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Jan Grajczonek

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In this final issue of the Journal of Religious Education for 2013 we offer a number of important insights into religious education in different contexts including school, parish and family. Gabriel Moran (1989) emphasises that religious education is both lifelong and lifewide. It is social, cultural and contextual extending beyond formal education in the school. While we know and understand the wider contexts of religious education, many of the papers in journals such as the Journal of Religious Education tend to focus on religious education in the school context. It is important that we appreciate the roles that other contexts such as the parish, family and indeed wider society play in religious education and further, that we also appreciate the important nature of dialogue and partnerships across those contexts.

Increasingly important aspects of religious educators’ work in schools concerns their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of their place within the Church’s mission. While teachers in Catholic schools are required to meet their local diocesan accreditation standards (demonstration of acquiring specific tertiary qualifications) at two levels, to both teach in the Catholic school as well as teach religion in the Catholic school, to what extent such standards measure teachers’ understanding and value of that mission and what are their roles in that mission, are not as readily available. Deborah Robertson’s paper explores the term ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ and its relevance in the contemporary Catholic school. She suggests a framework which would engage religious educators in a more concrete way of understanding their own place in ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ by considering the notions of ‘call’ and ‘commissioning’ and their potential in assisting them to understand their work as ministry.

At another level in the context of school religious education is that important level of leadership. Leadership is a complex, complicated and intricate phenomenon. Leadership in religious education is all of this and more, as school leaders in religious education not only lead the religion curriculum, but also the religious life of the school, the school’s role in the mission of the Church, the partnerships between school and parish, and so on. Religious education leaders serve many masters which at times can be competing. Michael Buchanan’s paper reports on a study that explored how leaders in religious education come to learn their craft, from where they draw their knowledge and skills in leadership, and what sustains them in this learning and leading. The part played by tertiary studies is quite significant in ways that extend beyond the actual units studied.

In her paper, Arniika Kuusisto of Finland considers religious education’s socio-cultural context of the family in Finland. Her study provides a number of key insights into how families of a minority religion navigate their religious beliefs and values within a contemporary secular, pluralist society. Religious education for these Adventist Finnish families is a focal aspect of their religion, as they seek to hand on the religious beliefs, values and practices to their children. For these families, religious education is a socialisation process that not only happens within the family but also within the wider social networks of their religion.

The family’s role in religious education particularly in terms of creating a space of personal interaction between parents and their children preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation was at the heart of one parish’s creative approach to sacramental preparation and education. Gerard Stoyles, David Hammer, Peter Caputi and Bryan Jones report on the development and implementation of the Confirmation and Life, 2012 sacramental program which pays attention to children’s own voices affording their personal spiritual engagement with the sacrament. It seeks to offer children along with their adolescent leaders “the experience of personal participation in the Church as Church-in-the-world” affording children “the opportunity to investigate confirmation not only from a theological perspective but also of viewing this sacrament as the invitation to take its fruits into interaction of daily life”. This paper outlines the children’s component of the program and provides insight into another key dimension of sacramental preparation.

Church-State relationships have occupied a significant place in Australia particularly within the controversial area of funding of schools and religious education programs in schools. In her article Charlotte Baines questions how existing religion-state relations in Victoria can both expand and limit the freedom of religion which also implies freedom from religion. The article suggests that pragmatic religion-state responses are ambiguous in that while the value of religious freedom is recognised, there is a failure to provide adequate state aid for education about diverse religions and beliefs. Australia is a pluralist nation and can be no longer recognised as an exclusivist Christian society, but to what extent is
this demographic reflected in religious education programs in government schools? The area is one that will continue to raise debate as governments and legal systems seek to preserve faith-based as well as secular interests in ways that acknowledge both. Charlotte Baines offers some worthwhile recommendations as a new way forward.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all contributors to our journal for 2013. Your papers have added significantly to the discipline of religious education. Religious education is a pivotal aspect not only of and for faith communities, schools and families but also of and for society. To continue to examine the nature and purpose of religious education in its many contexts is essential to all societies to ensure understanding of the roles of religion and religious beliefs in those societies.

I also would like to thank all reviewers of our articles who give of their time and expert knowledge generously to ensure that our journal continues to play its critical role in promoting the discipline of religious education.

References


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—Editor
We acknowledge the following people for their significant contribution to Volume 61 of the *Journal of Religious Education*:

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Professor Graham Rossiter – Faculty of Education
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We also acknowledge the valuable work of the peer reviewers who diligently review papers and offer feedback to authors.

The *Journal of Religious Education* makes a significant contribution to research in the field of Religious Education and to teachers in the field. From 2014, the Journal will be hosted within the La Salle Academy of Religious Education and in partnership with an international journal. Further details will be provided by the La Salle Academy in 2014.
In the last issue of the Journal, the article “Where was Jesus born?” by Maurice Ryan noted that “Robert Crotty (2009) thinks ‘that Jesus was conceived in the normal way by two Jewish parents, named Joseph and Mary’”.

Readers are advised that this statement is contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church:

From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary … Jesus was conceived “by the Holy Spirit without human seed.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church #496.

This teaching has indeed been honoured and celebrated for centuries in the Christian tradition.

The assertion by Robert Crotty does not reflect the opinion of the Australian Catholic University, nor the Faculty of Education. Teachers using such material contained in the article within the classroom should exercise due caution and prudence.
Empowering religious educators in Catholic schools through explorations of the meaning of ‘lay ecclesial ministry’: From call to commissioning

Deborah Robertson

Abstract

This paper conceptualises a contemporary perspective on ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ and explores its relevance to Australian Catholic school contexts. Developing a shared understanding of ministry in a school setting can provide a framework for guiding the teaching and leadership practice of religious educators. It may also serve to provide avenues for the formation of all staff members leading to their empowerment as lay Catholic and religious educators. The paper proceeds to provide an overview of the framework, including a detailed discussion of the notion of ‘call’ in light of its potential to enable religious educators and teachers to understand their work as ministry. The significance of ‘commissioning’ is highlighted because of its potential to illuminate the nature of teaching in a Catholic school in a way that reinforces the lay and ecclesial dimensions of ministry. The liturgical experience is presented as fundamental to engaging staff in the meaning of lay ecclesial ministry.

Author Note

Dr Deborah Robertson is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Educational Leadership in the Faculty of Education at Australian Catholic University.
A phrase such as ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ can be off putting for some religious educators and other school practitioners because of the formal nature of the language. However, it is argued in this paper that exploring the elements contained in this phrase can engage teachers in Catholic schools in an understanding of ministry that will empower them as people and as religious educators. In this context the word ‘empower’ includes both the secular understanding of fostering power in others for positive action, as well as the religious sense of opening people to the power of the Holy Spirit. All teachers in a Catholic school have a role in the religious education program and therefore the work of all teachers, indeed all staff, is considered to be ministry (Buchanan, 2011; Collins, 2005; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, #897-913).

In the following discussion the three aspects of ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ are explored for their meaning, and a framework is suggested for engaging teachers in this understanding in the context of their work. The framework also provides direction for school leaders in supporting not only religious educators but all teachers in the practice of ministry. The importance of the liturgical experience is emphasised as a way of development and support.

The development of the framework presented in this paper is based on an analysis of the document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Key themes from the document are reconceptualised for application in the specific context of Australian Catholic schools and, in so doing, provides a practical document for informing the practice of personal and professional development of teachers. It is not intended as an entire formation program but as a way of establishing a common language and familiarity with teaching as ministry which will inform formation programs. It can be used to assist principals and religious education coordinators, and other school leaders committed to the faith and professional development of staff, as a guide for reflection, discussion and liturgy.

By providing for a greater understanding of religious educators about their role in Catholic schools, as well as deepening knowledge about Church teaching on ministry, these explorations contribute to the content of the religious education program and the pedagogical expertise of teachers.

**The meaning of ‘lay ecclesial ministry’**

In the 50 years since the Second Vatican Council, there has been an attempt by church leaders and theologians to move towards a positive view of the place and work of lay people in the Church, rather than categorise the laity in negative terms as non-ordained or non-religious (Hagstrom, 2010). An emphasis on the importance of lay people in the ministry of the Church was clearly stated in the promulgations of Vatican II and has been reiterated continually in papal statements and church documents (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992; John Paul II, 1988; Paul VI, 1964; Paul VI, 1965). The phrase ‘lay ecclesial ministry’ was developed and adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), to describe the role of lay people who carry out work on the part of the church, for example parish pastoral ministers and Catholic school principals (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2005). The context of the Australian Catholic Church is similar to that of the United States in that the decline in the number of members of the ordained ministry and religious orders means that many roles previously carried out by them are now being carried out by lay persons (Belmonte, 2007). The unique Catholic education system in Australia, in which almost every Catholic parish has a Catholic school staffed by lay people, means that a consideration of lay ecclesial ministry is very relevant for the Australian context.

**Lay**

In answering the question ‘Who are the laity?’, Hagstrom (2010) provides a succinct explanation of the change in thinking about the role of lay people since Vatican II and which reclaims New Testament teaching:
Defining laity as all the faithful “except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church,” the council fathers declared baptism to be the means by which the lay faithful are incorporated into the people of God and come to share in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly offices of Christ. They are thus empowered to “carry out for their own part the mission of the whole people in the Church and in the world”. (p. 23)

The ministry of teachers is ‘lay’ because it is done by lay persons. The sacramental basis is the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist – through which all the baptised are called to “a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission” (Paul VI, 1965, #2).

When the word ‘ministry’ is used, many people think of ordained ministers, members of religious orders or those holding a formal title such as ‘campus minister’ (Buchanan, 2013). However, the role of laity has always had the distinctive role of working in the world ‘with the intent of bringing the secular order into conformity with God’s plan’ (USCBB, 2005, p. 13). The concept of the basis of ministry being in the Sacraments of Initiation immediately raises questions about the way in which staff members can participate in ministry when they are not baptised, or are baptised in a faith tradition other than Catholic, or are baptised in the Catholic Church but not engaged in any practice of their faith. However, it needs to be remembered that all teachers in Catholic schools are engaged in the work of ministry and therefore they need to understand the concept at the level of which they are capable. It is hoped that, through the experiences and understandings provided in an exploration of lay ecclesial ministry, the desire to embrace ministry more fully may be developed.

**Ecclesial**
The word “ecclesial” means relating to the church. The ministry is ecclesial because it has a place within the community of the Church, whose communion and mission it serves, and because “it is submitted to the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy” (USCBB, 2005, p. 12). It is important that this element of the phrase is not understood as a means of reinforcing ideas of hierarchy and control, but as being concerned with developing partnerships and working relationships that support ministry in schools. This understanding therefore demands collaboration with parish and diocese as well as developing a sense of being part of the universal church and its mission in the world.

**Ministry**
The word ‘ministry’ means service through the carrying out of particular functions and this meaning has both a secular and religious dimension (Macquarie Dictionary, 2013). In the ecclesial context, ministry is service as the means for accomplishing God’s mission in the communion of the Church (USCBB, 2005). As Catholic schools are established as part of God’s mission, the work carried out in them is service and therefore ministry.

In summary, lay ecclesial ministry refers to the carrying out of the mission of the church by lay people in service to others and in partnership with clergy and bishops. The framework presented in the following section is intended to provide a way of approaching the development of lay ecclesial ministry that could be used in any Catholic institution but is focused in this paper on teachers in Catholic schools.

**A Framework for Lay Ecclesial Ministry**
The framework set out in Figure 1 is a reconceptualisation of the four dimensions in the initiating, development and support of lay ecclesial ministry – Pathways, Formation, Authorisation, and the Workplace – as presented in Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord (USCBB, 2005). The intention is to provide guidelines for Catholic schools in Australia to support the understanding and development of lay ecclesial ministry in the context of building spiritual capital in our schools which has been identified as a significant contemporary need (Grace, 2010; Graham, 2011).
An overview

In the framework, ‘Formation’ is presented as the overarching idea within which the development of lay ecclesial ministry occurs. Canon Law is explicit about the need for formation for all those carrying out the work of ministry, including the laity: “Lay persons who permanently or temporarily devote themselves to special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation required to fulfill their function properly and to carry out this function conscientiously, eagerly, and diligently” (Code of Canon Law, 1983, #231).

Formation is spoken of extensively in the Australian context with relation to lay staff in Catholic schools because of the challenge that many staff are coming into Catholic schools without the formation that occurred ‘organically’ in faith communities in past generations (Rymarz, 2010). Many resources are already being invested in this area (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2013; Graham, 2011). Such formation needs to attend to the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral facets of the individual because all those in ministry need the following attributes:

- **Human qualities** critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God’s love and compassion.
- A **spirituality** and practice of prayer that root them in God’s Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all they do in ministry.
- Adequate **knowledge** in theological and pastoral studies, along with the **intellectual skill** to use it among the people and cultures of our country.
- The practical **pastoral abilities** called for in their particular ministry (USCCB, 2005, p. 34).

Formation also needs to be ongoing throughout the carrying out of the ministry and include appropriate agents in the process.
Underpinning the framework is the physical space and emotional climate of ‘The Workplace’, in this case the Catholic school, which is a critically important part of supporting ministry. The environment and climate of the workplace, as well as the processes in place, need to reflect an understanding of the work in Catholic schools as ministry. This is very well explained in *Co-workers* (USCCB, 2005) in light of contemporary workplace requirements and the Gospel:

> Lay ecclesial ministers … function in a workplace that shares both the characteristics of a faith community of co-workers, as described by St. Paul, and the characteristics of a modern organization. Thus, in the ministerial workplace, one finds the special challenge of establishing policies and practices that integrate Gospel values and best organisational practices. This is particularly true as regards the management of human resources. Best organizational practices are consistent with Gospel values. They balance the goals and needs of the organisation, its workers and the community in which it is located. They imply respect for persons, justice, integrity, efficient use of resources, successful accomplishment of mission and goals, and an environment in which committed and skilled workers are treated fairly. (p. 61)

What this means in practice in an Australian Catholic school needs to be extensively explored in a separate topic and is beyond the limits of this paper.

Within the context provided by ‘Formation’ and ‘The Workplace’ are two further dimensions: ‘Pathways’ and ‘Authorisation’. The dimension of ‘Pathways’ includes the desire to teach and the call that can be identified within that desire. Discernment involves exploring the meaning of the call and deciding how to respond. Suitability refers to the fact that not all people are suited to do that to which they feel called in the first instance, or perhaps they are called but not in that particular context.

The dimension of authorisation refers to the ecclesial structure of authorisation for lay ecclesial ministry coming from the bishop and parish priest. Certification involves the achievement of the correct qualifications and is generally not a major issue for Catholic schools in Australia. It can also include numerous accreditation requirements which vary from diocese to diocese. The processes of appointment are included in this dimension because, ideally, the consideration of the authenticity of the call and the suitability of the applicant to carry out the work of ministry, should be key factors in the consideration of offers and acceptances of employment. In reality the practice probably occurs more often within the dimension of ‘The Workplace’. The practice of commissioning with its blessings and rituals is another crucial part of ‘Authorisation’.

The dimensions of ‘Pathways’ and ‘Authorisation’ are investigated in more detail in the following section within a suggestion for their enactment in a school context in a process named as ‘From call to commissioning’.

**From call to commissioning**

Based on the framework presented earlier, this process is suggested as a practical way of engaging Catholic school staff in an exploration of lay ecclesial ministry with a view to enhancing their personal development as Christians and their capacity as religious educators.

**Pathways.** The basis of an understanding of teaching in a Catholic school as ministry needs to begin with an understanding of call, the core concept in the Pathways dimension of the framework.

**Call.** Call is defined here as a sense of being called by God to undertake particular work, although it is acknowledged that a sense of calling or vocation does not need to have a religious dimension. The importance of a sense of calling has long been recognised as a strong motivation in the undertaking of, and persevering with, the work of teaching (Bullough and Hall-Kenyon, 2012). However, there has been little research specifically addressing the experience of being called, either in the secular or religious sense. The most significant research in the area of calling in the context of teachers in Catholic schools has been carried out in the United States (Fox, 2002, 2005, 2010) and this work has significantly influenced the development of the USCCB concept of lay ecclesial ministry.

Call begins with a desire that is felt but not necessarily understood or articulated. The role of the leader in a Catholic school is to bring “to conscious awareness of that which had already been experienced by grace” (Fox & Bechtle, 2005, p. xiii; Rahner, 1971) and to:
try to build rope ladders between the experience of people devoting their energies to the mission of the Church, and the received language of the tradition of the Church...Important both for the individuals and for the coherence of the mission. (Fox & Bechtle, 2005, pp. xiii-xiv)

The articulation of the mission of the church in the “received language of the tradition of the church” is particularly applicable to the current and following generation of teachers entering Catholic schools because of the realities of their disconnection from the traditional community formation referred to earlier.

The desire to undertake a teaching ministry is often implicit. Fox (2005) provides quotations from her research in the United States with teachers in Catholic schools which would be consistent with the Australian experience: “I think this is what I should be doing now – but I do not know where it will lead’ and ‘I feel this is where I am supposed to be now’ “ (p. 4). Fox concludes that the “deep desires of the heart” reflected in these comments lead to an experience of call that comes from both within the individual but also from those around them (Fox, 2005). When discussing lay ecclesial ministry, the concept of service is central to an understanding of call:

To most people their calling does not come with a trumpet blast from heaven. It comes from a combination of what attracts them, what they are capable of doing, what others call on them to do, and where they are accepted.

No one has a ‘right’ to a particular ministry or task. It is not a privilege or a right, but a service. (Hellwig, 2005, p. 40)

Buechner (1973) has expressed this as: “The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (p. 95). Recognition of where this place is, leads to a consideration of the meaning and place of discernment.

Discernment. Discernment can be defined in various ways depending on the context, but the following definition is relevant for this discussion:

Discernment is a process of prayerful reflection which leads a person or community to an understanding of God’s call at a given time or in particular circumstances of life. It involves listening to God in all the ways God communicates with us: in prayer, in the scriptures, through the Church and the world, in personal experience, and in other people. (Challies, 2007, p. 1)

It cannot be definitively stated how many of those entering teaching have undertaken a serious discernment process such as described in this definition. As with the informal sense of ‘call’, it can be assumed that most aspiring teachers unconsciously test their call through the rigours of their training and practicum placements. Whatever process brought the teacher to a Catholic school, it is fitting that they enter into a more formal discernment process in light of their work of ministry.

Suitability. A sense of calling in itself is not adequate as justification for the undertaking of teaching as ministry and this is reinforced by the US Bishops Committee in their consideration of lay ecclesial ministry:

... a self-discerned call by the individual is not sufficient. Their call must also become one that is discerned within the Church and authenticated by the bishop, or his delegate, who alone is able to authorize someone to serve in ecclesial ministry. (USCCB, 2005, p. 13)

In an Australian Catholic school the task of discerning whether a person is suitable for the ministry of teaching in a Catholic school is usually undertaken at both the school and diocesan Catholic education office levels by panels consisting of but not limited to members of the Catholic education office, school principals and other members of the school community. The degree to which the panel can apply decisions based on suitability for ministry, rather than qualifications and experience for the particular job, is often limited by two factors: the understanding of teaching in Catholic schools as ministry by the members of the panel; and the level of need to fill the vacant position in relation to the number of suitable applicants. Nevertheless, both the individual and the panel need to consider: Is the applicant suitable to undertake the work of ministry in a Catholic school? For the individual it is a question of whether s/he has discerned that they ‘belong’ in a Catholic school community and if that community can support them to become the person they are meant to be. Although this framework is probably going to be used with those already employed in Catholic schools, the question remains the same.
The ‘Pathways’ dimension of the framework is basic to the understanding of lay ecclesial ministry and what is needed to support both school leaders and teachers as religious educators in addressing the concepts of call, discernment and suitability. Although ideally this would occur before people are employed in Catholic schools, the reality is that ‘getting a job’ and ‘filling a vacancy’ are usually of greater practical concern at the time of initial employment. It is therefore even more important that exploring the ‘Pathways’ dimension occurs both at the beginning of employment in a Catholic school but, also, throughout a person’s career as their life and career develops and changes.

**Exploring ‘call’ through the liturgical experience**

Before presenting some suggestions for exploring the aspects of call in a liturgical context, it is appropriate to present the argument for the importance of the liturgical experience for all dimensions of this framework. This could be a separate essay on the topic of liturgical catechesis (Rosier, 2006) and, certainly, resources from various Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) sites (e.g. Sloan, 2013), and RCIA programs run throughout Australia (Catechumenate Office, 2013), would prove very helpful for the support of school-based formation. This is because the RCIA program is precisely a ritual response to the need for those called to faith to be supported and developed in their understanding of their call and faith journey. However, for the purpose of this discussion, the terminology of the catechumenate is not being used (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults Study Edition, 2003).

Deciding on a definition of “liturgy” as it is understood in schools could also be a lengthy discursive process so, although other kinds of prayer and reflection are important parts of the school based spiritual experience, only the Eucharist and Liturgies of the Word are intended in this paper by the phrase “liturgical experience”.

Recent studies in a variety of disciplines, and the growth of liturgical theology over the past 150 years, highlight the importance of ritual and liturgy to the life of Catholics (Morrill, 2006, pp. 5-10). Its role in engaging the individual in the development of Catholic culture and identity, as well as in faith, is helpfully explained by Peters:

> Rich rituals help us to embody institutional values, enflame the heart, and foster zeal for the mission in all the participants. In a familiar, safe environment symbols, action, and word embody the deepest beliefs of the Gospel and help us to recognize ourselves as part of something so much greater than we are. (Fox, 2005, p. 117)

An emphasis on embodiment is reflected in other discussions about the importance of the embodied ritual of liturgy (Ross, 2008) and provides a necessary balance to the sometimes excessive emphasis on the intellectual, as epitomised by the requirements for religious educators and school leaders to undertake extensive postgraduate study.

Liturgies have been described as having the power to transform individuals and act as a pedagogy “that trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get hold of our heart and ‘aim’ our love toward the kingdom of God” (Smith, 2009, p. 33). Deely (as cited in Ross, 2008) speaks of God “shaping our lives” through liturgical ritual (p. 45). The ecclesial nature of liturgy makes it an act of community and therefore a “re-formation” of a member into a community which acts as a balance to the prevailing individualism of the surrounding society. It also provides the individual with the support to become drawn into the Christian story and become the person who they are truly meant to be (Smith, 2009).

The sense of being formed and shaped as part of a cultural identity is further reinforced by McDermott (2005) who highlights the formative nature of being brought into a culture through ritual and liturgy:

>Culture is that web of expressions of the human spirit consisting of behaviour patterns, beliefs, institutions, art, rituals, symbols, and narratives, a web which, once it has been expressed, turns around to shape both those who have expressed the culture and those who inherit it. (p. 88)

Fundamentally, however, the liturgical experience is personally nourishing for those who participate:

>We come to the liturgy hungry and thirsty for the word, for the assembly, for the body and blood of the Lord. We are nourished by the bread of life and by the community which shares in this banquet. We need the liturgy – like food and drink, like sleep and work, like friends. (Bernardin, 1997, p. 37)
It is hopefully evident that individuals need the liturgical experience to be personally nourished and formed, and that the church community as represented in the Catholic school needs the liturgical experience to be reminded of its ecclesial and cultural identity and the place of each person within it.

The following table presents readings and music that could form a focus for a series of liturgies. It was suggested by the description of ‘call’ as experienced throughout salvation history given by Fox (2005, p. 6). The hymns have been chosen because they are included in the As One Voice hymnal (1992) which is available in most parishes. All the hymns and songs are available as performances on YouTube and therefore can be used as a resource for learning the hymns or as a basis for reflection. There are many other hymns around the themes of creation, being called, and being chosen and each school will have a number of other resources on which to draw.

The sequence of stories presented looks at our salvation history through the theme of the ‘call’ and begins with the image and stories of God calling creation, including human beings, into existence. Stories of call can then be identified in the Old and New Testaments. Our continuing Christian story provides many examples of saints and heroes whose stories provide a rich description of how ‘call’ can be experienced. Allowing for the exploration of each person’s story in the light of this communal story enables people to articulate the whispers of the call and what has brought them to their current life situation.

Table 1
The Theme of Call in our Communal and Personal History: Resources for Liturgies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salvation History</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God called creation into being. And then invited human beings to be part of the ongoing process.</td>
<td>Genesis 1:1-24&lt;br&gt;Genesis 1: 26-31&lt;br&gt;Genesis 2</td>
<td>All you works of God. (Haugen, 1992)&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEezurdfzak">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEezurdfzak</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later there was a call to covenant portrayed in the Old Testament, a call to a more intimate relationship with the parent God.</td>
<td>Abraham and Sarah&lt;br&gt;Genesis 17&lt;br&gt;Miriam&lt;br&gt;Exodus 2, 15.&lt;br&gt;Moses&lt;br&gt;Exodus 3</td>
<td>Strong and constant. (Andersen, 1992)&lt;br&gt;Like a child rests. (Walker, 1992)&lt;br&gt;Here I am Lord. (Schutte, 1992)&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab-gLmGnt7E">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab-gLmGnt7E</a>&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0tA5bRgqTI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0tA5bRgqTI</a>&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h82lkLrFkxc">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h82lkLrFkxc</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And then with Jesus came the call to follow and be part of his ministry.</td>
<td>Call of the first disciples&lt;br&gt;Matthew 4: 18-22&lt;br&gt;The Samaritan Woman&lt;br&gt;John 4:1-42&lt;br&gt;Martha and Mary&lt;br&gt;Luke 10:38-42</td>
<td>The Galilee Song. (Andersen, 1992)&lt;br&gt;God has chosen me. (Farrell, 1992)&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab-gLmGnt7E">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab-gLmGnt7E</a>&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45TIn8BeA5o">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45TIn8BeA5o</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>And the call has been ongoing through our Christian history.</td>
<td>St Francis of Assisi&lt;br&gt;Edith Stein&lt;br&gt;Mary Mackillop</td>
<td>Katy Perry - Who am I living for?&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld0X8jPkhMs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld0X8jPkhMs</a>&lt;br&gt;Carolina Liar - Show me what I am looking for?&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iqCfxgKZd8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iqCfxgKZd8</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And the call is present in our lives.</td>
<td>Personal stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is not only in religious music that the theme of call can be identified. Much secular music makes reference to the experience of call and people can identify examples in contemporary music such as in the examples given in Table 1.

Formation begins with assisting those who desire and feel called to work in Catholic schools to articulate their experience. The experience of a variety of liturgies allows them to experience ancient and modern stories of calling, relate this to their own experience and therefore make connections with “the received language of the tradition of the church” (Fox & Bechtle, 2005, pp. xiii-xiv). Liturgies provide the time and space to recognise their desire and call, discern their response and suitability, participate in ongoing formation, and carry out their ministry in the understanding of their role in the church and its mission. The communion with God and church experienced in liturgy supports both the individual and the community in this endeavour.

This approach may not appear to instantly bear fruit in teachers recognising their work as ministry, or themselves as lay ecclesiastical ministers, because they may not have the maturity of life experience or spiritual practice to engage fully. However, it is a way of beginning the journey and giving people the language which enables them to engage at the appropriate time as well as the spiritual nourishment to grow as people and teachers.

**Authorisation.** In the context of lay ecclesiastical ministry, authorisation is the “process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent church authority” (USCCB, 2005, p. 54) and in terms of this framework it includes the aspects of the roles of bishop and priests, certification, appointment, commissioning and blessing and rituals. Although the two aspects of certification and appointment are important issues for lay ecclesiastical ministry in general (Wood, 2011), they are well-defined and implemented in the Australian Catholic school context for teachers and will not be discussed further in this paper.

**Bishop and Priest.** The role of the bishop and priests in the act of authorisation is a sign of the interdependence of all church communities and individuals within them in the life of the church (Wood, 2011, p. 4). The bishop is the centre of communion in the diocese and the link of Communion with the universal Church (USCCB, 2005, p. 22). The priest assists the bishop “in the work of teaching, sanctifying, and guiding” the local church community (USCCB, 2005, p. 24). However, what needs to be emphasised is that this aspect of ‘Authorisation’ is about the development of a mutual understanding of the nature of the church and the way service is organised in partnership for the carrying out of the mission. Lay ecclesiastical ministers can be authorised at either, or both, the diocesan and parish levels by the bishop and / or priest.

**Commissioning.** Lay ecclesiastical ministers are part of the great commission given by Jesus to his followers: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28: 16-20). In the context of lay ecclesiastical ministry, commissioning provides the ecclesiastical recognition of teachers as religious educators in Catholic schools (Wood, 2011, p. 2). This signifies the relationship of the teacher with both the church community and the pastors (bishop and or priest) who have authorised them on behalf of the church.

The idea that individuals need to be authorised in a way that emphasises the ecclesial nature of their work is one that is usually taken seriously in Australia and is enacted, usually in the context of liturgy at the diocesan or parish level, in many places. These liturgies include the aspect of blessings and rituals.

**Blessings and Rituals.** The importance of rituals has already been discussed. A blessing is an act of worship and is always part of a commissioning ritual which is significant in the work of teachers as lay ecclesiastical ministers. The church considers blessings to be sacramentals and therefore “sacred signs that render holy various occasions in life” (Paul VI, 1963, # 60) as well as dedicating people to God’s work (Catholic Encyclopedia, 2013). As ecclesial actions they signify that we are in partnership, we need to work together; we cannot carry out our ministry in isolation:

Lay ecclesiastical ministry is not just a job like any other job. It is a ministry, even though it should be subject to just and sound personnel policies. Authorization in the context of prayer emphasizes the spiritual dimension of ministry at the same time it underscores the relationship between the lay ecclesiastical minister, the community gathered in prayer, and the authorizing minister. (Wood, 2011)
The potential for a commissioning liturgy to achieve these purposes of witnessing to and strengthening the ecclesial community is expanded upon in the next section.

**Experiencing ‘commissioning’ through the liturgical experience**

Informal discussions with my students who work mostly in Catholic schools indicate that many teachers, and even principals and school leaders (Davison, 2006), are not ‘commissioned’ into their role in any way at all, let alone in a way that connects their work to ministry. On the other hand, the idea that commissioning is an important part of induction into Catholic schools is taken seriously in many places and is enacted from student level, with the induction of student leaders, to the level of the induction of principals in many schools and dioceses. An example at Diocesan level takes place in Parramatta and is available in a clip on YouTube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj3kyTH87UA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj3kyTH87UA). A web search reveals other examples of commissioning ceremonies at parish level (Catholic Diocese Ballarat, 2013) as well as resources for commissioning ceremonies (Senger, 2011). A public commissioning ceremony can reinforce the authorisation of teachers as lay ecclesial ministers as “an ecclesial moment” (Macquordale & Reynolds, 2011) and is one way of enabling new teachers to understand that they are part of something bigger.

The ceremony of commissioning is usually only a short ritual within the context of the celebration of Eucharist and therefore much of the power of the observance lies in the preparation and conduct of the liturgy itself. Attention to: the choice of music; quality of performance; opportunities for participation; contribution to the beauty of the environment; reverent yet joyful sharing of the community gathering; connections made through the choice of readings and content of the prayers and homily to the concept of lay ecclesial ministry and its meaning; all have the potential to engage teachers and the community in an understanding of lay ecclesial ministry and its place in the church. To do each of these things well requires time and the commitment of resources by schools, systems and dioceses.

Even in dioceses where there is a strong focus on commissioning, it is difficult to prioritise the importance of universal participation because of the practical demands of daily school life in dealing with seemingly more pressing needs such as the addressing the implementation of the Australian Curriculum and the pastoral care needs of the school. It is also expensive for country dioceses to have a diocesan focus and bring people together at that level. However, it is not only worthwhile to make people feel part of the bigger picture but it is essential to emphasise the ecclesial dimension of ministry.

**Conclusion**

The benefits of empowering a person to discern and live out their calling in lay ecclesial ministry as a teacher and religious educator in Catholic schools are summarised by St Catherine of Siena: “If you are what you are meant to be, you will set the whole world on fire.” This paper has presented a reconceptualisation of ideas contained in *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (USCCB, 2005) that the author argues have great potential to the application of the formation of religious educators in Catholic schools in Australia. A framework has been presented and reconceptualised for Catholic schooling in Australia to provide guidelines for exploring the concept of lay ecclesial ministry. The dimensions of Pathways and Authorisation have been explored in the context of a process named ‘from call to commissioning’ which has focused in particular on reflecting on call, and celebrating commissioning, through liturgies that express our history and experience as a Catholic community and witness the commitment to ministry of lay people working in Catholic schools on behalf of the Church.

**Acknowledgement**

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**References**


EMPOWERING RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS IN
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS THROUGH EXPLORATIONS
OF THE MEANING OF ‘LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY’:
FROM CALL TO COMMISSIONING


Supporting learners learning for leadership in religious education

Michael T Buchanan

Abstract
There are a variety of ways in which educational leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education may be supported in their own learning for leadership. In recent times much attention has been devoted to school leadership preparation in a variety of contexts. A range of systemic approaches to supporting educational leadership preparation and development has involved linking certain types of preparation to career structures. A growing trend occurring in many education systems links the attainment of a higher education degree to the career structure for leaders and aspiring leaders. This paper reports on the preliminary findings of a short term research project which sought to identify how those enrolled in tertiary studies might be supported in their learning for leadership in religious education. The participants in the study were leaders and aspiring leaders in primary and secondary schools enrolled in a Masters in Religious Education course. From the perspective of the participants the preliminary findings suggested that they can be supported in their studies through opportunities for mentoring, leadership development and networking. The findings are significant in that they provide insights from participants who have the potential to assist curriculum design reform and the delivery of such programs. Ultimately such reforms should be oriented towards meeting the perceived needs of lifelong learners and make opportunities for continuing education even more relevant for leaders and aspiring leaders particularly in religious education.

Author Note
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Learning for leadership through participation in continuing education via studies in a higher education course has increased amongst leaders and aspiring leaders. The increasingly complex and multifaceted nature of the roles and responsibilities of leaders in all types of schools and systems has been highlighted by the work of international and intergovernmental bodies such as the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007). The OECD’s investigation into improving school leaders involved participants from many parts of the world including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The OECD’s Activity on Improving School Leadership (2007) emphasised the importance of proper preparation and ongoing learning for people in positions of leadership as well as those aspiring to leadership. Institutions such as the National College of School Leadership, Nottingham, UK and the Centre for Leadership and Learning at the University of London have set benchmarks for other leadership learning centres in a variety of countries to aspire to in order to form people for leadership. Furthermore many universities throughout the world have included courses within their education faculties which are oriented towards learning for leadership in education (Anderson et al, 2007). In recent times an array of systemic approaches concerned with preparing people for leadership have been linked to career structures (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012). This trend is also apparent within the context of Catholic education in Australia where in recent times a wave of leadership reforms across many dioceses have been specifically oriented towards learning for leadership in religious education through enrolment in higher education courses. This paper reports on the preliminary findings of a short term study which sought to discover how studies at tertiary level could further support leaders and aspiring leaders in their learning for leadership in religious education. The participants involved in this study were leaders and aspiring leaders of religious education in Catholic primary and secondary schools across Australia. One of the problems faced by many school leaders is trying to meet the demands of tertiary studies as well as fulfil demands associated with their professional role as a school leader (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012). The aim of this study was to discover how the participants involved in this study perceived they could be supported in their learning for leadership. The preliminary findings suggest that leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education can be supported through opportunities for mentoring, leadership development and networking. Prior to exploring the preliminary findings an overview of the literature and the background to the study including an outline of the research design is presented as it provides a context for contemplating the findings and possible recommendations from the study.

**Literature and background informing the study**

The trends in learning for leadership in religious education should not be viewed in isolation to the trends that have impacted upon school leadership in general. Therefore an overview of the literature guiding learning for leadership in education in general is explored in this section. Contemporary literature pertaining to educational leadership has generally been concerned with the achievement of improved curriculum outcomes for students, staff development, people management, staff and student wellbeing, and successful bureaucratic management (Barth, 2001; Buchanan, 2013b; Christie & Limerick, 2004; Durbin & Daglish, 2003; Golanda, 1991; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). There are a number of avenues available for leaders and aspiring leaders to undertake in their quest for professional growth and development (Russell & Cranston; 2012). Research into the significance of leadership preparation and development as a means of developing the necessary skills to address current and emerging challenges faced by school is however comparatively limited (Moorosi & Bush, 2011). More research in this area is needed especially given the highly complex and challenging educational environments which require more sophisticated and successful school leadership than ever before (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012). Learning for leadership can take many forms; and Russell and Cranston (2012) revealed that many leaders and aspiring leaders preferred avenues such as the opportunity to access international expertise, professional reading, and membership to professional associations and continuing education by undertaking postgraduate studies at a university. Some dioceses throughout Australia have developed leadership in religious education policies that require such leaders to hold or undertake studies in a postgraduate qualification in religious education such as a Masters degree in religious education.
There are many advantages to be gained from continuing education. Russell and Cranston's (2012) research revealed that school leaders and aspiring leaders who undertook postgraduate studies perceived a distinct improvement in their leadership capabilities. They found that participant coverage of current research as well as exposure to an academic approach to learning about leadership theories enabled leaders and aspiring leaders to utilise this knowledge to confidently structure leadership change initiatives in their own schools. The research of Russell and Cranston (2012) identified some benefits to be gained from continuing education via postgraduate studies in tertiary education contexts. From a broader perspective other scholars have explored the reconceptualisation of university offerings as a means to support people committed to lifelong learning in Australian, European, Hong Kong, and North American contexts (Barrow & Keeney, 2012; Chisholm, 2012; Lee & Fleming, 2012). Although leaders and aspiring leaders value learning for leadership through higher education, little is known about how to best support these people in their learning. The preliminary findings reported on in this paper may contribute to narrowing the gap in the literature as this study sought to identify the types of support that leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education perceived they required to support their learning for leadership though the attainment of a higher education qualification.

Continuing education at a higher degree level requires a serious commitment. The stronger the commitment the better chance there is of success. This study sought to identify the kind of support needed to successfully continue education from the perspective of those studying for a Masters degree pertaining to leadership in religious education in Catholic schools. While the findings might be relevant to other continuing education settings in general, the limitations of this study are presented to illustrate the scope and relevance of the findings reported in this paper. The participants involved in the study were leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education in Catholic schools across Australia undertaking a leadership unit pertaining to leadership in religious education as part of a Masters degree. The participants were sponsored by the centralised authority for Catholic education in their respective dioceses. In some dioceses promotion to a senior leadership in religious education within schools is linked to the successful completion of a higher education degree.

It is plausible to perceive that the worldwide movements focussing on learning for leadership in schools contributed to the impetus for sponsoring leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education in Catholic schools to undertake higher education studies. Across numerous international settings, discussions about the changing expectations of leaders have contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of religious schools in the broader educational landscape. Significant attention has been devoted to research on leadership and leadership learning in education during the past decade (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; MacBeath, Frost, Swaffield, & Waterhouse, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Peterson, 2002; Robinson, 2007). The lessons that can be drawn from the international body of literature are relevant and vital to the needs of all leaders in all types of schools however, Chapman and Buchanan's (2012) research found that while these developments were necessary for the development of leaders in faith-based schools they were not entirely sufficient. The growing body of discourse highlights certain aspects of the distinctive nature leadership in faith-based schools (Bezzina, Burford, & Duignan, 2007; Cook, 2008; Duignan, 2007; Holman, 2007; Miller, 2007; Neidhart & Carlin, 2011). These distinctions are also relevant to learning for leadership in religious education in Catholic schools.

While the international trends in educational leadership development are relevant to all leaders, it is the distinctive nature of the religious dimension of a Catholic school that requires a critical examination of the religious leadership dimension in such schools (Buchanan, 2013a). At the systemic level education authorities supporting Catholic education in Australia have strategically encouraged leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education to participate in continuing education through higher studies in educational leadership, such as Masters Degrees as a means to achieving their career aspirations. Ultimately the goal has been not only to learn for leadership in religious education but also to lead in the light of the distinctive nature of leadership in a faith-based school. To achieve this goal the challenge for Catholic education authorities has been to ensure that learning for leadership courses offered at Masters level will provide leadership training in the areas of administration and management, pedagogy and educational aspects, while at the same time develop strong leadership in religious education. Viewed from a global perspective...
attention to the distinct nature of leadership in religious education in Catholic schools is worthy of considerable attention given that Catholic education serves approximately 55 million children with over 175,000 kindergarten, primary and secondary schools throughout the world (Pittau, 2000).

The participants were leaders and aspiring leaders of religious education in Catholic schools committed to learning for leadership though enrolment in a higher education qualification through the faculty of education at Australian Catholic University. The participants involved in this study, perceived that they held demanding leadership positions in schools and felt that their professional role added to the complexities of the challenges they faced through their commitment to continuing education. While the course aims to address leadership issues within the context of the distinctive nature of leadership in Catholic schools, the participants’ experiences of learning and the support they perceive they need in their learning may be relevant in broader learning contexts.

**Research design**

A brief overview of the research design drawn from Buchanan (2013c) provides a context from which to understand the perceptions of the participants that underpin the findings of this study. The participants involved in this study were enrolled in a Masters in Religious Education offered by the Faculty of Education at Australian Catholic University. The university is made up of six campuses across the eastern states of Australia. Enrolment in the Masters program is campus based; but once students are enrolled in the course they are free to enrol in units offered through any campus as well as those offered in fully online mode. Some units are offered in face to face lecture and tutorial mode, others in research mode under the supervision of an academic staff member and others are offered fully online.

Those who enrol in the Masters program are generally sponsored by the centralised Catholic authority having jurisdiction over the schools in which participants are employed. Each centralised authority is diocesan based and each diocese is responsible for the Catholic schools within its own geographical boundary. The centralised authority within each diocese is commonly referred to as the Catholic Education Office. Each Catholic education office determines the level of sponsorship offered to educators employed within their respective schools. This may take the form of sponsorship that covers the total enrolment cost of the degree or it may also take the form of study leave opportunities. Some Catholic education offices pay part of the enrolment costs upon successful completion of each unit studied within the degree. Keeping in mind the distinctive nature of leadership in faith-based schools, the Catholic Education Offices generally offer sponsorship to leaders and aspiring leaders to help build leadership capacity within their schools particularly in the area of religious education.

The participants who were invited to participate in this study were enrolled in a Masters unit which is generally taken in the final stages of the degree. The unit focused on various leadership dimensions which have been associated with the distinctive nature of leadership in Catholic schools (but not exclusive to leadership in such schools). These dimensions include educational leadership, curriculum leadership, faith leadership, spiritual leadership, ministerial leadership, and religious leadership (Buchanan, 2013a). The unit is offered in a fully online mode and those enrolled in the unit have access to the lecturer via online discussions, email and telephone communication. There are online discussion forums for students to interact with each other as a means to stimulate peer learning. The cohort participating in this study was invited because, by the time they enrolled in this unit: (i) they would have experienced the range of learning mode offered; and (ii) all members of the cohort were in leadership positions within schools or aspiring to be leaders. This cohort was deemed suitable to provide insights into discovering the kind of support leaders and aspiring leaders perceive they need from their university course.

There were a total of twenty-one people enrolled in the unit and at the completion of the unit a letter of invitation was sent to each person. The letter invited them to participate in the study. If they agreed to participate in the study they were asked to download a survey questionnaire from an online learning environment site, type their responses to the survey / questionnaire and return it via post in a stamped self-addressed envelope which was provided. The surveys were completed anonymously in that participants were asked not to disclose their name or any information that would reveal their identity. Twenty responses were received out of a potential of twenty-one participants.
The survey/questionnaire asked four broad questions about the type of support participants felt they needed to help them complete a Masters Degree. They were asked what type of support they felt they needed in general and what type of support they felt they need from the school in which they were employed, the centralised authority to which their school belonged (the Catholic Education Office in their respective diocese) and the university in which they were undertaking their course (in this case Australian Catholic University). This paper reports on the preliminary findings pertaining to the type of support the participants’ perceived that wanted from the Masters Degree program offered by the university.

Founded on the assumptions that knowledge is constructed and that learning can only be understood in social contexts, this qualitative study was situated within a constructivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Daniels, 2001). It sought to construct meaning from the perceptions of the leaders and aspiring leaders about the support they conveyed in their responses to the questionnaire. The conceptualisation of the participants’ responses to the questionnaire was guided by the principles underpinning the original approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) to grounded theory. By intensive engagement with the participants’ responses particular categories of findings began to emerge. According to Glaser (1998; 1992; 1978) the categories of findings should emerge from the data. Categorising the data in this way allows for the data to tell their own story (Goulding, 2002). This approach was appropriate because little is known about the kind of support leaders and aspiring leaders of religious education in Catholic schools perceive that they need if they are to engage in continuing education at a Masters Degree level. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that if one wants to know and understand a particular phenomenon where very little is known, one should ask those involved.

As indicated by the number of participants, this is a small scale study, but the qualitative researcher is not preoccupied with numbers of participants or numbers of participant responses as in qualitative research, events, incidents, and experiences, not people per se, are typically the objects of purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Glaser (1998; 1992; 1978) has emphasised that it is only necessary to stay in the field of data collection until the categories have reached saturation point. This is not determined by the quantity of participants but rather the quality of data, for saturation occurs when no new information or categories emerge from the data. Category saturation is an important factor that contributes to the plausibility of the study (Glaser, 1998).

Findings and Discussion

In terms of the type of support the participants felt they needed for their quest for learning for leadership in religious education three preliminary categories of findings emerged. The participants felt they could be supported through mentoring experiences. They also perceived that if their studies were oriented towards leadership development then this would support their learning and professional growth. Finally, the participants conceived that the program could help them to network and this would assist them in their learning and professional growth. Each of these findings is discussed in the following section.

Mentoring

Mentoring is commonly defined as a professional relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists a less experienced (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance a person’s professional and personal growth. A range of literature has explored the role and success of mentoring leaders and aspiring leaders (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Daresh, 2007; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; MacKay, 2006; Smith, 2007). The participants perceived that mentoring would assist them in their learning for leadership in religious education and leadership in general. They perceived that it would be beneficial to seek mentors from a variety of sources. These sources are reflected in Figure 1 and suggest that mentoring may occur in a range of educational settings and contexts. Mentoring is regarded as a significant form of learning for leadership (Lacey, 1999).
Table 1
Sources of Mentoring for Learning for Leadership in Religious Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Mentor(s)</th>
<th>CEO Mentor(s)</th>
<th>University Mentor(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to be a leader in general</td>
<td>Bring RE teachers up to speed with using and incorporating current resources</td>
<td>Learning how to come to terms with loneliness and solitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day to day running of the school</td>
<td>Leading school-based professional learning / development</td>
<td>Academic growth and professional growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running Meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence to lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaired Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence and competence in trying new initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To contribute to school leadership issues</td>
<td>Leading whole school and diocesan initiatives and events</td>
<td>Linking theory to practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education sought out other members of their school leadership team to mentor them in their learning of how to be a school leader in general. They felt that a mentor of this calibre could help them develop skills and experience in leading the day to day running of the school, including running meetings and chairing committees. Mentoring has the potential to be an effective form of learning when it occurs “in an environment that’s familiar and relatively comfortable” (MacKay, 2006, p. 49) and the leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education believed they could learn how to be a school leader with the ability to address the day to day issues that any senior leader would.

They also sought mentoring by religious education specialists in their centralised authority (i.e. Catholic Education Offices). The religious education specialists from their respective Catholic Education Offices were perceived as being able to mentor them in issues pertaining to leadership in religious education. They felt they could learn how to lead school-based professional learning in religious education for the staff members in their faculty. They also felt that the religious education specialists could mentor them about how to encourage staff to use and incorporate current resources in their classroom teaching programs. Furthermore they benefited from mentoring that would help them to lead diocesan initiatives that extended religious education beyond the classroom and involved all member of the school not just the teachers of religious education.

The participants also sought mentoring from their lecturers from their Masters course. Usually the type of mentoring required from academics is associated with attaining a higher performance in achieving the outcomes of the course (Hansford, Tennent & Ehrich, 2003). However in this study the type of mentoring extended beyond the pursuit of academic achievement (Buchanan, 2013c). It also focussed on issues such as dealing with complex issues at the school level, time management, articulating the complexities of the role and how that may impact on leadership in religious education.

Mentoring appeared as a key priority that would support learning for leadership in religious education. A Masters Degree in Religious Education could accommodate studies in mentoring which enable leaders and aspiring leaders to critically reflect on various modes and avenues for mentoring. Learning about mentoring and various forms of mentoring would enable participants in the course to consider mentoring options that might be relevant for their own learning. Furthermore academics could include mentoring experiences in their teaching and learning plans. A comprehensive overview of the ways in which mentoring might be incorporated in to a course of study is explored in Buchanan (2013c) The inclusion of mentoring within the curriculum and modelling its application in the teaching and learning process would help to highlight its relevance for those committed to learning for leadership.

Leadership Development
Drawing on international research, leadership development in Australian has focussed closely on improving school leadership activity through systemic, state and national approaches to building leadership capacity (Matthews, Moorman, & Nusche, 2008). The national and international trends pertaining to educational leadership development
have been oriented towards a wave of policies that aim to “embed the development of professional knowledge, competencies and dispositions in two wider contexts: Leadership capacity in each school and capability building in the host education system” (Macpherson, 2009, p. 107). These contexts encompass two major orientations to leadership development stemming from a passive leadership development approach from the systems based spectrum to an active leadership development approach at the school level (Hallinger, 2003). Both orientations are important to the leadership development of educational leaders and aspiring leaders. This broader picture of leadership development was also of concern to the leaders and aspiring leaders of religious education. They felt that in many situations there was no one to lead even though their role as a leader in religious education was a senior leadership position. They noted that other senior leadership roles within Catholic education had personnel that directly reported to them. However, as Figure 2 illustrates there appeared to be no personnel who directly reported to the leader in religious education particularly at the middle management level.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
<th>Direct Reports</th>
<th>Team Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Leader</td>
<td>Discipline Leaders</td>
<td>Subject Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing Leader</td>
<td>Year Level Leaders etc</td>
<td>Homeroom Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader in Religious Education</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Religious Education Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only in relation to leadership in religious education but in leadership in general there is a lack of knowledge pertaining to the appropriate avenues for enhancing leadership development amongst educational leaders and aspiring leaders. While there are a wide range of programs across many different education sectors very little research has focussed on identifying the most suitable ways to offer opportunities for those committed to learning for leadership (Anderson et al. 2007). In relation to leadership in religious education a Master in Religious Education was perceived by the participants as one avenue where they could learn ideas about how to develop leadership potential in religious education in their school. The following Figure reflects some of the insights shared by the participants regarding possible ways in which the development of leadership capacity might occur in the area of religious education in schools. They felt that many of the duties they were expected to perform could be developed into middle leadership roles. This would help to build the leadership capacity across more staff members and also enable the leader in religious education to lead.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Middle Leader</th>
<th>Teacher Leader</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader in Religious</td>
<td>RE Curriculum Leader</td>
<td>Year level curriculum team conveners</td>
<td>Classroom religious education teachers Teachers and Students Teachers and Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Retreat Program Leader</td>
<td>Retreat Team</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer &amp; Liturgy Leader</td>
<td>Prayer &amp; Liturgy Team</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mission &amp; Engagement Leader</td>
<td>Mission &amp; Engagement Team</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Justice Leader</td>
<td>Social Justice Team</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Faith Development</td>
<td>Staff Faith Development Team</td>
<td>Teacher and other Staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacrament Program Leader</td>
<td>Sacramental Team</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Leadership in religious education programs have tended to focus on exploring the dimensions of leadership pertaining to the senior leader in religious education. Consideration should be given to developing learning experiences that enable those who aspire to leadership in religious education to critically explore ways to develop leadership capacity. Each of the middle leader and teacher leader roles could be areas for study and critical investigation within a higher education program. While these middle leadership roles may appear significant what is vitally important is ensuring that these roles foster leadership growth and development.

Networking

The participants revealed that their experiences of learning for leadership through higher education provided opportunities for them to informally network with other leaders and aspiring leaders undertaking the course. Opportunities to network supported them in their learning for leadership. It enabled them to discuss issues pertaining to their studies and assignments. This occurred sometimes because an assessment task involved group participation and on other occasions it happened because individual members sought each other out to discuss issues pertaining to their studies and/or issues they were dealing with in their own schools pertaining to leadership in religious education. This type of networking provided an opportunity for leaders and aspiring leaders to speak with other participants who can listen in a calm and unconditional manner (MacBeath, 2011).

A feeling of loneliness sometimes associated with leadership and in particular leadership in religious education (Buchanan, 2013c) has the potential to drain such leaders of vision and energy for leadership. An opportunity to network is one way of minimising potential negative consequences of leadership loneliness (MacBeath, 1998). Networking was regarded as a vehicle that provided support for leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education in their ability to develop strategies that enabled them to remain connected and understand ways of “being without or beyond loneliness” (Stern, 2013, p. 107). Leaders and aspiring leaders need to look outside their own school context and establish memberships to networks that extend them beyond the school for sources of learning and ideas (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). This is particularly necessary for leadership in religious education where only one member of staff holds the position.

The networking experiences encountered by leaders and aspiring leaders undertaking a Masters in Religious Education brought participants into contact with leaders beyond their own geographical location which is normally not the case (Anderson & Togneri, 2003; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989). A broader range of networking for participants increases the potential for exposure to diverse insights informing for learning for leadership in religious education. Hargreaves (2003) suggested that:

A network increases the pool of ideas on which any member can draw and as one idea or practice is transferred, the inevitable process of adaptation and adjustment to different conditions is rich in potential for the practice to be incrementally improved by the recipient and then fed back to the donor in a virtuous circle of innovation and improvement. In other words, the networks extend and enlarge the communities of practice with enormous potential benefits ... (p. 9)

The possibilities should be explored not only because the participants expect this type of support from a Masters Degree program but also because it has the potential to promote learning with and between schools and the co-creation and advancement of knowledge about leadership and learning for leadership (Jackson & Temperley, 2007). External agents such as universities have the potential to play a vital role in helping leaders and aspiring leaders to learn how to network in ways that enable them to foster the development of schools that are able to utilise reflective intelligence (MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 2004). They are also able to illustrate the benefits of networks as a collective of critical friends (MacBeath, 1998) that understand the tensions of self-evaluation (Saunders, 1999). There is currently no independent professional association within Australia for leaders in religious education to facilitate networking opportunities on a broad scale. The higher education curriculum program could be adapted to ensure that opportunities for networking between participants is structured into the course rather than be left to happen informally and by chance.
Recommendations and conclusions
The preliminary findings arising from this study which sought to identify the areas of support leaders and aspiring leaders in religious education perceive would help them in their learning for leadership have been identified. They are mentoring, leadership development and networking. Each of these areas of support is relevant not only to their learning within a higher education course but they are also relevant to their lifelong learning as a leader and in particular as a leader in religious education. A recommendation arising from this study involves exploring ways to develop pedagogy that provides opportunities for mentoring and exploring ways to promote leadership development as well as networking through the participants’ involvement in their tertiary studies. The skills gained in these areas will not only support them through their studies but also throughout ongoing lifelong learning for leadership in religious education.

Acknowledgement
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“Feet sturdily on the ground but thoughts in Heaven”: Religious socialisation goals of parents in families affiliated with a religious minority

Arniika Kuusisto

Abstract

Although socialisation efforts of parents have been studied over time, there is a lack of recent research knowledge on the socialisation goals of religious minority families living in the increasingly pluralistic and secularised Western societies. This article examines parental socialisation goals in the homes of a religious minority, Seventh-day Adventism in Finland serving as a case study. The primary focus is in the effects of religious beliefs and religious minority affiliation on parental socialisation goals. The presented study included mixed method data from teenagers (n=100), young adults (n=106) and parents (n=55), out of which the present examination focuses on the parental sample. The findings illustrate the influences of parental values and worldview on the daily life of the family as well as on the utilised socialisation goals and the resulting parenting practices.

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International changes in religiosity and religious landscapes (e.g. Woodhead & Catto, 2012) highlight the importance of research on the meaning of a community (Pessi, 2013). Although parental socialisation has been studied from different perspectives, there is a lack of recent research knowledge on socialisation goals within religious communities and religious minority families living in the increasingly pluralistic and secularised Western societies. This article examines parental socialisation goals in the homes of a religious minority community, Seventh-day Adventism in Finland serving as a case study. The primary focus is in the effects of religious beliefs and religious minority affiliation on parental socialisation goals. More precisely, it is examined, what values these parents would hope to pass onto their children, and what means do they employ in the socialisation process.

The overall study included mixed method data from teenagers (n=100), young adults (n=106) and parents (n=55); out of which the present examination focuses on the parental sample. In the previously reported data sample including, among others, the teenagers of these same families (Kuusisto, 2011), 80% of the teenagers indicated either a strong or a very strong agreement to the statement that being an Adventist is an important part of their identity. Thereby, the here examined socialisation goals and the adjacent parental practices can be seen to have had a rather strong influence on the succeeding generation. In the following, these elements are examined more closely.

The relationship between religion and citizenship in the present-day secularised Finnish society is in many ways complex, and the expressions of private worldviews in the public space are not without tensions (Poulter, 2013; Kuusisto, 2010). The same applies to the younger generation’s transitions to adulthood and to their values, worldviews, and identity being constructed in the changing social landscape (Helve, 2013). Parenting is, to a large extent, a culturally influenced activity; thus also taking place in a particular societal situation. Cultural models of parenting consist of shared values and practices focused on particular socialisation goals (Lamm & Keller, 2007), which vary across families and cultures (Suizzo, 2007). Parental values in the contemporary post-modern society are increasingly fragmented. Besides the family setting, the present-day children and young people are also confronted with a multitude of influences from their peer groups, community, and the media. This causes serious challenges to parental socialisation, in particular when the family values collide strongly with the ideals fostered in the wider society. These value differences often cause particular negotiations on values and identities to children and youth from minority backgrounds on the borderline of the sense of belonging on one hand and feelings of otherness on the other (Kuusisto, 2010; Schmälzle, 2001; Sam & Virta, 2003; Riitaoja, 2013). Value discrepancies also affect parenting: the lack of intergenerational closure—as the similarity of ideals and practices between the homes—which is more likely in ideologically more coherent communities, places an additional burden on the religious education in the home (Coleman, 1988). However, despite these challenges, parental socialisation still holds a strong impact in the values of the young. In a recent study by Holden et al. (2013), for example, the researchers found maternal guidance to be a significant predictor of youth valuing religion.

In analysing cultural influences on parenting, religion has often been regarded as a major source of childrearing attitudes. Such analysis has generally concentrated on attitudes towards disciplinary practices in home education. However, there is a need for research that fosters a better understanding of parental values and beliefs and their effect on educational practices. Furthermore, although parental goals and expectations could be expected to affect religious parenting, there is relatively little research examining that assumption. (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005.) Moreover, although there are some studies of religious socialisation (e.g. Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens, 2007; Godina, 2008), parental goals and values across ethnic groups (e.g. Suizzo, 2007), and some focusing on youths’ values (e.g. Helve, 2002; 2013) and the child-rearing values among the Finns (e.g. Tulviste & Ahtonen, 2007), studies examining parenting in specific religious minority contexts within industrialised Western societies are few.

First, the theoretical framework and concepts are described, then the research context is outlined, followed by methods, data, and discussion on the findings.
Socialisation and Minority Context

Bandura’s classical social learning theory (1977), with his ideas of imitation and observational learning (i.e. children reproducing the behaviour of others, usually their parents), have been important for socialisation research. More precisely, learning from parents has been connected with: (a) the children’s dependence on parents and the parents’ subsequent power over them; (b) the perceived authority of parents; and (c) love of parents and resulting identification with them. Parents are usually also able to influence their children’s social contacts with others to some extent (Bandura, 1977; Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). The identification with a religion, too, is—besides the actual religious practice—a social contact with other members of the religious community (Amyot & Sigelman, 1996). Thus, the role of social networks of the religious community and the generated social capital as socialising forces cannot be neglected (Kuusisto, 2011).

In primary socialisation, children have emotional and social ties with significant others, and feel dependence on them. Socialisation process takes place in the framework of established structures and socially given hierarchies within the community. In societies where a particular religion plays a central role and is closely connected with societal structures, the need for formal religious training of beliefs and customs is different; children are likely to be well aware of what religion is about and what is expected from them, and religion is lived directly (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). Although many westernised societies may be far from integrating religion and culture this way, religious communities within them can still have many characteristics fitting this description. Children of minority families may struggle with contrasting models, norms and values of the majority and the minority (Sam & Virta, 2003; Schmälzle, 2001).

Religious socialisation is a process intentionally aiming to transmit values and beliefs. Parental religious attitudes and socialisation still hold a major importance for youths’ religious attitudes in Finland (Myllyniemi, 2006). Continuity in religious affiliation between generations has traditionally been seen rather as the rule than the exception, although the subsequent generations may have adopted more liberal—or, occasionally, more strict—beliefs than those of their parents (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). However, in contemporary society, religious parents face increasing demands in conveying their beliefs to their children (Helve, 2006). The multitude of influences from the media and peer group increases its effect when parental influence weakens. However, even at university age the religious activities between the first and the second generation have traditionally corresponded. Interestingly, the similarity has been greater for church attendance than for prayer, and greater for religion than for other attitudes or kinds of behaviour, such as sports participation. Similarity between parents and children is possibly explained in part by heredity, environmental factors, and reciprocal influences. In addition, parental influence has been found to be stronger when the relationships between parents and children are close, when parents agree with each other on religious beliefs, and according to parents’ gender and age (younger children tend to agree more with parents, but also younger parents seem to be more likely to transmit beliefs) (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Holm, 2001).

Also different social context effects and the agency of the child play important roles in the process of developing one’s personal worldview and belief system. Furthermore, the intergenerational influence can also go in the opposite direction, when children’s characteristics or actions have an effect on their parents’ values (Rosnati, 2008; Schaffer, 1996; Karraker & Coleman, 2005). Religious education may be multi-directional: children negotiate their own religious education and identity in the family, but also the parents are often engaged in a continuing process of negotiating their beliefs (Kieran, 2011).

Parental beliefs contribute in parenting styles and practices, influencing children’s development. However, parental actions can also come about without much grounding in deliberate choice (Goodnow & Collins, 1990); aspects of child rearing may be adopted on an ad hoc basis, or justification can be given for the actions that were at first carried out without much thought. Thus, the relationship between belief and action is bidirectional (Schaffer, 1996). Religion is also intertwined with many nonreligious beliefs and behaviours (Spilka et al., 2003), such as dietary or occupational choices, which may partly be due to religion but are often also culturally bound or strengthened by the social context.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the social community of affiliated members serving here as the context of the study, originated in the United States in 1844 and came to Finland via Sweden in 1892. Finland is a predominantly Evangelical Lutheran country, although only a fraction of Finns are regular church-goers in what is an increasingly secular society (Kääriäinen, Niemelä & Ketola, 2005). Adventism in Finland is a small minority with a membership rate beneath 4000. Adventism provides an interesting context for research, since the value system of this small minority is more cohesive, and the culture and lifestyle more defined and child-rearing practices can be assumed to vary less than in the wider society. Unlike some other minorities or societal settings, Adventism in Finland is not connected with ethnicity or way of dress, and thus members are not distinguishable from mainstream population by appearance. Besides Saturday Sabbath observance and baptism through immersion, the life style choices emphasised within the Adventist community, in particular the ideals of holistic well-being and a healthy way of life, are relevant here. These as well as some educational views found in the denomination stem from the pioneer in the early years of the movement, Ellen G. White. She emphasised a holistic and balanced development of bodily, mental and spiritual strengths (White, 1903). Much to her influence, the denomination now runs an international network of schools, universities and hospitals. Parenting in Adventist families has been studied very little, but for Lidia Godina (2008) who examined the experiences of having been brought up by Adventist parents in the UK context. On a more general denominational level, Bull and Lockhart (2007) have studied Adventism in the United States.

Methodological Framework

Research Questions
This article aims to investigate the following research problem: What kinds of religious socialisation goals are expressed among Finnish Adventist parents, and how are these pursued in the homes?

This research problem is approached through the following questions: (1) What is the religious identity and denominational commitment of these parents like? (2) Does their religious worldview affect their day-to-day life and educational practices, and if so, how? (3) What values do these parents hope to pass onto their children? And, (4) Which educational practices do they employ in the socialisation process?

Method and Sample
This study involved a mixed method approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. It comprises five data sets: 3 surveys (young people, teenagers, and parents of teenagers; overall n=286), 2 sets of interviews (ten young adults and ten teenagers), and complementary fieldwork data (e.g. taped group discussions) (for more, see Kuusisto, 2011), of which this article focuses on the parental data. The fieldwork data, as well as survey and interview data from teenagers and young adults were gathered from denominational Adventist camps, whereas the parents (n=55) received a survey questionnaire sent home following a teenagers’ summer camp. Although the data sets are small, so is the examined religious minority community. For example, the gathered sample on teenagers covers almost a third of the whole population in the target age group of the Finnish Seventh-day Adventist population.

The parental questionnaire, sent to 94 homes following a summer camp for teens (ages 13-18), was answered by 55 parents; 37 mothers and 18 fathers, of ages ranging from 36 to 67 (average parental age 46; median 45; SD 5.80). The represented Adventist generation in the family history fell rather evenly between first (f=16; 32%), second (f=16; 32%), and third (f=14; 28%); the sample also included a few fourth generation Adventists (f=4; 8%). Of the 55 participants, 52 reported a baptismal age: those fell between the ages of 10 and 40, averaging age 18 (SD 7.66). Over half (f=30; 58%) had been baptised before the time they reached their majority (the age of 18 in Finland); and the vast majority (f=44; 85%) by the age of 25. In some families, both parents had returned the questionnaire, whereas in others only one of the parents returned it; the latter naturally applies to single parent households, too. Since the sample was so small, no further analyses were completed on these.
The survey questionnaire first asked for personal data and continued with two quantitative sections (Likert 1-4): the first about home education and the second about their relationship with the Adventist denomination. A final section consisted of open questions. Those charted parental views on: (a) school choice (denominational vs. mainstream); and (b) experienced effects of peer influence on the adaptation of family values; (c) Adventist values and identity; (d) doctrines; (e) the effects of Adventism on parents’ life choices; (f) personal meanings of membership, faith and congregation; (g) possible benefits of denominational social network to the young; (h) family practices on the Sabbath; and (i) the means of value education; to name a few.

As is typical for a postal survey, the response rate was low, even after several reminders. Since it is not known how many of the teenagers’ homes were for example single-parent households, it is difficult to determine the exact response rate. However, as the sample is small, the data are examined as case study material with which no generalisations can be made without caution. One of the reasons for the limited response rate was probably the length of the survey measure, as the aim was to pursue towards as deep or ‘thick’ data as possible. Thus, besides the Likert style measures, the questionnaire included thirteen rather broad, open-ended questions: these may have been considered too time-consuming. However, the data that were received were more extensive than was expected. Many respondents continued their answers on the back side of the questionnaire and, overall, the answers appear to have been genuinely thought through. Thus, the depth of the data is satisfactory for investigating the general features of such a seldom studied area.

Results

In the following, frequencies with percentages are presented—including for clarifying the proportion of a particular opinion in the data. Statistical data on religious home education is presented first, followed by an overview and extracts from the qualitative parts. The frequencies present the number of those, out of the 55 respondents, who agreed on a particular statement. The answer averages mentioned are on the scale 1-4, four presenting the maximum value; that is, “strongly agree”. The first set of presented findings are issues connected to the parental belief systems, which were more noticeable in the quantitative data; then religious identity and commitment issues; followed by findings on rearing practices and other practical applications. Finally, I will look at the matters related to the community network. This format applies to both the quantitative and qualitative result sections below.

Quantitative data

Religion is an important part of everyday life for Adventist parents: 53 (96%) respondents either agree (f=14) or strongly agree (f=39) with that. Being an Adventist is a significant part of personal identity for nearly everyone (f=51; 96%). The majority (f=43; 83%) go to church weekly, are committed to denominational tasks in the congregation (f=44; 83%), and pray and read the Bible daily (f=39; 74%). Most of these Adventist parents also make financial contributions in the forms of tithes (in principle, a tenth of the income) and other offerings (f=46; 87%) to the church. Approximately half take part in the church charity work (f=27; 51%), and slightly fewer (f=22; 42%) often participate in congregational activities also during the week, or have spent a considerable amount of time studying the church doctrines, history, or E. G. White’s writings. Charity work is often channelled through the international Adventist Development and Relief Agency ADRA, whereas ingathering in this data generally refers to the voluntary work of gathering funding for the ADRA and other charity work.

Adventism also affects other spheres of life than just personal devotion, influencing the day-to-day practices of the families. The majority of these parents apply in their lives the health principles (f=39; 77%) emphasised within the church community. Health ideals are also considered significant from a religious perspective by most respondents (f=37; 71%). In practice, nearly half (f=25; 46%) reported that their family eats only vegetarian food, and the vast majority do not use any alcohol or tobacco products (f=47; 89%). However, although some avoid caffeine altogether as a stimulant, approximately a quarter of parents (f=13; 25%) do drink coffee or caffeinated tea regularly. Religion has also influenced the career choices for a considerable number (f=34; 68%) of respondents. A vast majority agreed that music (f=42; 79%) is an important part of Adventist identity, and for some, so is sports (f=15; 29%).


The social network of the congregation was perceived as personally beneficial in practical matters, such as finding a house, job, or place of study by slightly over half (f=26; 51%) of the respondents. Thus, the community can be seen as a social capital generating social structure. For many, the majority of friends (f=33; 64%), or relatives (f=16; 30%) are Adventists. Most respondents (f=42; 79%) alleged that their teenagers also had many friends outside the denominational community.

 Practically all (f=54; 98%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have intended to offer their children a religious up-bringing. Religious books were read to children in most homes (f=49; 89%). The majority (f=46; 84%) also took their children to church every week, and Sabbath afternoon was typically spent with Adventist friends (f=32; 59%). In general, Adventist congregation was considered by most (f=51; 94%) parents a good environment for the children. The majority (f=48; 87%) believed that the congregational context protects children and youth from many bad influences.

 These parents generally agree (f=44; 83%) that Adventist children should be provided with tools for questioning religion so that they would be able to make choices. Still, 30 out of 54 (vs. f=23 disagree; f=1 uncertain) require their adolescents to go to church with the parents as long as the youngsters live in the family home. Also, over half (f=29; 54%) agree to having had arguments with their children about going to church. At present, also a weekly family worship is a regular habit in the homes of 22 parents (41%).

 Besides dietary issues, parents see that Adventist values also set certain limitations on children’s hobbies such as the football games which are commonly played on Saturdays, which for Adventists is the Sabbath, thus coinciding with the family religious practices and the ideal enjoyment of the Day of Rest; or dance lessons, because dancing is not considered appropriate by some. Three quarters of the parents would not allow their teenagers to go to a disco. A quarter (f=13) would also not allow their teenage daughters to wear make-up. However, nearly a half (f=25) is aware that their teenagers have experimented with alcohol or tobacco.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I aim to offer my children a religious up-bringing</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious literature was often read to our children</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist values set certain limitations to children’s hobbies (e.g. football games on the Sabbath, dance lessons)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not allow my teenager to go to a disco on the weekend</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When our children were small, we went to church every week</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Sabbath afternoon we often spent time with believer friends</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist congregation is a good environment for the children to grow up</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ve sometimes argued with the children about going to church</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that my son/daughter has experimented with tobacco and/or alcohol.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In our family, youth are required to leave for church on the Sabbath as long as they live at the family home</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up within the congregational context of Adventism saves the children and youth from many bad things</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should also be provided with the tools to question religion, so that they would be able to make choices</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance is important for young women, and I would let also my own teenage daughter to wear make-up</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are accustomed to having a weekly family worship in our home</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative data

Firstly, a brief look at what the parents regard as the Adventist identity and the fundamental values and norms shared within the religious minority. Some of the most commonly featured answers include personal faith, Sabbath-keeping, and the expectancy of Jesus’ Second Coming. Questionnaire numbers are included for the reader to distinguish a particular respondent in the event several answers by the same person are quoted. A 47-year-old mother defines Adventist identity as follows:

Faith in God and trust towards his mercy, accepting Him, and agreement to redemption. Naturally also the fact that we go to the Sabbath church regularly makes us distinctive from the environment. I am an Adventist because my faith is based on the word of Bible ➔ faith ➔ acts. Strongly. Feet sturdily on the ground but thoughts in heaven. [46]

Baptism and healthful living were often mentioned, as was denominational membership. Still, many saw themselves foremost as Christians, and only secondarily as members of a particular denomination. For example, a 47-year-old mother says: “I think a person is primarily either a believer or a non-believer. The congregation one belongs to is not the main issue, but that you believe in God and Jesus.” [29]. Similarly, a 44-year-old father defines an Adventist as: “Firstly a Christian; additionally believes in Jesus’ Second Coming, in the permanence of God’s commandments, and in a positive, considerate and holistic lifestyle.” [8].

The personal meaning of faith and membership was important to parents. Faith was typically defined as the mainstay or backbone of life, hope for eternal life, the foundation of everything else in life. Congregation was defined as a ‘family’ or ‘home’; creating togetherness, trust, and network of friends, and sense of belongingness to a community:

Faith is an inseparable part of my life. I could not imagine myself living without God. Congregation is a place for learning something new. Social encounters. Intercession. That’s where I’ve got the faithful, good friends. Prayer friends. (Mother, age 47) [39].

Home. ‘Roots’; to belong somewhere, be something. Trust, hope of something better. Faith is like the air that I breathe, you do not come to think of that. It is a part of me like my heart is. What one feels, it is just life. (Mother, age 42) [37].

The main values that parents wanted to transmit to their children are presented in Table 2. The core value was honesty, followed by respect and acceptance of other people, and then health, cleanliness, and sobriety; along with trusting God and leaving one’s life to God’s guidance. Values such as helpfulness, responsibility and consideration, prayer, and diligence in chores and studies were seen as important values by parents. Many parents included a rather wide selection of ideals in their answers; however, some took a more practical perspective whereas others were more general or idealistic:

Life is God’s gift to you. What you do with your life is your gift to God! You can trust God; you’re allowed to do so; and it’s worth it. (Father, 43 yrs) [50].

I have wished they’d respect and trust to themselves. It is important to value and respect others. However, the basis of everything is to love and follow Jesus and to respect God – obey His instructions: the Bible. (Mother, 46 yrs) [26].

Honesty even when it is not easy; defending those who are weaker; valuing oneself (Mother, [age not indicated]) [53].

Although both some of the values and the categories overlap, the data were classified into three categories: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and religious values (see Table 2). The frequency of the value mentioned in the open question responses of the data is presented in parentheses. Since some categories may be overlapping and since an individual may have presented more than one values in one answer, the total is not necessarily the same than the number of respondents (n=55).
Table 2

The main values parents want to transmit on to their children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal values</th>
<th>Intrapersonal values</th>
<th>Religious values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty (30)</td>
<td>Health, cleanliness, sobriety (12)</td>
<td>Trusting God &amp; leaving one’s life to His guidance (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect &amp; acceptance (16)</td>
<td>Diligence in work &amp; studies (7)</td>
<td>His guidance (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness (9)</td>
<td>Thinking on your own (4)</td>
<td>Prayer (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility &amp; consideration (8)</td>
<td>Always doing one’s best (and that’s enough) (2)</td>
<td>Christian/Adventist core values (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apologising &amp; forgiving (5)</td>
<td>Limits given by the parents (2)</td>
<td>Honouring God (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices of friends &amp; deeds (3)</td>
<td>Independence &amp; personal boundaries (2)</td>
<td>God’s love to people (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice (2)</td>
<td>Valuing oneself as one is (2)</td>
<td>Sabbath-keeping &amp; church-going (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-mindedness (2)</td>
<td>Personal devotional life (1)</td>
<td>Living with Jesus (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness (2)</td>
<td>‘Saving’ oneself (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing up for the weak (1)</td>
<td>Economy (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faithfulness (1)</td>
<td>Good manners (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family; love &amp; togetherness (4)</td>
<td>Flexibility (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness &amp; discussing (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The means of transmitting religious values and identity, that is, the most important parental socialisation practices utilised, are shown in Table 3. These include, first and foremost, a credible parental example of a personal conviction on and modelling the values one aims to transmit in daily living (e.g. by showing love to other people). This was mentioned by the majority (n=49) of respondents. The educational ‘atmosphere’ (parental attitudes in showing love, respect and honour to others, sense of humour, openness, and honesty) was also considered important. Other practices mentioned were discussing the reasons behind values and providing children with information about the religion. Congregational affiliation was seen as significant, both in affiliating children with the religious community and in church-organised education.

In Table 3, the number of mentions in each category is shown in apprentices. Since an individual parent may have mentioned more than one category in his/her answer, the total number does not equal the number of respondents. Also, as many of the categories were overlapping, and the wordings of different answers varied, the numbers mentioned are indicative.

Table 3

Parental practices in transmitting religious identity and values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Example</th>
<th>Discussion and instruction</th>
<th>Congregational Affiliation</th>
<th>Educational atmosphere</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental example of a personal confession &amp; living according to your values (e.g. by showing love to other people) (49)</td>
<td>By discussing the reasons behind values (11)</td>
<td>Congregational education, e.g. Children’s Sabbath School classes, Youth classes, pathfinders (5)</td>
<td>Parental attitudes; showing love, respect and honour, openness, sense of humour, honesty (9)</td>
<td>Spending time with children, togetherness (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of other believers (2)</td>
<td>Providing children with knowledge (6)</td>
<td>Interaction with other people (4)</td>
<td>Forgiveness (3)</td>
<td>Praying with and for the children, intercession (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Congregational schools (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature, e.g. Bible stories (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sincere interest in the children’s life and in what they have to say, letting children ask and wonder (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By searching answers together (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Letting children sometimes learn from their mistakes (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Starting Christian education early on, being consistent (1)</td>
<td>Being less instructive, no forcing (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The issues that caused conflicts between the generations in the home education shed additional light on the success of parental value transmission, and these data are therefore incorporated in Table 4 below. These included matters related to social life and appearance (20 mentions); usage of time and money (25); home and devotional life (19); as well as general views about whether or not there had been any notable disagreements between the teenager and parents (29); and other comments.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental views on issues that have caused conflicts between the generations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social life and appearance (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home and devotional life (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More general views on conflicts in the home (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of friends; peer group or dating (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different day rhythm or general time usage (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music preferences (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions regarding the Sabbath (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We haven’t really been through notable disagreements (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Our children would know the answer better’ (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed time (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curfew (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to church (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s been some general questioning of parental/denominational values (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Same problems than others have’ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions on hobbies (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV; when / what / how much to watch (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Bible reading (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music too loudly (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child chose something we didn’t agree with (e.g. military service); we respected his/her personal choice (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a challenge for us and our teenagers to learn to understand each other’s interests before the issues create conflicts (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage of money (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music too loudly (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child chose something we didn’t agree with (e.g. military service); we respected his/her personal choice (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a challenge for us and our teenagers to learn to understand each other’s interests before the issues create conflicts (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers &amp; internet (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational communication (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ve been through a lot of conflicts (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discos, parties, restaurants (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chores at home (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rearing practices related to religious up-bringing seem to culminate in the Sabbath. In some families it started on Friday with special preparations, candles on the dinner table, and so on. However, in comparison to the first data set gathered at the end of 1990’s from 20-30 year olds, these notions were rather few in these data. As those data showed, also here the Sabbath afternoon was typically spent with the family as well as other Adventist families, dining well, spending time outdoors, and playing games together. The social network of the denomination was also seen as advantageous in terms of supporting religious socialisation.

Discussion

The data illustrates that these Finnish Adventist parents are highly committed to their faith, both in terms of their personal values and lifestyle, and the religious community. The data illustrate the nature of parenting as a culturally influenced activity, the models of which here consist of the mutually shared denominational values and practices focusing on particular socialisation goals (Lamm & Keller 2007). Besides the similarities, the data also portray some of the variety within the religious community, both across families (Suizzo, 2007) as well as between individuals. However, the mutually shared values do form intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988) between these Adventist families, and the parents value the community support of the socialisation process highly.
In the wider societal level, the comparison of the data gathered in the late 90s from the then young Adventist adults to these data from teenagers’ parents—and also that gathered from their offspring—show that Adventist up-bringing in Finland has become somewhat more liberal than was found earlier. This is hardly surprising, as Adventists do not live separately from wider society, and the communal practices are thus likely to be gradually influenced by societal change. The overall data gathered for this study stretched from some of the childhood memories of these parents in the fifties and sixties Finland, to the 1970s and 1980s childhood memories of the 20-30 year olds interviewed in the late nineties, and to the 1990s and 2000s childhood of the teenagers of this parental generation. Thus, the societal transition in the educational atmosphere, such as the gradual shift from normative parental authority towards child-centeredness—the attitudinal undercurrents that especially influence the positions of power and use of authority in the family life—is also likely to have had an effect on Adventist families. However, the foundation of the value system seems to remain relatively unaltered, as the fundamentals of the Bible and White’s ideals on holistic well-being and health have maintained a strong position across the community.

Nonetheless, similarly to many other minority background peers, the children of these families, and to some extent the parents themselves, are likely to face negotiations on their values and memberships, and having to justify their value choices to others (Sam & Virta 2003; Schmältze 2001). For example organising a dietary alternative for children’s school lunches may still cause struggles in some municipalities. However, in this sense the increasing cultural and religious diversity in the society as a whole has altered the societal policies and practices, too, as in particular the schools in the larger cities such as the capital Helsinki area provide a variety of alternatives to accommodate the needs of everyone.

The Bible and the theological interpretations of the Adventists influence the belief systems of the affiliated parents, setting a communally shared culture with its norms and customs as well as the shared core values. These, in turn, to some extent affect the parenting practices of individual parents as well as the families and the denominational community and thus contribute towards shaping the growing up context for each of these children and young people, their belief systems, and the social network. However, these influences are also bidirectional, as the agency of the younger generations also influences the process and the beliefs and values of their parents and the community, and even some of the theological emphases may gradually shift during time.

Thus, although the presented data portray explicit similarities in the core values and practices shared by these respondents, for example in terms of the significance of Sabbath as the holy day of rest, the practical implementation of this varies somewhat from family to family. Thereby, the data show how a particular value system can serve as a basis to a variety of different alternative paths for a personally meaningful way of family life.

**Conclusions**

This study illustrates some of the ways in which religious values can influence parents’ educational values and practices—also in a relatively secularised society where religion is often regarded as a private matter of the individual and the family. The above presented data demonstrate the diversity within what is often perceived as the majority for example in terms of ethnic belonging—most Finnish Adventists belong to the ethnic majority. To some extent, it also sheds light to the heterogeneity in how religion affects the lives of individuals and families within any community, and the fluidity and process nature of any worldview in the life of an individual affiliated with it. The data also portray some of the difficulties that the contrasting values the individual for whom religion is personally important may face in the widely secularised societal context. In Finland, although traditionally strong Lutheranism has decreased in terms of membership figures, the secular Lutheran norm still forms an integral part of the nation construction processes in the public arenas (Lappalainen, 2006; Riitaoja, Poulter & Kuusisto, 2010; Poulter, 2013; Riitaoja, 2013). Taking distance to this norm may set the individual in the position of ‘the other’ for example within the peer group of a mainstream school—either in her personal negotiations of identity and belonging, or in the form of being excluded by others. This tension and the pressures of ‘being different’ are repetitively present also in the parental negotiations of educational practises. The parents have to weigh their priorities: do I/we want our children to get healthy exercise and important team experiences through playing football as their hobby, although the actual games would always take place on the Sabbath?
The privatisation of late-modern religiosity has also been scrutinised from the point of view of the relationship between the individual and the religious community. Pessi (2013) writes that the ‘privatisation thesis’ is both confirmed and contradicted in the European religious scene. Namely, she asks that as religion is a social phenomenon, what exactly is the meaning of a community to an individual with privatised religiosity? This question is highly relevant when looking at religious socialisation in the home and within a religious community: the aim of religious socialisation is to transmit the tradition to the following generations, in which each individual processes the offered information, accepts and/or rejects the faith altogether and/or some smaller elements in it, and even if the tradition is accepted into the personal life stance, each individual at least to some extent gradually moulds his or her own personal ‘version’ of the beliefs and lifestyle values attached to the religious tradition. Succeeding these choices, religious values are negotiated and re-negotiated in the everyday; which choices are in line with my worldview and which are not, and when to live according to one’s core values and when is it seen as a matter of an ‘exception to the rule’ for example when peer pressures or other competing pressures or ideals are regarded stronger. This way, the individual is also continuously taking stance as to whether some matters are regarded ‘public’ or ‘private’ (Kuusisto, 2011; Poulter, 2013; Riitaoja, 2013); for example in relation to whether or not to speak openly about one’s confession when justifying one’s value choices (e.g. abstinence from alcohol) to others. 

Pessi also writes about the interplay between the experiences, values, and truth, as well as authenticity, in the relationship between the individual and the church. These elements are also present in the above presented data: these parents tell about their experiences and emotions, values and expectations, and their strong relationship with the religious community; as well as their standpoints and their relationship with the religious beliefs and participation in Adventist church related activities (Pessi, 2013). Through the parental data, the here presented study highlights the essential meaning of the religious communities for the individuals also in the ‘secular’ late-modern society, in numerous ways. Namely, the religious community was here perceived as significant for these parents: first of all for their religious life; secondly, it was considered essential as a social network – also through its social capital generating practical functions; and thirdly, it was seen to hold an important role in supporting the socialisation (family) and growing up and remaining ‘in faith’ of the successive generations of children and youth.

References


FEET STURDILY ON THE GROUND
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AFFILIATED WITH A RELIGIOUS MINORITY


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“Confirmation and Life, 2012”: Exploring the Sacrament of Confirmation with adolescents and children using the Little Box of Big Questions

Gerard Stoyles, David Hammer, Peter Caputi and Bryan Jones

Abstract
This paper describes the development and implementation of the Confirmation and Life, 2012 preparation program for the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation. The program provided an adjunct to traditional program of sacramental preparation, and was structured around a resource titled the “Little Box of Big Questions” (Gersch & Lipscomb, 2012). Year 11 trained adolescent leaders guided groups of eight to ten Confirmation candidates (11 to 12 years old) through the four-week program. A parent component of the program concurrently took place, although only the child segment is reported in this paper. Comments of the children indicated that the program achieved its goal of sensitising them to actively live out their Sacrament of Confirmation in the social spaces in which they lived.

Author Note
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“The place of my song-dream” (The Wind in the Willows)

“It’s gone!” sighed the Rat, sinking back in his seat again. “So beautiful and strange and new! Since it was to end so soon, I almost wish I had never heard it. For it has roused in me a pain, and nothing seems worth while but just to hear that sound once more and go on listening to it forever”.

(Kenneth Grahame: The Wind in the Willows, originally published 1908; this edition 1993)

The opening quote of this paper describes a spiritual experience of Rat and Mole, and the feelings of loss when that experience came to an end. While looking for the lost baby otter, Portly, Rat, with his friend Mole once more discovers a sacred moment from his childhood – the music of the divine Piper:

The sweetness of its sound comes and goes and he is drawn forth into its midst. “This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me”, whispered the Rat as if in a trance. “Here in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him”. Both the Rat and Mole draw upon the Piper, not a figure of terror, but a figure of kindly and humorous eyes, looking down upon Rat and Mole as they stood transfixed before Him. Then Mole spoke. “Rat!” he found breath to whisper, shaking. “Are you afraid?” “Afraid?” murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet – and yet – O, Mole, I am afraid!” Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship. (Grahame, 1908; 1993, pp. 98-99)

This small excerpt from The Wind in the Willows is perhaps one of the most beautiful and touching occasions of Grahame’s story. For so brief a time, Rat and Mole are taken away from the reality of their world and are placed in the midst of the divine; the presence of the Piper. The vision leaves them, replaced by the gentle caress of a breeze that shakes the roses and tosses the aspens.

So much of life is lived in mediocrity. The routines of day-to-day life become fixed and predictable, so much so that any deviation from our routines creates disruption. Even chaos can have its own routine feeling. We need routine as part of who we are. We need to know what comes where and when as each day unfolds so that we are constantly prepared to deal with whatever does come our way. In other words, we cannot avoid living life, and in so doing, respond to its ever-present demands. We gain meaning in the midst of routine. Like Mole and Rat, we can be taken from our comfortable contact with reality into a realm that brings us face-to-face with self. Within this realm, we can find ourselves feeling deeply at peace, or deeply disturbed, or somewhere in-between. These moments become entwined with our being; with the uniqueness of whom we are and need to be nurtured.

Previous research by the authors

Three papers precede this current paper. In the first paper on spirituality, child development, and the relationship between spirituality and religiosity in children, we considered spirituality as a capacity within any person to seek something greater than that which is found in the immediacy of the world (Benson, Rehlkepartain & Rude, 2003; Stoyles, Caputi, Lyons & Mackay, 2010a); as “something greater” that extends beyond what is immediately and physically evident (Benson et al., 2003, p. 208). The spiritual being of a person communicates with the created order and enters the realm of the divine, whatever form or image that divine might take (O’Murchu, 2000). While spiritual realities and religious ritual might combine, the spiritual is not dependent on religiosity for its validation (Adams, Hyde & Woolley, 2008; de Souza, 2009; Hay & Nye, 1998).

Our second paper reported on the development, ranking and weighting of six domains of spiritual influence in children, namely Family, Relationship with God, School, Friends, How time is used, and Influence of technology (Stoyles, Caputi, Lyons & Jones, 2010b). Years 5 and 6 children who attended two Catholic primary schools in southern coastal NSW, together with their parents, also ranked and weighted these domains as influences on child spiritual development. Our third paper reported these findings (Stoyles, Caputi & Jones, 2012). Mothers rank ordered the six domains as Family, School, Friends, Relationship with God, How time is used, and Information technology. Fathers expressed similar rankings as mothers, apart from the ranking for Relationship with God and How time is used. Fathers placed How time is
used in fourth ranked order, whereas mothers placed this domain in third place. Our findings suggested that parents both understood the relevance and importance of being a family, and additionally, were of similar views as to how this relevance and importance translated into everyday life.

**A new approach to preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation**

Our previous findings suggested a redirection of thinking about the preparation of children for the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation. We therefore developed a preparation program for candidates receiving Confirmation in Year 6 (11 to 12 years of age) that focused on family interaction, and shared family time. Our program was not designed to replace the more traditional approach to preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Research Report On Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass (Dixon, Bond, Engebretson, Rymarz, Cussen, & Wright, 2007) referred to percentages from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, taken in 2001, that indicated a small minority of the Catholic population continued at that time to participate in Mass. The percentages of attendance for adults between the ages of 44 and 24 years ranged between 15% and 7%, with a gradual decline in percentage rates across this age range. The ABS Census, taken in 2006, reflected the above percentages, with 73.3% identifying themselves as Catholic but not attending Mass, 11.8% identifying as Catholic and attending Mass, and 14.9% no longer identifying as Catholic (Cahill, 2011, cited in Wilkinson, 2012).

The research team responsible for the development of the Confirmation and Life, 2012 program expressed the common belief that if children generally were not engaged in participation in the Church through Mass attendance [11% of 0-14 year old children attended Mass in 1991 (ABS Census, 2001)], then preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation needed to be adjusted around this downward trend.

Of particular interest for our program were family-related reasons for non-attendance, such as difficulties in attending Mass experienced by single mothers, and older children refusing to attend or attending under duress (Dixon et al., 2007, p. 37). Additional significant findings indicated that family members who viewed time with each other, or were dealing with family conflict, or for whom the weekend was an opportunity to rest and recreate after a busy week, viewed these needs as being a priority over Mass attendance (Dixon et al., 2007, p. 41). These findings paralleled the ranked weightings of our research that both parents and children placed the domain of Family in first ranked position as being the primary influence over a child’s spiritual development (Stoyles et al., 2012). We therefore developed Confirmation and Life, 2012 around the focus of family-related issues for parents, and issues of self-awareness for their children who relied on their parents and family for support and personal formation.

The thrust of Confirmation and Life, 2012 was therefore one of entering the world of parents’ priorities in life, and responding to them at this point with knowledge and strategies for the strengthening of their parent-child bond and their self-care as the parent of a developing adolescent. Rationale for this approach was found in the understanding that Confirmation is the completion of Baptism. The grace of Confirmation, as a grace of “completion and perfection” (Rituale Romanum, 2010, Confirmation - Introduction), is brought to life through the proclamation of the Good News of salvation within the world, by one’s spoken word and manner of life (Rituale Romanum, 2010). St Luke emphasises the baptised person’s role of proclamation in the world: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth” (Acts, 1:8). The blessing prayer, taken from the current Rite of Confirmation, reflects this understanding, when it proclaims, “…they may never be ashamed to confess Christ crucified before the world…”

The Sacrament of Confirmation is in the unique position of engaging a child at the cusp of adolescent development, when thinking becomes increasingly abstract and the capacity to logically reason and argue becomes more refined (Boyatzis, 2005; Oser & Reich, 1996). Children at Confirmation age are at this onset of development; hence our program sought to draw upon the hypothetical thinking that begins to emerge during adolescence (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009). We encouraged children to think philosophically about themselves, the Divine, and the world, to question assumptions, and to pose their own formulated ideas. In particular, we argued that our approach needed to involve both parents and children at this level of philosophical discovery, and so respond to the perceived importance of the family context as emphasised by parents and children in our research. The role of parents cannot be omitted from the
child’s sacramental journey. The parental role is emphasised at the start (the questioning of parents) and during the final blessing of the Rite of Baptism, where parents are reminded that they are the first teachers of their children in this faith journey. (At the start of the rite of Baptism, parents are asked if they are prepared to bring up their children “as Christ has taught us, by loving God and our neighbor”, and then, in the final blessing, parents are reminded that they are “the first teachers” of their child “in the ways of faith” (Rite of Baptism for Children, Second Edition)).

The invitation to children to reflect philosophically was seen to reflect the “signature phenomenon” of a child’s spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp. 98-99). That is, children were encouraged to explore themselves, others and their world at a level that was commensurate with their cognitive and emotional maturity, and their experience of the world thus far in their development.

Our approach was intended to provide an adjunct program that could stand comfortably beside the more traditional sacramentally focused program. We aimed to emphasise the Spirit-bestowed gifts of wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, wonder and awe as gifts in action (The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 1986/2003).

The significance of children’s voices

Children possess the capacity to think deeply about issues of life, both those issues that affect them personally, and those issues that they observe in the lives of others (Gersch, 2001; Hart, 2003). It is further argued that children are capable of considering everyday physical events from a metaphysical perspective (Gersch, 2001; Gersch, Dowling, Panagiotaki & Potton, 2008). That is, children consider metaphysical questions such as “why they are on the planet’ and whether they have a ‘fundamental purpose for living’” (Gersch et al., 2008, p.228). They do this in the context of their school and home experiences, personal values and attitudes, and decision-making practices. Therefore, to deny children a voice about what happens in their lives, or to not see them as the experts of their lives, is to render children a great disservice and offer insult to their intelligence and reflective capabilities. Even at children’s younger ages, simplicity of expression does not belie depth of reflection. Children’s ability to speak in simple terms can greatly benefit adult understanding of what is otherwise complex (Hart, 2003). Hart (2003) drives home this point when he writes, “Children have a secret spiritual life. They have spiritual capacities and experiences – profound moments that shape their lives in enduring ways” (p. 1).

Lansdown (2004) draws an alignment between children and adults in relation to their sharing of dialogue, and couches this alignment in the respect and empowerment of the child. Lansdown (2004) reminds the reader that where children experience social exclusion and isolation, not only will their self-concept and confidence suffer, but they will also be denied the opportunity to test their strengths and identify their limitations.

As a requirement of program development, Confirmation and Life, 2012 considered the need to respect the significance of children’s voices, and to do so in a way that promoted the “signature phenomenon” of their opinions (Hay & Nye, 2006, p.98-99). We sought to encourage children to reflect on their lives and experiential worlds as experts. In so doing, we believed it would be possible for both children and parents to reframe the meaning of Confirmation as the sacrament of Gospel proclamation within the everyday events of their lives, and not only within the structure of a sacramental theology.

The Little Box of Big Questions

The “Little Box of Big Questions” (Henceforth LBBQ) (Lipscomb & Gersch, 2012) was used to structure the children’s discussions. The LBBQ comprises four sets of dialogue cards that help children explore meaning in their lives, and how their behaviour and experiences are linked together by their belief structures. Each set of cards concentrates on a specific topic. The title of each set is Identity, Important people, Meaning and purpose, and Thinking and planning, and contains four questions written on four separate colour-coded cards (one colour for each set). For example, identity comprises four questions that explore personal uniqueness, valued activities, seeking true happiness, and
self-awareness. On the reverse side of each card are prompt questions that the person asking the question can use to either initiate or continue the conversation. For instance, the question relating to personal uniqueness is prompted by questions such as “What are your special talents?” “What would your friends or family say you are good at?”

Lipscomb and Gersch (2012) describe the LBBQ as a ‘listening tool’, inviting children to explore their values and questionings, thus providing a window into their spiritual and philosophical beliefs. The difficulty in attempting to define spirituality has been noted in this field (e.g., Hay & Nye, 2009). Hence, Lipscomb and Gersch adopted the notion of spirituality established by Benson, Roehlkepartain and Rude (2003). Benson and colleagues (2003) drew spirituality away from the context of religiosity, and furthered this understanding as a dimension in its own right in which “the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred” (Benson et al., 2003, p. 3). The LBBQ therefore presented an existential context of meaning and experience that was positioned in the broader philosophical tradition of reflection, insight, and wonderment. Further, the development of the LBBQ was inspired by the writings of Victor Frankl (2006). For Frankl, meaning lay at the heart of one’s spirit, and offered man and woman the strength to survive even the most horrendous of experiences, as indeed did Frankl in the horrors of the World War II death camps. According to Lipscomb and Gersch, every person has the right and responsibility to seek out their rightful places in the world, and establish the meaning that these places have for them (Gersch, 2009; Lipscomb & Gersch, 2012).

The LBBQ is a dialogue between two individuals who listen to each other rather than just hear each other. In the power differential that exists between an adult (or older adolescent) and a child, the child will tend to pay greater weight to the status of the adult or adolescent. Thus, the older person must take on a truly listening stance, attending to the complexity of verbal as well as non-verbal communication from the child, and not merely to the words that the child uses to frame his or her beliefs, values, feelings, and experiences.

The LBBQ enabled the children to explore the daily experiences of their lives, the beliefs and values they brought to these experiences, and the questioning that they struggled with in the context of these experiences. The adolescent leaders were asked to offer their own perspectives to the questions as a means of encouraging the children to engage in conversation, but not to dominate or steer the conversation. The principal aim for the leaders was to dialogue with and listen to the children, and ensure that every child who wished to contribute to the discussion had the opportunity to do so, and every child who wished to sit back and listen was respected in doing this.

Over the four weeks of the program, only the first set of the LBBQ (the set is titled Identity) was used, firstly because the discussions were conducted over four weeks only, and secondly, the subject of Identity fitted well with the wider preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Rite of Confirmation describes the anointing of the individual as an anointing of the unique qualities of that person so that he or she might go into the world and, through the strength of these qualities, ‘anoint’ the world of their daily experiences (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2003, Article 2, No. 1316). Hence, the exploration of Identity provided the children with an opportunity to depth those unique qualities in themselves. They discussed what it meant to be born into the world, and to interact with others and the world in the ‘here and now’. They discussed the meaning of freedom according to their developmental capabilities, and related this freedom to the concept of responsibility – towards their families, friends, significant people in their lives, and themselves. The children further considered what it meant to live life well. That is, was it simply a case of “doing right and avoiding wrong”, or was it rather the pursuit of living life as fully as possible (as described in the Gospel of John, 10:10), conscious that life is not a dress rehearsal for the ‘real thing’?
How the Confirmation and Life, 2012 program was developed

The final development of the program was titled Confirmation and Life, 2012, and was trialled in a Catholic parish in southern coastal NSW. The program was conducted over four nights, with each night running for 90 minutes. Fifty-four Confirmation candidates (aged 11 to 12 years) participated in the program along with their parents. Parents and children were segregated into two physical areas, and addressed different contents. Due to space limitations, this paper will present the children’s segment of the program only. However, and briefly, parents elected to discuss issues related to the specific needs of parenting during the adolescent years. These needs comprised adolescent development, child-adolescent communication, problem solving, networking and monitoring, and finally self-care. In this way, we focused directly on the adolescent parent-child relationship, emphasising the relationship between appropriate parenting approaches during this developmental period and the harmony and strength of the family unit. Parents were asked to find a quiet time as often as possible during the week to dialogue with their children about what they had discussed, and not allow any other demand to intrude upon this time.

This article is the first of a number of articles that will investigate the benefit of our program. In 2013, the program was again conducted as Confirmation and Life, 2013. Once again, parents participated in four presentations related to the parent-child relationship during adolescent development, and the role of the parent during this developmental phase. Parents completed an evaluation of this content in Confirmation and Life, 2013, and their responses are currently being analysed. A further paper will focus on the continuation of benefits derived from the program. Evaluation of post-program maintenance will be conducted towards the end of 2013 before the children enter secondary school. Finally, at the conclusion of Confirmation and Life, 2014 (next year’s implementation), a longitudinal study will investigate the effects of this program across years.

Formation of the adolescent leaders

Year 11 students from the parish Catholic high school were asked to consider becoming leaders of eight to ten Confirmation candidates. Leaders were not expected to be Catholic, and two were not. Admitting the two non-Catholics as leaders was not seen to be a problem since the discussions with children would revolve around everyday issues of life that did not necessarily align with Catholic tradition. Rather, potential leaders were required to undergo a period of training prior to leading a group, and be open to spiritual exploration within themselves as well as encouraging this experience in the Confirmation candidates. Prior to the commencement of the training period, those adolescents who indicated a desire to become leaders were told that their behaviour and attitudes were to consistently reflect a moral and ethical conduct of living. The advice of teachers, who knew the adolescents who were eventually chosen as leaders, ensured their suitability for this role.

In other research, we found that adolescents who were rated high in mindfulness were more likely to sense their inner state of being (Lum, 2012). This finding was in accord with similar research (Ciarrochi, Kashdan, Leeson, Heaven, & Jordan, 2011; Leavey, Rothi, & Paul, 2011; Wilson & Deane, 2001). Mindfulness is the readiness to remain in the present moment of awareness and attention, in which the acceptance of thoughts, emotions and sensations happens in a non-judgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Adolescents who were mindful in the manner described by Kabat-Zinn (1994) were considered suitable for the task of leading younger children in their own spiritual journey. Once again, the advice of teachers was sought to confirm this requirement.

A meeting was held with the full Year 11 cohort who had the program and the qualities required of a suitable group leader explained to them. At the end of this presentation, and after a suitable cooling off period, interested students committed themselves to the leadership role. Fourteen students from a possible 109 offered to become group leaders. Their formation took place during school hours, and was conducted for a one-hour period over three weekly meetings. This preparation is outlined in Table 1.
Table 1

Preparation program for adolescent group leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week One   | How does the presentation of a Year 6 child appear?  
Adolescents first viewed the video of an interaction between the program director and 11 to 12 year-old children. The interaction was focused on a story with a moral attached to it. After listening to the story, the children discussed both what they thought the moral was and how it applied to daily living.  
Adolescents discussed the verbal and non-verbal communication that emerged from the discussion. They observed communication skills such as open and closed questioning, probing, summarising, and active listening. Adolescents critiqued the effectiveness of this skill usage.  
Adolescents observed places where the discussion leader struggled to communicate effectively, and offered their critique of how the leader addressed this struggle. |
| Week Two   | Adolescents reviewed the basic skills of verbal interaction, namely questioning, active listening, and summarising. They then divided into pairs and practised these skills, swapping the roles of listener and speaker. A simple question such as “What do you plan to do next weekend?” provided the focus for this practice.  
Adolescents reviewed this practice session, discussing the difficulties they encountered and ways in which they might overcome these difficulties.  
The program director normalised their difficulties, emphasising that listening and responding to the children in a context of alliance was more important than the refinement of their skill usage.  
The issue of dealing with aversive behaviour in the group was discussed in the context of using and practising skills of interaction. The program leader demonstrated basic strategies of group control through role-playing with the adolescents. |
| Week Three | Adolescents discussed the importance of balancing sitting and listening with doing and discussing.  
Adolescents were introduced to playing message-embedded games with 11 to 12 year old children. They discussed the structure of game development according to a teaching/learning component, implementation of the game within a limited time frame, group discussion about the message contained within the game, and finally linking the game back to the teaching/learning component.  
Adolescents discussed the combination of having fun with gaining insight into some aspect contained within the game. |

Meeting before each week’s session  
Prior to each week of the program, the program leader met with the adolescent leaders and discussed the theme and aims of that week’s interaction with the children.  
Adolescent leaders were encouraged to ask questions about these activities, and suggest ways in which they might best be implemented.  

Disclosure by a child  
The issue of child disclosure was described to the adolescents, including disclosures of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.  
Adolescents were given a procedure for dealing effectively with any possible disclosure.  
Adolescents were reminded that they were not in a therapeutic role, and so were not, nor expected, to deal with the disclosure themselves.  
Special attention was paid to the adolescents’ responses to this possibility, ensuring that they were comfortable with its possibility and the manner in which they were to deal with it. |
Structure of the night and of children’s sessions
Each night was programmed with the same structure (see Table 2).

Table 2
Structure of the night

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00 – 7.10pm</td>
<td>Children sign on and collect their name tags.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10 – 7.15pm</td>
<td>Children move to their group leaders, who then take them to a pre-allocated space away from the parent meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.15 – 8.15pm</td>
<td>Group discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.15 – 8.30pm</td>
<td>Children return to their parents with their group leaders. All participants gather in a quiet space and conclude the night with a prepared reflection on the Gospel taken from the previous Sunday Mass.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dialogue with the children also had a consistent structure (see Table 3 for structure content).

Table 3
Structure of the children’s dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.15 – 7.20</td>
<td>Children settle into their space and become comfortable. They speak about the highs and lows of their week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.20-7.45</td>
<td>Leaders present the children with the LBBQ question for the week. Leaders ask the children what they think that question means to ensure that they understand its content. Leaders then open a dialogue with the children, and encourage a free-flowing communication between the children and with the leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.45 – 8.00</td>
<td>Children engage in a group game that has been developed to reflect the LBBQ question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00 – 8.15</td>
<td>Children discuss how the experience of the game reflected the dialogue around the LBBQ question. Children are encouraged to link their own comments and thoughts about the LBBQ question to their personal experience of the game Leaders ensure that the fun of the game is not ‘bled dry’ by the dialogue, but rather that the game and the dialogue map well onto each other in meaning and application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>Children re-join their parents in the quiet space for the reflection on the Gospel passage from the previous Sunday Mass.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The time frames indicated in Tables 2 and 3 required occasional flexibility to enable people to move to allocated spaces. However, the starting and finishing times of the meeting were maintained as closely as possible, thus ensuring that parents met any deadlines or responsibilities they had set (e.g., baby-sitting) in order to attend the meeting.

Leaders worked with the children in pairs, according to friendship, and used a simple lesson plan to guide them. A brief question and answer time took place with the leaders before they moved off with their groups, and at the conclusion of the night they gathered for a period of debriefing. Debriefing was an important opportunity for leaders to speak about any experiences that might have concerned them, or significant experiences they might have had, including “feel good” experiences with the children. Leaders were also given the mobile telephone number and email...
address of the program director should they have any personal concerns they wished to discuss in private. A suitably qualified adult was available for support should the leaders require it. However, it was made clear that the adolescents would be allowed to work with their groups without adult intrusion, and would seek support if they felt it was needed.

Group spaces were allocated to the children, and each group maintained the same space throughout the four weeks. Leaders sat in the circle with the children, rather than in front of them, thus providing the sense of dialogue rather than ‘speaking to’ the children. Individual spaces were structured so that games and dialogue of one group did not interfere with adjoining groups. The physical space provided some difficulties. It was not possible to give each group sufficient space to be totally separate from other groups so that they did not interfere with each other. This interference was mainly seen in members of one group “eaves-dropping” on the group near them.

The teacher, who was responsible for pastoral care in one of the schools, agreed to undertake the role of support person. The support person who moved around the groups each week reported that children and leaders seemed to mix with each other in an involved manner. Adolescents were also observed to put their own personal signature on the groups. Some groups were more physically active than other groups, with the more active groups moving around their space and becoming exuberant in their conversation, and the quieter groups appearing to listen and speak as if they were having a deeply philosophical discussion. Leaders reported that the games were of varied success. The implementation of games was not a problem. Rather, the difficulty lay in developing a link between the game and the LBBQ question. Leaders reported that children ranged between simply not picking up the link between game and question to being completely off the mark in their interpretation of the link between the game and the question. Nonetheless, dialogue did take place after the game was played, and children appeared to take the opportunity to express their opinions and be heard. This outcome was considered more important than grasping the link between game and question. According to both leaders and support person, the children appeared to enjoy the games. However, and more importantly, children were also reported to engage with each other through these games, and in so doing, were further able to develop a team spirit of mutual acceptance and communication.

Leaders were debriefed at the end of each meeting. They did not report having to deal with disclosure from any child, nor did they report difficulties with controlling their groups. Some leaders did report having difficulty with maintaining a balance of interaction among the children, stating that some children tended to dominate the group with their comments. Leaders appeared to lack the experience of dealing effectively with this issue without stifling the dialogue. In relation to weekly attendance, there was no drop-off by children and their parents. In fact, the number of children increased slightly over the four weeks as news about the groups filtered through the two schools. Leaders also remained consistent in their attendance.

Children’s evaluation of the four sessions
The Year 6 teachers conducted an evaluation of children’s experiences during the program, and made their responses available for the purposes of this paper. Children completed an age-appropriate anonymous questionnaire, providing both a rating and qualitative comments for each question. Questionnaire items enquired into their appreciation of the weekly discussions, their appreciation of the leaders’ involvement, the gender mix of the groups, and the group make-up. Forty-four children completed the questionnaire. Percentage values for their responses were generally encouraging. Children believed that their group sizes were “just right” (84.4%), and that each week’s dialogue either “mostly” (37.8%) or “definitely” (42.2%) allowed them to express their feelings and ideas. The opportunity to become involved in the dialogues was evidently positive (“yes”: 68.9%; “mostly”: 22.2%), and children seemed to enjoy having this opportunity happen in a mixed gender setting (93.3%). Finally, children seemed to enjoy a positive relationship with their adolescent leaders, with 68.9% saying that this relationship was “great”, and 20.0% saying that it was “good”.

Children indicated that the dialogues helped them to reflect on issues that were important at their stage of development, particularly moving from a primary school environment to the less structured life of high school. One child commented “I’m not scared to grow up and go to high school”, while another child believed that the discussions “made me feel empowered and positive to [sic] my future years ahead”. This and another comment (“good to learn about the challenges ahead of me”) showed that the children engaged in dialogue that encouraged them to reflect on
future realities. The children seemed to imagine what their future lives were going to look like. Another child felt that
the program was “helping me to slow down and just enjoy life”. Even at this young age, it appeared that this child was
being affected by demands that prevented him or her from listening to one’s needs.
Qualitative comments were also encouraging. Children viewed their leaders as “supportive, kind and awesome”, as
being “a great help with questions”, and capable of facilitating dialogue (“the leaders took [sic] turns for people to
talk”). The leaders also appeared to keep the children engaged (“really good and fun”; “it was great they spoke to all of
us”) although it seemed that at least one pair of leaders drifted off the mark with the children (“sometimes they get a
bit off track”). One child commented that “I don’t think that the ‘when we die what will happen’ convosation [sic] was
necessary”. It was unclear as to what group had this conversation, and when the conversation took place in the group.
However, the comment reiterated the importance of ensuring that the adolescent leaders were properly prepared and
skilled, and that they remained sensitive not to engage the children in dialogue that might create distress for a child.

The benefit of Confirmation and Life, 2012 for the children, and future directions
The aim of developing a program that served as an adjunct to the more traditional preparation for the Sacrament
of Confirmation was achieved insofar as children appeared to experience and enjoy the opportunity to explore
important issues in their lives. This exploration of daily life events was seen by the program developers to provide
children with a personal direction for the Sacrament of Confirmation, and therefore offered them the opportunity to
take the meaning of this sacrament into the everyday context of the children’s lives.

The LBBQ offered the appropriate structure for engaging the children in dialogue. The questions prompted children
to speak about their lives, and express the activities that took place within them through the lens of personal identity.
That is, children were encouraged to see themselves as unique beings who were given the choice to make decisions
in life and act on them, and who could therefore engage with life and not just observe it from the fringe. In this way,
children were exposed to the notion of flourishing rather than languishing, although they were not of a developmental
level to describe the experience in this way. As a means of opening dialogue with children, and enabling their voices
to be heard, the LBBQ was a valuable resource that encouraged this goal to be reached.

Preparations for Confirmation and Life, 2013 are currently underway. The LBBQ will once again be used without alteration
to its administration. The leaders are being prepared with greater emphasis on management of group dialogue with
children. Role-plays with Year 7 rather than Year 6 children (due to convenience) are giving the current group of leaders
the opportunity to practise their skills in a realistic setting. The video of interaction with children of varying ages as
demonstrated by the program director is again being used in the context of role-plays with Year 7 students. Greater
emphasis is also being placed on leaders exploring and listening to their inner selves, using the LBBQ questions as a
means of achieving this end. In addition, preparation sessions will be concluded with a period of quiet meditation,
wherein the program director will guide the adolescents through self-reflection. Apart from these changes to leader
preparation, the Confirmation and Life, 2013 program for the children will be repeated as in 2012.

Our approach to preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation offered children and adolescents alike the experience
of personal participation in the Church as Church-in-the-world. Having the traditional parish sacramental program
run alongside the Confirmation and Life, 2012 program afforded children the opportunity to investigate Confirmation
not only from a theological perspective but also of viewing this sacrament as the invitation to take its fruits into
interactions of daily life. Our approach also involved adolescents and children in frank discussions about the place
of the Church in the world today, and their participation in it. Leaders were not expected to be Catholic, but they were
expected to view spiritual realities as pervading both the tradition of the Catholic Church and the secular world of daily
activity alike (see The Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, describe the
“dichotomy affecting the modern world” as being a “symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man [sic] himself”
(#10). Further, this constitution describes the Church as being the means of strengthening people through the Spirit
in order to be worthy of their destiny (#10). Confirmation and Life, 2012 was therefore the gathering point of the young
who grappled with personal issues and the issues of the world as they experienced it, not just as individuals but as members of the Church who participated in the world, and if they were not Catholic, as members of the world who were welcomed into the Church as valued companions on the journey of life.

References


A new way forward: 
Special religious instruction in Victoria, Australia

Charlotte Baines

Abstract

Topical debate about religious instruction in Victorian schools raises wider issues about the religion and state relationship in Australian education. This article draws on a recent Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Decision (VCAT) decision to explore the limits of religious freedom in Victoria, Australia. This article questions how existing religion-state relations in Victoria can both expand and limit freedom of religion which also implies freedom from religion. It is argued that pragmatic religion-state responses are recognising the value of religious freedom on the one hand, and on the other, failing to provide adequate state aid for education about diverse religions and beliefs. It is concluded that state neutrality as an aspirational goal is not fully realised in Victoria as the government and legal system is failing to preserve faith-based and secular interests in an even-handed way. Recommendations are made to improve the status quo.

Author Note

Charlotte Baines has recently completed her PhD on the church and state relationship in contemporary Australia at Monash University, where she has taught in the Sociology Department. Dr Baines’ research area is in the area of sociology in religion. She is also a former Mayor of the City of Monash.
Religious instruction in Victorian state-run (public) schools has hit the headlines. One advocacy group, Parents Victoria, wants religious instruction to occur outside normal school hours as they claim that children who ‘opt out’ of special religious instruction (SRI) feel excluded (Topsfield, 2012). Under the Victorian Education and Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian school principals must arrange for the provision of SRI if an accredited and approved instructor is available. SRI emerged in state schools during the nineteenth century to enable Christian clergy and others to educate school students about the value of Christianity, especially the English church (Byrne, 2013). SRI arose in an era when the majority of Australians were Protestant Christian – a demographic reality which no longer exists. In 2011 the percentage of Australians identifying as Christian fell from 88% in 1947 to 61%, with 22% claiming no religion and other religions such as Buddhism (2.5%), Islam (2.2%) and Hinduism (1.3%) continuing to rise in the population (Bouma, 2011b; ABS 2012). As Australia has transitioned from a predominately Christian to a multi-faith society, Bouma (2011a) declares that to ‘force children into being instructed as though they were Christians, or Christians in the making – or as one school chaplain described them “not-yet-Christians” is unsupportable in multicultural, multi-faith Australia.’ In this sense, the idea that public schools can be used to educate children into the Christian faith to the exclusion of other religions and beliefs in contemporary Australia is no longer tenable.

Some commentators are concerned that religious instruction is being used to proselytise children, and that existing programs do not properly address diverse religious needs in Victorian state schools (Zyngier, 2013). Access Ministries, the main provider of special religious instruction in Victorian government schools, has repeatedly denied claims that it is proselytising to children: an act which is strictly prohibited under the program (Collins, 2011). Other stakeholders, such as the Uniting Church, are pushing for more inclusive religious instruction that guarantees “a broader theological and educational approach including contemporary teaching practices, recognition of literature, history and science” (Preiss, 2013). Issues about what ought to be the religion and state relationship lie at the heart of debates over religious instruction in government schools. The President of Parents Victoria, Sharon Healy believes that religious instruction is a family matter that should not be taught in state schools (Topsfield, 2012). Access Ministries, in contrast, wants Christian instruction to be retained in schools (Collins, 2011) while Lesh (2011), a Melbourne high school student, is pushing for education about diverse religions in government schools. In her study of Australian education, Byrne (2013) claims that religious instruction under public education statutes remains contentious as the interpretation of the word ‘secular’ has remained ambiguous over the last two hundred years. Byrne believes that clarifying the secular principle would help to reduce religious tension in contemporary Australian education. This study will test whether state neutrality as an aspirational goal is fully realised in Victoria.

A further Australian study by Byrne (2012a, pp. 206-207) examines how religion is taught in state schools, and attitudes towards religious diversity. Byrne found that conservative religious pedagogies produce negative attitudes towards religious diversity, and that Australian parents and professional educators would prefer a more inclusive approach to the teaching of religion in public schools. Although multicultural policies encourage inclusion for all, the practice of multiculturalism can favour one faith over another, and undermine goals for a more socially inclusive education system. In a related study, Byrne (2012b) investigated segregated religious instruction, child identity and exclusion in state-run (public schools). Her findings suggest that an emphasis on Christianity in a school environment may lead children to exclude those who follow other religions and beliefs. Byrne believes there is a need to further explore how different religion pedagogies may contribute to a more inclusive future for young Australians. Wider research by Reid (2011) argues that religious education should form part of the new National Curriculum as religious education can promote inter-religious understanding, and enable young people to “make sense of the world” and to develop a sense of “self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity” (pp. 10-14). Religious education for Reid includes a critique of secularist assumptions about society.

Maddox (2011a, b) has considered the inclusive nature of Australian faith schools under existing religion-state arrangements. In her research of faith schools under the Howard era (1996 to 2007) of conservative politics, Maddox (2011a) maintains that schools are inclusive when they support diverse cultures and ideas that might otherwise be excluded by the dominant culture. Schools are exclusive when they perpetuate existing privilege through high school fees and ideology which denies admission on the basis of faith. In a related study, Maddox (2011b, pp. 300-314)
questions the appropriateness of increased government funds to Christian schools that have a legislative exemption to discriminate on the grounds of religion. The implication here is that religious exemptions can be used to favour a particular section of the community that can already look after themselves. Both studies suggest that the funding model and legislative framework for education in Australia can perpetuate inequalities between faith-based and secular interest groups. The Australian government has funded faith-based schools since 1963 (Maddox, 2011b). The Australian constitution broadly defines the religion and state relationship in Australia. In particular, section 116 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act states that:

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

The Australian constitution suggests that the state is required to treat faith-based and secular interests in an even-handed/neutral way. The studies reviewed above demonstrate that the practice of religion-state relations in Australian education can favour Christian interests, and raise issues about the recognition of other minor faiths and secular interests in contemporary Australia. Some academics support a more inclusive educational alternative to what is currently on offer in state and faith-based (private) schools (Byrne, 2012ab; Maddox, 2011ab). In their comparative study of religion-state relations in the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, England and Germany, Monsma and Soper (2009) claim that Australia's religion-state arrangements are characterised by pragmatic pluralism which involves the government responding to faith-based and secular interests in a politically expedient way. Monsma and Soper also found that Australian policy reaches the goal of governmental neutrality as it does not favour or discriminate against faith-based and secular interests. Monsma and Soper's findings will be tested in this project. This study, contributes to the literature on religion-state relations in contemporary Australia by exploring the limits of religious freedom in the Victorian education system. This article questions how the practice of religion-state relations can both expand and limit freedom of religion, which also implies freedom from religion. The implications for the religion and state relationship in Australia today are then discussed. In this paper, the religion and state relationship refers to the relationship between (organised) religion, VCAT and the Victorian government.

Studies of religious instruction in Victorian public schools, and the wider religion-state relationship, is rare and timely as diversity continues to increase and the role of the state continues to expand in social welfare (Bouma, 2011b; Carey & Gascoigne, 2011). The primary source of data for this article is: Aitkin & Ors v The State of Victoria – Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (Anti-Discrimination) [2012] VCAT 1547 – a Victorian case on religious instruction in schools that was heard before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). The case is available via the VCAT website (www.vcat.vic.gov.au). The human rights division of VCAT hears and determines civil disputes that relate to racial and religious vilification and discrimination (VCAT, 2013). While a detailed analysis of religious instruction in all Australian states and territories goes beyond the scope of this paper, an examination of the issues arising in Victoria provides some insights into wider national issues that need to be addressed.

A distinction is made between special religious instruction (SRI) and general religious education (GRE) under existing religion-state arrangements. The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Victoria) defines special religious instruction as “instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs” (section 2.2.11(5)). GRE is defined as “education about the major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world” (2.2.10(4)). General religious education is broader in scope than special religious instruction. Except for the provision of SRI in schools, education in government schools must be secular and not favour or discriminate against any religion or belief. Religious instruction is the focus of this study.

This article will now investigate how religion is taught in England, US and Quebec schools to demonstrate how Victoria’s religion-state arrangements in education are different. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States were settled by people of European descent. A brief history of religion and education in Victoria will follow. Religion-state arrangements will then be explored in the Victorian education system with particular reference to Aitkin & Ors v The State of Victoria – Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (Anti-Discrimination) [2012] VCAT 1547.
Recommendations will be made to improve the status quo. Against a backdrop of religious change, it is argued that pragmatic religion-state responses are recognising the value of religious freedom on the one hand, and on the other, failing to provide adequate state aid for education about diverse religions and beliefs.

**Comparative Perspectives on Religion and Education**

England accommodates diverse religious needs in schools under the *Education (Reform) Act 1998* (UK) (Halstead, 2011, pp. 100-101). Approximately one third of publically funded schools in England are faith schools. The *Education (Reform) Act 1998* (UK) provides for religious education but not religious instruction. Pupils in state schools are taught about Christianity and other principal religions in Great Britain namely Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, the Sikh faith, and Buddhism (Lundie, 2012). Religious education does not form part of the National Curriculum. Parents may withdraw their children from religious education and/or collective worship. The content of religious education in public schools is monitored by a local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) which comprises a cross-section of faith leaders, teachers and local councillors. The local determination of religious education in public schools can lead to significant variation in the way religious education is developed and taught.

The religious curriculum of faith schools in England is the responsibility of the governing body which has the power to reflect the religious character of their school in the education syllabus, or to educate their pupils about a range of religious traditions (Brown, 2003). Religious education is based on a phenomenological approach which compares and contrasts various religious traditions with different forms of beliefs such as humanism and communism in a non-judgmental way (Buchanan, 2005, p. 30). Students are not required to approve or practise the religions or beliefs that are taught. Faith schools in England do not have an obligation to promote inclusive religious education. Schools have the potential to play a more powerful role than the church in educating young people about religion as attendance at Catholic and Protestant churches continues to decline sharply, there is an absence of qualified clergy, and the church is struggling financially (Berger et al., 2008, p. 11). The key challenge is to develop a uniform religious pedagogy that can influence classroom practice and public policy in all schools.

The United States protects religious freedom by interpreting and applying a strict separation of religion and state in education (Haynes & Thomas, 2007, pp. 62-65). The United States judiciary plays a key role in resolving religion-state tension as the Supreme Court has prevented government-sponsored religious activity under the First Amendment. The First Amendment prevents any law from establishing a religion, or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Teachers and public school officials cannot persuade or compel their students to participate in prayer, devotional readings from the bible or other religious activities. Schools do not play a key role in educating young people about religion. The government supports private religious activity. Students can pray before, during or after the school day, and can congregate in prayer or study religious materials when not engaged in school activities or instruction. Students can also receive off-premises religious instruction. Despite the lack of religious instruction or religious education in schools, religion is vibrant in the United States, and is viewed as a source of positive values (Berger et al., 2008). Public advocacy from a variety of stakeholders has renewed efforts to support religion in schools (Wood, 1984, pp. 40-42). In the late twentieth century, President Reagan advocated in favour of ‘voluntary prayer’ in public schools during his term of office (1981-1989). Existing educational initiatives such as the Religion and Social Studies Project of Florida State University support the academic study of religion.

Religion-state relations in Quebec are co-operative and recognise faith-based and secular interests in education. Since 2008 the ethics and religious culture program in Quebec has become a compulsory subject for students who attend public and private schools (Morris, 2011, pp. 188-211). In the past, students could choose from one of three options: (1) Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction, (2) Protestant Moral and Religious Instruction and (3) Moral Education. The ethics and religious culture program combines the study of ethics and religion into a single program, and encourages dialogue and understanding between secular and religious Canadians. Private schools can still conduct religious education which emphasises their faith-based identity. Students who participate in the ethics and religious culture program are required to reflect on ethical questions, to understand the place of religion in society, and to engage in dialogue about diverse religions and beliefs. Although the more “mainstream” Protestant Churches have supported...
the change, Catholic parents in various regions in Quebec have spoken out against the secularisation of the education system (Boudreau, 2011). The Quebec government changed the study of religion in schools eleven years after the initial proposal was made to the government by a task force established by the Education Minister in 1997.

The new ethics and religious culture program in Quebec regards diversity as a strength that needs to be recognised, nurtured and respected. Although the majority of Quebeckers (83%) identify as Catholic, the Catholic Church no longer dominates all aspects of society, from family life to education and social services (Bibby, 2007). According to Boudreau (2011, p. 220), the ethics and religious culture program emphasises specific religious traditions such as Protestantism, Catholicism, Native Spirituality and Judaism to the detriment of other faiths and beliefs. Despite this concern, the content of the program is attempting to include a range of faith-based and secular views.

Comparative studies of religious instruction in England, US and Canadian schools provide insights into the limits of religious freedom under existing religion-state arrangements. England has a history of pragmatically accommodating religious minorities, and recognises the growth of religious diversity under the Education Reform Act 1998 (UK). One limitation of the existing approach is that questions about the meaning and purpose of life are directly related to religious concepts (National Secular Society, 2011). SACREs can also be dominated by faith leaders, which have implications for secular representation (National Secular Society, 2011). The government’s recent decision to withdraw training bursaries from religious education in 2013-2014 further suggests that those faiths which are more established than others, such as the Christians, will be at a competitive advantage (Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2013). The United States, in contrast, continues to prevent government-sponsored religious instruction during school hours. Some pragmatic accommodations have been made.

In their work on the challenge of pluralism, Monsma and Soper (2009) contend that the strict separation of religion and state violates the aspirational goal towards state neutrality as the “government is no longer treating religious and nonreligious viewpoints and groups in an even-handed way” (p. 226). In this sense, those who support the exclusion of religion in schools are at a competitive advantage while those who support religious education in schools are at a competitive disadvantage. Pragmatic religion-state responses by the English and US governments recognise the value of religious freedom on the one hand, and on the other, fail to provide adequate state aid for education about diverse religions and beliefs.

The Quebec ethics and religious culture program is exceptional when compared to the English and US models of religion in education, as the Quebec government recognises the value of religious freedom and funds a religion and ethics program that is fair for all. A recent government report on the establishment of an ethics and religious culture program in Quebec stated that:

The implementation of a common ethics and religious culture program for all students in Québec is rooted in the government’s will to best serve the interests of everyone involved (students, parents, school staff and society as a whole). This decision attests to the government’s intent to respect contemporary sensitivities with regard to equal treatment of people and groups and not to perpetuate a system of exceptions that contravenes the fundamental rights recognized by the Charters, while contributing to transmitting Québec culture, which has particularly been shaped by Catholic and Protestant traditions. (Government of Quebec, 2005, p. 4)

The Quebec program responds to concerns that the school system was discriminatory (Boudreau, 2011). It is argued that the Quebec model provides the best example of government neutrality towards faith-based and secular interests. Further detail about the ethics and religious culture program is provided below. Another salient difference between the Quebec model and the English and US models is that the study of ethics and religion is compulsory in public schools. In England, religious instruction is voluntary in state schools. The United States, in contrast, does not fund religious instruction in public schools. This article will now provide a brief history of religion and education in Victoria.

**Religion and Education in Victoria: A Brief History**

Religious instruction in Victorian state schools was first provided under the Education (Religious Instruction) Act 1950 (Victoria). Section 21 stated that:
(2) subject to this section religious instruction may be given in any state school but otherwise secular instruction alone shall be given in state school.

(3) When religious instruction is given in any state school during the hours set apart for the instruction of the pupils—
(a) such religious instruction shall be given by persons who are accredited representatives of religious bodies and who are approved by the Minister for the purpose;
(b) such religious instruction shall be given on the basis of the normal class organisation of the school except in any school where the Minister, having regard to the particular circumstances of such school, authorises some other basis to be observed; and
(c) attendance at any class for such religious instruction shall not be compulsory for any pupil whose parents desire that he be excused from attending.

 Religious instruction was provided during school hours. Despite a decline in religious instruction during the mid 1960s to mid 1970s the government continued to support special religious instruction in Victorian government schools for pragmatic reasons (Howells, 1978). For example, in 1974 a report on religious education in state schools (Russell Report) recommended that religious education be made available to all children, and that religious education replace the church-controlled religious program (Howells, 1978, pp. 118-122). The report claimed that it was possible to develop religious education that focused on theological reflection or religious studies. Theological reflection was deemed to be inappropriate while the latter was acceptable. The Minister backed religious instruction due to considerable Christian support to retain the church-controlled program. The Minister did not support religious education as there had been adverse legal opinion against some aspects of the program. There was also not enough community support for the change. Subsequent government attempts to change the rules governing special religious instruction in 2005 and 2006 were met with loud opposition from the churches, and the law stayed unchanged (Bachelard, 2011).

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Victoria) does not treat faith-based and secular interests in an even-handed way as the act does not contain a secular ethics program as an alternative to religious instruction and general religious education (GRE). A secular ethics alternative does not need to replace the teaching of religion in public schools. The Victorian curriculum and assessment authority currently provides a state accredited course in Religion and Society for students completing their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The study comprises four units: religion in society, ethics and morality, the search for meaning, and challenge and response (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2010). Victoria is a religiously diverse state. In 2011, 57.5% of the population affiliated with Christianity, 24% followed no religion and 9.3% followed non-Christian religions (Profile.id, 2013). It is unlikely that minor faiths such as the Buddhists, Muslim and Hindus, alongside secular humanist groups will have the capacity to effectively challenge the status quo in the future. Religion in Australia has been described as shy and withdrawn, not exuberant as in the United States (Bouma, 2006, p. 35).

All Australian states and territories recognise the value of religious freedom by making provision for religious instruction or religious education in government schools under their respective education acts. Religious education is essentially the same as religious instruction but with a different name. The New South Wales Education Act 1990 is the only act that provides special education in ethics as a secular alternative to special religious education in state schools. The Queensland Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 permits selected Bible lessons in state primary and special schools during school hours. Bible instruction cannot “include any teaching in the distinctive tenets or doctrines of any religious denomination, society or sect” (section 76(4)). The South Australian Education Regulations 2012 emphasises Christian religious education in government schools, and allows churches to conduct seminars or gatherings on school property or elsewhere for one half day in each term. The Australian government is currently developing a national curriculum for all states and territories. The Australian Education Act 2013 does not make reference to religious instruction or a secular ethics program. The status quo provides qualified faith-based providers with a voluntary choice to develop their faith-based views in an otherwise secular environment.
The inclusion of religious instruction/education in all education acts in Australia suggests that the state supports a place for religion in education and society more broadly. It is argued that all states and territories except for New South Wales favour Christian interests in religious instruction/education as they do not provide a secular ethics program which would encourage students to learn that they can be moral without being religious. This article will now draw on Aitkin & Ors v The State of Victoria – Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (Anti-Discrimination) [2012] VCAT 1547 to consider how VCAT resolved a dispute concerning religious instruction in the State of Victoria.

Special Religious Instruction in Victoria, Australia: Aitkin & Ors v The State of Victoria – Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (Anti-Discrimination) [2012] VCAT 1547

In 2012 three Victorian parents of primary school children brought a case before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal claiming that special religious instruction (SRI) in three Victorian schools discriminated against their children (eight in total) under the Equal Opportunity Acts 1995 and 2010 (Victoria). The parents claimed that children who choose not to participate in religious instruction were identified as different and separated from their peers on the basis of their religious beliefs. The parents also alleged that there was a lack of educational alternatives for students not attending SRI. The parents did not believe that religious instruction should occur during school hours. SRI can be provided in government schools by a range of faith groups who are approved by the Minister for the purpose of religious instruction under part two, division two of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Victoria). Attendance at special religious instruction is not compulsory and runs for approximately thirty minutes. Since 23 August 2011, Victorian schools have required parents of children who participate in religious instruction to ‘opt in’ to special religious instruction as opposed to ‘opt out.’ The tribunal held that the State of Victoria had not discriminated against eight primary school children in the provision of special religious instruction in those schools. The court also found that special religious instruction is not compulsory, and that parents who withdraw their children from SRI engage in meaningful activities under teachers’ supervision. The decision reflects a “hands off” approach to religion-state relations.

VCAT recognises the value of religious freedom but does not encourage the government to fund education about diverse religions and beliefs in government schools. At present, Access Ministries, a Christian service provider, is the only religious instruction provider to receive funding from the Victorian government (Hobsons, 2013). Access volunteers provide 96% of religious instruction in Victorian government schools (Hobsons, 2013). The CEO of Access Ministries, Dr Evonne Paddison has previously urged evangelical Christians to use religious instruction to ‘make disciples’ – an act which is prohibited under the program guidelines (Topsfield & Cooper, 2011). Dr Paddison’s comments imply that Access Ministries may not represent broad Christian interests – an objective of their ministries (The Council for Christian Education in Schools Training as Access Ministries, 2013). Some public commentary also suggests that the Victorian government has increased funding for Access Ministries over the last several years (Topsfield, 2011). While small changes to the act are important, the monopoly that Access Ministries have over religious instruction is concerning as the religious instruction provided by Access Ministries could be used to promote an exclusive view of the world. It is further suggested that the lack of a suitable secular ethics program divides students on the basis of faith.

The absence of government funding for general religious education under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Victoria) raises issues about the capacity of Victorian schools to promote respect for different religions and beliefs. Pragmatic religion-state responses recognise the value of religious freedom on the one hand, and on the other, fail to provide adequate state aid for education about diverse religions and beliefs. It is argued that Victoria’s response to education about diverse religions and beliefs is trailing behind the Canadian and British approach to education about diverse religions and beliefs in schools. At present, the aspirational goal towards state neutrality is not fully realised in Victoria as the state is favouring (evangelical) Christian interests, and raising issues for the recognition of other minor faiths and secular interests. The findings support the work of Byrne (2012ab) who suggests there is a need to address educational inequalities, and to produce educational responses that better reflect religious change. Other Australian studies support an increased focus on interfaith and intercultural understanding within Australian schools (Erebus International, 2006).
It is suggested that the Victorian government is not interested in making significant changes to the practice of SRI or general religious education in Victorian government schools as faith leaders and secular lobby groups are too divided on the issue (Fairness in Schools, 2011; Humanist Society of Victoria, 2011; Preiss, 2013; Zwartz, 2011). In her work on public school religion education, Byrne (2009, p. 29) also claims that the multi-faith study of religions may lead some people to believe that Australia’s Christian heritage is being threatened which could limit a politician’s ability to court Christian voters. A further political setback for the introduction of a secular ethics program in Victoria is loud Catholic advocacy against the program. In 2010 the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney challenged a trial ethics program in ten state-run New South Wales primary schools on the grounds that it competes with special religious education, and seeks to draw students away from Christian teaching. The Archdiocese of Sydney supports an ethics course that is taught within the scope of general religious education (Archdiocese of Sydney, 2010).

Australian Catholics have not always supported ‘general religious teaching’ in public schools. In his work on the challenge of the public syllabus in religious studies, Lovat (2001, pp. 1-10) examines how Catholic advocacy played a key role in eradicating ‘general religious teaching’ under the New South Wales Public Instruction Act 1880, and limiting discussion on ‘general religious teaching’ that arose from a 1964 government report entitled General Religious and Moral Education. Catholics opposed ‘general religious teaching’ in government schools from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century on the grounds that government schools were perceived as ‘godless’ and unable to provide proper religious education. Lovat (2001) writes that:

The supreme challenge…for Catholic Education [is] to reprise their role, to be honest in assessing the place (and true impact) of religious education, and to allow (finally) educationalists to wrest control of religious education from the religious politics of diocesan and education office bureaucracies. In this way, the supreme irony of all might not occur, namely, that religious literacy, understanding, sympathy, and even enfaithment, might be seen ultimately to be done better in the public schooling systems than in their religious counterparts. (p. 11)

Today, public syllabuses on religious studies are influencing faith-based schools (Lovat 2001). If a secular ethics program is introduced in Victoria, the government will need to ensure that Christian groups, such as the Catholics, do not feel that their interests are being threatened. While faith-based and secular schools provide parents with educational choice, it is argued that religious instruction in Victorian state schools is not neutral, and raises issues for the aspirational goal towards state neutrality in the state of Victoria. My findings contrast the work of Monsma and Soper (2009) who found that “in practice, if not always in theory, Australian policy discriminates neither among religious groups nor between religious and nonreligious belief systems” (p. 124).

A New Way Forward

Against a backdrop of religious change, comparative studies demonstrate that Victorian state schools would benefit from more inclusive education about diverse religions and beliefs. In his study of Quebec’s ethics and religious culture program (ERC), Morris (2011, pp. 193-207) considers how the two primary objectives of the ERC program – the recognition of others and the pursuit of the common good – can encourage open and respectful dialogue with others. Morris believes that the ERC program inspires students to value diversity and to work on projects that benefit the community and democracy. The program invites students to reflect on ethical questions, to understand the importance of religion, and to engage in open dialogue that benefits the wider community. Morris (2011) maintains that “this openness and cooperative spirit are essential for social peace” (p. 198). Uniform pedagogy is also important as variation may hinder respect for religious difference in local communities, as is possible with local SACRES in Britain. It is argued that an ethics and religious culture program in Victorian government schools would provide a fairer and more inclusive alternative to the status quo which favours evangelical Christian interests through government aid to Access Ministries, and the absence of government funding for general religious education. An ethics and religious culture program would meet the needs of a multi-faith state, and help to ensure that faith-based and secular interests are treated in an even-handed way in education.
In their comparative study on the challenge of pluralism, Monsma and Soper (2009) consider the proper relationship between religion and state to reduce religious tension:

We are convinced that the answer to these growing conflicts is to be found in a church-state policy that is genuinely neutral among all religious groups and between religious and secular perspectives generally, and that accommodates and promotes the religious pluralism that is a natural feature of each nation. We do not believe that the state can attain genuine neutrality, or evenhandedness among religious and secular groups in society, with a church-state policy that supports only some religious groups and practices but not others, nor through a no-aid-to-religion standard that ends up favouring secular over religious perspectives. (p. x).

Against a backdrop of religious change, the Victorian government has the capacity to promote religion-state policy that is genuinely neutral among faith-based and secular interest groups. Three recommendations are made for the Victorian government to consider as they strive towards the aspirational goal of state neutrality.

1. First, it is recommended that the Victorian government address the meaning and interpretation of the word ‘secular.’ At present, the word ‘secular’ has various shades – from representing a private place for religion in society to allowing religious voices to be heard in public discourse (Byrne, 2013). As a consequence, the ongoing place for religious instruction/general religious education in schools remains ambiguous. It is recommended that a range of stakeholders from faith leaders to policy makers and academics convene a state or national forum with a view to reaching agreement on an overarching religion-state framework that can accommodate the growth of religious diversity in contemporary Australia. A discussion about what ought to be the religion and state relationship in Victorian education may improve the status quo.

2. Second, it is proposed that a secular ethics program be trialled across the state of Victoria. The trial ethics program could be tested in a range of public and private schools, and at a range of times, i.e. at the same time as religious instruction and at another convenient time in the curriculum to minimise perceived competition with religious instruction. Given that the National School Chaplaincy Program has been secularised and renamed the ‘National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program’, it is time for the Victorian government to trial a secular ethics program.

3. Third, it is recommended that Victorian government develop and fund a curriculum that better supports education about diverse religions and beliefs in government schools. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians states that there is a “need to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship” (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2009, p. 4). Given this clear directive, it is recommend that the Victorian government partners with Religions for Peace in Australia to develop and fund a general religious education curriculum (GRE) that provides a multi-faith study of diverse religions and beliefs. The current lack of funding for general religious education prevents the development of a best practice model. A GRE program could level the playing field in education, and help to reduce a favoured status for evangelical Christian teaching. General religious education does not have to replace religious instruction in schools.

Conclusion

This article explored the limits of religious education in Victorian state-run schools. The findings revealed that the aspirational goal towards state neutrality is not fully realised in Victoria as the state is favouring (evangelical) Christian interests and raising issues for the recognition of other minor faiths and secular interests. There is little doubt that faith groups play a key role in influencing religion-state arrangements in Victoria. It remains unclear how the government is working with faith leaders and secular interest groups to better reflect religious change in the education system. The ethics and religious culture program in Quebec provides a best practice model for the Victorian government to adopt as it adequately meets the needs of a multi-faith society. In pursuing a new way forward in Victorian education, it is recommended that a range of stakeholders, from faith leaders to policy makers and academics, convene a state or national forum with a view to reaching agreement on an overarching religion-state framework that can accommodate
the growth of religious diversity in contemporary Australia. Further recommendations include a trial ethics program in Victoria, and the development and funding of an educational curriculum that better supports education about diverse religions and beliefs.

References


During her religious education work with five year olds in her Year 1 class, a teacher in a northern New South Wales Catholic primary school said “Children, Mary is the mother of God”. The response from one child was “But how do you know that?” It is not so much that the child had any idea of the profound epistemological implications of the question. But it is illustrative of the extent of questioning that extends throughout the culture from the five-year-olds to the 90-year-olds that has become a characteristic of what is known as cultural postmodernity. In its extreme, this thinking calls all metanarratives – like the Judaeo-Christian religious story – into question; it tends to imply a cultural agnosticism about religious interpretations of life; it considers that all personal and spiritual knowledge is contextual, individualistic, relative and uncertain – and by implication, unreliable.

This is the context within which teachers are trying to educate young people spiritually and religiously. And they are endeavouring to hand on a 2000-year-old religious tradition, with its scriptures, theology, liturgy, prayer and spirituality. But just to attack and discredit postmodernity and assert that the church has the ‘truth’ is not an adequate solution to the problem. Elements in the high level of questioning in the culture need to be scrutinised and appraised. And one way of addressing the problem is to show how there are natural levels of uncertainty in spiritual knowledge; but this is normal and is not inconsistent with having a trustworthy faith, and more importantly, a fidelity to one’s beliefs and values. Life lasting commitments are not incompatible with some uncertainty in spiritual knowledge.

For example, Harold Horell (2004) showed how Christian hope can help one live a committed spiritual life while accepting some of the uncertainty in cultural postmodernity. But this means, as Eckersley (2005) pointed out, that while most people today retain some form of religious belief, this is not nearly as absolute and binding as it once was. Many more people are now themselves deciding in the light of their own experience and wisdom what they will regard as authentic meanings for life. Rather than defer to God and religion, they may well become their own touchstone for what is ‘truth’. Rapid social change has resulted in much more uncertainty about life and the future. Some get used to the levels of uncertainty about life, the future, and reliable meaning/purpose that has resulted from social change; others cannot cope with it, and they seek communities where meanings are more black and white, and authoritarian. Hughes’ (2007) research on the spirituality of young Australians considered that for many, religion has lost its earlier relatively unquestioned authoritative role in giving a religious meaning to life. And instead it has become like an optional, spiritual resource that you can use if you are inclined; but it has now assumed an advisory rather than an authoritative role. A similar finding showed in Maroney’s (2008) study of the spirituality of teenagers in Catholic senior secondary schools.

The idea that knowledge, including religious knowledge, is socially constructed is not a new idea (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berger, 1973). But, as illustrated above, accepting this reality is much more widespread today – even for five-year-olds. While addressing this situation is a major agenda for religious education, only one aspect will be considered below – the natural levels of uncertainty in religious knowledge and faith.

In the 1960s, the Catholic film scholar in the United States William Kuhns considered the influence of new media on religious faith. He thought that a media/entertainment driven society would generate an increased, but natural level of uncertainty in faith. He noted:
The entertainment milieu has transformed the ways in which we believe and are capable of believing. An absolute kind of belief, as well as a belief in absolutes, becomes increasingly difficult as the entertainment milieu trains people to believe tentatively and with elasticity...

A total belief in God must be rooted in a total belief in something tangible, but in a world of plastic furniture and television commercials, the tangible realities are cause more for disbelief than belief...

In the future a total belief may be virtually impossible (and similarly undesirable): perhaps the only viable belief in God will be riddled with doubt, and constantly shifting with the fluctuations of the reality-fantasy ratios created by the entertainment milieu. (1969, p. 165-166).

Kuhn’s ideas from the 1960s about the personal influence of film/television and how the Christian church might understand and relate to the electronic media showed both an astute diagnosis of culture in his own time as well as a prophetic insight into the developments that would unfold into the 21st century. He hoped that the church would have a helpful, critical role in educating people with respect to the influence of media.

As the [electronic media] become increasingly potent in shaping society, someone should be capable of maintaining the critical distance necessary for judging the moral and aesthetic directions which people take as a result... [the church could be] a vital force in society for creating a critical awareness of the entertainment milieu... “[The church should] be a community, but not a highly structured authoritarian organisation. Its key concerns would not be proselytising and converting others, but educating people to the languages and techniques by which their lives are being shaped... church authority would emerge from the social concern which the community exerts, the depth with which they care about the present and the future. (pp. 163 – 164).

In 1984, the Anglican priest Richard MacKenna talked about uncertainty as a natural part of belief in God. He proposed that growth towards maturity in meaning in life and in religious faith involved giving away false certainties and replacing these with true uncertainties. This meant learning how to cope with a natural level of complexity and uncertainty in life and in faith, and learning how to live and believe with the valuable partial meanings that individuals can construct in connection with community life; and it includes valuing traditional meanings even if they are reinterpreted anew from generation to generation.

Following up on MacKenna’s ideas, two issues need to be addressed: Can there be trustworthy spiritual meaning for life when there is so much questioning, uncertainty and relativism? What does truth mean in a constantly changing landscape of meanings?

Many people today feel a heightened sense of uncertainty and anxiety because they are puzzled about what is happening in the world; they cannot make sense of it; they are not sure of where things are going. For many, traditional beliefs and values do not provide the security and direction they appeared to give formerly. There is a need to understand how and why culture is moving from a period of apparent security and certainty in meaning towards one where there is more uncertainty and less security.

It is not just that a lot of new uncertainties have been introduced, but that the incipient uncertainties that were always there in the past, just beneath the surface, have become more visible. This is disconcerting for a greater number of people. No longer is it a matter of finding meaning within an accepted framework; cultural postmodernity tends to call frameworks into question. Where the questioning of meaning becomes excessive, there is a danger that people will become increasingly self-centred and will channel most of their energies into satisfying present needs in an individualistic way, with disdain for both the support and the responsibilities associated with communities of meaning.

A first step in addressing the crisis of meaning is to acknowledge and articulate the naturally high levels of complexity and uncertainty in life across many domains that have resulted from cultural and technological progress – although the meaning of what constitutes ‘progress’ is part of the problem. Hence it may be unrealistic to expect that meanings should be absolutely certain or true, and that they should be totally secure; that is not the nature of human meanings. They always have some measure of inbuilt uncertainty, even though people may have been unwilling ever to
acknowledge this; human meaning always involves interpretation, even if an interpretation of reality outside the person (Lombaerts & Pollefeyt, 2004). In other words, there may be access to absolute truths outside the individual, but this access will always be partial as far as the individual knows and meaning is concerned.

Then there is the question of how one can live constructively, comfortably and securely with partial meanings; and how one can accept a tolerable level of uncertainty that goes naturally with both the personal meaning-making process and a culture that is very critical and questioning. It is not a matter of being unable to know absolute truth, but of acknowledging that one cannot know all of the absolute truth, because it is too large and complex. This is not relativism, classic agnosticism or a pragmatic functionalism. Constructive, functional meaning does not have to be perfect or absolute. Fidelity in commitments can be maintained while admitting natural uncertainties in the personal knowing and meaning-making processes as well as in personal faith.

From this point of view, growth towards maturity in faith and personal meaning involves learning how to cope with a natural level of complexity and live with valuable partial meanings. This approach to meaning-making applies to those who are religious believers as well as to those who are not. Admittedly, it is the sort of maturity that might be expected of adults. Also, it can be more suited to some personalities than others; some find it difficult to live with too many 'loose ends', especially as regards their ultimate meanings. Inevitably, some will reject this view as relativism of a sort because it admits to a level of uncertainty in personal knowledge that they are not prepared to accept.

This interpretation has implications for religious people: for example, acknowledging a degree of uncertainty in the physical or historical details related to their religious beliefs and accepting this as a normal part of faith, as well as accepting that religious doctrine is socially constructed and has usually evolved over time. Some, however, would want a stronger place for historicity and unchanging doctrine.

The differences in epistemology implied in the above discussion need to be acknowledged; this is significant in the public debate about what might be entailed in an education in meaning. It is likely that there will never be full community consensus about the issues. But it is still possible to work at clarifying what can be done about these questions in religious education.

A capacity to live with some uncertainty in the meaning system has probably always been a part of the makeup of mature people. It is just that in contemporary Westernised societies, there is a greater need for such a capacity just for psychic survival and mental health. Those who favour a more absolute and certain meaning system will be in for a harder time, even if they are supported and reassured by a strong group of the like-minded.

It is too much to expect that this sort of adult maturity in meaning can be realistically achieved by children and adolescents. Nevertheless, if it is an appropriate ideal, it should have implications for school religious education (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

To focus more on Christian religious faith, it is appropriate here to ask what level of uncertainty is going to be ‘natural’ to Christian faith? Or does it have to be absolutely certain? The common sense answer for Christians has always been “if you do not have some doubt and uncertainty, you don’t really know what faith is about”. In other words, faith is not incompatible with some doubt and hesitancy, and even with asking challenging questions about faith.

It is here that recent comments from Pope Francis I are relevant. It is also interesting to see where he published these ideas – not in an encyclical, formal letter or in L’Osservatore Romano, but in an interview for the Italian Catholic journal La Civiltà Cattolica. (Also published in the English speaking Catholic journal America).

The Pope suggested that trying to go back towards a more traditional, more absolute, authoritative spirituality and faith is not a useful answer to the contemporary situation. He advised people to avoid getting, locked up in small things, in small minded rules… If the Christian is a restorationist, a legalist, if he wants everything clear and safe, then he will find nothing. Tradition and memory of the past must help us to have the courage to open up new areas to God. Those who today always look for disciplinarian solutions, those who long for an
exaggerated doctrinal ‘security,’ those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists — they have a static and inward-directed view of things. In this way, faith becomes an ideology among other ideologies. (Pope Francis I, 2013, pp. 8, 11)

He went on to note that there is a natural level of uncertainty in any authentic faith:

In this quest to seek and find God in all things there is still an area of uncertainty. There must be. If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good. For me, this is an important key. If one has the answers to all the questions — that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble. Uncertainty is in every true discernment. Our life is not given to us like an opera libretto, in which all is written down; but it means going, walking, doing, searching, seeing.... We must enter into the adventure of the quest for meeting God. (Pope Francis I, 2013, p. 11).

There is a strong link between the ideas discussed above and the work of Australian (and other) religious educators since the Second Vatican Council to try to make the religious tradition more meaningful and relevant to contemporary Catholics and others. A new dimension to this quest for relevance has been presented in the theology of interruption and re-contextualisation proposed by Lieven Bove – the theology that underpins the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project in Victoria (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010).

Boeve (2007, 2011) considered that there is interplay between the cultural processes de-traditionalisation (overlapping considerably with secularisation), individualisation (where there is now a widely accepted view that individuals should have the principal say in constructing their own personal identity), and pluralisation (which is reflected not only in the plurality of religious views in multi-faith society, but in the multiple meanings about life that are advertised in the culture, seeking adherents). He proposed the need for a re-contextualised Catholic theology. It calls for an, at times radical, critical dialogue with contemporary culture that challenges Christianity to positively engage in enhancing human life and community. Boeve regarded the extensive breakdown in the traditional ways through which communities hand on their beliefs and values – the primary interruption – as a challenge for Christians to construct a new and deeper relationship with God with the hope that the interruption to the relationship will eventually result in many positive gains. There was also the challenge to re-contextualise the language of theology both within the church and in its dialogue with the world outside.

The thinking reviewed above has many complex implications for religious education. A significant one to note here in conclusion is the need to help young people learn how to ‘theologise’ about their faith. Hyde (2011) in his case study of the use of Godly play with a pre-school child, showed how the “I wonder” questions in the pedagogy help encourage children to think about the meaning of religious stories and symbols in terms of their own experience and sense of the world. This complements the learning of traditional Christian religious meanings – developing a basic religious and theological literacy appropriate to children is a key part of the Godly Play pedagogy.

This sort of theologising takes a more sophisticated form with adolescents and adults. A part of this will be allowing them to engage in some theologising about the symbolic, theological and faith meanings of their religious tradition, including doctrines like the immaculate conception, the virgin birth, the ascension, the assumption etc. If this is not allowed, they will tend to dismiss literal, physiological interpretations as of no consequence.

So with all of this thinking in mind, and with further speculation about a range of implications across the school religion curriculum from K-12, you can now imagine and rehearse what you would say if you were in the shoes of the kindergarten religion teacher referred to in the opening paragraph when she commences her answer to the class: “Now children, listen carefully and I will explain the way the Catholic church community answers that important and interesting question that has just been asked: ‘How do we know that Mary is the Mother of God?’” Answering this question – especially to a five year old – requires a larger frame of reference than the problem with levels of uncertainty in the epistemology of belief. It needs to start with the faith memory of the historical, believing Christian community
and its revelatory beliefs about Mary as a primordial model of the Christian, also evident in the many religious titles given to Mary across Christian history (as in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary), with a special focus on Mary’s role in the Incarnation. The questioning child needs a satisfying child’s explanation (and understanding) of where and why this belief came from within the Christian community. There is also the added challenge to the teacher’s answer in knowing that most of the children in their class will not have had their first familiarisation with such beliefs in their own homes.

References


Religious education, broadly defined, is a fertile area of study in Northern Europe. The Netherlands certainly provides a very rich vein of high quality research. The Dutch context for religious education is an important one as it encapsulates many trends that are emerging in a range of places that have been until now described as highly secular. Many of the issues that are proposed by Habermas’ famous understanding of the post secular apply to the Netherlands. On the one hand you see a rise in personal religious beliefs and behaviours that are eclectic but unified in their expression outside of conventional religious categories and communities. On the other hand, the return of religion to the public square is also taking place. This is fueled, in part, by demographic factors such as the rise in immigration from countries that do not share the secular assumptions of Dutch society.

In this context a critical theoretical area is the development of good citizenship as a goal in a virtue-ethical approach to religious education. In a pluralistic culture this approach seems to meet the needs of the community by exposing students to common accepted values that are seen to be intrinsic in countries such as the Netherlands. Willems study examines the specific case of encouraging civic virtue in Dutch Catholic primary schools. In this model a specific connection is made between citizenship education and moral education. The bridge that links the two is the development of virtues, the argument being that the way to ensure good citizens is to encourage virtues in them. This is a classical idea going back to Aristotle and the Greek philosophers. The research question that is explored in this study is how do teachers in Dutch Catholic primary schools attempt to stimulate and cultivate civic virtues?

Willems examines two major pedagogical approaches used by teachers. The first is how the teacher models civic virtues in the classroom. The second is how they use discussion as a means of furthering the understanding of students. Willems argues that a virtue-ethics approach is particularly suited to Catholic schools. The Catholic Church has a long tradition of promoting virtue ethics after the appropriation of much of Aristotle’s ethical thinking by Aquinas in the thirteenth century. The approach, however, can be extended to public schools as promotion of virtues has a common basis in many worldviews, including secular ones. What is critical is what content
or virtues are chosen. The three virtues that are examined here; justice, tolerance and solidarity are certainly applicable outside of denominational settings.

An important feature of this study is an examination of how teachers’ own moral and ethical positions influence how they approach teaching virtue ethics. What is critical for teachers working in this area is to be aware of their own preexisting moral positions and how these impact on their pedagogical practices. This has clear implications for teacher training especially as it relates to the moral didactic model that the author presents. This model is centred on three aspects that set the context for structured classroom discussion. In the first aspect, by key teacher interventions students are encouraged to be morally responsible. This can be achieved by asking what the author calls “why” questions such as, “why do you think bullying is wrong?” The second aspect encourages students to become more emotionally involved. Here teacher facilitation is directed toward assisting students to relate content to their own experience. Questions that begin with, “how would you feel if….” can advance this process. The final aspect involves guiding students towards virtues that are appropriate responses to actions discussed in the lesson. These virtues are subsumed by the three general categories that are given as outcomes for not just the lesson but the unit of work.

This is an interesting study based on a viable proposition about how virtue and ethics education can be conducted in primary school classrooms in post secular contexts. It is most applicable to places where religious education is broadly conceived and has a place in school curriculums in both public and religiously affiliated schools.

Professor Richard Rymarz
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In the beginning was the Spirit: Science, religion, and indigenous spirituality. New York: Orbis Books.


Those familiar with O’Murchu’s writing will know that, from the outset, he makes no claim to be an academic, or to have worked in an academic institution, but that he does, however, cherish the wisdom bequeathed by academics, despite the fact that they can occasionally “be dismissive of people like me who do not belong to the inner realm of the academy” (p. 8). Those familiar with O’Murchu’s work will also know that he is, nonetheless, an accomplished writer – a non-academic intellectual – who writes from multidisciplinary perspectives. His latest work, In the beginning was the spirit, continues to reflect the many and varied perspectives from which he writes, and in particular, the evolutionary nature of life at every level. His aim in this work is to provide a synthesis between first nations’ spirituality, physics, biology, consciousness studies, theology, world religions and various social sciences in order to explore the notion of the Great Spirit who dwells at the heart of all humanity.

In this latest work, O’Murchu crafts his writing to explore the Spirit’s role in creation’s becoming by employing insights largely arising from within the fields of science and cosmology. The first chapters in this book adopt this approach to help foster in the reader an understanding and appreciation of the intuitive insights of first-nation peoples in their understanding of the Great Spirit. In particular he notes that for indigenous people, their first connective link with the Spirit is not with the dogma and creeds of inherited religion, but rather through with the living creation itself, and through the meaning they themselves glean through nature’s processes and seasonal unfoldings.

The middle and latter chapters of this book explore the notion of the Great Spirit as understood by various indigenous peoples, including the various tribes of Africa (The Maasai, the Zulu, the Kikuyu, the Yorba, the Ibo, and the Malike, to name just a few), the native American people (including the Iroquois, the Hopi the Sious), the Maori people of New Zealand, and the Aboriginal people of Australia. There follows a critical chapter on the Great Spirit in Christianity, in which O’Murchu proposes not only the notion of the Trinity as an archetypal statement (that the divine life force is first and foremost a relational matrix), but that we re-vision God – the Trinity – as being at work in creation in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that we re-envision the Christian task as a discipleship in solidarity with, and within, the radical empowerment of Jesus’ humanity. As O’Murchu himself states, “Much of
the theological rhetoric characteristic of Scholasticism past and present, needs to give way to an experiential appropriation of a living and vibrant faith, inspired primarily by the pervasive Spirit of the Holy One in our midst” (p. 154). He claims that conventional Christianity has lost the real power of the Spirit, and correspondingly, the incarnational wisdom of the body – as cosmos, planet and person. The underlying creativity is the Spirit, which, he argues, has been subdued by excessive rationalism, anthropocentrism, and patriarchal domination. Having drawn on the wisdom of the Indigenous peoples’ understanding of the Great Spirit as explored in the previous chapters, O’Murchu maintains that the Spirit is now in our time “revisiting the spiritual landscape with a disturbing but timely wisdom [calling us to] discern more deeply” (p. 154).

O’Murchu’s work is daring and challenging, motivated by a desire to make connections between Christian theology and the other humanistic disciplines. Personally, I find his writing inspiring and fascinating. However, many people may find his writing challenging, provocative, and perhaps even a little disturbing – such is the nature of his radical thought. In this work, he has not shied away from asking challenging questions of theology about its narrow treatment of the Holy Spirit. For some too, there may even be a sense of déjà vu in his writing, for many of his previous works have either discussed or at least alluded to the similar themes of dualism, evolution, the dominance of patriarchal consciousness, and the questioning of dogma in both science and religion.

That being said, the insights offered by O’Murchu in this latest work are timely and worthy of discussion and debate. This book will be of great interest not only to religious educators, but to all who approach the text with an open mind, and who are willing to engage with new and creative insights about the ways in which we presently think about religion, spirituality, and science.

Dr Brendan Hyde
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What the postgraduate students are saying about values education: The appraisal of various pedagogies

By Postgraduate students in Religious Education, Australian Catholic University

One of the units in the ACU Masters of Religious Education program includes a section in which different pedagogies in values education are appraised. Extracts here are from participant’s evaluations. References are not included.

Background

What is often missing in teacher talk about values education is an understanding of how teachers actually ‘educate’ in values. They all know that they cannot teach values into young people. But there remains an ambiguity in the discourse of values education where the notion of ‘teaching values’ still carries the connotation of doing this impossible task. Hence there is a need to acknowledge that values education will not necessarily bring about change in values - just covering the content may give knowledge of values and about values related issues, but it cannot produce personal change. Teaching young people to be moral, to have values and to believe is a very different and much more complex developmental process. Educating in values provides students with a rich exploration of the issues. And this provides some ‘substrate’ or ‘infrastructure’ for potential personal change. This is not really a new issue for religion teachers, because this same ambiguity about changing young people’s faith has long bedevilled religious education.

Moral biography and Children’s literature

Linda Maher

In the early years of teaching, extensive use has been made of fictional characters to describe and explain values. For example, a popular children’s book The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister, is widely used for this purpose. This story is often used to formulate an understanding of generosity, compassion and respect. It not only opens up dialogue opportunities as a piece of literature, but affords an opportunity for discussion of interdependency and social conscience. It could also open the way for discussion of Catholic social teaching and provide a text for consideration of the ethics that govern the classroom, the school community and beyond.

In a similar way, stories function like moral biographies – directing attention to certain values. Moral biographies are often about the lives of real people confronting real trauma or challenges. However, most of these are about adults and adult situations, which may be beyond the comprehension or understanding of young children. The use of fictional characters and children’s stories can open the students to an age-appropriate level of moral thinking, which can later be complemented and confirmed by more advanced non-fiction and biographical literature.
There are number of inherent strengths in this pedagogical approach. Firstly, children entering the imaginative world of the fictional book can empathise with the feelings of the focus person or character. Secondly, children’s books provide an experience of joy, awe and wonder which can captivate children, resonating with their world of mystery. Further, discussions can then provide the tools for imagination and play to cultivate interpretations and meanings of other traditional values or theology embedded in narratives. Thirdly, children can extrapolate personal experiences of discernment of what is right and wrong. It is a hope that children might absorb the lesson’s intention and incorporate some moral thinking into their kit of values. Fourthly, in guiding the children towards creating a set of moral values to live by, educators will use examples suitable for the age level. Age appropriate moral biographies are therefore imperative; otherwise you run the danger of presenting unattainable goals. Pedagogical use of moral biographies also needs to have some practical outcome for children rather than just something they may only use later as an adult. Fifthly, contemporary young people need exposure to examples of moral development as portrayed in literature to reflect critically on or juxtapose the belief from many of their parents (and children themselves); in this way they themselves provide the adequate moral compasses for their own lives. Children can be made to feel that they are the self-sufficient centre of the universe. And there is a need to acknowledge their interdependence with others to help provide them with a guide for living a balanced individual-community life.

There are a number of weaknesses in too much reliance on the moral biography pedagogy. Some research has suggested that the study of moral biographies is not enough to stimulate changes of values in individuals. Children’s interest in the spiritual needs to be stimulated by prompting them to think critically, to question and to search for and formulate understandings.

A teacher can lead with experience and knowledge, guiding the child to insight not found as an individual. The approach may need to be combined with other teaching techniques to flesh out the implications of the text for reflection related to moral development.

Thoughtful use of this pedagogy can help children acquire something about meaning and purpose in life as well as more skill in making informed judgments about issues. Positive role models from the child’s community are also important.

**Simulation games**

*Kristie-Ann Ferguson*

Any opportunity that allows students to use imaginative rehearsal in their moral learning is an educational opportunity worth exploring. When a student is permitted to act out in the imagination a series of events or responses to unfamiliar situations, it can provide them with new awareness and understanding. It may even possibly impact on their value systems, moral codes and future actions.

Because simulations are a ‘game’ and games are usually fun, teachers and students alike enjoy using them. Unlike normal games however, educational simulation games require de-briefing and evaluation – both of which form crucial elements to the activity. Simulation games involve students responding in a new situation in a game format. This helps them to respond to an unfolding or unfamiliar situation which can be challenging for some students. This challenge is a form of experiential learning which means students are able to learn vicariously through the experiences that are tied to the role they are exploring. Students may as a learning consequence become better able to empathise with people in real life situations and the game might have an influence on both their cognitive and affective dimensions.
It is important for teachers to distinguish the difference between ‘role plays’ and ‘simulation games’. In simulation games the teacher provides different members of the group with several pieces of information which will have an effect on the roles of other players and the direction of the simulation. Unlike role plays, there is no pre-set path that the student could take; instead it is hoped that a genuine response from the student is gained. During simulation games, students evaluate and respond to the circumstance quickly and instinctively, which allows them to experience the feeling of going with an ‘intuition’ rather than a calculated, pre-determined outcome as sometimes happens in role plays. It is because of this intuitive response that students are more likely to identify with the new ‘role in situation’ and learn something about themselves as well as about the situation they find themselves in.

Debriefing involves a series of steps including reflection, discussion, analysis and synthesis. By following the prescribed debrief and evaluation, students can gain an understanding of what people ‘did’ or ‘might do’ and why they ‘did it’. This personal involvement tends to lead to clearer and longer-lasting understandings which can be applied to real life situations; this being one of the ultimate goals of simulation games.

Advantages

One of the most useful aspects of these games is that they allow students to explore situations and experiences that they might ordinarily avoid in real life – specifically conflict and change. This may allow many feelings, even hostile ones, to be expressed and explored in a non-threatening environment. Potential change can be explored and choices and decisions considered that in some instances may even provide relatively instant results, with awareness of cause and effect. This helps students to learn to take and accept responsibility for their own actions.

A safe environment for students to experience the potential implications and consequences of various actions and decisions is beneficial as they do not have to deal with the real-life consequences and they have the opportunity to reflect on and analyse the outcomes without potentially problematic results. Because simulation games allow these realistic insights and experiences, students are experientially involved in the learning process, rather than being taught from the outside by a teacher (direct instruction). Effective simulation of reality has the potential to build within student’s empathy for various people and their circumstances – feelings that may not have arisen if the student was unable to experience ‘walking in their shoes’.

Another advantage is their flexibility for use in the classroom because of their adaptability. The games can be modified for various age groups and sizes and promote experiential learning; allowing students to explore complex issues and deal with complicated matters in a concrete and tangible way. The games can help deepen a student’s understanding of cause and effect and provide them with knowledge that can enhance their decision making abilities.

One of the biggest advantages with simulation games is that they can help students transfer the learning and understandings gained to their own lives and experiences. Because the games deal with real life encounters, students are more likely to develop empathy and sensitivity to the feelings and actions of the person whose role they have assumed. This notion of walking in someone else’s shoes is a concept many teachers try to assist students with and these games provide a good platform for doing this. The games also help students try out different behaviours, experiment with taking risks and trying out new solutions without the pressure of getting it wrong. It allows them to extend themselves and take a ‘no risk’ approach as when the game is over, they revert back to themselves and their usual lives. Desirably however, they have taken on new insights from what they have gained from participation in the game.

Disadvantages

Simulation games have a capacity to stimulate emotions, and this might lead to inappropriate or excessive emotional responses. Therefore teachers need to be careful when choosing content matter, roles, and students for their simulations. It is also recommended that teachers avoid using highly emotive and sensitive issues and observe the simulations carefully to ensure students maintain an understanding that it is an organised and planned experience.
The debriefing process may deter some teachers who do not want to risk uncomfortable situations with their class and thus they may avoid some topics for fear of failure. Also, there exists the possibility for emotional responses to be manipulated by the teacher. Such manipulation is certainly not appropriate to classroom practice. Often, the reality simulated is selective (chosen by the teacher) and contains only those elements the game designer deems relevant to the game’s purposes. This therefore implies that some bias can occur, consequently making the game not completely real life based.

A final disadvantage is that the desired effects of the games on the students’ lives may be short lived, when the ultimate goal is to have the skills learned transcend into their everyday lives. This short lived experience may occur regardless of how well the teacher plans and monitors the simulation, particularly if the de-briefing is inadequate or if the game is not reinforced by other educational experiences.

Ideally, simulation games would form part of a unit of work and would be useful to introduce a topic as well as sum up the learning at the end of a unit. Simulation games provide a good platform for assisting students to develop outside their comfort zone and experience behaviours and consequences from another perspective. The games thus provide students with an experience of what ‘could be’ rather than ‘what is’, and permits them a glimpse of what is possible. Debriefing in particular can encourage individual and co-operative planning to make the possibilities concrete.

**Medieval and contemporary morality plays**

*Ronel Moore*

As part of a combination of methodologies to expose students to experiences that may lead to uncovering values and also to reflecting on how to exercise moral choices during certain scenarios, the performance, creation or viewing of medieval morality plays could be useful. It is also a good lead into understanding contemporary morality plays portrayed ubiquitously in film and television and more recently in online social networking. Originally mediaeval morality plays were set up precisely to serve as a vehicle for moral education. They were an engaging opportunity for people to look at what was going on in the play and at how this might help them reflect on their own values base and on what they might do to change. The original mediaeval morality plays which were designed specifically as a moral education event - like ‘mediaeval Kohlberg’.

The study of morality plays exercises young people’s imaginative identification with the characters, the development of empathy for different characters, and imaginative rehearsal during the dramatisation of moral dilemmas. They also allow participants to be involved in learning about morality while responding to the demands and invitations that stories have presented from time immemorial.

One of the main advantages of live or filmed theatre as a teaching technique is that it powerfully engages the participants and that willing suspension of disbelief takes place. This immersion in the story can theoretically help people to rehearse the taking of decisions that may occur in their daily lives. Whereas the medieval morality plays were used as a teaching tool when few people could read, it is interesting that virtually the same techniques, but in a technically different form (such as television and film) are used today even though the main purpose is not to teach but to entertain. Viewing a performance aimed at what will engage and satisfy a popular audience is less intellectually demanding than reading, and viewers who are not able to read, such as very young children are easily reached.
Even so, contemporary television dramas, cartoons and feature length films are rich in implied values, although some of those values may not be the ones that teachers may wish to emphasise when educating in values. When film or television content is used wisely, it can be used to create awareness of the underlying values of the social milieu in which students find themselves as well as provide opportunities for teachers to facilitate critical viewing skills. In that way students become less consumers of the viewed materials and more critical evaluators of what they view. In addition, students can be invited to critique viewed material from a different moral perspectives such as Christianity.

There are some pitfalls that should be avoided when exposing students to contemporary film or television – not that they are unexposed in their ordinary lives! As in the medieval morality plays where characters were usually as either good or bad, and were given names such as “Vice”, “Everyman” or “Virtue” to correspond with the role they were playing, in contemporary cartoons, films and television programs characters are often stereotyped to allow instant identification and to ensure swift development of the plot. In real life, people are seldom as simplistic in their moral make-up and students may have to be made aware of that fact. Problematic situations and dilemmas are also not as easily resolved in real life as in film or television episodes, nor does the ending ever present as neat a resolution as in popular media presentations.

The weaknesses of using the methods of medieval and contemporary morality plays include the problem that students may actually identify with the “baddies”. Teachers will therefore have to choose content for viewing very carefully and ensure that there is time to follow up and to facilitate critical thinking about what has been viewed. Only presenting the material, without facilitating thinking and evaluation may lead to enforcing and confirming the value system already held by students.

Furthermore, medieval morality plays often conveyed fear of God and punishment of wrongdoing in a simplistic and moralistic way. It is generally accepted that those techniques do not result in the desired personal change today.

Useful activities that would allow students to engage critically with material they view, could include them following the actions of a character and analysing their motives and feelings – drawing on the pedagogy of moral biography. They could reflect on alternative responses of the characters, rewrite certain sections or the conclusion and write an episode from an alternative perspective such as Christianity.

Many of these methods are used in English or Drama classes, and they could fruitfully be applied to an educating for values program in a dedicated subject such as Religious Studies.

For teenage audiences, television programs like “The Big Bang Theory” could be used to examine underlying values and to lead students towards questioning the value of the nature of the sexual relationships that are portrayed. The film “The Dark Knight” has been called a modern morality play and students could be guided towards examining the different world views out of which its characters operate. Youtube and channels like “Wingclips” that provide film clips could be used to great effect in lessons aimed at educating in values. Cartoons such as “Peanuts” can be used with all ages. Humour, as it was in medieval morality plays, will always be a useful tool to engage an audience, especially when educating in values as overly serious material may cause students to become disengaged.

It has been said that people in the developed world are exposed to thousands of visual images and stimuli daily. Education departments have also included programs to develop visual literacy in their curricula. In an age where most teenagers are visually experienced and where visual media are often the preferred means of accessing information and entertainment, it would be remiss of educators not to explore this material when attempting to educate in values.
Values clarification

A compilation

There is a strong individualistic focus in values clarification activities. A more precise word would be its focus on ‘personal subjectivity’ - looking at people’s opinions and interpretations. Most of the data generated in these sorts of activities comes from the individual thinking about their own experience, their own views, their own activities etc. It is primarily subjective.

And it is primarily concerned with the analytical process. Values clarification is ‘process oriented’ and does not try to look critically into the content of values. It does not really attempt to evaluate ‘values content’ which is so important in morality. While values clarification may get the individuals involved to put their subject of ideas into some sort of hierarchy of importance, it does not really go into an evaluation of the values content as such. It is more a process of just sorting out your ideas about values; it does not go into saying: “Do you have really good values or not?” Also, it does not ask: “Do you really need to change your values because they are inappropriate?” In other words there is no real moral evaluation just a prioritising of subjective views. It does not get into questions like: “What are good and bad values and why are they good or bad?” There is a need for evaluation from some accepted values perspective. What the group decides on the basis of their ‘own opinion’ may be quite questionable. For example: a class group might endorse getting drunk on Saturday nights!

The conclusion that educators can draw from this evaluation of values clarification is to note that the activities do not in themselves constitute a fully rounded or holistic approach to values education. The clarification activities need to be followed up and complemented by other activities that deal with substantial values content and with judgments made about the quality of values (or drawing attention to the use of inappropriate values).

Also important as an adjunct to values clarification is the need to try to foster an awareness of the source of values and an understanding of the influences on value development is something to address for students. As Brian Hill described this process, it is to “help young people interrogate their cultural conditioning”. While a mouthful, this is a very useful phrase for summarising this evaluative function.

Values clarification can prompt some good discussion in a non-threatening environment. But you also need to be careful when you are dealing with a sensitive matter to be sure that students are not pressured psychologically to expose their own personal views. Sometimes they are not ready to talk about their own values.

Conflict resolution activities are a sub-set of values clarification; but they try to deal more specifically with the causes and situations of violence and bullying etc. They so set out to inform participants about the issues in a way that might help them to learn how to become better at resolving conflict situations. But the examples used often need to be realistic; if they are trivial and superficial, this could create a problem in terms of students perception of their relevance and usefulness.

Some critique of values clarification can help make the activity are more valuable one within religious education and values education by helping educators be aware of its possibilities and limitations.
Values clarification: Strengths and weaknesses

Inez Durrer

With this strategy, people can identify those values and values networks that form the foundation of their attitudes and behaviours.

**Strengths**

This strategy can be beneficial over a range of subject areas. Values are better investigated in conjunction with other KLA’s, not as an independent subject area. With Values Clarification, students are given the opportunity to participate in an active or passive manner while still being engaged in the discussions at a deeper, personal level. When I have used this strategy, I have incorporated the movement of the spirit into discussions. At the start of the lesson, it is explained to the students that ‘when the spirit moves them, feel free to join in’. By taking this approach, students are not pressured into participating, particularly with a topic that is more personal in nature. In fact, when this approach is utilised, I have found more students willing to join in as they know it is their choice rather than being told to ‘be ready as your turn is coming up next’.

Another benefit is the ability for this strategy to be used at any time during the school year, and for it to be brought to life when an issue within the classroom may arise rather than as a regularly scheduled activity. Also, for many children, short answer questions or a quick checklist is quite manageable for them, providing a fairly instant check of where they stand with the values presented. To ask students to write an essay could be in itself a challenge but even more so when digging deeper into personal values and beliefs.

**Weaknesses**

The nature of this strategy is sharing and although the environment in which the students share should be comfortable, this is not always the case. For me, it also brings to mind the vulnerability of students in such situations. In such a forum, students may choose to share something fairly personal and if the context of the discussions permits, things can get out of hand very quickly. This is particularly true if the teacher allows the discussion spiral out of control.

In Canada my teaching required all Year 6 students to participate in the *Lions Skills for Adolescence* program. This was also standard for the Catholic schools in the district at that time. Although the program had (and still does have), great fundamental teachings and beliefs for the students, there were a few pitfalls. It was by nature:

- Pre-scripted
- Not always taught by teachers
- Took place as a stand alone subject
- Required every student to complete the tasks in order to get a certificate of completion at the end.

There continues to be new programs and approaches for the education of values in the classroom. *Random Acts of Kindness and Foundations for a Better Life* are two programs that can add ‘values’ content to the classroom. *The Virtues Program* was another example of one implemented by many schools. For any program to be of value, the teacher has to believe in it and know that the good in the content. Simply implementing a program ‘because we have to’ is not good enough.