importance of developing Religious Educators with appropriate religious and professional formation (para. 65). Engebretson (1992, p. 19) also found similar motivations initially among her study group of novice RE teachers. Authenticity was linked here with the willingness of the teacher to share their own personal story with the students about faith. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, para. 96) emphasised that:

A teacher who has a clear vision of the Christian milieu and lives in accord with it will be able to help [students] develop a similar vision, and give them the inspiration they need to put it into practice.

In this statement, the Congregation for Catholic Education has recognised this important personal integration of authentically human and spiritual qualities. The capacity to share aspects of their personal humanity and its impact on students should not be underestimated (Rymarz, 2001, p. 24). Interviewees discussed this faith witness as crucial to how they presented themselves authentically to their students. For example, Ursula wanted the students to respect her as a person of faith. She felt that this perception by the students was significant. Ursula believed she was a model of a “person living out Gospel values” who encouraged the students to do likewise. To give of themselves in this way meant the teachers also needed to become something more themselves.

The faith commitment of the teacher was an important factor for RARE teachers. Recently assigned RE teachers, like Ursula, believed that the authenticity of their faith influenced their students, even if the students did not agree with what the teachers believed. The impression left on the students was not only the actions of “living out Gospel values” but also how Ursula recounted her own personal experiences of faith. Authenticity here was linked to personal experience. Ursula had experienced the love and mercy of God and she wanted to share this personal faith experience with others too. Similarly, teachers who had experienced injustice or unhealthy lifestyles understood the power of
redemption in their lives and wanted to share their personal experiences of such events. It was this form of personal authenticity that impressed the students because the teachers had the religious integrity – to integrate faith and life – as part of their RE teaching. Such a quality echoes the comments of the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982, para. 59):

> The norms of the local bishop should be faithfully followed in everything that has to do with their own theological and pedagogical formation, and also in the course syllabi; and they should remember that, in this area above all, life witness and an intensely lived spirituality have an especially great importance.

Witness here meant that teachers had an understanding and appreciation for a particular lived experience. They had a knowledge and empathy of what it really felt like to become a believer and accept the grace of God. After all, “it is difficult, if not impossible, to meaningfully teach what one does not know” (Fisher, 1999, p. 35) in matters dealing with spirituality and faith.

It was surprising to hear from the interviewees how they had spoken very little, if ever, to anyone about their motivation or reasons for why they would continue to teach Religious Education. Some of them became quite emotional in recounting their attitude towards RE teaching. While reflections about materials and strategies were communicated with others, the more important discussion of self-knowledge and integrity was ignored or suppressed. This lack of discourse is typical of the general teaching profession. While teachers talk about what they do, they rarely discuss how they see themselves and the qualities that make them a good teacher (Banner & Cannon, 1997, p. 4).

For recently assigned RE teachers such a discussion was crucial to whether they continued to teach RE classes. As is the case for novice teachers, teacher efficacy is a significant issue for RARE teachers (Onafowora, 2004). Where they felt they truly put themselves ‘on the line’ with their students, to be teachers of strong character (Banner & Cannon, 1997, p. 6), they needed to have the affirmation and support from their colleagues, the administration and the students themselves. Considering the emotive reactions expressed when asked about what they believed was ‘best about RE’, the teachers remained a ‘bubbling pot’ of feelings that, left unattended, desiccated their emotional and psychological energy (Cook & Engel, 2006). While Banner and Cannon (1997) referred to the pressures of teaching in general, the responsibilities recently assigned RE teachers felt with regard to the personal and spiritual formation of their students escalated the intensity of the pressures experienced.

**Conclusion**

The vocation of the recently assigned RE teacher is not a smooth or easy path. It is a journey of formation that entails personal and professional challenges. As much as the centrally prepared RE Units of Work assist RARE teachers in teaching RE confidently, the Units also challenge teachers in regard to their own personal and religious character as well as their conviction in RE teaching. Recently assigned RE teachers who were interviewed felt pressured to conform to an image of a Religious Educator that had yet to be attained by experience or training. In a sense, some teachers believed that they were called to live their faith by teaching RE whereas others felt that the personal dissonance was too much for them. RARE teachers needed time to develop and they needed opportunities to explore their personality and passions for RE teaching. In short, they required a holistic and ongoing formation as an RE teacher. Assumptions about all RARE teachers being at the same point in their professional, spiritual and religious formation are inaccurate; nor is it possible to assume that their formation is fully in alignment with faith stances presented in the RE Units. This
study has indicated that special care and attention needs to be given to the formation of those starting out on the road of RE teaching.

References

*Dr Chris Hackett is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle Campus and teaches Religious Education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He has a particular interest in the formation of beginning RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools.

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Please see p. 67 of this issue of the journal for details regarding registration and accommodation.
The impact of environment on spiritual wellbeing in school

Abstract

Spiritual well-being can be revealed by the quality of relationships that people have in up to four domains of spiritual health, namely with self, with others, with the environment and/or with God. Many papers have been presented on the quality of relationships people have with self, others and God. This study concentrates on the views expressed by nearly 100 educators in a range of Victorian secondary schools about the impact of the environment on aspects of spiritual well-being in schools. It provides insights into Environmentalists, those people who see connection with the environment as the key component of spiritual well-being. Case studies and reports on variations between educators and school types are provided as well as suggestions about ways of developing spiritual well-being in schools.

Introduction

The term spiritual well-being (SWB) was first reported by the National Inter-faith Coalition on Ageing (NICA) in the USA in 1975. NICA suggested that ‘Spiritual well-being is the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness’ (from Ellison, 1983, p.331) [author’s italics]. Fisher took note of this definition and after a wide search of other health, theological, psychological and educational publications, interviewed 98 educators in a range of secondary schools in Victoria, Australia, to determine their ideas of how spirituality related with health in educational settings. The resultant model of spiritual health/well-being shows that these four sets of relationships of people with self, others, environment and/or God are variously important for SWB (1999).

For some people, intra-personal relationship with self is considered all that is necessary for SWB. In this Personal domain of SWB, self-awareness is seen as the driving force seeking meaning, purpose and values in life. Most people, however, believe that relating with others is also essential for SWB. In-depth inter-personal relationships are informed by morality, culture (and religion, for those for whom it was important) in the Communal domain of SWB. Identity and self-worth are considered to be two expressions of SWB in the Personal domain. Relating with others is expected to build on and build these up and add other expressions of SWB, such as love, hope, faith, trust in the Communal domain of SWB. For some people, these two sets of relationships are considered adequate for SWB. But, not all agree.

In the third domain of SWB, people go beyond care, nurture and stewardship of the physical and biological environment to a sense of connectedness with nature/the world, which enhances their SWB, by building on and building up the Personal and Communal domains. Many groups of people gain a deeper sense of identity and community by relating with special places. These can be as diverse as childhood neighbourhoods, schools, parks, holiday venues, sports arenas, scenic wonders or sacred spaces. Some people believe that we are part of a self-regulated, living organism, such as Gaia (Eckersley, 2004, p.220) in which people can become one with the universe. The Environmental domain is often overlooked in discussions of SWB, because of a tendency to focus on the horizontal relationships between people and/or on the vertical relationship with a Transcendent Other.
However relating with the environment is gaining in importance as we face crises such as global warming, fossil fuel and water shortages.

Some people do not accept the notion of an external Transcendent Other; they concentrate on a god-within. This can be confused with a search for a higher self, which would be posited in the Personal domain of SWB in this model. Those who, by faith, believe in a higher power, transcendent Other, or God, illustrate the fourth, or Transcendental, domain of SWB. The relationship of humans with a transcendent reality is a means of building on and building up the other three domains of SWB. For example, this idea can be presented in a relationship between a creator and creation. Many cultures abound with creation stories that add essential meaning to the Personal and Communal well-being of humans situated within created environments.

The study

This paper presents a summary of the reflections of nearly 100 secondary school educators on the importance of environment to the spiritual well-being of students. This input was gathered via interviews ranging from one to two and a half hours. These interviews focussed on issues related to spirituality and health and well-being in state, Catholic, independent and other Christian schools in Victoria. The principles of grounded theory were applied in the analysis of data from the interviews. The data were coded, then categorised; the action/interaction contextually analysed; then consequences investigated, to build up an understanding of spiritual health and its place in the school curriculum. The original model of spiritual health developed from literature was refined and expanded through the analysis of data collected in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.23).

Findings

A selection of findings from the study is presented here. Full details can be accessed from http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/archive/000029941.

Environmentalists

This study revealed a group of teachers who embraced the Environmental domain as spiritual well-being. These so-called ‘Environmentalists’ have an appreciation of aspects of the Personal and Communal domains of SWB, together with, at least, a sense of awe and wonder about the environment. They go beyond responsible management of the physical, eco-political and social aspects of the environment to a sense of connectedness of the individual or group with it. They are so in tune with nature that their relationship with it adds meaning to the other domains. Worldviews of many indigenous people would fit in this category (Hammond, 1991; Regnier, 1994, p.133).

Case studies of Environmentalists

1. Mr Kidman was the 51 year old Principal of the Koori School, a residential independent school for Aboriginal children, located in the hills near Melbourne. Although his father had been a minister, Mr Kidman was an inactive member of the Uniting Church. He chose monism as his preferred account of spirituality, which ties in with his belief in unity with the environment. Mr Kidman stressed this notion of unity with the environment by describing Aboriginal spirituality as

   Aboriginal people’s relationship with the land. Because the land contains sacred sites and the thing that makes the sites sacred is the totem in a particular site. The totem is the object, or symbol, of spirituality from which power radiates. And so, sacred sites have to be looked after and traditionally those sites were looked after by performing a group ceremony. Ceremonies
are very complicated. Whereas in the non-Aboriginal world, we tend to put sacred things into a building, called church, in Aboriginal society, they take a more holistic view and so, rather than having separate compartments for art, music, drama, politics, religion, all of those things come together in the ceremony to look after the totem in the sacred site.

To Mr Kidman, spiritual health 'ties in very closely with identity and the concept of self-worth'. Within this school, they 'place a very high priority on raising self-esteem...by reinforcing Aboriginal identity of students.' Mr Kidman saw the environment making major contributions to the development of self.

It is one thing to read about issues, it is another to live them. For example,

Contemporary Western culture is dominated largely by concerns of materialism and a preoccupation with the tangible aspects of life, such as industrial production, wealth and power, apparently relegating spiritual issues to a place of minor importance, if they are studied at all. In contrast, Aboriginal culture highlights the unity of humans living in harmony with the environment (Good Weekend, 15 November, 1997, p. 17).

David Tacey has had much more experience with indigenous Australians about which he has written (1995, 2003). However, the author’s experience, although brief, is no less real.

2. This author was very fortunate to be at the Koori School on the day that an Aboriginal elder from Arnhem Land visited with a group of his dancers, who had just participated in the Melbourne Arts Festival. Part of the interview transcribed below, illustrates Aborigines' belief in unity with nature:

**Can you tell me how the actions of the dancers reflects what they would be feeling on the inside?**
Connection between the land and animals and the dance. Sometimes we dance tree. It's a most important thing for an Aboriginal bloke.

**When the boys are dancing that, what do they feel inside?**
They feel comfortable and one with the tree, animal..

**Can I use the expression 'worship'?**
No. I don't think so. It is one with them.

**When do you feel most peaceful?**
Up in the country, it's more peaceful. Not see all this pollutions, polluted air, all the traffic, big buildings; can't see the stars, or the moon. Bright lights stay on. Like quiet place. Sing, dance. Look at the moon, stars, you know. No more noise. Feel at home with the land, the nature.

**How does the totem fit into this?**
The land is our totem. We feel connection with the land. Land is our Mother Earth.

**How do you manage to find food and water in the bush?**
Aboriginals are smart in the bush. We know the tree, the waterhole, anywhere. I believe the land is my Mother Earth; I love it. Important for young people to learn dance, feel comfortable. With art, make symbols. We get inspiration from nature, a new song - wallaby hoppin' along, or snake.

**How do you look at subjects like science, maths etc?**
Science we know by nature. We know plants. We know every season; we know harvest time, because the nature will tell us. We know what time to go hunting, getting yams, or what time to get stingrays. What time you get fish. Nature tells us, you feel it. We live in nature.

By talking with this Aboriginal elder, this author's attitude was radically altered, coming to understand the elder’s connection with the land, his Mother.
It is a sad indictment on our society that most of the students who attend this Koori school felt lost in mainstream education. However, this school provides a supportive environment with house parents/elders for these aboriginal children. It gives them a sense of belonging where they are able to learn about their history through which they can appreciate their culture/heritage in a way that would have been most unlikely in mainstream education. It was an enormous pleasure for this author to see the joy the students expressed in finding a place in which their SWB can flourish.

Ways of promoting spiritual health via environment

Educators’ views – environmental awareness

In response to the general question, ‘How do you promote student spiritual health/well-being in this school?’ the educators’ responses were combined to form what was called ‘the environmental awareness’ factor. Environmental awareness ranked ordered at number 15 out of the 18 factors that derived from the educators’ responses to the general question. This result showed the low level of immediate concern expressed for it as a means of promoting students’ spiritual health. This result reflects the low level of interest in environmental factors often perceived to be existent in Western culture, especially in parts of Protestant Christendom, as illustrated by one teacher, Mrs Nader, in whose opinion, ‘the piety tradition has not been strong on environment.’ Hughes (1997) used responses to questions from the 1994 National Social Science Survey and 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics data to make comments on environmental attitudes and values among Australians. He concluded:

An educational programme designed to strengthen environmental concern and action should take into account the mindsets of people through which information about the environment is interpreted. The religious component of these mindsets should not be ignored (ibid., p. 24) as

Statistically, it would appear that religious beliefs and practices make very little difference in themselves to attitudes and actions about the environment. Upon deeper analysis, however, it is apparent that religious beliefs and practices make a considerable difference, but Christian traditions work in a variety of ways. While respect for God as creator does mean respect for creation, this translates in action in different ways for different people. For some it means that creation is there for human use, while for others it means respect for the inherent spirituality of nature (ibid., p. 24).

In answering the general question, only 9% of educators mentioned the environment. When their attention was drawn to developing relations with the environment, through the second question, ‘How do you encourage students to develop positive relationships with (part d) the environment?’ an increased number of teachers acknowledged its importance (raising its rank order from 15 to 5). This marked variation indicates the importance of the way in which views are canvassed, and the meaning which interviewers attribute to the responses.

Comments from educators were grouped in two types of environmental awareness, namely items relating to physical, and those relating to social and emotional, environments (See Table 1 for details – p. 28).
Table 1. Components of environmental awareness and awe promoting spiritual health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental awareness (36%)</th>
<th>Environmental awe (8%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical</strong>:</td>
<td><strong>Social &amp; Emotional</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conservation, trees</td>
<td>class dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness, litter</td>
<td>aesthetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stewardship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excursions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School environs**

Several schools in this study had worked enthusiastically toward providing aesthetically pleasing surroundings, as havens from the harsh environments from which their students come. Staff and students in one school had planted several thousand trees, to beautify the grounds, as well as to provide shelter from strong, northerly, summer winds. The school grounds appeared to be an informal, rather than formal, part of the curriculum in a number of the schools. Many of them did not seem to take full advantage of the richness of local environments as means of developing student spirituality.

**Excursions**

Limited opportunities were available to quite a few of the schools for outside camps and excursions, which were seen as worthwhile in the development of students’ spiritual health. Sadly, a few teachers considered environmental activities a waste of time as Ms Ewing commented, ‘the students hate environment camps’. Apparently some of the girls were concerned that they would not have a place to plug in their electric hair driers if they went camping.

**Environmental awe**

In contrast to the combined, relatively high rating for environmental awareness, terms suggesting ‘environmental awe’ were seldom employed by the educators, increasing marginally from 1% to 8% after they responded to the second question (see Table 1 for details of these factors). Environmental awe was ranked at number 18 of 18. This low level of teacher response is of concern as it seems they tended to defy Hughes’ statement:

> Even more, the natural environment has become important as the arena in which many (author’s italics for emphasis) Australians find their sense of peace and well-being... (where) for some people, the bush, the sea and gardens may take the place of churches (op cit., p.4).

**Variations in promotion of spiritual health/well-being as perceived by different educators.**

Curriculum co-ordinators expressed very practical concerns relating to the quality of the personal learning environment for students established by the teachers. They showed greater than average concern for the teacher approach (+10%’ i.e., 10% higher than the score for all educators in this study), religious values (+19%), discussions (+12%), self-talk (+12%), conflict resolution (+11%), environmental awe (+13%), and less than average concern for the communal activity of religious services (-16%).

Other subject heads and teachers were only slightly more concerned than the whole sample with environmental awareness (+9%) and discussions (+7%), but less concerned with teacher approach (-
12%), religious values (-15%), religious services (-11%) and conflict resolution (-10%) as means of promoting students’ spiritual health. Table 2 shows the percentage of educators whose responses were classified into each factor, compared by educator type.

Table 2. Frequency (%) of selected factors considered important for promoting spiritual health, by educator type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Principals (n=22)</th>
<th>Curriculum Co-ordinators (n=19)</th>
<th>Welfare Co-ordinators (n=10)</th>
<th>Chaplain/RE Co-ordinators (n=15)</th>
<th>Other Heads and Teachers (n=31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Teacher approach 63</td>
<td>Teacher approach 90</td>
<td>Devotions 67</td>
<td>Env awareness 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Services</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Religious values 53</td>
<td>Conflict resolution 40</td>
<td>Religious classes 53</td>
<td>Teacher approach 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Discussions 42</td>
<td>Discussion 40</td>
<td>Religious services 53</td>
<td>Discourse 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Model</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Relation to others 50</td>
<td>Self-talk 23</td>
<td>Religious values 19</td>
<td>Religiosity 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation with God</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Env. awe 21</td>
<td>Relation with God 10</td>
<td>Outreach 20</td>
<td>Conflict resolution 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB **bold** represents >10% variation from whole sample response, *italics* show < whole sample value.

Variations in promotion of spiritual health by educators’ personal views of spiritual health/well-being.

There appears to be a strong correlation between the educators’ personal views of spiritual health and ways in which they believed spiritual health of students could be promoted in schools. This qualitative view has been supported by findings from quantitative surveys of teachers, which reveal that teachers’ lived experiences are the key factors influencing help provided by schools for students’ SWB (Fisher, 2008).

Environmental awe featured more strongly than average for the Environmentalists as a way to develop spiritual health. For Mr Kidman, the Aboriginal students saw the environment ‘like a library around them’ strongly contributing a sense of awe and wonder, in the process of enhancing their spiritual health. The Environmentalists ignored devotions (-41%), religious classes (-32%) and services (30%), and relations with God (-30%) as means to achieving this end.

Table 3 (p. 30) shows the percentage of responses indicating key factors that promote spiritual health/well-being by each of the four types of educators classified according to their stated personal views of spiritual health.
Environmental awareness and awe (each 40%) were of concern to the Environmentalists, whereas the staff who focussed on the God-factor (Transcendentalists) expressed lower than average interest in environmental awareness.

Variations in promotion of spiritual health/well-being by school type.

For the educators in state schools, the principles of developing relations with others (+14%) and discipline (+13%) featured more highly than across the whole sample, but the practical outworking of these principles through discussions (-10%) and self-talk (-10%), which could help achieve the desired goals, featured very lowly. These state school teachers had a slightly higher than average interest in environmental awareness (+9%). It was not surprising to find lower than average concern for religious values (-14%) and religious classes (-22%), no support for devotions (-41%) or religious services (-30%), and opposition to relationship with God (-45%) by some of these state school teachers.

It seems the Catholic school educators had high expectations of themselves with regard to creating supportive environments in which their students could develop spiritual health, with increased emphasis on teacher approach (+31%), devotions (+22%), religious services (+28%), religious values (+8%) and teacher model (+15%). It would be interesting to find out how much effort the students put into maximising the opportunities created by their teachers. Also of note for the Catholic educators was the lower than average expectation they showed of developing relations with others (-19%), religious classes (-6%), and relation with God (-4%).

For educators in the other Christian schools, religious classes (+19%), devotions (+8%), relation with God (+13%) and self-talk (+9%) were mentioned more frequently as means of promoting student spiritual health, whereas teacher model (-8%), environmental awareness (-5%), religious values (-7%), and discipline (-10%) were not considered as important, very slightly lower than the whole sample response, illustrating that these people were more interested in relations than rules.

For the educators in the other independent schools, religious values (+55%) and discipline (+34%) featured strongly, especially for the staff in the Islamic and Jewish schools, for whom devotions

### Table 3. Key factors relating educators’ personal views of spiritual health to its promotion in schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personalist (n=4)</th>
<th>Communalist (n=17)</th>
<th>Environmentalist (n=5)</th>
<th>Transcendentalist (n=62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pers. development 50</td>
<td>devotions 53</td>
<td>env. aware &amp; awe 40</td>
<td>devotions 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious values 0</td>
<td>religious values 47</td>
<td>religious classes 0</td>
<td>religious services 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to God 25</td>
<td>relation to God 0</td>
<td>relation to God 0</td>
<td>env. awareness 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>religious classes 0</td>
<td>pers. development 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB **Bold** figures represent > 10% variation from whole sample value. **Italics** show < whole sample value.
(+15%) were also of importance in fostering spiritual health. Environmental awe (+22%) was considered to be of importance to the teachers in the Aboriginal and Waldorf schools. The connectedness of the Aboriginal people to their Mother Earth has previously been mentioned. For Mrs Wadtke, the way the Waldorf school differs from other schools is in the curriculum, where ‘you’re not going to give a dead, cold, clinical view of the world. You’ll give other, imaginative truths about animals and about plants and picture them as connected with the cosmos in an imaginative way.’ She also added that being in tune with the environment means that ‘when the day calls us out, we go.’

Details of variations in promotion of spiritual health by school type are listed in Table 4. The figures show the percentage of teachers whose comments were attributed to the listed factors, perceived as being important in promoting spiritual health.

Table 4. School type and teachers’ ideas of factors promoting spiritual health/well-being in schools (% of teachers giving each response is shown)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Catholic (n=20)</th>
<th>other Christian (n=49)</th>
<th>other independent (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relation to others</td>
<td>teacher approach</td>
<td>religious classes</td>
<td>religious values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>env. awareness</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline</td>
<td>devotions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussions</td>
<td>religious services</td>
<td>relation to God</td>
<td>devotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-talk</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious values</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious classes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>devotions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to God</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB Bold figures represent > 10% variation from whole sample response. Italics represent < whole sample value.

Variations in promotion of spiritual health by gender of teachers.

The female teachers showed greater concern than the males for teacher approach, teacher model, and personal development, with slightly greater concern for environmental awareness and conflict resolution. These findings support the suggestions made by Skogen (1996, p.470, reported in Hughes 1997, p.12) that women are oriented more towards human concerns. He suggests that “nurture” or “ethics” of caring are developed more strongly in the socialisation of women than among men and that this translates into a concern for the nurture of the environment.
and, as has been shown in this study, for the development of spiritual health as well.

The males expressed greater interest than the females in devotions, religious services and relation with God, with a slightly greater interest in relations to others (see Table 5 for details).

### Table 5. Gender of teachers and promotion of spiritual health/well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>teacher approach</th>
<th>relation to others</th>
<th>teacher model</th>
<th>devotion</th>
<th>env. awareness</th>
<th>religious values</th>
<th>religious classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Gender of teachers and promotion of spiritual health/well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>discussions</th>
<th>religious services</th>
<th>relation to God</th>
<th>self-talk</th>
<th>HG/PCare</th>
<th>conflict resolution</th>
<th>personal development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB Figures represent percentage of the gender type whose comments were attributed to the stated factor. **Bold** figures represent > 10% variation from whole sample response. *Italics* represent < whole sample value.

Curriculum concerns for promoting spiritual health.

A rich variety of curriculum concerns and alternatives were proposed by the educators (41%) for creating ideal circumstances to help foster spiritual health/well-being:

- encourage teachers to include spiritual health
- check/examine the curriculum
- put heart back in the curriculum
- different places/different people
- relaxation classes
- service/ministry programs
- use ‘real life’ issues
- curriculum audit
- alternative curriculum activities
- camps
- enrichment programs
- review VCE

Slightly more female educators (48%) expressed concern over curriculum than the males (37%). The Catholic school teachers (+15%) had higher expectations in this area, especially of camps. For example, Sr Cayley would like to ‘get away from city life...go on bush camps, look at the stars, and tell stories of life experiences.’ Mr Jeckyl wanted to ‘have camps, where students can communicate with each other, nature and God, perhaps...Make it less formal, much more personal, and more of it.’ Ms Puccini would like to have

a camping opportunity for kids, at Year 9, to go for a term; get really in touch with the environment and each other. It has enormous potential in terms of developing maturity; spiritual health; social relations, working as teams - not in an elitist way. It would be a fantastic experience. Year 9s are left out in the cold. Year 7s have enough on their plate learning a new culture. Year 8s are just getting into the school. Good to have the experience...
before year 10. It would help them enormously. Year 9’s the age where rebellion really hits; discovering their own identity; hating everybody else. It’s the right time for that sort of thing.

Mr Lupin considered the ideal to be ‘a Timber-top type camp for Year 9s, between six months to a year. Get back to living with nature; think about what is worthwhile - relationships.’

The other independent school teachers (-19%) were less concerned with having more time and opportunities to build relationships, maybe because they felt they already had sufficiently enriched programs and opportunities in their schools.

None of the Personalists (-41%) were interested in enhancing the curriculum and providing alternatives, but the Communalists (+12%) showed greater interest in this area than the sample as a whole. Ms Tace believed

more community work would expose students to real-life experiences, backed up with opportunities to discuss issues. Form study groups where they’re to talk about feelings, willing to discuss matters because their spiritual health is not good...school is not necessarily the right place for this, but who else would do it? School has the responsibility to expose students to the opportunity of discussing crucial situations; matters of life and death.

It was surprising to note the lower interest in matters of curriculum expressed by the principals (-13%) especially when they considered lack of priority to be a hindrance in the development of spiritual health. The teachers strongly expressed the opinion that principals set the ethos, and presumably priorities for curriculum, within schools.

In terms of building the four sets of relationships for SWB through day-to-day interaction of teachers with students, the quality of teachers was perceived to be of paramount importance. The main factors which arose from the interviewees’ responses were the teachers’ approach (53%), relations to others (51%), and teacher model (43%). Environmental awareness (36%) was of reasonable concern, with little reference to environmental awe (8%). Devotions (41%), religious values (34%), religious classes (32%), relation with God (30%), and religious services (30%) were also considered important. Discussions (31%), self-talk (30%), home group/pastoral care (28%), conflict resolution (26%), personal development (23%), and discipline (22%), featured less prominently as techniques for fostering students’ spiritual health.

When asked to comment specifically on the characteristics of a teacher who was seen to be good at promoting spiritual health, the majority of the teachers’ responses were seen to group into factors which reflected the caring/sensitive/personal nature of the teacher (70%), concern for the individual (68%), and commitment to personal beliefs and values (57%). Secondary characteristics of teachers, which were seen to be of some importance to fostering spiritual health, were classified as confidence (41%), being a good teacher (37%), and dedicated (37%). Lower emphasis was placed on communication skills (22%), the teacher being personable (20%), and having a calm nature (16%). Variations were found, in the perceived suitability of characteristics for promoting spiritual health, when teachers were compared by gender, teacher type, personal view of spiritual health, major curriculum concern, and school type (Fisher 1999, p.39-42).

Implications of this Study

There was general agreement between teachers from different school types about the importance of developing students’ self-esteem, sense of peace, meaning and purpose in life, positive relations with others, together with concern for the environment.
Most of the literature on spiritual health has come from the medical field, and that from people dealing with elderly or terminally ill patients. Teachers have an advantage over most medical staff in that they are more likely to have extended contact with their clients (the students), mostly in a positive environment, as they are not brought together by illness or pathological circumstances. Informal contact through Pastoral Care, extra-curricular activities, and camping programs provide ideal opportunities for teachers to help enhance students’ spiritual well-being through developing the four sets of relationships as appropriate to the setting and the students’ desires. But, this author believes that nurturing the students’ spiritual well-being should not just be hit and miss, an addendum to the curriculum; it should be an essential planned component of the curriculum. For the students’ sake, we need to ensure that discussions of spiritual health do not become hollow rhetoric, without action. This could so easily happen in the busyness of school life.

Suggestions for action in developing students’ spiritual health/well-being.

For teachers and schools who are committed to being pro-active in developing their students’ spiritual health, here are some suggestions for action. Teachers need to:

• self-check - They need to clarify, stipulate and be comfortable with their own values and beliefs; not just religious ones either. They should understand what spiritual health is. Once the teachers are clear on their individual views, they need to reach consensus or have an understanding of the range of beliefs, values, cultural and religious practices which concur with the school’s ethos, and work through differences.

• prepare - Teachers need to enhance their own spiritual well-being in the four sets of relationships. Appropriate in-service for individuals and/or groups should be established.

• be aware - Teachers need to be aware of students’ spiritual needs. Spiritual health questionnaires can be useful here (see Gomez & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 2004, 2006). Another technique which could be employed is what Christians call discernment; others call it intuition. The four sets of relationships need to be assessed in appropriate ways, keeping in mind the bias or filtering effect of the observer’s own beliefs/world-view. As a rule of thumb, each student should be known well by at least one adult in the school. Teachers need to identify acceptable limits within the four sets of relationships:
  - Link depression with the absence of meaning and purpose in life.
  - Have a clear idea of educational, democratic and ultimate values.
  - Understand appropriate cultural expression of relationships.
  - Appreciate religious celebrations, ritual, prayer and symbols.
  - Identify excesses/pre-occupation with cult, occult, religious activities and practices.

• plan - Teachers need to audit the curriculum for which they are responsible to identify places and ways in which they can enhance students’ spiritual well-being within the guidelines of the school’s charter. Teachers need to keep in mind that they do not ‘have the right to exercise influence of whatever kind across all aspects of a child’s life’ (McLaughlin, in Best, 1996, p.15).

• implement - Teachers who are caring and sensitive to the students’ needs and views create opportunities for spiritual development. Teachers need to use appropriate language, time and opportunity for contact, and know how to handle dissonance between students’ and teachers’ views. Teachers need to be aware of the impact of their views on the process and content of the teacher-student interaction. They need to understand what it means to be a “culture broker” to resolve conflicts between disparate views from home, school, or other parts of the culture (adapted

- **evaluate** - Teachers need to know how to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of their interaction with students in the realm of spiritual development. Identification of the students’ with the teacher’s views might not always be positive for the students. To communicate and evaluate effectively, teachers must be in touch with their own spirituality and must possess an openness and respect for all cultures and beliefs (adapted from Peri, 1995, p.73). Being prepared to listen is a very effective way to plumb another’s spiritual depths, as it is quoted, “it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). Prayer can also yield spiritual insight, but must be checked carefully.

- **refer** - Teachers need to know when and be willing to refer students to professional counsellors, psychologist, or clergy when the situation warrants it. Avoidance of spiritual issues on the part of some teachers could be caused by embarrassment, denial, discomfort, or lack of understanding regarding their own spirituality (adapted from Peri, 1995, p.69). For students’ spiritual health to be nurtured, each school needs at least some staff who can be identified with an appropriate “tag.”

A Chaplain with appropriate interpersonal, curriculum, and communication skills, backed by a breadth of relevant experience could fulfil the function of Spiritual Facilitator. The Council for Christian Education in Schools’ chaplaincy guidelines (Victoria) would be a valuable guide to help with selection.

The Australian Government has made $90 million available over the period 2007-2010 to help provide chaplaincy services to schools. Up to $20,000 pa is being provided to each school that can show a need for such help. The aims of this program are to provide help for values and spiritual development within Australian primary and secondary schools. Time will tell how successful this initiative has been.

- **report** - Schools should have at least an informal structure to monitor the spiritual well-being of individuals and the total climate of the school and report excesses to parents and other appropriate authorities. For example, adverse effects of cult or occult practices from private life which surface at school need to be addressed sensitively with parents.

**On curriculum.**

Each school would be well advised to review its curriculum in terms of spirituality and spiritual health/well-being to ensure this area is included, for the sake of caring for the whole child. The living curriculum, or quality of teaching, has been mentioned. If the written curriculum is not audited, or monitored on a regular basis with regards to the inclusion of matters related to spiritual development, any concern for students’ spiritual well-being might be dissipated. If it is visible, in written form, suitable programs, procedures and personnel, are more likely to be assessed and acted on regularly.

**Conclusion**

This paper has hopefully provided some insight into the impact of environment on spiritual well-being, so that it might become more visible as one of the four key areas in which relationships can be developed through education to nurture students’ spiritual well-being in schools.
References


Dr John W Fisher has 46 years’ experience in education in schools (principal for 14 years) and teacher education (17 years). John has been researching aspects of spiritual well-being in schools for the last 15 years (PhD, University of Melbourne, 1998. Recently submitted EdD, University of Ballarat).

Abstract

The authors investigate ways in which the South African National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) actually embodies some of the social capital required for restoring the moral fibre of South African society. They do this by firstly discussing a number of definitions of social capital to serve as a conceptual framework for their search for social capital potential in the Policy. They then analyse international trends with respect to religion and education, with emphasis on the problem of social capital building. Finally, they report on their analysis of the Policy itself with emphasis on its potential to create social capital by means of which the moral degeneration in South Africa can be combated. They find that, although this Policy is conducive to the creation of social capital, it has been framed in such a way that the problem of social decay cannot be addressed in its entirety.

Orientation

This paper focuses on the suspected inherent potential in the South African National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) to create social capital for the purpose of contributing to the restoration of the moral fibre of South African society. We do not enter into a detailed discussion of social and moral decay in South Africa as such (see among others Richardson (2003) for a detailed discussion); instead we concentrate on ways in which the Policy can be used in schools for creating some of the social capital required to combat the problem.

Having researched the problem of moral degeneration and disintegration in South Africa as it has been unfolding over the last five decades, we concluded that the South African Policy on Religion and Education (henceforth: the Policy) that was promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2003 embodied potential to generate at least a part of the social capital required for redressing the problem.

Methodology

We will now defend this conclusion by triangulating as follows:

- Firstly, we discuss a number of definitions of social capital to serve as a conceptual framework in our search for social capital potential in the Policy.
- We then analyse international trends with respect to religion and education, with emphasis on social capital building potential.
- Finally, we report on our analysis of the Policy itself, with emphasis on its potential to create social capital.

Our discussion of the findings contain remarks about the extent we found our preliminary conclusion (mentioned in the previous section) to have been vindicated, as well as a pertinent recommendation.

Delineating Social Capital

We made a transcendental-pragmatic (c.f. Alexander (Alexander, 2006, pp. 205–221), for a detailed discussion) study of social capital theory with a view to identifying some norms for establishing the
extent to which policies on religion and education (could) contribute to social capital building.

The notion of social capital is believed to have first appeared in Hanifan’s discussions of rural school community centres (Hanifan, 1916, 1920). He used the term to describe “those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people” (1916, p. 130). He was concerned with the cultivation of goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social interaction among those that “make up a social unit” (Smith, 2007). It took some time for the term to come into widespread usage. Contributions from Jacobs (1961) in relation to urban life and neighbourliness, Bourdieu (1983) with regard to social theory, and Coleman (1988) in his discussions of the social context of education moved the idea into the academic arena. However, it was the work of Robert Putnam (1993, 2000), Fukuyama (1996, 1999) and Field (2003) that launched social capital as a focus for research and policy discussion. Social capital has also been picked up by the World Bank as a useful organising idea. The Bank argues that “increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable” (The World Bank, 1999).

In 1983, Bourdieu (1983, p. 249) explained that social capital could be understood as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

In 1994, Coleman (1994, p. 302) surmised that social capital was defined by its function. He was convinced that it was not a single entity, but rather a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals within the structure.

In 1999, the World Bank (1999) indicated that social capital refers to the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions. They concluded that social capital was not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it was the glue that holds them together.

In 2000, Putnam (2000, p. 19) compared social capital with physical and human capital. In his opinion, physical capital refers to physical objects, whereas human capital refers to the properties of individuals. Social capital, Putnam maintained, refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In this sense, social capital is closely related to the concept of ‘civic virtue’. Social capital calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a network of reciprocal social relations. For Putnam, a society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.

John Field (2003, pp. 1-2) then argued that the central thesis of social capital theory is the fact that relationships (especially of trust and tolerance) do matter. Interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric. He argued that a sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks could benefit people greatly.

Trust between individuals thus becomes trust between strangers and trust of a broad fabric of social institutions; ultimately, it becomes a shared set of values, virtues, and expectations within society as a whole. Without this interaction, trust decays; at a certain point, this decay begins to manifest itself in the kind of social problems that South Africa is currently experiencing. The concept of social capital implies that building or rebuilding community and trust requires face-to-face encounters that depend, amongst others, on mutual recognition, neighbourliness, reciprocity, social commitment and social justice. (Beem, 1999, p. 20).

The work of Fukuyama (1996, 1999 passim) helped to expand this relationship between social
capital, community rebuilding and trust to include the concepts of ‘sharing’ and ‘cooperation’. In particular, he described social capital as the existence of a specific set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them.

There is evidence that communities with a good 'stock' of such 'social capital' are more likely to benefit from lower crime figures, better health, higher educational achievement, and better economic growth, says Smith (2007). However, there can also be a significant downside, Groups and organisations with high social capital have the means (and sometimes the motive) to work to exclude and subordinate others. Furthermore, the experience of living in close-knit communities can be stultifying - especially to those who feel they are 'different' in some significant way.

Based on our study of the theory of Social Capital, we managed to isolate connectedness as the overarching, inclusive norm for establishing the extent to which policies on religion and education can contribute to social capital building. From the literature, it is clear that the norm of connectedness may favour – in much the same way as Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s psychological contract – both an idiogetic (personal, individual) and a nomothetic (a social, societal, ‘body politic’) polarity, depending on its perceived role and function at any given juncture.

On an idiographic (personal, individual) level, connectedness is accomplished – amongst others – through the manifestation of trustworthiness, belonging, communication, goodwill, dependence, neighbourliness, commitment, tolerance, sympathy and empathy. On a nomothetic level (the level of the group, the ‘social’, society, the ‘body politic’), connectedness is accomplished – amongst others – through the manifestation of interconnectedness, sociability, social cohesion, interaction, social justice, social norms and values, conflict management, cooperation, fellowship, information exchange, interdependence, mutual acquisition, mutual recognition, neighbourliness, relationships, reciprocity, sharing, commitment, tolerance and unity.

The literature furthermore suggests that if the idiographic and the nomothetic polarities of connectedness were harmoniously balanced, they would provide for relatively straightforward problem-identification and problem-solving as far as social and moral decay is concerned. If this were successfully accomplished, it would result in the emergence of civic virtue, underpinned by the basic freedoms as expressed in the Manifesto of Human Rights (contained in Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution, Act 108 of 1996).

We subsequently analysed international policy on religion and education to see to what extent it could facilitate capital building by complying with the norm of connectedness, with all its ramifications, as outlined above.

**International policy on religion and education: capital building potential**

In Western Europe and North-America, the present policies pertaining to the relationship religion-education have been shaped in recent decades by the increasingly multi-religious composition of populations (Kelly, 1988, p. 442). This seems to express compliance with the nomothetic polarity of the social capital norm of connectedness and, as such, it has two implications for the relationship religion-education. Firstly, it puts pressure on state schools as places where only a particular religion is taught, respected or adhered to, i.e. as having a specific religious ethos and aimed at inculcating that religion in the learners. Secondly, it supposes schools to introduce learners to the entire spectrum of religions prevalent in society, with the aim of acquainting them with those religions and acquiring an understanding and tolerance towards followers of those religions. This is an adherence to the social capital norms of tolerance, understanding and association. The report of the Swann Commission of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups in the United
Kingdom, for example, contains an entire chapter to this effect (Great Britain, 1984, pp. 465-520). The 1988 Education Reform Act in England subsequently effected such changes in policy on Religion Education in state schools (Rose, 2006, p. 186).

Another example of adherence to the nomothetic polarity of the social capital norm of connectedness can be found in Norway. Until 1997, Christian religious knowledge was taught as a compulsory subject in Norwegian state schools. In 1997, that was replaced by a subject compulsory for all pupils, where both Christianity and other religions and secular world views are taught on an equitable basis (Hagestaether & Sandsmark, 2006, p. 275). This is an expression of the social capital norms of mutual acquisition and recognition. A similar policy change was introduced in the Netherlands in 1985 (Miedema, 2006, p. 117; Westerman, 2001, p. 21).

Some international policy documents reveal a greater degree of balance between the idiographic and nomothetic poles. The United Nations’ Declaration on Human Rights (1948) as well as other international conventions on human rights, for instance, declares freedom of thought, conscience and religion as fundamental human rights. This includes the freedom to manifest one’s own religion or belief in school education (Article 18 of the United Nations’ Declaration on Human Rights). The United Nations’ Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966) also stipulates that parents have the liberty “to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions” (Article 81.4). The European Convention on Human Rights, too, contains stipulations to this regard (Article 2). All of these policies represent an example of emphasis on the idiographic polarity of connectedness counterbalanced by the social capital norm of tolerance.

Some Norwegian parents in November 2004 referred to the idiographic polarity in the international policies in their (successful) legal challenge of their country’s policy on religious education in state schools (Hagestaether & Sandsmark, 2006, p. 284). They criticised the above-mentioned reforms of religious education in Norway inter alia on the grounds that young pupils would suffer from identity confusion when confronted with so many different world views (Hagestaether & Sandsmark, 2006, p. 278).

When policies on religion and education accentuate the idiographic polarity of the social capital norm of connectedness, the norm itself becomes compromised. This can be illustrated with two examples. In the Netherlands, the phenomenon of individualisation of religion in contemporary society (Miedema, 2006, pp. 120,121) has been prompting people no longer to write a religious standard biography; instead they write a religious choice biography. They develop a form of ‘cafeteria Christianity’. (Engebretson, 2003, p. 11; Vermeer & Van der Ven, 2004, p. 51ff)

In Australia, Engebretson (2003, pp. 10-11) found that there was a decline among young people’s interest in Christianity and in religion in general (including instituted religion), and a concomitant increase in private, personal, individual spirituality. Australian adolescents, in their search for a religious direction to follow, yearn for meaningful personal experiences that speak to them of a spiritual life (2003, p. 11).

In other instances, the nomothetic polarity seems to receive stronger emphasis. Contemporary pedagogies of religion use “Muslim” or “Sikh” merely as reference points, while guarding that they do not obscure the diversity, interaction and change that is the underlying reality. (Jackson, 2004, p. 8). By emphasising the general, generic, diversity, interaction and change, modern religion education, such as that developed by Robert Jackson at the University of Warwick, Julia Ipgrave at Leicester, Heid Leganger-Krokstad in Northern Norway and others, capitalises on learners’ readiness to engage with the broader religious questions in religiously plural communities, and helps young
people to find their own positions within key debates as Jackson (2004, pp. 8-9) contends. The emphasis here is clearly on the nomothetic polarity.

**South African policy on Religion and Education (2003): capital building potential**

The Policy provides for three facets of Religion and Education. In the first place, it sets guidelines for an academic subject known as *Religion Education* (note: *not* Religious Education) (article 17 et seq.), forming either a part of the learning area Life Orientation in the General Education and Training (GET) band (20) or known as *Religion Studies* in the Further Education and Training (FET) band (33). As part of the Life Orientation learning area, it is a compulsory subject, but in the FET band, it is an optional, specialised and examinable subject (33). This implies that only those learners taking *Religion Studies* as an elective in the final three years of schooling (grades 10 to 12), will enjoy the benefits of the social capital that might accrue from taking this subject. In the FET band, learners not electing the subject for their final three years will have missed the opportunity of sharing in this social capital building process in school. All of them, however, will have shared in the social capital building in the previous nine years of schooling since they would have enjoyed compulsory exposure to *Religion Education* as a (relatively small) part of the Life Orientation learning area (20).

The Policy indeed possesses potential for social capital building, especially in terms of the nomothetic polarity. It encourages, for instance, the equitable practice of Religious Observances at school (article 66). It also regards religion as a contributor towards “creating an integrated educational community that affirms unity in diversity…” as well as a creator of “a free, open space for exploration” that “demonstrates respect for the distinctive character of different ways of life” (68). This is an affirmation of the social capital norm of connectedness and, as such, it helps South Africans to find “new ways to celebrate our … religious resources. (…) It is time for all people of goodwill to know and understand the diversity of religious and other worldviews that are held by their fellow citizens.” Everyone can benefit from the inter-religious knowledge and understanding cultivated through Religion and Education (69). The Policy is “designed to support unity without uniformity and diversity without divisiveness” (70).

*Religion Education* contributes to (nomothetic) social capital building in the following ways: It provides for understanding about religious diversity in the country (17), about the common values that all religions promote, and for promoting social justice and respect for the environment (18). It teaches about the religions of the world (religion in the widest sense) and in South Africa, as well as worldviews (19), life orientations, cultural resources and ethical resources of humanity (21), and emphasises values and moral education (in accordance with the nationally prescribed curriculum known as the National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9, 2002). It provides for “religious literacy”.

*Religion Education*, according to the Policy “should enable pupils to engage with a variety of religious traditions in a way that encourages them to grow in their inner spiritual and moral dimensions. It must affirm their own identity, while leading them to an informed understanding of the identity of others” (19). It will “purposely pursue the moral and ethical development of pupils, whilst they learn in a factual way about the various religions and beliefs which exist” (20). “As they develop creative and critical abilities for thinking about religion and religions, pupils will also develop the capacities for mutual recognition, respect for diversity, reduced prejudice, and increased civil toleration that are necessary for citizens to live together in a democratic society. Learning about themselves while learning about others, pupils will surely discover their common humanity in diversity, and be both affirmed and challenged to grow in their personal orientation to life” (21). “Religion education can provide opportunities for both a deeper sense of self-realisation and a broader civil acceptance of others. (…) It can teach pupils about a world of religious diversity, but at
the same time it can encourage pupils to think in terms of a new national unity in South Africa” (25). It will “empower them to recognise a common humanity within religious diversity” (26). It also promotes the freedom of religion (28). According to this analysis, the Policy tends to over-emphasise the nomothetic polarity of the social capital norm of connectedness.

*Religion Education* does not promote, however, confessional or sectarian forms of religion or religious instruction since these are deemed inappropriate for a religiously diverse and democratic society and in public schools, which are supposed to serve the entire community (22). For these same reasons, the Policy-makers regarded Religious Instruction (confessional instruction in a particular faith or belief) (54) as a form of instruction that is “primarily the responsibility of the home, the family and the religious community, and more needs to be done to strengthen this role” (55). Religious Observances, on the other hand, may have a place in schools, on condition that they are treated equitably (58 et seq.).

According to the Policy, any social capital flowing from Religious Instruction in a particular faith or religion will have to come from parental homes, religious communities and institutions, but *not* from the schools as public institutions. Some social capital will accrue from the accommodation of Religious Observances in the schools, however: pupils will learn that these observances are equipollent and have to be mutually respected, that people participate in them on the principle of free and voluntary association (58), that people are religiously ‘different’ (62) but may not be discriminated against because of their right to freedom of religion and conviction, and that people may be excused from participating in certain religious observances (63).

Most commentators on the Policy initially did not focus on the issue of social capital building. Malherbe, Claassen, Colditz and Kulenkampff (2003) and Malherbe (2003), for instance, analysed the Policy to establish whether schools that had a Christian ethos before 2003 could persist in their practices without transgressing the stipulations of the new Policy, or whether the Policy complied with stipulations of the South African Constitution (1996), especially with its guarantees regarding freedom of religion, conviction and association. In her research, Swartz (2006, p. 558) also found (with reference to policy regarding religion and education in general) that “educators and learners ... seemed to want ... thicker sets of values to be present in schools” (thick values are private, maximalist, broad, even contexted and prescriptive, cf. Swartz, 2006, p. 557). These initial assessments of the Policy witness to stronger emphasis on the idiographic polarity of the social capital norm of connectedness.

Roux (Ferguson & Roux, 2004; Roux, 2003, 2006a; Roux & Du Preez, 2005), on the other hand, among others criticised schools in South Africa for, in practice, ignoring the official 2003 Policy, and trying to remain mono-religious “by keeping the other religions out” (refer Du Plessis, 2008, p. 6) Similar sentiments were uttered by Phiri (2000) and Kruger (1999). Kumar (2006) also warned against persistence with traditional categories of religious diversity that were increasingly at variance with reality, whereas Matsaung (2003) offers evidence that students at a formerly black university did not perceive the study of Religion Education in multi-religious classes to be a problem. These assessments are evidence of stronger emphasis on the nomothetic polarity of the social capital norm of connectedness.

Chichester (2006) made specific remarks about the social capital potentially accruing from the application of the Policy by saying that its promulgation was an effort on the part of the education authorities to create the ideal state and society envisioned by the Constitution (1996) and the Bill of Rights contained in its Chapter 2. Roux (2006a, 2006b) made similar remarks: “…the purpose for schooling should include the promotion of human well-being or personal wellness, education for life
as such; it should reflect the priorities of life as well as the values of society in particular.” These are indirect injunctions towards adherence of the social capital norm of connectedness.

Possibly as a result of a perceived lack of social capital flowing from the application of the Policy in schools, the Ministry of Education in 2008 announced its intention of introducing a pledge to be recited by learners in schools (see Olivier, 2008, p. 2) as being more of a ‘plaster’ than a solution to the problem of moral decay in South Africa. A subsequent step in the direction of creating social capital in schools was, in collaboration with the Forum of Religious Leaders, the Minister’s announcement of the intended publication of a Bill of Responsibilities for Learners / Pupils (Rademeyer, 2008, p. 2). This move might have been inspired by the fact that all of the moral guidelines supplied by the education authorities up to that point contained only ‘thin’ moral values (i.e. values without any religious or life- and world-view content). (Swartz, 2006, p. 556; Zecha 2007, pp. 48-60)) The Ministry of Education’s Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2000) as well as the Policy contains only such ‘thin’ values. The proposed Bill of Responsibilities for Learners, although intended to eradicate this ‘thinness’ (see Goldstein, 2008, p. 20)), suffers from exactly the same shortcoming,

Discussion

By following the three strategies of (a) understanding the notion of social capital, (b) analysing international trends with respect to religion and education policy and their potential for social capital building and of (c) analysing the South African Policy on Religion and Education (2003) with respect to its social capital building potential, we have, in our opinion, largely vindicated our conclusion that the Policy (2003) indeed embodies the potential to generate social capital for at least partially redressing the problem of social and moral decay in South Africa.

We deliberately used the expression ‘largely validated’, because we were, and remain not totally convinced that the current policy can provide all of the social capital needed to redress the problem of moral degeneration. In our opinion, the Policy should also have provided for learners that are mature enough, to also participate in inter-religious dialogue in schools for the purpose of understanding others and having empathy with them and their religions (see Abdool, Potgieter, Van der Walt, & Wolhuter, 2007, p. 557), in the process building still more social capital. Our analysis of the Policy has shown that while substantial amounts of social capital might indeed flow from accommodating Religious Observances in schools (under the prescribed strict conditions) as well as from the academic subject Religion Education – in the GEC band as part of the learning area Life Orientation, and for those who choose it as an elective in the FET band – practically no such capital will be forthcoming from Religious Instruction which, being confessional or sectarian, is deemed to belong to the domains of parental homes and religious communities. However, we believe that the Policy-makers might here have forfeited an opportunity for creating substantial additional amounts of social capital for the South African community.

Although it is claimed by the Policy-makers that the Policy is largely in agreement with international tendencies, we have found evidence to the contrary. At least some international experience has shown, as indicated in our discussion above, that policy on religion and education has occasionally been criticised for banning confessional Religious Instruction from public or state schools.

We would, therefore, argue as follows in favour the inclusion of (confessional) Religious Instruction in all schools:

- very young children should, we agree with many educators (as Roux (2003) found), have a decent grasp of their own religious convictions before being confronted with other religions; they would have a better grasp of the others as a result of mastery of their own;
confessional religious instruction in schools would link up with such instruction in the parental homes, especially if it is taught by a teacher or a member of the clergy belonging to the same religious group as the children in a particular group; this would, in our opinion, create stronger bonds among parental home, religious community and school. We believe that the Government was on the right track initially with its White Paper on Education (Republic of South Africa, 1995) in which it acknowledged parents’ right to choose the religious basis of their children’s education; the 2003-Policy deviates from this position;

the inclusion of Religious Instruction in schools will remove the objection that official policy only contains ‘thin’ values (i.e. devoid of religion and / or life-view content, and therefore general, generic and meaningless in practice); each religious group will have the opportunity of equitably equipping learners with ‘thick’ values under strict and well-regulated school conditions;

well-trained teachers should facilitate inter-religious dialogues arising spontaneously; they need to be well-prepared to be able to avoid potential conflict and to steer inter-religious dialogues in productive directions;

we believe that substantial social capital will accrue from the acquisition of the ‘thick’ value systems that will be created as well as from the ensuing inter-religious dialogues because pupils will have learnt about their own and other religions and religious convictions and assumptions in highly regulated and controlled conditions; and

the social capital accruing from such inter-faith / inter-religious dialogues will, in our opinion, substantially contribute to the quality of South African democracy – in the process giving rise to greater peace, and the eradication of the current state of moral decay.

Conclusion

While we have found the 2003-Policy to be indeed conducive to the creation of social capital in South Africa, we believe that it has still more potential for more significant social capital building. We are convinced that, despite an international trend favouring the banning of confessional / sectarian Religious Instruction from public schools, South African Policy makers should be contrary, and re-introduce this vehicle for substantial capital building into the official curriculum and the general school programme.

References


*Charl Wolhuter is Comparative Education professor at the North-West University, a former junior lecturer of History of Education and Comparative Education at the University of Pretoria and a former senior lecturer of History of Education and Comparative Education at the University of Zululand

* Johannes L van der Walt is currently involved in research capacity building at the North West University. His research interests include philosophy of education, spirituality and religion in education studies

Faculty of Education Sciences, North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus), South Africa

*Ferdinand J Potgieter is Associate Professor of Education in the School of Education in the Faculty of Education Sciences at North-West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa. His preferred speciality is Philosophy of Education
Introduction
The nature and purpose of Religious Education in Catholic schools has continued to be the subject of much interest and discussion. Contributors to the field operate out of varied contexts and concerns which reflect different understandings of the nature and purpose of the subject. This has been influenced, as much, by the cultural, political and technological changes in society as by reforms that were introduced at the wider school curriculum level which have been a response to new knowledge about the learning process and a focus on the individual student’s growth and development.

In the nineties, in my doctoral studies I investigated students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the Year 12 religious education program to discover how appropriate the programs were in meeting the needs of the students and in achieving the aims of religious education for senior secondary students in Victorian Catholic schools. The findings from my doctoral study raised many concerns about the practice of Year 12 classroom religious education. In particular, it noted that the emphasis given to knowledge and content, that is, the cognitive elements reflected by the work requirements and CATS (at that time), were perceived as a negative factor for a large majority of students. In general, over half of the students surveyed felt that their faith and spiritual lives were not nurtured through the classroom programs. Despite the focus on cognitive learning, there was also evidence that a significant number of students perceived RE to lack an intellectual challenge and felt they had learnt little about the faith tradition.

Drawing on the findings of this study, I proposed some guiding principles which were aimed at informing the development of new religious education programs for senior students and some of these principles have been reflected in new programs, particularly in relation to utilizing a range of up-to-date teaching and learning activities and resources and some recognition given to the nurturing of students’ spirituality.

In the intervening years between 1995 (when I conducted my survey) and 2006, there have been many developments in religious education. While the VCE religion study units have continued to attract a number of students, the textbook curriculum, aimed at promoting religious literacy, has become well established for P-12 in the Melbourne Archdiocese. As well, the Melbourne texts have been used as resources in the other Victorian dioceses. Finally, a new Religious Education Curriculum using a flexible Shared Praxis approach was introduced in each of the Victorian country dioceses in 2005. As well, a new curriculum framework was developed for use with the To know, worship, love textbooks in Melbourne in 2006. Accordingly, it was an appropriate time to replicate my previous study to examine the perceptions of Years 10-12 students in 2007 to discover if the programs were meeting their needs and promoting their knowledge of, and perhaps, their interest and participation in the Catholic religious tradition.

Therefore, this study, which was funded by a Bishop’s Research Grant in the Victorian dioceses, aimed to replicate and extend part of the earlier study. It surveyed Years 10-12 students in Catholic schools, across the four Victorian dioceses, in the third term of 2007 to discover their perceptions
and experiences of current practices in religious education to determine if their perceived religious and spiritual needs were being catered for.

**Curriculum frameworks in Religious Education – Melbourne Archdiocese**

By 2007, the secondary Religious Education (RE) textbook curriculum in the Melbourne Archdiocese, which was introduced in 2000, had been reviewed. This led to a new curriculum framework being designed which aimed at assisting RE teachers to make effective use of the textbooks *To know, worship and love*. The curriculum documents for Year 7-10 were entitled: *Coming to know, worship and love: A Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (2005). In the letter at the front of the document, Archbishop Dennis Hart stated:

> This curriculum framework fulfils two aims. Firstly it has been designed to enhance the use of the student’s texts *To know, worship and love*. Secondly it responds to the educational demands of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). In fulfilling both of these aims *Coming to know worship and love* will provide Catholic schools with a rich and engaging curriculum supported by high quality student text books (p iii).

Possibly, one of the significant differences between the new curriculum approach and that described in the previous Teaching Companion is the recognition that learning needs to be extended beyond the cognitive level or the gaining of knowledge. While there were cognitive and affective learning outcomes provided in different units of work in the previous textbook curriculum, the links between the activities and outcomes were often ambiguous.

The new revised curriculum framework (*Coming to know, worship and love: A Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* 2005), however, discusses the theoretical aspects of theology and pedagogy in the context of the Emmaus story from Luke’s Gospel which involve the processes of coming to know (informed), experiencing Jesus in sacrament and worship (formed) and returning with love (transformed). This process would imply that a spiritual dimension is being recognized (p.3) and this is stated in the section referring to the dimensions of Religious Education:

i) Religious knowledge and understanding

ii) Reasoning and responding

iii) Personal and communal commitment (see, for instance, p. 5 in *Coming to know, worship and love: A Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Year 8*).

This third dimension refers to the nurturing of the spiritual life, the importance of belonging to the faith community and engagement in community service. It is within this dimension that the Religious Education curriculum extends beyond the classroom to include retreats, the sacramental life of the Church, community service, leadership formation and contribution to civic and faith communities (p. 5).

What is evident from this description is that spirituality has been framed within a religious context so that expressions of the spiritual life pertain to expressions associated with religiosity. This, of course, has been one of the ways spirituality has been interpreted within western Christianity for many years and it does not necessarily reflect contemporary research and understandings about spirituality, that is, that spirituality is an innate human quality – the relationality of being (see for instance, Groome 1998; Harris & Moran, 1998, Hyde, 2008, Miller & Nakagawa, 2002); it is about the connectedness an individual feels to Self and everything other than Self which, in turn, helps the
individual find meaning and purpose in their life experiences. This is an important consideration in contemporary society where, for many young people, there may not always be an obvious religious dimension to their spiritual expression (see for instance, Tacey, 2003).

Returning to the three dimensions as described in the curriculum document, the outcomes associated with each unit of work are articulated as indicators of learning under the headings: Values and Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills. Within these categories, there is scope for the spiritual dimension to be addressed but, in fact, many of the verbs provided in the values and attitudes statements are related to skills rather than inner learning or reflective experience of Self in relation to Other. For instance, in a unit on Jesus at Year 8 (Unit 5), the following indicators of learning are an example of what is offered under Values and Attitudes:

- Articulate those qualities of Jesus which are an example for Christian living
- Consider the Great Commandment as a guiding principle in Jesus’ ministry (this is one which could lead to inner reflection if teachers guided students to consider what this actually might mean for them and their way of perceiving and being in the world)
- Discuss the power of Jesus to influence the lives of those he encountered

And so on.

A spiritual learning outcome, instead, would provide an opportunity (which would require time and particular resources and activities) for students to consider what the teachings of Jesus means to them; How do they see themselves in the context of Jesus’ teachings? And, is there anything about their lives that they may change as a result of their learning in the unit? Of course, in some classrooms, these aspects may be addressed. However, if such an outcome is not articulated, there is a good chance that this level of learning may not occur and that the teacher will focus on the stated outcomes such as those identified above.

It would appear, therefore, that while the new RE curriculum in the Melbourne Archdiocese has acknowledged the spiritual dimension of the student, the activities related to this are not the main focus of the classroom but extend beyond it. Such an approach does reflect the intention of RE as articulated in many Church documents. For instance, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988) and General Directory for Catechesis (1997) describe RE as a subject to be taught with the same rigour as other disciplines - a scholastic discipline that honours the “distinction and complementarity” of religious education and catechesis”. However, such an approach does not consider the implications of contemporary literature which examines the spiritual dimension of learning within all classrooms (for instance, see Moffett, 1995; Miller, 2000; Miller & Nakagawa, 2002; Palmer, 1983, 1998 among others).

Curriculum Framework – Victorian country dioceses

In 2005, the new religious education curriculum documents were released in the Victorian country diocese. This was the result of a three-year collaborative project of curriculum development authorised by the Bishops of Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst and the Archbishop of Hobart. The purpose of the project was to provide a set of resources for learning and teaching in Religious Education for use in Catholic schools (Awakenings, 2005, p. 11).

The religious education curriculum developed in the Inter-diocesan Project was based on an adaptation of the pedagogy of Groome’s (1980, 1991) Shared Christian Praxis which aimed to inform, form and transform, thereby implying a spiritual dimension in the learning (through transformation). The Praxis approach recognized six movements:

- Focusing
- Naming
- Reflecting Critically
- Accessing the Christian Story and Vision
- Understanding and Integrating
- Responding.

After the initial collaboration, each Victorian country diocese individualized its curriculum and named it accordingly:

- Ballarat – Awakenings
- Sale – Journeying together in Hope
- Sandhurst – Source of Life

The documents are a result of extensive consultation and provide some excellent ideas and advice. They are also responsive to the contemporary situation where many young teachers require in-depth knowledge about the faith tradition. Consequently, there are carefully planned details about the discipline of religious education presented in the core documents from each of the dioceses: the aims, the context, the curriculum structure, the relationship to other curriculum areas and quality teaching, assessment and reporting. The core documents are complemented by teaching resources that have been progressively developed in the ensuing years. For instance, the Sale diocese has a publication on teaching strategies which reflect many of the curriculum initiatives, models and approaches through the past decade. In general, the curriculum structure in all three core documents is outcomes based and the categories of Knowledge and Skills and Values and Attitudes form the basis for learning outcomes. Again, there is discussion about faith development but not about spiritual development. However, there is an implicit intention that the spirituality of the student will be addressed through the Shared Praxis process of inform, form and transform.

Since the new/revised curricula for each diocese has been gradually introduced into schools over 2005/6, this research project is timely as it seeks to examine the initial impact of the new and revised curricula through students’ perceptions of their learning experiences in the RE program.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to discover Year 10-12 students’ perceptions and experiences of the effects of the religious education program. To this end, they were asked, as a result of their religious education program, which may incorporate either or both school based and VCE units of work, to what extent they agree or disagree with a number of items included in a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed to take approximately 35-40 minutes to complete.

The research instrument for data collection was a questionnaire that had been used in the previous study but with appropriate amendments for the contemporary context. Amendments were made in consultation with religious education personnel from the different Catholic Education offices. The sub-questions that generated the items for the questionnaire were:

Does the senior secondary religious education program:
1. increase students’ interest in different religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion;
2. promote the knowledge and understanding of the key practices and beliefs of Christian communities;
3. increase students’ interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of religion in their lives;
4. provide students with learning experiences that have the potential to nurture their faith and spiritual development;
5. offer content and learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students from a contemporary pluralist society, and
6. achieve appropriate status and recognition of its specific contribution to the broad curriculum?

The questionnaire included closed and open questions thereby allowing some flexibility in the responses and Likert scales were used to indicate the degree of agreement to various statements. The responses were quantified and an SPSS software program was used to generate statistical evidence—and frequency tables were used to present summaries of the data.

In discussion with the staff in Religious Education at each of the Catholic Education offices, 15 schools were invited to participate in the research. Affirmative responses were received from seven schools. Due to a delay in the process for the Ethics clearance, the administering of the questionnaire was delayed so that most of the Year 12 students were unable to participate in the project. In the end, the final number of participants was 401, made up mostly of Years 10 and 11 students from seven schools across the four dioceses. The schools were numbered from 100 – 700 and Table 1 shows the spread of students from each school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part A Section 1 - Role and importance of religion

The first area that was investigated was students’ interest in different religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion. Approximately 49% of students agreed that, as a result of their religious education program they had developed an appreciation of religion and its role in their lives while 34% remained uncertain. However, two-thirds of the students, 75%, indicated that they understood how religion influenced customs and practices of people and 70% of students agreed that, as a result of their religious education program, they had developed an understanding of the importance of religion in the lives of many Australians from different cultural backgrounds.

In general, then, half of the students indicated that they had developed an interest and appreciation in the role of religion in their own lives as a result of their religious education program. As well, a large majority of students had developed their understanding and appreciation of the role and importance of religion in other people’s lives. This is an important consideration given the pluralist nature of contemporary society and the emerging evidence of some forms of religious divisiveness in recent years.
The second sub-question focused on the promotion of knowledge and understanding of key practices and beliefs of Christian communities and 74% of students provided positive responses to items related to this question. However, a minority of students, 42% and 38% respectively, felt that (i) their faith in Jesus had developed and that (ii) his teachings were meaningful to their lives.

The next responses focused on spirituality, involvement in social justice and understanding the big questions in life. These were included as evidence of Christian belief and practice and were relevant to the relational dimension of the individual. Approximately 56% of the students perceived that their own spirituality had developed; 40% were interested in social justice programs and 43% showed a positive response to understanding the big questions.

The findings so far present a mixed overview. A majority clearly perceived that their knowledge of the faith tradition had increased but less than half felt that the RE program had any impact on their faith development. This does raise some questions about the appropriateness of the classroom as an avenue for faith development or whether classroom programs should focus only on the educational aspects of RE. These are questions that have continued to attract different points of view.

Further findings showed that less than half of the respondents showed any interest in social justice programs and a small majority felt that their spirituality had developed as a result of their experiences in the program. The first finding, here, could be a generational feature that implies that, for any number of reasons, young people today are less concerned about supporting social justice programs. It could be that the context of young people’s lives is so demanding and all-consuming that they have little time left for other concerns. Or it could be that the pace of change has reached such proportions that their mental and emotional abilities are concentrated on ‘keeping up’ so that their spiritual strengths in terms of the depth of the connectedness they may feel to Other may have become somewhat diminished. Whatever the cause, this finding does point to the need for further research.

Another focus concerned involvement in the Church community and, here, a minority, 21%, were positive about being involved in the Church community or youth groups and a slightly larger percentage, 34%, were positive about the need for continued involvement in the Church once they had left school. In general, then, less than a third of the students, as a result of their religious education program were interested in involvement in the church community beyond school. It is pertinent here to observe, that these findings reflect the results of recent National church Life Surveys (for instance, see Gilchrist, 2004) which indicated that a minority of young people, in general, are involved in their parish or in church life, and indeed, this lack of participation from young people mirrors a global phenomenon in the Western world. Therefore, it is not surprising to find this result in this research study and it, probably, has little to do with the religious education programs and more to do with societal and cultural pressures and influences.

The next focus, and one which is very relevant to contemporary pluralist societies, was interest in and tolerance of different religions. The findings were that 52% of the students were positive about learning about different religions and 71% were more tolerant towards other religions. This is a useful finding given the religious divisiveness that has become evident in the wider society since 9/11 and highlights the benefits of the religious education program in raising awareness and tolerance of different religious cultures. Finally, 61% of students responded that they perceived religious education as being a lifelong learning process.

Overall, it can be seen that there were some positive results from this section of the questionnaire. However, the findings do highlight some areas that require further attention.
Part A Section 2 – Delivery of the classroom program

Section 2 aimed to investigate aspects related to the delivery of the classroom religious education program. The items in the questionnaire related to seven broad areas:
- RE is an important subject;
- RE is intellectually challenging
- RE is interesting and relevant
- RE should be optional
- Teaching/Learning strategies/activities
- Use of prayer and liturgy
- Retreats and reflection days

RE is an important subject.

Table 2 shows the spread of responses (in percentages) to these items. Fifty-six per cent of students perceived RE as important but only 18% spent as much time studying RE while 38% came prepared for class. Twenty-nine percent believed that RE contributed to their lifelong learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RE is important (%)</th>
<th>Equal study time (%)</th>
<th>Prepared for class (%)</th>
<th>Lifelong learning (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, then, a small majority of students perceived RE as an important subject but a large majority did not spend as much time studying for RE or coming to class, prepared for the lesson. These latter findings have some implications for the next finding where 68% of students found RE easier than other subjects while 51% did not find RE intellectually challenging.

These results while they are not overly positive about the intellectual challenge of RE are, in fact, an improvement on the findings from the earlier study. However, they also indicate that this is an area of ongoing concern for RE curriculum planners and classroom teachers.

The next area also has some links to the previous one that is whether students perceived RE to be interesting and relevant. Table 3 (p. 51) presents the corresponding spread of responses and shows that 34% of students disagreed that RE was boring; 36% were interested in class work; 43% disagreed that RE had little meaning for students and 33% felt that RE was interesting for senior students. Another 49% agreed that students were disinterested and disruptive during RE class, and 29% found that the topics were relevant for them. Finally, on a personal level, 51% found RE interesting. Importantly, there were quite significant numbers who responded that they were uncertain about these items.
Table 3 - RE is interesting and relevant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boring (%)</th>
<th>Interested in class work (%)</th>
<th>Has little meaning (%)</th>
<th>Little interest for seniors (%)</th>
<th>Usually interested (personal) (%)</th>
<th>Disinterested and Disruptive (%)</th>
<th>Topics not relevant (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next area related to teaching and learning strategies/activities. Table 4 shows that 36% of students felt that there was a balance between written and practical activities; 34% perceived the resources to be stimulating and up-to-date; and 64% responded that there was variety in the learning activities.

Table 4 - Teaching and learning activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Balance between written and practical activities (%)</th>
<th>Stimulating and up-to-date resources (%)</th>
<th>Variety in learning activities (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, these findings about the teaching and learning activities had a mix of responses apart from the response about the variety of learning activities where there was a positive response from a clear majority. The responses about prayer and liturgy in the class program were less positive and have some implications for this area of the RE learning program. Twenty-four per cent of students agreed that attending class masses helped them to pray, 21% felt that there should be more opportunities for class prayer and 18% felt that preparing liturgies brought them closer to God.

The responses to retreat and reflection days were also mixed where 54% of students agreed that retreats and reflection days nurtured their faith and spirituality but a fewer number, 37%, felt that reflection days took up important study time.

Further responses which related to teaching and learning strategies showed that 68% of students enjoyed discussions, 65% thought it was important to have guest speakers and 40% found RE class uninteresting.

In addition, 65% of students agreed that some learning activities in RE had made them reflect on their own personal and spiritual growth and these referred to watching films/videos; reflection days;
retreats; going to chapel; and studying social and ethical issues. On the negative side there were a minority of responses that indicated that their learning in RE had resulted in them reflecting on their personal and spiritual growth.

Finally, students were required to indicate on a scale from 1 – 5, specific learning activities in terms of how helpful each was. Table 5 presents these responses through Most helpful, Somewhat helpful, Possibly helpful, Not very helpful and Least helpful.

Table 5 – helpful learning strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Most helpful %</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful %</th>
<th>Possibly helpful %</th>
<th>Not very helpful %</th>
<th>Least helpful %</th>
<th>No response %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass preparation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written assignments</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community work</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films, DVDs, Visuals &amp; Music resources</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play/drama</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Research activities</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared talk/tutorial</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreats</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pastoral programs for junior students</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer formal/informal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guest speakers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection days</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web quests/faith quest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings show that discussions were perceived by 46% of the students as most helpful followed by Films/DVDs, Visuals & Music Resources (43%) and Retreats (40%). Twenty-nine percent agreed that meditations were helpful with 28% indicating reflection days and 23% choosing community work. Moving to the lease helpful activities, 24% indicated Mass preparation followed by 18% for prayer activities. Other activities perceived as least helpful were oral presentations (17%), written
assignments (15%), web quests or faith quests (14%) and role plays/drama, research activities and prepared talks/tutorials (13%).

To sum up, then, there were mixed responses to aspects related to teaching and learning and were similar to the findings from the earlier study.

The final sections of the questionnaire required responses that provided an overview of the program. These showed that 62% indicated that, as a result of their religious education program, they understood the message of Jesus, 40% agreed that they lived out the message of Jesus and 30% responded that they included prayer in their daily lives. Certainly, the first finding here was a positive response from a majority of students.

Discussion

The findings of this study do show that in some areas the religious education program is achieving its aim for a majority of students. However, they highlight areas that do require further consideration.

One of the more positive findings was that a large majority of students indicated that they had developed their understanding and appreciation of the role and importance of religion in people’s lives. As well, while just on half of the students showed an interest in learning about other religions, a good majority indicated that, as a result of their religious education program, they had become more tolerant towards other religions. This response showed a positive impact of the religious education program. It is also an important factor in a contemporary world where religious divisiveness has become a significant issue.

A second factor was that a good majority clearly indicated that their knowledge of the faith tradition had increased although this knowledge appeared not to have increased faith development or promoted an interest in social justice which may be seen as related areas. As well, only a small majority felt that their spirituality had developed as a result of their experiences in the program. One implication of this latter finding could be the need to examine contemporary understandings of spirituality which has implications for ways in which the spiritual dimension of learning can be addressed. For instance, this would involve examining multisensory approaches to teaching content through a selection of particular resources and activities, and perhaps, adapting the learning environment to include periods of silence and stillness, and to promote integration, connectedness and inclusivity.

In general, less than a third of the students were interested in involvement in the church community beyond school. This does have serious implications for the future of Catholic communities and indeed, for the character and identity of future Catholic schools. As indicated earlier, however, this is a much bigger societal and cultural issue rather one that is specific to the religious education program and, as such, needs to be addressed at the wider level.

While a small majority of students perceived RE as an important subject, a little more than half of the students did not find RE an intellectually challenging subject. This latter finding was reflected in the fact that a large majority did not spend as much time studying for RE or coming to class prepared for the lesson. These findings do present further challenges to RE curriculum planners and educators to find ways in which to show students why the subject is important and how it contributes to their lifelong learning. They also do present an area of concern as they suggest that despite the strong cognitive focus which has dominated much of the RE curriculum in the past decade in some of the dioceses, nearly half of the students did not appear to find it an intellectually challenging subject.
While a majority of students indicated that RE classes were not interesting and that the topics were not relevant this could have something to do with the influences of their peers and the fact that religion and RE is often seen as counter-cultural to society. As such, there are ongoing challenges for RE teachers to find new and illuminating ways in which they can show how the content of RE may be made meaningful to students’ lives particularly in relation to their lifelong learning. This also relates to the fact that only a minority of students were positive about aspects related to teaching and learning. In a culture where young people have had their lives contextualized by instant gratification, ongoing entertainment via small and large screens, and activities that require a short concentration span, the challenge to find ways to engage students and to maintain their interest so that transformative learning can take place is huge. Once again, research about the spiritual dimension of learning which requires time, stillness, silence as well as activities, resources and environments that engage a student through multi-sensory learning has enormous relevance here. There would seem to be a distinct need for RE planners and educators to become familiar with such research and writings to further enhance their work in RE classrooms.

One further area that raises some concern is that only a small majority were positive about their retreat experience. It certainly suggests that retreats as a learning experience may need to be examined and evaluated so that the planning becomes responsive to the needs and interests of a new generation.

Conclusion

In the contemporary pluralistic and secular context of society, religious education continues to pose some difficulty for educators who attempt to engage young people within a context that, at many levels, appears to de-value religion. Accordingly, it presents significant challenges for religious educators who try to nurture the Catholic identity of their students who, potentially, will provide future leadership in the Church. While it is vital that students leaving Catholic classrooms are grounded in their Catholic identity and are armed with a sound knowledge of their faith tradition, it is equally important, that they are nurtured in their spirituality which engenders their wellbeing and an openness to exploring relevant and meaningful questions. These are areas that most religious educators would readily identify as significant and many are constantly seeking new ways of addressing them.

Further, against a political backdrop that has generated certain levels of religious divisiveness, in the multi-faith and multicultural context of today, a positive finding of this research was that students indicated that they had developed their understanding of the role of religion and how it could affect the beliefs and practices of many people. Certainly, it suggests that there is a place for activities which would nurture the relationality of the student, that is, their spiritual nature, through not just learning about Other but actually seeking engagement with and inclusion of Other. Such experiences should lead to greater tolerance, engagement and empathy which, in turn, may build a more harmonious and cohesive society with acceptance and inclusivity as foundational principles.

In the end, the findings of this study suggest that the evaluation of religious education programs should include an examination of the perceptions and experiences of students themselves. These perceptions, then, would complement the perceptions and experiences of curriculum planners, religious educators and religious education classroom teachers and provide more rounded information about classroom practice. Accordingly, this could lead to necessary amendments/extension to ensure that programs achieve their aims for a large majority of students; that educators continue to find ways in which the Catholic identity of school communities may be enhanced particularly where there may be multiple expressions of Catholic identity; and how the spirituality and religiosity of their students may be nurtured in pluralist contexts.
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*Dr Marian de Souza is a Senior Lecturer who teaches at Australian Catholic University, Ballarat Campus. She has researched and published extensively in the area of young people’s spirituality and the spiritual dimension of education.
In teaching about morality from a Catholic perspective, especially in senior high school, one challenge the teacher faces is presenting complex ideas in a way that is both interesting to the students and which facilitates further learning. One approach that I have found useful is to use narratives as a way of presenting what could, otherwise, be quite abstract notions. Consider the following three points that are foundational to Catholic moral theology.

1. Seeing the development of conscience as getting stronger or weaker as a result of our beliefs and actions.
2. The idea that moral absolutes exist.
3. Regarding the moral sphere as complex and resistant to simplistic legalism

How can we best convey these points in a way that is both interesting and which does justice to them? Here, the use of narratives can be helpful, especially contrasting stories. The narrative below sets out two stories that can serve as an instructional tool as well as setting the platform for future learning.

Narrative 1: Into that darkness

Franz Stangl was born in 1908 in Altmunster a small town in Austria. By the 1930’s he was working as a policeman but was ambitious and felt that his talents were being hampered by malicious superiors who he saw as determined to hinder his career. Around this time Stangl became a Nazi. He saw this as an opportunity to get a new and better job, although there were some aspects of the Nazi program he knew to be wrong. When he joined the party he had to renounce his allegiance to the Catholic Church. This did not really trouble him because he was not a religious man, although he chose not to discuss his decision at any length with his wife because he knew that it upset her and she challenged him about it. Soon he had a new job, which in the early stages, however, disturbed him. He was working in the impressively named General Foundation for Institutional Care in a special unit known as the T4. Part of his job was identifying people in the community whom the Nazis described as burdens to the state, such as those with intellectual disabilities. Eventually he was asked to participate in their murder. This troubled him. Killing people was wrong, the people identified by T4 were innocent. He thought about his actions and came up with reasons to support what he was doing and eventually killing the weak and defenceless no longer troubled him.

Soon Stangl had a different job, head of the Sobibor concentration camp. Soon after, he was again promoted. In his new post he was the Commandant of the Treblinka death camp. Here hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed. Treblinka was in many ways the nadir of the extermination camps. It was unlike the better known Auschwitz which was a huge camp with various sections and inmates of different status. At Treblinka Jews, largely from the Warsaw ghetto were gassed and cremated as soon as they disembarked from the train. By early 1944 the camp was closed down and bulldozed and farmers brought in to work the now empty fields. Stangl escaped justice at the end of the war. In 1968 he was eventually tracked down living in Brazil, under his own name, and returned to Germany and was tried. Those people who interviewed him were amazed at his attitude. He did not seem to have any personal regrets about being involved in some of the greatest crimes in history. He blamed others for his actions and saw his role as Commandant of Treblinka as an exercise in
logistics, that is, making sure the trains could enter and exit the camp without delay or bottle necks forming. Stangl died in prison.

**Narrative 2: A world class conscience**

Franz Jagerstatter was a contemporary of Stangl born in 1907. He was a farmer, married with three daughters, and lived in the village of St Radegund in Upper Austria – which in Albertan terms is a little like living in High Level – a long way from the lights and sophistication of Vienna. We do not know everything about his youth but he seems to have been a short tempered and rude teenager who may have fathered a child during this time. After a period of searching and doubt he resolved to take his Catholicism seriously as a matter of personal conviction. Jagerstatter was a ‘prickly character’ who was not well liked in the village. When the Nazi’s took over his country he loathed the new regime. He found the Nazis an abomination. He decided to have nothing to do with them. This lost him some friends but he was not concerned. It was far more serious when he was drafted into the army. Being a soldier contradicted everything he believed in – being a soldier fighting for Hitler was even worse. He refused to swear a military oath and so become involved in the Nazi war effort. In Germany there was no provision for conscientious objectors, that is, those who did not want to fight in the war. The penalty for refusal was death. Despite pleas from many sources, beatings and torture, he refused to swear the oath and serve a regime he knew to be wrong. He was beheaded in 1943. In October 2007 he was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI as a martyr of God. His wife attended the ceremony.

**Implications for Teaching**

The essential educational rationale for using narratives is that they are able to illuminate well, in the form of a story, a complex reality. They need, in the first instance, to hold the interest of the reader or listener. The teacher’s first task is to be able to either find or create a narrative that at once points to deeper issues and engages the class. In the example above the teacher can make great use of the striking parallels in these stories; both protagonists were Austrians, with the same first name and born within a year of each other. It is where their stories diverge which help to make the three foundational points that are characteristic of a Catholic moral worldview. Firstly, both men made choices that impact on their lives and on the health and vigour of their consciences. This idea of conscience as an almost organic thing that can be strengthened or weakened by how we act is often a very difficult concept to get across if it is taught in a didactic fashion. The stories here bring out this idea in quite a dramatic but effective fashion. By the end of his life, for instance, Stangl seems to have no significant moral qualms about being a key figure in perpetrating genocide. This situation almost demands the question, “how did this happen?” which provides a natural entrée to further enquiry and deeper learning.

Secondly, the idea of moral absolutes is one that is becoming more and more counter-cultural. That an act can be wrong no matter what the wider context is provides a challenge to many students. In the story of Stangl, however, we find support for this notion. Can anyone argue that his actions in selecting “mentally and physically deficit” people for categorization and then murder is acceptable, much less his conduct as commandant of extermination camps? Finally, in the story of Jagerstatter, and those around him, we see some of the ambiguity that is often associated with moral questions. These can be brought out by further questioning of the class. Did, for example, those who counselled him to change his mind give good advice? Also, what should an individual do when confronted with state sanctioned evil?

These are the bare bones of the narratives used here, they can be elaborated on in a number of ways. For example in the Diocesan archives we can read the following which is a testimonial of the Bishop of Linz at the time of Jagerstatter’s imprisonment and execution: “I explained, in vain, to him the moral principles on the degree of responsibility that the private citizen has for the actions of the
authorities, and reminded him of the much higher responsibility he had for those around him and particularly his family." In elaborations such as these we see the real power of narrative. They give the human story behind the moral issue. We have the answer that Jägerstätter gave to the bishop and others who challenged him. This is not expressed as an abstract philosophical principle but with the power of a personal response to a particular circumstance.

Franz Jägerstätter had sensed the bishop's fear, and his objections to war service were not weakened. Of his responsibility as the father of a family, he noted: "Again and again, people try to trouble my conscience over my wife and children. Is an action any better because one is married and has children? Is it better or worse because thousands of other Catholics are doing the same?" Jägerstätter knew that bishops and priests would be arrested if they said anything other than the government permitted. Yet he put the question: "If the Church stays silent in the face of what is happening, what difference would it make if no church were ever opened again?" These are good questions and presenting them in the context of two narratives bring them, in a way, to life hopefully stimulating further enquiry.

In conclusion, I think the lesson here for practitioners is to see in the use of narrative an effective classroom teaching strategy that can present contrasting and complex ideas and also keep them in tension. In this case, for example, how can moral situations be complex and multifaceted and at the same time how can we still maintain that there are moral absolutes. The narrative also establishes a strong cognitive basis for further exploration and questioning.

Further Reading


Richard Rymarz holds the Peter and Doris Kule Chair in Catholic Religious Education, St Joseph's College, University of Alberta and is a visiting Research Professor attached to Quality of Life Flagship at Australian Catholic University.

The title of this book filled me with a sense of expectation and promise. The author, Ronni Lamont, an Anglican priest and Chair of the Rochester Diocesan Children’s Committee, purports to offer readers a window into the processes going on inside children as they come to understand God. Indeed, the subject matter of this book is of interest to a broad audience, including religious educators, and Lamont’s writing style is both inviting and engaging. A perusal of the contents page reveals a series of chapters which are logically arranged, and which seem as though they will present both theoretical and practical explorations which might enable the reader to come to an understanding of children and their personal development in their understanding of God.

However, upon reading it I was, in many ways, quickly disappointed. There is little material which is new, with most of the subject matters covering old ground. Although it provides a useful tool kit for lay practitioners working with children in the Christian tradition, there are several concerns I have which became apparent to me in reading this text.

After a brief introduction to the concept of spirituality (drawing on a very narrow and out-dated literature to do so), Lamont presents a series of chapters which explore the ways in which children develop – cognitively and socially as well as in terms of personality and faith. Herein lies my first concern. These chapters draw heavily on the cognitive developmental theories of Piaget, as well as on other theorists who have themselves drawn on Piagetian notions of development. There is very little critique of the theories presented, many of which have now been superseded by more current thinking. Theories based on cognitive development have been the subject of scholarly critique because they assume development to proceed in a linear trajectory. Contemporary research in this area recognises that this is not the case, and that developmental trajectories are uneven and are far more complex. As well, such cognitive theories do not take adequate account of other domains in which children develop, such as the emotional and spiritual dimensions.

There follows a chapter on Godly Play – an approach to religious education which offers children opportunities to engage with the language of the Christian tradition as presented through sacred stories, parables and liturgical actions. Children are then encouraged to respond through play, wonder and creativity. However, here too there are concerns. Those familiar with the Godly Play method will know that non-evaluative (non-judgemental) responses ought to be given to the children’s creative responses, should the children themselves choose to share their response with adults in the Godly Play classroom. However, in the examples Lamont provides of interactions with children in the Godly Play setting, responses such as “that’s lovely”, “I think that’s a wonderful poem” and “I think this is a really, really super piece of work” cannot be considered to be anything but evaluative! This is indeed a concern, especially considering that the author is an accredited Godly Play teacher.
The chapter which draws on children’s own comments about God is interesting and potentially insightful. However, here too there are concerns. The promotional “blurb” on the back cover of the book gives the impression that the children’s comments have been gathered via an empirical study. This is not the case. They constitute little more than a series of statements collected by the author with no indication of the context in which they were gathered, nor of a systematic process and methodology which underpinned the collection of this data. The author then attempts to evaluate and analyse these in terms of the developmental processes outlined in the earlier chapters. However, this analysis is at times tenuous and at best provisional. This is because the Piagetian models which guide the analysis do not adequately take into account the complexity of children’s development. The trustworthiness of the research is not demonstrated.

The book concludes with a series of suggestions for those who engage in catechesis with children in parish contexts. These are based on the author’s own experience in ministry with children, and provide one of the clear strengths of this book. The suggestions presented are useful, practical and would be able to be acted upon within parish contexts.

In summary then, reader beware! While this book may serve as an introductory text for lay practitioners and volunteers who work in Christian ministry with children (and, to be fair, I suspect that this is the intended audience of this book), more discerning readers will quickly perceive the shortcomings and limitations of this particular work.

Dr Brendan Hyde
National School of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University


This is an interesting, concise study, well worth a read, that explores a perennial topic in contemporary Catholic education, namely the spirituality of teachers working in Catholic schools. The report by Philip Hughes, one of Australia’s foremost sociologists of religion, is based on interviews with sixty teachers working in Catholic secondary schools across Victoria. Those interviewed represent a range of ages with a slight preponderance of females. As a commissioned report it lacks the normal theoretical underpinnings that would accompany a study of this sort as it is designed not primarily for the scholarly community but for the group that sponsored it, namely, the principals of Catholic secondary schools. In a more conventional academic study I am sure that Hughes would have drawn out and expanded on the arguments presented here but due to the extremely topical nature of the work the report merits close attention.

The strongest part of the study is contained in the second half which examines how best to nurture the spiritual development of teachers. The report provides a range of responses which give an idea of the scope of views held by teachers on current practices and what they would like to see in the future. For the participants in this study the basis of spirituality are relationships. In order to foster spiritual growth then, attention must be paid to the relationships that form the core of life. In an educational setting these relationships would include those between teachers, students, school leadership and parents. Hughes identifies the leadership of the school as having an indispensable contribution to make to the spiritual flourishing of their staff. They must model servant leadership as exemplified by four key traits, namely full consultation with staff, trust in staff as professionals, positive reinforcement and equal treatment.
The tensions inherent in school life often make spiritual discernment and growth a contentious issue. Here the diversity of the spiritual paths of teachers in Catholic schools comes to the fore. Hughes provides eight approaches to life which he draws from the interviews to illustrate the complexity of the human element in Catholic schools today. Here Hughes is, I suspect, elaborating a view that is derived from a sense of contemporary religious culture which privileges the spiritual quest and sees it developing in many different forms. Others would see many of the categories he describes as evidence of a multi-faceted but, nonetheless, relentless secularisation. The various life journeys are also open to question as they often lack a clear sense of boundary and there is a hint of a pejorative tone in some of the labels used. To illustrate the lack of clarity here is a part of how Hughes describes one of the life journeys, that of Reflectively Catholic, “ Some of them were highly involved in parish life, while others were much less involved. Most of them had some level of involvement. However, a couple of people in this group were not involved at all in parish life, but felt they were expressing their faith in other ways. However it was expressed, faith was important to the members of this group”. Aside from the question of whether, or to what extent, this group were involved in parish life, one wonders about the utility of a definition of faith that is open to individual interpretation and the value of a conclusion that faith, whatever it is, is important to this group. If we have, say, three teachers and all have significantly different understanding of what faith is but all agree that faith is important what have we learned by placing them in the same category?

Another talking point in the report is how Catholic secondary schools should meet the spiritual needs of their teachers. Hughes argues that the starting point for developing programs aimed at spiritual growth should be rooted in holistic concern for others, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable, and the manifest concern of schools to be responsive to the needs of all staff. This, of course, leaves open the question of what makes this ethos distinctive. In chapter three the question of Catholic ethos is discussed but I think the arguments advanced here would have been strengthened by comparison with teachers in other school systems. To be sure this was outside the range of the empirical portion of this study but an engagement with the wider literature would have given the discussion more focus. It is noted that prayers, liturgies, religious pictures are all distinctive indicators of Catholic identity and the schools visited all manifest these markers. It is always a little unnerving, however, when researchers uncritically accept claims to Catholic ethos in schools on the basis of the care for individuals or “each person was valued in their own right”. One rarely encounters schools of any stripe that do not espouse these values. In conclusion it is noted that the model of spiritual development of teachers developed by the Brisbane Archdiocese is both systematic and comprehensive. Hughes cautions, however, that this model is too theological, stressing a strong Christological foundation. Such a model does, however mark Catholic schools with an approach to spiritual formation which could at least distinguish it from more generic ones. This discussion points to wellspring issues in Catholic education which cannot be entered into in a report of this type and size.

Richard Rymarz holds the Peter and Doris Kule Chair in Catholic Religious Education, St Joseph’s College University of Alberta and Visiting Research Professor Quality of Life Flagship, Australian Catholic University.
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