

JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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As I begin writing my final editorial for the Journal I find myself reflecting on the different issues and innovations that have been evident over the past few years in religious education in Australia. New or revised curriculum documents have been released in different dioceses, the number of undergraduate and postgraduate students in religious education has increased and there are a wider range of topics that may be covered in the subject area today. For instance, there is more attention being given to interfaith and multifaith content and activities, religious education and human rights, religious education in early childhood, religious education for citizenship, the spiritual dimension for religious education and religious education and Catholic identity. The fact that there is this ongoing movement in the discipline suggests that Religious Education is alive and well in Australia.

The spiritual dimension of religious education is one which has long interested me and it is featured in three articles in this issue. Early research into spirituality and RE tended to be restricted to particular perspectives and understandings of spirituality as something pertaining to religious practice. However, during the 1990s, the notion of a secular spirituality became the subject of discourse and in Britain, various policy documents identified spirituality as something distinct from religion (for instance, NCC, UK, 1993; Ofsted, UK, 1994; SCAA, UK, 1995). Following this, the concept of a spiritual intelligence was introduced (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshall, 2000) and this meant that the potential for spirituality to have a wider application in the learning process beyond the religious education classroom became a challenge to be investigated. As well, this had implications for learning in religious education and the growth in articles, symposiums, conferences and research in contemporary understandings of spirituality have continued unabated since those days. As well, the topic has featured often in the pages of this journal. I suggest the interest that the topic generates is a healthy one since it tends to promote a more inclusive attitude to the teaching of religious education, one that is useful and valuable in a multicultural society. In addition, in the mainstream Christian communities which, according to different National Church Life Surveys (see <http://www.ncls.org.au/>), have been showing signs of wear and tear, often because of the distancing between many of its younger and not so young members and Church authorities, learning that addresses the spiritual dimension of religious education, potentially, provides a bridge across the gap formed by the different perspectives generated by cultures and religions and generations.

In this issue, then, we find three articles that report on research into the spirituality of children in religious education. The first comes from Gerard Stoyles *et al* and is the third in a series of articles based on research undertaken in a coastal region, south of Sydney, NSW, Australia. The focus here is on the influences on the spiritual formation of children and the participants in the study included children in their sacramental program of Confirmation along with their parents. While it was found that family influence was an instrumental factor in the formation of children's spirituality, a combination of other factors also played a role, including the preparation of children for Confirmation. The second article comes from Graham Rossiter who offers a reflection on children's spirituality and religious education programs and raises some pertinent questions about various current perspectives and writings. The third one by Mukhlis Abu Baker reports on research with Muslim children in Singapore in a religious education class where a learning model was utilized where the complementarity of the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning was recognised. Interestingly, the findings furthered research in Australia where this learning model had been introduced to pre-service religious education teachers in the Victorian Campuses of Australian Catholic University (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008) and indicated the transferability of the model to different cultural and religious zones.

The next article shifts the focus to pedagogy where Art Canales reports on research into a program on Christian Discipleship. While this is an area of learning that lies outside the religious education classroom, there are many aspects that should be of interest for teachers in religious education, especially at the wider school level of RE which includes retreats and other activities for personal and spiritual development. Richard Rymarz's article which follows offers a discussion on the implementation of text books in the

religious education curriculum in Catholic schools in the United States and argues that not enough research had been conducted to examine the impact that approved textbooks have on religious education in the classroom. This is surely an area that requires a proactive response. The following article by Liz Dowling presents the preliminary findings of a research study that examines the effectiveness of professional development programs for religious education teachers. Once again, this is an area that requires continual attention if teaching and learning in religious education is to remain effective, informed by current issues and innovations and responsive to the needs of students in this second decade of the twenty first century.

Dr Marian de Souza
Editor

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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE BELIEFS OF CHILDREN AND
THEIR PARENTS ABOUT WHAT DESIGNATES PROMINENT INFLUENCES
IN THE FORMATION OF A CHILD'S SPIRITUALITY**

Abstract

Stoyles, Caputi and Jones (2010b) described the development, ranking and weighting of the salience of six domains considered influential in the spiritual formation of children. The findings of Stoyles and colleagues (2010b) enabled this further stage of research to explore the beliefs of children and their parents about the influential prominence of these domains. Eighty-three children and 53 parents participated in this further research. All participants believed that the child's family was the most salient influence over his or her developing spirituality. However, differences in perception were found in relation to the prominence of the child's school, friends, and relationship with God. The implications of these findings, together with their application to the development of a preparation programme for the sacrament of Confirmation, are discussed.

Introduction

Building on our previous research (Stoyles, Caputi & Jones, 2010b), the aim of the current study was to explore the beliefs of children and their parents about the prominence of experiences and relationships that act as domains of influence over the spiritual growth of a child. An extension of this research was to incorporate its findings into the development of a parish-based programme to prepare children for reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Our research developed over two separate though interlinked stages. During the first stage, a focus group of eight suitably qualified adults who worked in the field of children's spiritual development identified six domains believed to influence the spiritual formation and growth of children. These domains were then taken to a wider group of thirty-seven adults, who also worked with children in the area of spiritual formation. This wider group ranked and weighted the six domains in relation to their salience as constructs of influence in children's spiritual lives. The findings for this first research stage were published in an earlier paper (Stoyles, *et al.*, 2010b). The second stage of the research project, the focus of the current paper, conducted the same process of ranking and weighting with children and parents who were associated with three geographically different Catholic parishes.

The theoretical foundation of the overall research program has been described at length in earlier papers (Stoyles, Caputi, Lyons & Mackay, 2010a; Stoyles *et al.*, 2010b), and is equally applicable to the current investigation. However, three theoretical aspects are especially pertinent to this paper. First, a transitional pathway does not necessarily traverse the spheres of traditional religiosity and spirituality (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson, & Zinnbauer, 2000; Hyde, 2008; O Murchu, 2000). Religious ritual and belief, no matter how rich, cannot encapsulate the breadth and depth of one's spiritual being (Hyde, 2008). Hence, a traditional religious "non-believer" can be a deeply spiritual person.

The second point focuses on the two related concepts of a *shared environment of interaction* (Stoyles *et al.*, 2010b) and Champagne's (2003) modes of a child's spiritual being. Champagne's three modes of spiritual being comprise the Sensitive (children's self-expressions within their environments), the Relational (the spiritual quality of children's relationships), and the Existential (children's experiences located in space and time), and characterise the child's interaction with the world. Hence, the expression of spiritual being occurs within environments that draw the child into communion with significant people – parents, family, peers, and

teachers (Granqvist & Dickie, 2006). In what they teach, express, believe and model, these people individually and even collectively enhance or impoverish the child's spiritual openness. De Roos and colleagues found that where kindergarten-aged children experienced a relationship with their teacher that was characterised by closeness and a lack of conflict, they also possessed a concept of God as a loving and compassionate person. This finding was also evident where peer acceptance and self-concept were high for these children (De Roos, Miedema & Ledema, 2001). Furthermore, De Roos and colleagues found no evidence of a wrathful, punishing God in their investigation of the personal relationships between their kindergarten children and peers and adults who were significant to them (De Roos *et al.*, 2001). In later research, De Roos and colleagues noted that the mother's concept of God flowed over onto that of the child. Accordingly, where mothers believed that God was loving and gentle, and where their parenting practices encouraged child autonomy, their children's sense of God's power supported their capacity to be self-assertive. On the other hand, where mothers reported strict, punitive parenting practices, their children tended to attribute the punitive, power-assertive nature of these practices to their concept of God, and saw themselves as not only being necessarily submissive to God's power, but also as being incapable of making moral decisions through their own initiative (De Roos, Miedema & Ledema, 2004). The significance of the mother-child attachment relationship for the positive development of a child's concept of God has been found in other research, and supports these latter research findings (see especially; Granqvist & Dickie, 2006; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

The role of parents and other significant people is addressed in the research of Hay and Nye (2006). Hay and Nye (2006, p.109) refer to the concept of "relational consciousness", and describe this consciousness as a "compound property", indicating that a child's spiritual expression (particularly that of spiritual narrative) draws together the relational and physical contexts that couch it. Relational consciousness is relevant to Champagne's modes of spiritual being and the shared environment of interaction since, as Hay and Nye (2006) point out, the contextual point of reference is wider than simply "the other", including also the self, the world-environment and God (or a divine being). Furthermore, through the dynamic interaction of relational consciousness, a child is able to draw what is aesthetically and spiritually meaningful from what is apparently ordinary and common. It is here that significant adults, in the role of 'teacher', shape the child's spirituality by passing on information, by engaging with the child's experiences, and by modelling appropriate behaviour and attitudes (Hay & Nye, 2006). Of even greater importance is the relationship between child and parent, since this relationship provides the haven of secure attachment from which the child sets out to embrace the joys and pains of the world, and to which the child returns to find delight and welcome in the parent who is wise, strong, and gentle (Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin & Powell, 2001; Granqvist & Dickie, 2006; Siegal & Hartzell, 2005).

The third aspect is specifically relevant in applying the findings of the current research to the development of a preparation programme for the Sacrament of Confirmation. This aspect is the "signature phenomenon" of a child's spiritual sensitivity (Hay & Nye, 2006, pp. 98-99). Hay and Nye (2006) note that each child possesses a personal style that suggests a caveat against any attempt to simplify his or her spirituality into concise, unilateral constructs. Furthermore, the various features of a child's spirituality are interwoven within psychological and physical facets unique to the child, and as such provide the individual brush-stroke, or signature, to the child's spiritual expression. In their description of the signature phenomenon, Hay and Nye (2006) suggest that the interplay between spiritual awareness, psychological development, and age refines the unique signature of a child's awareness of and sensitivity to the world. Hay and Nye (2006) also suggest that the younger the child, the greater the purity of that child's spiritual awareness. This purity provides a framework for understanding the potential link between spirituality and religiosity. When viewed through the lens of pure spiritual awareness, the meaning and significance of traditional religion emerges as something discovered and grasped by the child (even though parents and others might teach it), rather than as an entity imposed from without. At the same time, while spiritual growth and sensitivity can occur within the context of traditional religious values, religiosity and spirituality are not equal referents (Adams, Hyde & Woolley, 2008; de Souza, 2009). Furthermore, the essence of spirituality can surpass the boundaries of traditional religion to include those who otherwise would not describe themselves as being traditionally religious (O Murchu, 2000). Recognising a child's "spiritual signature" therefore invites one to *hear* the personal style of each child's spiritual narrative, rather than structure a religious template for containing this narrative. One therefore becomes *aware* of the child *being aware* through *hearing* the child's personal, spiritual style (Hay & Nye, 2006).

By asking children and their parents to rank and weight the relevance and importance of previously identified domains of spiritual influence (Stoyles et al., 2010b), this research explored both the perceptions of parents and their children about these issues, and also considered their perceptions within the contexts of the child's daily life.

Permission to conduct this research was granted by the University's Human Research and Ethics Committee.

Method

In Stoyles et al. (2010b), a focus group of eight suitably qualified adults developed six domains considered influential in the spiritual development of children. These domains have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1

List of domains and relevant descriptors

Domain	Descriptor
Family	Nesting place where values are formed; safe and nurturing for all members; the beginning place for one's development into society and Church
Relationship with God	Personal experience for each individual; does not develop or exist in a vacuum; is influenced by circumstances and people
School	The place into which the child brings family values within an environment of social interaction and gathering; the child's understanding of the divine are brought into the school setting and taken from the school setting
Friends	Friendships develop from childhood into adulthood; friends influence us and are influenced by us; friends influence one's values and beliefs, one's learning and development
How time is used (Time)	Structured time influences our thinking – structured by work, school, etc; what happens with our thinking when we have "time on our hands", to ponder, and to use as we wish?
Influence of information technology (IT)	A reality of our time; an influence on our thought processes, beliefs and values; a means of communication of ideas, hopes; a means of expressing our beliefs, values, ideas and hopes.

The domains presented in Table 1 (Stoyles et al., 2010b) were then presented to 83 children from Years Five and Six, together with their parents, who ranked and weighted the influential importance of each domain. All children attended Catholic parish schools. These schools were chosen on the basis of their demographic characteristics. Two schools (S1 and S2) were located in a coastal region south of Sydney, and the third (S3) was located in the western suburbs of Sydney. School S1 was situated within a relaxed village-like beach atmosphere wherein the majority of children and their families have been established for more than one generation, lived in relatively close proximity to each other, and shared a level of social contact that incorporated school and neighbourhood within the boundaries of their suburb. Schools S2 and S3 were similar in their demographic structure, with S3 being separated from S1 and S2 by some 70 kilometres. Families within the demographics of S2 and S3 experienced a busy urban existence, lived mostly in newly or recently established housing estates, and commuted significant distances for school and work. The principals of these schools posted letters and Participant Information Sheets in a single package to all parents, inviting them and their children to participate in the research. These packages described the application of the research to the spiritual development of children, and provided consent forms for both children and parents with pre-paid return envelopes. Eighty four children and 53 parents agreed to participate in the current research. Child gender was sought but eventually not considered for reasons described under the later heading titled *Results of the current research*. The age range of children was 10 to 12 years (the stage of conceptual, pre-abstract thinking capacity), and parents' ages were not sought. Child and parent participant information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Child and parent participant numbers together with relevant schools. Total number of potential respondents, and the percentage of response rate, are reported in brackets.

School	Yr 5 children	Yr 6 children	Mothers	Fathers
School One (S1) / two stream	20 (42: 47.6%)	16 (42: 38.1%)	11	9
School Two (S2) / two stream	13 (61: 21.3%)	4 (61: 6.6%)	3	3
School Three (S3) / three stream	18 (89: 20.2%)	12 (82: 14.6%)	15	12
Total	51	32	29	24

From Table 2, comparing the number of participating children with total class sizes demonstrates that the response was poor. This was also true of parent responses. The reason for the poor response rate is unknown. It is of note that the principal of S2 sent out relevant information afresh on two occasions, spoke of the research to children and parents at school gatherings, and even approached children and parents individually to enquire if they had received and understood the information. In spite of these efforts, the response rate for this school was remarkably limited. For this school, only a total of 13.4% of children (6.6% of children in Year 6, and 21.3% of children in Year 5), together with their parents, agreed to participate. The information contained in the parents' Participant Information Sheet was considered to adequately explain the purpose and process of ranking and weighting the categories. Response sheets were then posted to the home addresses of participating parents rather than rely on the children to pass response sheets onto them. Parents completed these sheets and returned them directly to the first author in a pre-paid envelope. However, given the children's ages, a pre-data gathering exercise was undertaken with them. Children were introduced to the notion of "ranking" and "weighting" by considering the steps a child would need to accomplish when learning to ride a pushbike.

Ranking: Children were gathered together into a classroom and presented with six pre-set domains considered important for learning to ride a pushbike, such as "stopping", "road rules", and "balance". Domains were typed on A4 sheets, laminated, and attached to a magnetic patch, thus permitting them to be individually placed on a metal whiteboard and physically moved around in terms of ranked importance. After all domains were explained, the children were asked to discuss how salient they thought each domain was in relation to all domains. With the direction of the first author, children moved the domains around the whiteboard until they reached agreement about their ranked importance from a rank of 1 (most important) to a rank of 6 (least important).

Weighting: When the first author was satisfied that the children clearly understood that they had ranked each domain in relation to all domains, he introduced them to the process of weighting. For the weighting task, the same four-point Likert scale for weighting the spiritual development domains was used, namely Not important at all [1], Somewhat important [2], Very important [3], Most important [4]. Each descriptor of the Likert scale was also typed on an A4 page, laminated, magnetised and placed side by side on a whiteboard in the classroom. Domains were then individually and randomly placed on the whiteboard, and different Likert points were moved next to the domain under discussion until children agreed on a weighting for that domain. The first author wanted the children to understand that domains were being weighted *individually* in terms of the importance placed on *each* domain *without reference to other domains*. Hence, ranking meant that one considered the salience of domains in relation to each other, whereas weighting meant that varying levels of salience were allocated to each domain *without* reference to other domains. Hence, two domains could receive the same weighting, as indeed was the case with a number of domains.

Completion of the research task: When the first author believed that the children had grasped the process of and difference between ranking and weighting, he proceeded with the task of ranking and weighting the domains of spiritual development. Before the children completed the ranking/weighting response sheets, he invited the children to express what they thought each domain meant, and guided their understanding when he considered this to be necessary. Children then ranked and weighted the domains of spiritual development (see Table 1). They undertook this task in private and without discussion, using ranking/weighting response sheets, after which they placed their finished sheets in a sealed box. All data were then analysed using the SPSS v17 statistical package.

Results

Results of the first research stage: It is necessary to briefly present the findings of the first research stage (Stoyles et al., 2010b) in order to grasp the significance of the current research findings. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics resulting from the ranking and weighting task described in the first research stage. In this first stage, the salience of six domains of influence (see Table 1) were ranked and weighted by a group of 37 adult members of a Catholic parish community who were responsible for the spiritual development of children (see Stoyles et al., 2010b for details of this research).

We constructed an index of domain salience using ranking and weighting data for analysis of the first stage of research data. Because statistical analysis relies on the use of discrete numbers (1, 2, etc), and because higher order numbers would numerically reflect greater quantity or valence, the values of ranks were reverse scored so that a rank of 6 reflected the greatest weighting while a rank of 1 reflected the least weighting, thus giving an overall mean score of salience¹ for a particular domain. For example, if a respondent ranked Family as 'three' and weighted the same domain as 'two', then the index value would be 'six'. Higher mean scores therefore indicate greater domain salience. Furthermore, the differences between minimum and maximum salience scores represent the variation of each participant's thinking in relation to a particular domain. Score ranges result from the spread of responses for each domain in relation to the number of options presented by the Likert scale, enabling each person to vary his or her response as either 'not important at all', 'somewhat important', 'very important', or 'most important', rather than simply 'important' or 'not important'. Hence, a low difference score would indicate that participants shared a similar vein of thinking in relation to the salience of a relevant domain. Conversely, a high difference score would suggest that participants did not share similar beliefs about a particular domain. Maximum and minimum values range from 1 to 24, and result from the product of reversed rank by weighting, with the lowest minimum score being 1 (1 x 1) and the highest maximum score being 24 (4 x 6). Domain salience allocated by the 37 participants has been reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of domain salience reported by adults responsible for the spiritual development of children (Stoyles et al, 2010b).

Domain	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Family	22.84	3.02	9.00	24.00
Relationship with God	15.19	5.98	2.00	24.00
School	12.44	3.60	2.00	20.00
Friends	10.03	5.34	2.00	20.00
How time is used (Time)	6.78	4.28	2.00	20.00
Influence of information Technology (IT)	3.66	2.35	2.00	12.00

Limitations of space preclude a detailed reporting of the findings in Table 3. However, in brief, the results show that the domains of Family and Relationship with God were perceived as most salient by the 37 respondents, while the domains of Time and Information Technology were perceived as least salient. Additionally, and apart from IT, the differences between minimum and maximum ranges are very broad, indicating that respondents varied greatly in their reasons for allocating the ranks they did to relevant domains.

Results of the current research: Neither sex nor school year of the child sample was considered in the analyses, given the small sample size for each participant cell. Hence, a unitary convenience sample of child responses was analysed for each school. Similarly, the sample size for some parent participant cells was considered inadequate for meaningful analyses of parent responses. Additionally, the sample sizes of both mother and father responses for school S2 were of themselves inadequate for analyses. So that analyses might include the fathers' responses of S1 (n=9) and both mothers' and fathers' responses of S2 (n=3 for both), the parent data were also analysed as a unitary convenience sample. The drawback of combining data

1 Rather than the word "importance", the word "salience" has been used throughout the presentation of results to indicate participants' perceptions of domain influence and so avoid confusion with the concept of importance implicit in the ranking and weighting process.

sets in this manner meant that child and parent responses could not be directly compared with each other, but could only be considered independently. Table 4 reports the descriptive statistics of children's perceptions of domain salience in relation to each school.

Table 4

Mean scores and standard deviations for domain salience across schools, including minimum and maximum scores of children's perceptions

Rank order for S1	Descriptives (S1)	Rank order for S2	Descriptives (S2)	Rank order for S3	Descriptives (S3)
Family	23.64 (1.62) 15.00-24.00	Family	23.00 (2.45) 15.00-24.00	Family	20.90 (3.80) 9.00-24.00
Friends	17.53 (4.65) 4.00-24.00	Relationship with God	13.94 (7.14) 1.00-24.00	Relationship with God	14.67 (7.76) 1.00-24.00
School	9.72 (3.27) 3.00-16.00	Friends	12.59 (5.11) 4.00-20.00	Friends	11.33 (5.44) 2.00-20.00
Relationship with God	9.17 (5.94) 1.00-20.00	School	11.35 (5.15) 4.00-20.00	School	8.31 (4.36) 2.00-20.00
How time is used (Time)	8.22 (2.84) 4.00-8.00	How time is used (Time)	9.82 (2.40) 6.00-15.00	How time is used (Time)	7.90 (3.70) 2.00-16.00
Information technology (IT)	4.19 (2.85) 2.00-12.00	Information technology (IT)	3.12 (2.26) 1.00-9.00	Information technology (IT)	5.50 (5.74) 1.00-24.00

From Table 4, a pattern of mean salience scores is evident among children's perceptions across the three schools. All children believed that Family exercised the most prominent influence in the spiritual development of a child, and the high mean score for this domain indicates that children perceived its salience as being found at the upper end of the Likert scale response ('very' to 'most' important). For S1 children, Friends was placed second to Family, while School, together with Relationship with God, were placed in second and third position, although the closeness of mean scores for these positions needs to be noted. S2 children believed that Relationship with God, Friends, and School followed after Family in decreasing levels of respective salience. Finally, S3 children also resembled the beliefs of S2 children. The children from schools S2 and S3 comprised 57% of the child participant sample. Hence this was a majority response among the children. The children of all schools believed that the domains of How Time is Used (Time) and Influence of Information Technology (IT) were considered to be the second least and least influentially prominent domains respectively.

From Table 4, the minimum and maximum salience scores of each domain, together with their difference scores, indicate varying beliefs among the children. For the domain of Family, the low difference score for S1 and S2 (difference = 9.00), and to a lesser extent for S3 (difference = 15.00), suggested that the children were of similar mind in relation to why they considered this domain to be most salient (although the findings do not indicate the *content* of this thinking). On the other hand, children's difference scores for Relationship with God were notably large. These scores indicate that children varied in their beliefs as to why they attributed second (S2 and S3) and third (S1) place to this domain. The breadth of minimum and maximum scores across all children for School and Friends again indicated that they differed in their opinions as to why these domains were allocated third or fourth positions. Finally, the children of S1 and S2 appeared to be in agreement as to why they considered Time and IT to be least salient, unlike the children of S3 who appeared to hold a broad array of opinions as to why they considered these domains least salient. In summary, therefore, all children appeared to be of like mind about the prime position of Family as a prominent influence on spiritual development in childhood. Apart from the children of S3, similar might be said about Time and IT. Relationship with God, School, and Friends seemed to generate the broadest array of children's beliefs about the salience of these domains for child spiritual development.

Table 5 reports the descriptive statistics for parents' perceptions about domain salience

Table 5

Mean scores and standard deviations with minimum and maximum salience scores of mothers' and fathers' perceptions

Rank order mothers	Descriptives mothers	Rank order fathers	Descriptives fathers
Family	23.75 (1.00) 20.00-24.00	Family	23.38 (2.22) 16.00-24.00
School	14.75 (4.09) 9.00-20.00	School	12.38 (5.61) 3.00-20.00
Friends	12.19 (3.33) 6.00-20.00	Friends	10.54 (5.38) 4.00-20.00
Relationship with God	10.81 (6.66) 2.00-24.00	How time is used (Time)	8.62 (4.87) 2.00-15.00
How time is used (Time)	6.56 (2.94) 2.00-12.00	Relationship with God	7.15 (6.41) 1.00-20.00
Information technology (IT)	3.31 (1.40) 1.00-6.00	Information technology (IT)	6.08 (2.96) 2.00-12.00

What is immediately apparent from Table 5 is the perceived salience of mothers and fathers for the domain of Family. Similar to children's scores, the high mean for this domain indicated that parents saw this domain as being found somewhere between 'very important' and 'most important' on the Likert response scale. This finding reflected the perceptions of all children for this domain. Of particular note were the parents' beliefs about how much prominence should be given to Relationship with God. Mothers allocated fourth place to this domain after School and Friends while fathers allocated fifth place to Relationship with God after Time. These findings were contrary to those for the children of S2 and S3 who allocated second place to Relationship with God, although the children of S1 were similar to fathers in their beliefs about the influence of Relationship with God. Mothers and fathers gave second place of prominence to School, while they saw Friends as being in third place after the domain of School. Similar to children's beliefs about Time and IT, mothers attributed fifth and sixth places to these domains respectively. As with the children, fathers allocated their lowest rank to IT, although they placed Time ahead of Relationship with God in fourth place.

The range of parents' domain salience scores for Family were also notably small, suggesting that they were of like mind about the primacy of this domain, although mothers' difference scores were half the fathers' scores. For the domains of School, Friends, and Relationship with God, ranges were broad indicating that mothers and fathers were varied in their reasons as to why they ranked these domains as they did. Finally, and similar to Family, difference scores for Time and IT were notably small, indicating that parents were of like mind as to why they ranked these domains in second last and last places of influence.

Discussion

The 37 participants in the first stage of research (from here on referred to as 'mentors' for the sake of simplicity) were chosen on the basis of their responsibility for the spiritual formation of children. Mentors, children and parents all believed that one's family was the most important area of influence in a child's spiritual formation. Furthermore, all participants seemed to be in agreement as to why this domain was allocated prime position. Mentors and children (apart from one school), then, believed that one's relationship with God (or the presence of the divine in one's life) was the next most important area of influence. Interestingly, both mothers and fathers placed this domain in fourth and fifth places respectively. Parents and mentors believed that the school environment was the next most salient domain, followed by the child's friends. On the other hand, children believed their friends were more salient influences than their school environment. Unlike the domain of Family, the different scores for these latter domains were broad, indicating that children, parents, and mentors did not express general agreement as to why they positioned these domains as they did. The action of *role* in a child's spiritual growth will be explored in attempting to understand the meaning and significance of these findings.

The role of both mentor and parent in a child's spiritual formation is that of 'teacher', and these roles are conducted in the common physical settings of a child's life, particularly those of home, school, and for many, church. Children also adopt a role in these settings, for it is in these milieus that children experience and carry out what they learn from their spiritual teachers. These settings are also the shared environments of a child's existence (Stoyles et al., 2010b; Champagne, 2003), and it is within these arenas that the roles of child, parent, and mentor intercept in the expression of the spiritual life. Yet the findings of this research showed that mentors differed from parents in their beliefs. All participants believed that the family must be given first position of prominence as a realm of spiritual influence, and the small breadth of different scores indicated that everybody was of like mind as to why this needs to be the case. However, mentors and children differed from parents in their perceptions of one's relationship with God as a focus of influence. While mentors and children saw one's relationship with God in second position of influence compared to a child's family, parents saw this influence very differently. Mothers believed that the three superior areas of influence needed to be the child's family, school and friends, with the influence of a relationship with God being given fourth place after these domains. Fathers resembled mothers in relation to the first three domains, and placed a relationship with God in fifth position following the way a child uses time. Parents therefore suggested that the human relationships in a child's life are most important, while mentors seem to believe that God and family must preclude friends and school as vehicles of influence. A clear discrepancy exists here, and it is essential to further explore this discrepancy since both parents and mentors exercise a teaching role in the child's life.

Although they exercise a role different to parents, mentors can become very significant sources of inspiration in the spiritual lives of children. Research into the relationship between teachers and the children they teach support this role of the mentor (De Roos et al., 2004). As such, children are likely to absorb the teachings and values of mentors as they would with their parents, although perhaps to a more shallow depth. Presuming that both parents and mentors guide and direct the children under their care from the outlook of their personal and previously-formed values, then both will seek to instil these values in their charges (as mentors) and children (as parents). The current research findings seem to suggest that parents will instil the value of family, friends and school as the primary focal points for their children's participation in society (and hence for the development of their spiritual sensitivity), with a person-God relationship being seen as subordinate in importance to these arenas. Mentors will do likewise from the primary focus of family, but will then view friends and school as being subordinate to the person-God relationship. These discrepancies of perception regarding what is salient for the spiritual formation of children can potentially become a source of conflict for the child.

The influence of one's family was persistently expressed as being the influence of greatest prominence by mentors, parents, and children and all seem to share similar beliefs as to why this should be the case. Any domain of influence, regardless of prominence, will span the breadth and depth of a child's life as focal points of the compound property of the child's spiritual encounters with self, others, and the world (Hay & Nye, 2006), and children are continually immersed in each of these arenas throughout the many occasions of their day. Hence, the issue is not whether the perceptions of mentors and parents are right or wrong, but rather whether the mentor or the parent is the one who needs to be recognised as holding the principal role of influence in a child's spiritual formation. Research findings have confirmed the pivotal place of the parent, and in particular the mother, in a child's life. A child models the mother's concept of God, living out a relationship with God as an image of the parent-child attachment relationship (De Roos et al., 2001, 2004; Granqvist & Dickie, 2006; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). The role of parent is founded in the attachment figure that provides the child with security, affection, trust, strength and support as he or she grows older. This attachment role is essentially important for the overall well-being, happiness, and healthy development of the child. Whether the parent is physically present with the child or not, the parent is an intricate part of the child's interactions at home, with friends, at school, and in the context of religious belief where it exists. In terms of attachment theory (Cooper et al., 2001; Granqvist, 2006; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Siegal & Hartzell, 2005), the child will take the *person* of the parent (as reflected in the attachment relationship), and not just what the parent teaches and models, into his or her relational consciousness of the world, self, other people, and a divine being such as God (Hay & Nye, 2006). That is, the parent is likely to be a constant presence in the child's life, either physically or in the child's thoughts and feelings. In the context of a secure attachment relationship, the parent-child bond cannot, and must not, be supplanted by any other relationship with the child. What is critical in the findings of the current research is that all participants ranked the family in the position of greatest influence in a child's

spiritual formation, and all other domains followed suit after this domain. Hence, the point of argument is not whether God, family, school or friends are of more or less spiritual influence in relation to each other. Rather, the *stepping-off point* for accommodating these research findings into practical application is found in the role of the parent, who should hold the place of greatest accountability and influence within the family (Siegal & Hartzell, 2005), and therefore needs to be afforded prime focus of attention when considering the spiritual growth of a child. Therefore, if parents see the human relationships of family, friends, and school as essentially important in a child's spiritual formation, then all considerations about how one will best form a child's spirituality must begin from this vantage point. It is important to note that God (or the presence of a divine Being) as a focus of influence is not being relegated out of the picture of the child's spiritual formation. Rather, one's relationship with God as a focus of influence must not uproot and discard the role and authority of the parent in the child's spiritual development, even if the place of importance given to God might appear as subservient to other, more "human" domains.

Research limitations

This research revealed a number of limitations. First, both child and parent samples were restricted to schools from three demographic regions only, thus limiting the application of these findings to children and parents generally. Second, children's gender or year was not taken into account. Third, parents' responses were not matched directly with children's responses. However, apart from these limitations, findings suggested interesting and relevant information about the comparison between parent and child responses, and the responses of the 37 participants who ranked and weighted domains in the first stage of the research. The difference between children and parents, even though they were not matched, was also of interest. Finally, the salience of Time and IT as domains of influence was not discussed due to space restrictions, since these domains were generally allocated lowest places of salience (with the exception of fathers' perceptions about the domain of Time).

Future research

Future research will comprise the implementation and evaluation of a preparation programme for Confirmation that reflects the findings of this research project. Therefore, this programme will reflect the unique nature of a child's spiritual search in the world, and the parent's role in guiding and supporting the child in this task. Hay and Nye (2006) refer to the "signature phenomenon" of a child's spiritual sensitivity (pp. 98-99), and the proposed programme requires that this unique brush-stroke of the child is incorporated in its content and implementation. Hence components such as parent-child/family-child relationship and communication, parent and child self-efficacy, self-concept, confidence in personal relationships outside the family, the enhancement of a life-giving value system, and the opportunity to find one's place in the world as a valuable contributor, will be reflective of the domain salience of family, school, and friends². It is acknowledged that in the current atmosphere of sacramental preparation, it is not unknown for programmes to have these elements as a primary focus. However, the proposed programme will not underpin these domains of influence with a presumed context of relationship with God. Rather, the programme will view this relationship as emerging from the expression of the above elements within the context of the child's family, friendships and participation in the environment of school regardless of whether or not God is viewed as an important part of these contexts. That is, the proposed programme will not presuppose that religious commitment and practice is evident in the child or the child's family. The influence of a personal relationship with God is likely to take hold, if at all, where the spiritual signature of the child is respected by listening to the child's narrative, and then by helping the child to interpret, understand, and expand these narratives as he or she grows older. Hay and Nye (2006) place much importance on the purity of the young child's spiritual sensitivity, and understand this purity to provide a pathway for the entry of the traditional practices of religion into the child's life as he or she grows older. Hence, the movement towards a relationship with God will be made available to the child *through* the human interactions in the child and parents' lives. The alternative to this approach is to impose values and traditional practices on the child, thus ignoring the need for openness to these practices, and further ignoring the realisation that openness to traditional practice results from the

2 The Rite of Reception of Baptised Christians into Full with the Catholic Church (1975) reflects these programme elements by expressing wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, wonder and awe as gifts of the Holy Spirit that free people to embrace the new life of anointing in Confirmation.

child discovering the meaning of a particular tradition. That is, traditional religious participation is more likely to occur where the child is able to locate religious practices in his or her spiritual narratives (that is, the unique “brush-stroke” of the child), thus giving these practices meaning, purpose, and personal value (Stoyles *et al.*, 2010a). This ability, together with developing maturity, will enable religious practice to reflect the values of the child rather than risk becoming an irrelevant optional extra in the child’s life.

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REFLECTIONS ON ISSUES FOR CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Abstract

This is the third article in a series on children's spirituality and primary school religious education. It is written not from expertise at the primary school level, but from a more general spirituality perspective. It is not a systematic review, but a reflection intended to raise issues and to promote further discussion on four areas:- The role of children's imagination in learning; the place of story telling – especially Biblical story telling and Godly Play; interpretation of Scripture – especially the Genesis stories and the Gospel parables; and religious literacy. In each of these areas what is needed is a realistic and balanced interpretation of children's spirituality that avoids the two extremes:- presuming spiritual activity that is beyond their age-related and psychological and mental capacities, but which can develop as they grow older; and a tendency to ignore or underrate the active involvement or agency of children in constructing their own understanding of spiritual and moral questions.

Introduction

This ongoing discussion of children's spirituality and primary school religious education in Australian church schools was prompted by interaction with postgraduate religious education students on differences between primary and secondary school religious education. There is an evident coherence in the academic writings on children's spirituality and religious education over the last decade. Much of it concentrates on psychological aspects (like awe, wonder, imagination, play, story etc.) making a valuable contribution to understanding the *human* dimension to children's spirituality, complementing what has been written specifically about *religious* development (E.g. Adams et al. 2008; Berryman, 2009; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008; Nye, 2009).

While the psychology of children's early spiritual/religious experience is an important focus and starting point for studying children's spirituality, what appeared to be missing in the literature was adequate attention to the primal socialising influence of parents/guardians. A broader perspective on children's spirituality needs to include accounts of the different 'starting spiritualities' of children from religious and relatively secular homes. This helps make the overall view of children's spirituality more realistic because it acknowledges that the majority of families with children at church schools in Australia are now in the latter secular category. This wider perspective also throws more light on the apparent conflict between what the literature described as the *responsive* spirituality of children and the relatively *disinterested, secular* spirituality of many youth – hence a useful starting point for identifying issues and potential problems in content and pedagogy in primary school religious education (Rossiter, 2012A). In addition, from this perspective, some challenging questions can be asked – questions that are less likely to come from within the 'established' thinking about children's spirituality and children's religious education.

The Australian Government's Early Years Learning Framework for children, and its companion guide for educators, postulate fundamental links between play-based learning, thinking, imagination and story (DEEWR, 2010, p. 30). Complementing what was said about the place of play in children's learning (Rossiter, 2012B), the following will focus on the role of imagination in children's learning and spirituality, and how this in turn is related to the pedagogy of story telling. Some potential issues will be raised for:- Biblical story telling, including Godly play; the interpretation of Scripture, with reference to teaching the Genesis stories and the parables of Jesus. Finally, brief attention will be given to religious literacy because the proposed ways of addressing the issues seem to converge under the umbrella of religious literacy as a useful overarching

perspective for primary school religious education. The discussion will not refer in detail to the wider literature on imagination, story telling and children's learning (a large task beyond the defined scope of this article); but rather, it will signpost some particular questions and issues that need further investigation and debate.

The place of imagination in children's learning

This section provides a summary interpretation of the place of imagination in children's learning, specifically in the classroom context, that serves as a background to the discussion of story telling.

In the discussion of children's play (Rossiter, 2012B), as well as more generally in the literature of children's religious education (E.g. Adams et al. 2008; Coles, 1989; Grajczonek, 2009; Hyde, 2008; Mountain, 2007), the words 'imagination' or 'imaginative' figure prominently. This illustrates the centrality of imagination to children's play – it is difficult to talk about children's play without reference to the imagination. The comments below propose a view of some roles for imagination in learning that can be applied to both children and adolescents (as well as adults).

Imagination is the capacity of the mind to transcend reality to some extent by constructing new scenarios and new possibilities for action. It is a creative mental process showing new ways of thinking and acting, or novel ways of reprising past actions. Previous learning can be applied or extrapolated to new circumstances. Imagination thus helps construct *virtual new realities* or possibilities that can be enjoyed, as well as tested and evaluated for their appropriateness, their meaning and usefulness. Some imagined possibilities can be frightening or distasteful for the individual, and this can serve as a warning or a prohibition. Imagination can not only be casual and relaxing – like day-dreaming – it can involve serious application of the mind to exploring new possibilities. Imagination can thus be like a *behavioural pathfinder* or *precursor to action* that tentatively explores possible ways ahead that the individual can try out in advance.

It is useful to single out three types of imaginative learning that are common in children (as well as in adolescents and adults).

Imaginative reprise is where children imaginatively copy, replay or mimic past experience or action in their own way, sometimes adding novel elements. This may involve exploring what the original experience means for them. Or it might simply be the repetition that children engage in as part of their coming to know something or to develop a particular skill / capacity.

Imaginative identification (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985, p. 73; 2006, p. 292) occurs when children explore with their imagination what it would feel like to be in the shoes of others. They can identify what they think would be the feelings and thoughts that others have, and of how they interpreted their experience. And this can help them learn how both to take and appreciate perspectives other than their own.

Imaginative rehearsal (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985, p. 72; 2006, p. 291) is where children construct new virtual realities and then try themselves out in these circumstances; or they imagine how they might manage in some current real situations. It is like answering the question: "What would it be like for me to be in this situation? Or in a new situation? How would I feel? How would I manage?" This is the creative 'pathfinder' function referred to above for 'lighting up' new ways of behaving; they can explore new territory in advance and, depending on the result, this imaginative experience may either encourage or deter them from entering the new situation. Children can experiment imaginatively with different responses in the new situations; this can be a prelude to decision-making and future action.

As noted in Rossiter (2012B), imagination is fundamental to play with toys. Imagination endows toys with life; children invest them with imaginative life and they interact with them. They can pass considerable time by themselves absorbed in such imaginative play.

This section shows how children's imagination functions in their learning. And it illustrates the psychological basis of how it might contribute to spirituality, when they apply their imagination to interpreting their spiritual/religious experience and to understanding their religious culture.

Questions and issues related to story telling in primary school religious education

1. Religious story telling

The psychological and religious functions of story The telling of stories, especially in oral form, dates back into human prehistory. For early humans, stories were their vehicles for handing on cultural meanings, history and values, for explaining cultural practices and for providing personal guides to life. Humans had become genetically dependent on a non-genetic cultural inheritance not just for survival but for meaningful lives – and stories were a central component to this ever-evolving inheritance. And they still are today – even though the extent, diversity and forms of stories are more varied and ubiquitous through modern communications technologies. The role of religious story telling needs to be contextualised within its broader human base. Stories are always intended to be entertaining and engaging; but the hallmark of religious stories is their embedded meanings about the values, purpose and direction to life – they are never just about entertainment (Power, 2010).

Biblical story telling In story telling in the Hebrew Bible, the religious stories committed to text were primarily about Yahweh's covenant with the people of Israel. The fidelity of God to the chosen people was the model proposed for the fidelity that the Jewish people hoped to demonstrate in their own lives. Scripture scholarship would not regard the biblical stories as strict history in the contemporary sense of scientifically recorded history. While aetiological interpretations, explaining and reinforcing their mythic origins in a relationship with God, were projected through these stories, they nevertheless had a historical basis in the religious community that gave rise to the texts. The biblical stories are thus about the great religious heroes of the tradition; they are about God's work amongst the chosen people (including creation and covenant); they are repositories of the community's religious faith and wisdom about life; they showed how prophets, who were like the "conscience of Israel" (Vawter, 1961), challenged the community to be more faithful. The biblical stories reflect theology; they are an invitation to faith; they provide moral exemplars; and collectively they contribute to the religious community's sense of cultural identity – and in turn, this can flow into the personal religious identity of individuals (Kiley & Crotty, 1999).

In the New Testament, the story telling tradition of the Hebrew Bible was continued. Here the focus is mainly on stories about Jesus, written from a post-Easter perspective (Borg, 2006). While historically based, they are primarily documents of faith in the risen Jesus. As will be considered in more detail later, the parables are a story form that is distinctive of Jesus – stories that challenged hearers to think again about conventional views that may not always reflect God's perspective.

Religious stories and children's spiritual development While a natural love for stories is genetic to all humans, appealing to people across their life cycle, children appear to have a particular affinity for them, not only as entertainment but also as fundamental mechanisms for learning about life and learning about themselves (Hyde, 2010). Children's literature is fertile with moral biographies where children can imaginatively identify and evaluate the moral stance of characters in the stories (Grajczonek & Ryan, 2009; Coles, 1989). Story telling, along with play, are two fundamental ways for entertaining children and for promoting learning. And they are therefore key vehicles in their religious education (Hyde, 2008).

To hold together coherently, all stories have built in world views or sets of values that are often implied and not always overt. Inevitably, all stories are thus value embedded. And religious stories are also theology embedded. Hence stories, whether religious or not, are about beliefs and values. Learning to discern the values, beliefs, biases, and morality in stories is a fundamental part of education – and as noted later, this is a valuable part of acquiring literacy generally and religious literacy in particular.

Contemporary multi-modality of stories The film scholar Gerbner drew attention to the radical contemporary change to what had been the traditional patterns of story telling for millennia: "We have moved away from the historic experience of humankind. Children used to grow up in a home where parents told most of the stories. Today television tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time." (Gerbner, 1992).

Australian social researchers have also pointed out the educational need to address the problem:

The media's growing influence has many benefits: informing, educating and entertaining people; increasing awareness of human rights and environmental impacts; breaking down dogma; promoting diversity. But the stories the media tell, which define modern life, are also often driven by the lowest common denominator in public taste. While most societies have taken great care of their stories, today's media present, at one level, a cacophony of conflicting messages and morals; at another, they offer a seductive harmony of harmful influences, both personal and social. As one media critic warns: 'The media claim they are only telling our stories, but societies live and die on stories'

. . .when a community abdicates the role of story telling to the mass media, particularly commercial media, a focus on wellbeing or the good life is diminished to stories about feeling good. These stories can have a very individual focus
(Eckersley et. al., 2006 p. 32, 35)

While it is beyond the scope here to address this issue, it is explored in detail in the section "The shaping influence of film and television on young people's spiritual and moral development: An educational exploration" (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 332-367).

Some proposed implications for primary school religious education Earlier, reference was made to the situation of many children from relatively non-religious families who will hear something about God 'for the very first time' in their primary school religious education (Rossiter, 2012A). For them, it is particularly relevant for their teachers to introduce and highlight the scriptures as the faith-stories of a continuing, historical religious community – a community of memory. For children as for adults, the main element in biblical story telling should be the *religious meaning* that the community attaches to the story. In other words, biblical story telling pedagogy would be misleading and incomplete if it were to concentrate on the descriptive details of the story as if they were historical, while neglecting to emphasise the theological meaning; this would also lay the foundations for a continuing literal/fundamentalist interpretation, that may be difficult to 'educate away' at a later stage. Religious story telling by definition should point towards the development of a symbolic/theological understanding of the scriptures.

Even for young children, teachers should be able to explain how the religious stories in scripture were not written in the same way as contemporary history is recorded in a strict documentary-like fashion. It is the intended community meaning of the scripture that is its main purpose; to focus too much on details as if they were historical, but which cannot be verified historically will sabotage this meaning. This is not to deny the historicity of scripture, especially in the New Testament; but it acknowledges that the New Testament authors were unfamiliar with the sort of scientific, historical, 'facticity' that has dominated historical memory and texts since the 20th century (Borg, 1997). The complex topic – the historicity of scripture – needs more detailed attention for adolescents and adults. To interpret the scriptures only from a contemporary historical perspective is therefore unlikely to recover accurately their intended theological meanings (Crotty, 2002). A lingering literal interpretation of scripture may be a potential problem with the Godly play pedagogy, as discussed later.

Religion teachers involved in biblical story telling would do well to recall and follow the example of the Jewish Passover ritual where the presider continually reminds the group 'why we are re-telling this story now'.

2. Godly play – Biblical story telling using concrete story objects

Godly play (Berryman, 1991, 2002, 2009; Hyde, 2010) makes use of story objects as concrete reference points for a Biblical story telling pedagogy. No doubt the approach is valuable for pre-school children, especially in the context of a local church (community of faith). Giving the children a hands-on way of engaging with the stories taps into their natural interests in imaginative play and in the repetition of activities. But, in the light of issues considered above, some reservations are proposed regarding the extension of its use as a principal pedagogy into primary school religious education. These points are not so much a critique of the principles of Godly play but cautions about the extent of its use.

Appropriate selection of biblical stories There is a possibility that the selection of biblical stories for use in Godly play depends to some extent on how amenable they are to the availability and use of story objects. Clearly, the animals in Noah's ark have a prominent place in the Godly play classroom; and this prominence is in all likelihood not lost on the children. But this is a Hebrew Bible aetiological myth; it is not in the same category as, nor does it have the same Christian importance as, say Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Biblical story telling needs to reflect the hierarchy of theological importance in the selection of stories. And the children themselves need to have this hierarchy explained to them in terms they can understand. This approach presumes that knowing the theological message of a story is paramount. And children also need to know why the story is being retold from generation to generation.

Children's acquisition of symbolic/theological meanings in the interpretation of scripture It is evident that what children will often think of first when it comes to play is toys. A three/four year old with no religious background at home cannot but initially see the Godly play story objects in the Noah's ark story as toys. Presumably, religious story telling will help them progress through the notion of toys, to toys used in a religious story, and thence towards religious meanings and an understanding of religious symbols and concepts. But this progression takes time, religious learning and explanatory teaching – and its successful achievement is difficult to monitor. Some Godly play practitioners are not happy with the use the word 'toys' applied to the story objects. If children do initially perceive them as toys, this appears in no way to compromise the religious purpose of the pedagogy. But the teachers cannot presume that children will automatically discern a difference between the notion of toy (and playful engagement with toys) and religious story-symbol.

There is a need to acknowledge children's religious starting points which are often distant from an understanding of religious symbols. An educator's strong attribution of religious symbolism to objects cannot be presumed in children. Children's initial, natural psychological engagement with the biblical story-objects should not be automatically be interpreted as spiritual and religious. Not being presumptive can help motivate teachers to draw attention to, and encourage more symbolic/theological interpretations of the biblical stories.

If the ultimate purpose of biblical story telling is to communicate the community's theological views and inspire faith, then transcending a literal and/or fundamentalist interpretation is central to the process. However, because Godly play associates the stories with concrete play objects, this very concreteness may tend to ingrain a literal/historical interpretation; and this may create later difficulties for both the children and their religious educators when the children's literal meanings need to be transformed into the symbolic/theological. It would appear that a basic way of addressing this potential problem is to make the theological meaning, in terms accessible to the children, a key part of the pedagogy. However, there may be a further difficulty with Godly play if teachers feel reluctant to clarify the Christian theological interpretation because this might inhibit children's wondering. For example, it would depend on how Berryman & Hyde's (2010, p. 42) proposal was interpreted "The role of the children's mentors is not to impart religious truths, but rather to present the lesson and to provide a safe environment, . . . so that the play between each child and God in community" [can occur]. Giving the Christian interpretation of religious meaning a central place in the teaching does not require a dogmatic approach that inhibits children's own wonderings and meanings. This issue is addressed further below.

Children's wondering and their construction of personal meaning through interpreting the scriptural stories

Some descriptions of Godly play emphasise children's wondering as central to the pedagogy, with the purpose of allowing them to contextualise the story by constructing their own meanings, relating it to their own life experience.

. . . the child drawing on her or his own sense of wonder as a means by which to make sense of the world and events from the many and diverse frameworks of meaning that are available (Hyde, 2010, p. 512).

It is not a 'question and answer time,' but rather an opportunity for the children and the Storyteller to engage playfully with the lesson of the day. The children's wondering emerges from their own lives, their relationship to God and their participation in the lesson. The role of the Storyteller is to support their wondering (Hyde, 2010, p. 508.)

This is an appropriate and valuable learning process; but it can become problematic if wondering is over-emphasised to the point where teachers feel unwilling to tell the children the traditional Christian interpretation of the stories, because they fear that this might compromise the integrity of the pedagogy by 'cramping' their imaginative style and stifling their wondering. On the contrary, children's knowledge of Christian meanings for the stories would appear to be an essential outcome for Biblical story telling.

Perhaps too much attention can be given to encouraging the children to wonder and to construct their own idiosyncratic meanings, at the expense of explaining the Christian interpretation. More than anything, children at an early age need *answers* – even relatively 'black-and-white' answers about meanings to life coming from family and religious tradition. They will have plenty of time as they grow older to develop and inject their own creativity and originality into their personal meanings.

Overemphasising their own personal resources in the construction of meaning at an early age seems to appeal to a questionable mythology of freedom and individualism that is increasingly imposed on children when they are not ready for the exercise of freedom, individuality and responsibility that such a construction implies. This is a difficult enough task for adolescents and adults. Children need to 'lean' on the ready-made meanings that their parents and key reference groups (E.g., religion) provide until they are old enough and mature enough to be more independent in their construction of personal meaning (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 24-28). One can readily see this sort of problem emerging in young children who are given freedoms and choices more appropriate for older children and adolescents. For example: two year-olds have been perplexed by being required to make decisions about what they might want to eat from an extensive menu, about what they might want to wear from a wide range of clothing, and about what they might want to do (or watch) from a broad range of entertainment. If exaggerated individualism can be a problem for adolescents and adults, (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 115) it can be an even more subtle developmental problem for children.

Telling the children the Christian interpretation does not have to be dogmatic or too didactic. Wondering and making up one's own personal meanings are important in education for all age groups, but for children the discovery of new knowledge and experience is more important. Of course children will always naturally contextualise new knowledge in their own way, but there is no need for their teachers to overemphasise their putting this together into a comprehensive personal meaning system or world view. They need to know their community meanings as a type of inherited, baseline world view; they have much scope for crafting their own idiosyncratic meaning system as they get older.

This issue is related to the 'quest for personalism and relevance' in religious education (Rossiter, 1999) that has been a prominent interest of Catholic religious educators since the late 1960s. It has the purpose of trying to make the study of religion relevant to the lives of young people. It is a valid and fundamentally important principle that remains pertinent to school religious education. But attention to this principle should not be exaggerated so that it eclipses other key principles such as knowledge of the religious tradition. Also, the quest for relevance needs to acknowledge a natural limitation in that adolescents, and even more so children, have a relatively limited life experience – even though they now have extensive electronic access to information. Hence it is proposed that use of the Godly play pedagogy should take care not to overemphasise children's wondering and construction of personal meaning.

Overstating the wondering aspect may also tend to presume a sort of mysticism (or spiritual reflectiveness) operative in children that is really more appropriate for older young people and adults. The scope and depth of children's personal meaning-making in Godly play are difficult, and probably impossible, to determine. And the validity of the pedagogy in introducing children to the Christian stories does not require such an assessment – the private, mystical/reflective dimension to children's religious education can be respectfully left alone. Hence children's absorption in the activities in Godly play can comfortably be interpreted as a manifestation of their natural capacity for curious and inquisitive engagement in play; the extent to which this is also a mystical/reflective/religious experience remains an open question.

The issue here is really a matter of wise balance. To concentrate exclusively on communicating an authoritative religious interpretation is an extreme to be avoided. Also, both to overestimate or underestimate the capacity of children to reflect and construct their own spiritual meanings are equally to be avoided. An article on the spirituality of newborn children (Surr, 2012) would appear to be an example of overestimation. Adams *et al.* implied recognition of the other extreme of underestimation when they encouraged educators

to become more aware of the 'geography' of children's spirituality [and] to engage more fully with children's worlds – how children experience their inner worlds, and how the inner and outer worlds interact to shape the spiritual dimension of their lives. (2008, p. 9; see also Hoffman & Lamme, 1989, p. 47)

Respecting and encouraging children's spiritual agency needs to be balanced with educating them towards increasing familiarity with the religious interpretations of their faith tradition.

Threshold and sacred space The Godly play teacher would have no difficulty interpreting the significance of a liturgy-like 'threshold' through which participants pass into a 'sacred space' that displays objects symbolising the Biblical stories and key words/ideas in the Christian language system. Similarly, the Eucharistic overtones to the Godly play 'feast' would be self-evident. But for young children, it may be presumptive to think that they are mature enough to appreciate the notion of sacred space and Christian liturgical symbolism to that extent. Some may initially interpret what was said about the threshold as more an arbitrary rule of engagement imposed by the teacher than as a special entrance to a sacred space – its religious significance may initially elude them. As noted above, only gradually would their religious education help them understand this symbolism.

Natural decrease in the pedagogy's relevance through primary school religious education? The objects used as concrete referents in the story telling within Godly play appear to make the pedagogy particularly appropriate for pre-school children. This 'hands-on' approach is naturally engaging for the children. Hence the value in their manipulation of the story objects in reprising the Biblical stories is not in question as regards their learning these narrative aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the very concreteness of the play objects tends to engender a literal interpretation of the story; and a literal interpretation is at odds with the theological purpose of Biblical story telling. So it is crucial that children's religious education helps move them gradually towards the theological/symbolic meanings of scripture, and away from literal interpretations. Hence, it could be expected that the Godly play pedagogy, whose use of concrete objects would seem naturally linked with literal interpretations, should have diminishing relevance as children progress through primary school.

It would seem essential that as soon as the children can read well enough, the Biblical story telling should be complemented with their actual reading from a children's bible. They need to know that the stories come from Biblical texts created and sustained within the Judaeo Christian religious tradition. This strategy can also help address a problem identified by one teacher as follows: "Some primary students see Biblical story telling as 'baby stuff' and switch off making it a little difficult for the teacher and those who are engaged" (Modini, 2011).

Where Godly play is used in the early primary years, the Christian meanings of the theology-embedded stories need to be introduced into the pedagogy in a prominent way, taking into account the capacity of the children at that age. Otherwise, insufficient transition from concreteness to symbolic meanings might occur.

3. Teaching the creation stories in Genesis: Addressing the potential clash between scientific and religious interpretations

Dating back to the 1970s, research on children's understanding of science and religion has identified the problems associated with a literal (fundamentalist) interpretation of the Genesis stories in particular, and Biblical stories in general (Goldman, 1964; Hare Duke & Whitton, 1977; Martin & Pluck, 1977; Francis *et al.*, 1990).

Childhood belief is breached with incredible ease on the basis of a simplistic scientism ... the first incursion into a simple Biblical literalism seems to be the automatic death blow to 'belief'. There is in fact a complete vacuum at the point in intellectual development where the 'fairytale version' ends and anything more 'grown up' might take its place (Hare Duke & Whitton, 1977, p. 5).

What was said earlier about the symbolic/theological meaning of scripture is particularly pertinent here. In addition, when the Genesis stories are introduced to children, they should not be taught something that has to be 'untaught' later. The literal details of the stories should not be emphasised whereas the theological / symbolic meanings should. Children can be helped to understand something of the nature of the Biblical literature itself and about its literary genres – the Hebrew Bible is about the covenant between the people of Israel and their God. They need to know when it was written and what were the authors' purposes. The Bible is not a science book about the origins of the world. If there are apparent clashes between scientific and religious accounts of creation and human life, then it is likely to be either faulty religion or faulty science (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 73-76). Through the use of creation stories from other traditions, children can learn something of the creation story genre (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985, p. 172).

4. Teaching the parables: Highlighting their subversive nature

The article by Dowling (2010) explained the parabolic, subversive nature of the parables of Jesus in the New Testament. These Gospel stories are much more than moral fables. Parables challenge people to think beyond their comfortable, conventional frames of reference; and they prompt questioning of their often limited view of the world; they also imply that God's generosity and care go well beyond people's usual expectations. This articulation of the original teaching purpose of the parables is relevant to early childhood and primary school religious educators because it presents 'benchmarks' about the Christian meanings and pedagogical significance of parables. It shows what an informed Christian adult should know about the challenges intended in the parables; and this requires knowledge of their intended subversive meanings for the original audience in the sociocultural context of New Testament times. The issue then is how much of this perspective can be communicated with primary school children.

Those who are the first tellers of these stories to children should make sure that they do not engender meanings that would make it difficult for the children to move towards the more challenging interpretation later. While children may be encouraged to develop their own personal understanding of and response to the stories (E.g., the care of Jesus illustrated in the parable of the good shepherd), if they do not have some understanding of the original context and intent of the parables, then they will be mis-informed; their understanding of parables will be deficient. Hence, teachers need to think about how they might help children move gradually towards the intended meaning of the parables, even if some of the complexity in their subversive elements might be beyond them at an early age.

Primary religion teachers could attend to the following questions in their pedagogy for parables.

- What did Jesus appear to have in mind when he told this parable to people?
- Given their social situation, what meanings would Jesus' listeners and his own followers take from the story?
- Given answers to these two questions above, what might be some important messages in the parable for people today?

It would not be beyond the maturity of many primary school pupils to see that the parable of the good shepherd is about challenging people's view of God – God's care for every individual goes way beyond what might usually be expected.

Conclusion: Religious Literacy -- a valuable 'umbrella perspective' for primary school religious education

This article will conclude with some reflections on promoting critical religious literacy as a key purpose in religious education, because the issues discussed above seem to come together appropriately under this heading.

Understanding of religious literacy needs to be contextualised within a contemporary view of children's literacy. The Australian Government's *Early Years Learning Framework* (2009) proposed the following broad definition.

Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, story telling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing. Contemporary texts include

electronic and print based media. In an increasingly technological world, the ability to critically analyse texts is a key component of literacy. Children benefit from opportunities to explore their world using technologies and to develop confidence in using digital media. (DEEWR 2009, p. 38)

A useful complement to this definition is the understanding of 'critical' literacy proposed by the Tasmanian Department of Education (2009).

There is value in the breadth of these definitions, particularly the way in which they point to contemporary 'multi-modal' literacy. However, there is a potential problem when their broad scope tends to make everything into literacy (the same sort of problem with a broad definition of spirituality). Hence it is proposed that an emphasis is needed on the central idea of critical literacy as *expanding children's cultural horizons by extending their use of language, especially as it helps develop critical thinking*. Just as written texts require critical interpretation, film, television, pop music and digital communications are then like different 'texts' to be appraised. To be literate, children need to learn how to 'read' these new sorts of texts – with understanding, contextualisation, interpretation and evaluation. This means appraising their form (or modality) as well as their content.

The first indication that religious literacy was being proposed as a key aim for Catholic religious education appeared in the 1997 curriculum documents of the Archdiocese of Brisbane. Since then the term has gained wider prominence in diocesan religious education literature (Dwyer, 2001). The idea of promoting a *critical* religious literacy (Wright, 2004) has a long history in Catholic religious education (Rossiter, 1999).

Pertinent to the notion of religious literacy, as well as to the issues discussed earlier, is the *Early Years Learning Framework* comment about an important link between children's play and literacy.

Children use play to participate in their culture, to develop the literacy of their culture, to order the events in their lives and to share those events with others. Through play, children develop an understanding of their social worlds. They learn to trust, form attachments, share, negotiate, take turns and resolve conflict. Since play varies from individual to individual, family to family and across cultural groups, play enables children to experience and to begin to understand difference and diversity. Play for young children begins with reflexive action and exploration of their immediate world using their senses. (DEEWR, 2010, p. 30)

This thinking helps put children's play and story telling pedagogies within religious education into better perspective. It helps show how the distinctive contribution that a school education, and especially school religious education, can make to children's learning is through the *critical* dimension to literacy. That means an emphasis on promoting a thoughtful, critical appraisal of cultural meanings, as well as the assimilation of core religious meanings.

The various issues and cautions discussed in this article could all be described as focusing on the development of a critical literacy in children – at least the first steps in this direction which should be followed up in the religious education of adolescents and adults.

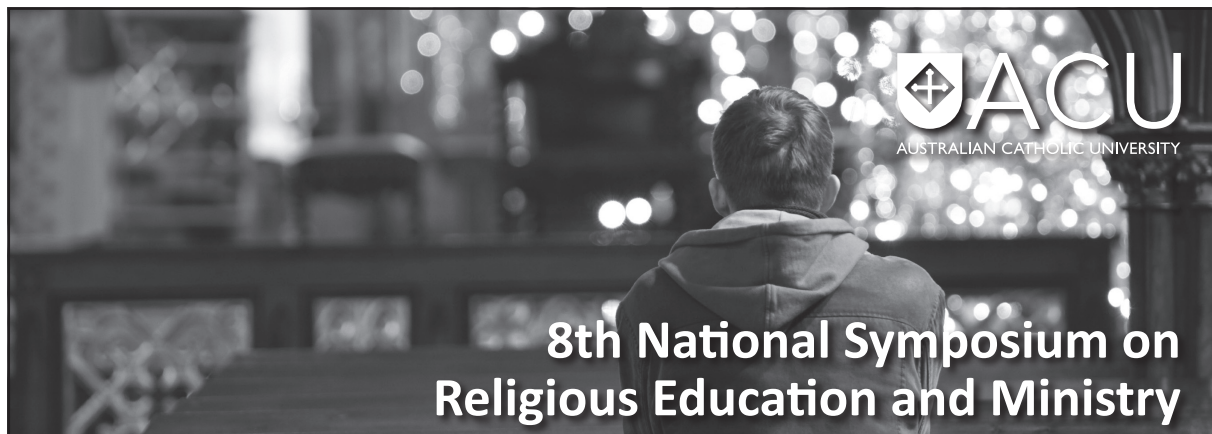
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LEARNING AND SPIRITUALITY IN YOUNG MUSLIM CHILDREN

Abstract

This paper reports on one particular finding which emerged from a Singapore study of young Muslim children attending the last year of a four-year Islamic education weekend program. The program provides the 5-8 year old young learners with a learning environment in which they not only memorise Qur'anic verses but also learn the relevance of Islamic values and practices in their daily lives through activities which are age-appropriate. Learning in the program is perceived to be holistic in that it recognises the roles of thinking (cognitive), feeling (affective) and reflecting (spiritual) as complementary within the learning process. Children's account of what they have learnt suggests the emergence of interplay between these learning dimensions. Such interplay, as argued in this paper, may lead to transformative learning experiences even as the program itself is concerned with a particular outcome (i.e., convergence with the Islamic worldview).

Introduction

The study and transmission of religious knowledge have always been at the heart of Islamic tradition. Religious study is considered by many as a form of worship and Muslim children are taught Islamic education from a young age (Boyle, 2004; Hefner & Zaman, 2004). Education of Muslim children can take place through formal and semi-formal venues such as mosque schools, study circles, and after-school programs where the heritage of Islamic knowledge is passed to future generations. Education for Muslims may also take the form of the madrasah, a full-time educational institution where the curriculum includes both Islamic and secular education. The range of purposes of madrasahs can be as pragmatic as training students to become religious experts, to training students to become skilled tradespersons and employees of public and private secular institutions (Park & Niyozov, 2008). In Singapore, the majority of Muslim children receive their Islamic knowledge on a part-time basis in the mosques or private religious educational establishments. They attend the religious classes before or after school or during the weekends. A small majority choose to attend the full-time madrasahs where they receive both secular and religious education (Abu Bakar, 2009).

The history of Islamic education has been well documented elsewhere (Halstead, 2004; Hefner, 2009; Kadi, 2006; Park & Niyozov, 2008). It is replete with contributions to the development of Muslim and non-Muslim societies, the production of sacred and pragmatic knowledge which includes the science of hadith (the recorded and verified words and actions of Prophet Muhammad), mathematics and medicine through the combination of spiritual and secular knowledge, and the schooling of famous religious and worldly scholars and artists. The days of Muslim learning and scholarship, however, did not last due to internal and external reasons, the political rivalries among Muslim leaders and the Western colonial expansion being notable among them. Today, Islamic schools, particularly in Southeast Asia, have generally abandoned the pursuit of rational sciences and focused exclusively on the teachings of Islam as prescribed in the Qur'an (Haqqani, 2002; Rahman, 1982). The madrasahs have thus evolved from the centres of Islamic learning to the centres of secular knowledge acquisition, to the current state of greater emphasis on Islamic teachings only, and with it the pedagogical emphasis on memorisation and recitation.

For some time, Singapore has shared with other Muslim countries in the region, an Islamic education which is perceived to suffer from shortcomings. These include the over emphasis on the cognitive skills of memorisation and rote learning, and the attention to rituals and aspects of mysticism. Such emphases appear

to depart from ideas on education in contemporary society which emphasises the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, the cultivation of a spirit of inquiry, the development of responsible attitudes and the preparation of young people for later life and wider society (Abdul Rahman, 2006).

The rapid globalisation and Islamic revivalism in the last two decades provided the impetus for the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore to review the Islamic education in the mosques and in selected madrasahs. A new curriculum for the mosques, known as aL.I.V.E. (Learning Islamic Values Everyday), was introduced in 2004 as a result. Two pilot programs were initially launched – Kids aL.I.V.E. (children aged from 5-8 years old) and Teens aL.I.V.E. (for 13-16 year olds) – followed by two more programs in 2006 – Tweens (for 9-12 year olds) and Youth aL.I.V.E. (for 17-24 year olds). Offered part time, these mosque-based programs exist alongside the existing curriculum which is to be gradually replaced by the aL.I.V.E. program.

The curriculum and philosophy of the aL.I.V.E. programs suggest that they are a better alternative to the existing approach of teaching Islam to the young. Through age-appropriate activities, the students engage in less memorisation and recitation but they learn about the relevance of Islamic values and practices in their daily lives and their identity as Muslims in relation to the world and people around them. The aim is to prepare Muslims of different age groups to better understand, appreciate and practise Islam in light of the present and future challenges. It develops students “intellectually, spiritually and emotionally...into a responsible social being” (Youth Education Strategic Unit, 2007). The question addressed by the present study is how might students of this program embody this cherished aim. de Souza’s (2004) three dimensions of learning – cognitive, affective and spiritual – provide a useful framework to investigate this question.

In de Souza’s work with pre-service teachers, she asks them to write cognitive, affective and spiritual learning outcomes. Any content that the teachers want to teach must be taught in such a way that the child has the opportunity to think, feel and intuit/ imagine/ create. This latter process requires time built in to the learning process and it means that the learning moves deeper into the non-conscious mind and re-emerges in the form of an intuition/ creation/ solution to a problem. The roles of thinking (cognitive), feeling (affective) and reflecting or intuiting (spiritual) are recognised as complementary within the learning process. The outcomes of such learning are not limited to the acquisition of the complex cognitive skills desired such that learners may produce ‘right’ answers but goes beyond the surface and may include a transformative experience for the learners. The complementarity of the three dimensions in the learning process has been supported by contemporary scholarship (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008; de Souza, 2005; Hyde, 2010; Palmer, 1998).

This paper focuses on the aL.I.V.E. program designed for 5-8 year olds called Kids aL.I.V.E. It examines students’ accounts of what they have learnt in the program. While de Souza uses the learning dimensions in planning a teaching strategy, this paper uses these dimensions as a framework to analyse what has been learnt. It starts with the following question: How do the students’ accounts of what they have learnt in the Kids aL.I.V.E. program demonstrate the complementarity of the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of their learning?

The following section outlines briefly de Souza’s three dimensions of learning as adapted for use in the present study.

Cognitive, Affective and Spiritual Dimensions of Learning

Learning experiences which have the power to be transformative – when learning goes beyond the surface and touches the soul of the student leading the individual to act upon what has been learned – require a holistic pedagogical approach to education (de Souza, 2004). Effective learning takes place when the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions function in complementary roles (de Souza, 2005).

Cognitive

The cognitive dimension of learning is concerned with the acquisition of declarative and functional knowledge, as well as the acquisition of skills and abilities. In the context of Islamic education, a distinctive emphasis on the cognitive dimension of learning is the knowing of the content of Islamic teaching on faith and morals. For example, a student might be able to:

Recite and explain what Surah ‘Al Humazah’ (Chapter on ‘The Slanderer’) of the Qur’an is about.

Affective

The affective dimension of learning on the other hand is concerned with the reactions, feelings and emotions of the learner. The affective domain is the types of human reaction or response to the content, subject matter, problems, or areas of human experience – the area of human character which deals with emotions, feelings, attitudes, values, predispositions and morals. For example, a student might seize the opportunity to:

Appreciate what type of people are scandal-mongers.

Spiritual

The spiritual has come to be understood in terms of the connectedness, or relationship an individual has with self, others, the world, and with the Transcendent, named in the Muslim tradition as Allah. While the affective dimension concerns the reaction, feelings and emotions, the spiritual domain offers an occasion to reflect inwardly so as to express outwardly aspects of the inner transformation that may have taken place. Spirituality can be seen as relational, which is demonstrated through the individuals' expressions of connectedness to the human and non-human world. For example, a student might be moved to:

Reflect inwardly on the message of (for example) the story of scandal-mongers to consider how it may challenge their perception of friends.

Learning that encompasses the affective and spiritual dimensions, together with the cognitive, may result in a transformative experience, potentially providing the learners with a more lasting impact. The harnessing of these three dimensions in students' learning supports a key focus of the Singapore Islamic Education System which has a distinctive emphasis in developing a curriculum that is relevant, dynamic and full of significant learning experiences for Muslims in Singapore.

Background of Singapore

Singapore is a city-state of four million people in the middle of the Malay Archipelago. On independence, it inherited from the British colonial government a population of mixed racial background, the composition of which remains roughly the same today – Chinese (78%), Malays (14%), Indians (7%), and other races (1%) (Leow, 2001). The Malays are native to the area and almost all of them profess Islam as their religion. They form the biggest group of Muslims in Singapore followed by Singaporeans of Arab and Indian descent with the Chinese and Eurasian converts forming the smallest Muslim group. Taoists, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and believers of other faiths make up the rest of the population.

Malay is the national language and one of four official languages that comprise also English, Chinese and Tamil. Following the British colonial administration and education, English is the language of administration, widely used in the professions and businesses, and the primary language of the school. Alongside the official languages is Singlish, an English-based Creole spoken colloquially in Singapore. Chinese, Malay and Tamil are learned as mother-tongue languages in school, a policy to safeguard Singaporeans' sense of identity with the cultures that their mother-tongues represent. For the Malays, until recently, the Malay language has been the sole language through which they learn about Islam.

Singapore is constitutionally a secular state and does not allow religion to play a significant role in the national curriculum. But the constitution upholds the right of groups to adhere to their religious faiths and grant them space to engage in their practices. The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore has been entrusted with the responsibility of offering a full-time Islamic education within its religious schools (*madrasah*) as well as part-time options. Until 2000, little was modified in the traditional way of teaching Islam to young generations. In 2004, after a review of the mosque madrasah program, the aL.I.V.E. program mentioned earlier, was introduced as a holistic system of Islamic education with a view to eventually replacing the existing mosque madrasah program. The change in curriculum and pedagogy extends to the medium of instruction, from Malay to English, to cater to the many Malay children who are increasingly more comfortable using English (and Singlish) and also to accommodate non-Malay-speaking students in the program.

Method

Participants

Three mosques which offered the Kids aL.I.V.E. program and which had run the full length of the four-year program were identified. The participants were accessed through an Islamic Religious Council officer who liaised with the supervisor of the program in the mosques who then made enquiries with families of children in the final year of the program. The families were invited to participate in what was officially called 'a survey'. A total of 20 children (15 Malays and 5 Indians, aged 8 years old) were selected on an indiscriminate basis from among those whose parents had given permission for their participation. All the children were enrolled in the program since Year 1 (while at the age of 5 years old) and would have had a full exposure to the program by the time they took part in the research.

Data Collection

Following a pilot study, data from the 20 participants described above were collected over a period of four months. For each of the 20 children, one visit was made to the home lasting about two hours. The parents understood the visit as a means of gathering feedback from them and their children about the program. This has implications on the findings as will be discussed later. Also, the fact that the author was an outsider might not have provided for a 'safe' environment for the children to explore other than what they thought the researcher was looking for.

The author and a Research Assistant (RA) carried out face-to-face interviews with the focal child and parent participants, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The author interviewed the parent(s) in attendance while the RA spent time with their child chatting with him/her on some relevant topics. The language medium was English or Malay, according to the preference of the participants.

The data which this paper draws on were based on the interviews with the children in the following two areas:

- a) Around three main topics: 1) Stories of the prophets; 2) *Surahs* (chapters) from the Qur'an; 3) Pillars of Islam (duties incumbent on every Muslim, i.e., the five daily prayers (*solat*), almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and a pilgrimage to Mecca). Questions include: "What have I just learnt?", "How am I feeling right now?" The inquiry aimed at discovering what the child professed to have learned and how he/she felt about his/her own learning, which was part of the inner reflection.
- b) Around pictures. The pictures were introduced to the child with an open-ended "I wonder ..." question such as "I wonder how this picture makes you feel/think about?" The aim was to generate some reflective conversation on the topic (Hay & Nye, 2006).

Data Analysis

All the interviews were electronically recorded, and all were transcribed by Malay-English bilingual transcribers. The utterances were coded and examples selected for inclusion in the study. From the close examination of the transcript, the author analysed for evidence of cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning.

Findings

The interview data suggested there was an emergence of the interplay between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of what the children had learnt, although this varied between students. The cognitive dimension was particularly evident in the students' narratives. For instance, many knew the stories about the prophets, the moral behind it, and they remembered the activities they did in class in relation to these stories. However, some had difficulty re-telling these stories, missing out details, while others had difficulty naming the prophets even though they knew the story accurately. A contributing factor could be that they had learnt about a new prophet almost every week and, over time, they found it difficult to keep track. Similarly, students had learnt about the five pillars of Islam. Some knew the details appropriate to their age – for instance, in the case of fasting, one cannot eat or drink during the day – but some needed prompting before they could respond appropriately.

The affective dimension was also apparent in the students' narratives although the girls showed a greater propensity to express their feelings than the boys. In relation to the story of Prophet Noah, one girl expressed her sadness when the Prophet was not believed by his own people, and anger when he was branded as a mad person. A boy expressed his feelings in a rather sophisticated way such as desiring that those who opposed Prophet Muhammad should suffer the same 'pain' as what the Prophet had endured. Another boy was rather worried that his act of kindness might not have counted because the money he had given to a roadside beggar was not his own but his aunt's. One girl felt happy that she could fast during the month of Ramadan but for reasons of her own, i.e., she could save her pocket money.

The spiritual is the more difficult dimension to track in the children's narrative. For instance, when a child expresses his/her willingness to help others in need or when the child says that doing *solat* (the five daily obligatory prayers) can get one to heaven, it is not clear if these potentially spiritual awakening activities have become part of the child's natural self or simply a regurgitation of what the teacher has enjoined upon him/her to do. It is also difficult to determine if a child's inclination to engage in acts that earn him/her rewards to heaven is a spiritual act or a material consideration, or at best, a cognitive activity.

Space does not permit the author to present each of the various texts of the research. However, those outlined below suggest the emergence of the interplay between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of what the children had learnt. The first two excerpts are taken from the interactions between the children and the RA around the stories of the prophets and the pillars of Islam. The last excerpt is an example of the children's response to the pictures/drawings presented to them.

In the first excerpt below, a male student, Zul, was quizzed about what he knew about the third pillar of Islam, i.e., fasting during the month of Ramadan and in this particular exchange, the cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects are quite evident:

Excerpt 1

Fasting during the month of Ramadan

RA: Imagine you have a friend in school, let's say this friend ... is not a Muslim, then this person goes up to you and says, "Zul, can you tell me what is fasting?" So you imagine this person doesn't know a single thing about fasting right, so what do you say to this person?	5
Zul: Fasting is we cannot eat and drink. When it's our prayer time, we can break our fast and eat.	
RA: And then if the friend says, "But why must you fast?"	
Zul: We must fast because we must feel how the poor people don't have food.	10
RA: Oh, okay. So by fasting, we know how the poor people feel?	
Zul: Yeah.	
RA: And what exactly do they feel?	
Zul: Hunger.	15
RA: How do you feel for them?	
Zul: No, should not feel hungry.	
RA: So after you break your fast, how do you feel?	
Zul: I feel so happy, excited.	20
RA: Why?	
Zul: Because can eat.	
RA: So now that it's over right, how do you feel, when you look back, oh, I fast thirty days, how do you feel?	25
Zul: I feel so excited, happy.	
RA: Why?	
Zul: Because finally I finish my fasting, I hope I get so many <i>pahalas</i> (reward) from Allah.	

At the cognitive level, Zul demonstrated certain knowledge about fasting, that one cannot eat or drink during the period of a day and the reason for it (lines 6-10). The affective dimension involved his reactions and feelings, both about the realisation on people who fast ('hunger', line 15) and his own experience at the conclusion of the fast ('excited' and 'happy', line 26). The spiritual dimension was inherent at two levels: one was his inner reflection that one 'should not feel hungry' (line 17), almost suggesting some kind of appropriate response. The other level was his desire that his act of fasting earned him points to heaven (lines 28-29) which displayed the primary reason for why he fasted, i.e. submitting to God's injunction. If in fact these reflections would lead him to want to help the poor, this would have meant a transformative learning experience, potentially providing him with a lasting impact. Thus, in this episode, Zul demonstrated a disposition that located himself within two forms of relationship, between him and God and between him and his fellow man.

In the second excerpt, a female student, Siti, was asked about doing good deeds.

Excerpt 2

Doing a Good Deed

RA:	I believe the surah talks about good deed as well, right?	
Siti:	Yeah...	
RA:	What can you tell me about good deeds?	
Siti:	The one who has a... the heaviest... the good deed that is the heaviest the one, he will go to the... he will go to heaven, <i>Jannah</i> ... the... and the one who has less good deeds, will go to a pit of hell... there is fire... hot.	5
RA:	What can you do that's a good deed?	
Siti:	... helping <i>lah</i> .	
RA:	Ok. Helping others? Do you think it's important to help other people?	10
Siti:	Yeah because, example, you fall down the staircase and your leg is bleeding, ... and then a kid walks pass you and they said 'haiya, no need to help you <i>lah</i> ', of course you can walk by yourself, and then they walk pass us without... without caring about us, being bossy... and we were like asking for help, and then when the next time they fall down we said... then we will help them because (even though) last time they did not help us what, so we just cannot leave them, lying there, leg bleeding... we want to be very good... I help... I will help them... try not to be very bossy, and try not to... like feel angry because they did not help me when I fell down... so just be helpful and... forget about the thing happened... forget about the thing that had happened, just forget it and just... remember about now, don't... don't remember about the last time.	15 20 25
RA:	Why do you want to help them when they didn't help you?	
Siti:	Because we all want to go to heaven, and we don't want to go to hell...	
RA:	How do we get to heaven?	30
Siti:	We have to do good deeds, and we worship... we worship Allah but not the idols, and we always help our friends, try not to be angry when they didn't help us.	

Again, the cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects can be identified in this exchange. At the cognitive level, Siti was not able to give a direct answer about what a good deed is, preferring to highlight the 'utility' of doing good deeds (the chance to go to heaven, lines 4-7). When pressed further, she still did not answer the question but gave an example of what a good deed is ('helping', line 9). As far as her affective response is concerned, she did not offer an adjective to describe her feelings, but traces of disappointment and anger can be detected in her hypothetical account of her falling on the stairs and not being helped by a passer-by (lines 12-17). Her hypothetical reverse situation where it was the passer-by who suffered the calamity and not herself (lines 17-26) included a declaration that she would still help him despite the latter not helping her when she fell. In this, the spiritual dimension was also evident; her inner reflection allowed her to keep her anger in check to do what was right. This was made clearer in the last turn where she reiterated what she meant by a good deed (lines 31-33). As with Zul, Siti also showed awareness of her relationship with God and the human person.

In the third excerpt, a male student, Salim, was responding to the ‘I wonder’ type of questions as he looked at a picture.

Excerpt 3

Looking at a picture of a beach

RA: <i>Bila Salim tengok gambar ini</i> [When you look at this picture], what does this picture remind you of?	
Salim: Keep the place clean.	
RA: Why do you say that?	
Salim: So that when people swim, the sea will be clean.	5
RA: Is it important to keep the environment clean?	
Salim: Yes.	
RA: Why?	
Salim: If not [there'll be] mosquitoes..	
RA: Oh, ok. [pause] What else will happen if the water is not clean?	10
Salim: People cannot swim.	
RA: Ya. I wonder what this boy [pointing to a boy in the picture] will feel if he finds the water dirty.	
Salim: I don't know.	15
RA: What would you feel?	
Salim: Sad.	
RA: And what would you feel if the water is clean?	
Salim: Ok.	
RA: Ya?	20
Salim: When we go to the beach, we can use the water to take wudu' (ablution).	
RA: Oh, you learned that from your teacher?	
Salim: Yes.	

Here, the spiritual dimension of Salim is apparent throughout this exchange particularly in the beginning where he showed concerned for his fellow human – people might not want to swim in dirty water (lines 5 & 12) and that it could breed mosquitoes which is also harmful to human beings (line 9). Although his cognitive understanding of mosquito breeding is open to challenge – stagnant water is more likely to invite mosquito breeding than dirty, moving water – he at least had the right idea that a beach should be kept clean so that it could be enjoyed by all. Towards the end of the excerpt (lines 21-22), Salim offered an additional reason for keeping the beach clean – one can use clean sea water to take one's ablution and perform one's prayer. Here, his cognitive ability to tap the relevance of what he had learnt is clear to see. Lastly, the affective dimension is evident through the adjectives he used to describe his feeling if he had found the water dirty or clean – ‘sad’ (line 17) and ‘OK’ (line 19) respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is worth noting the complexity and difficulty in making judgements about the children's achievement on the affective and spiritual dimensions. Awareness of the learning at these two dimensions may not actually be demonstrated within the timeframe of a particular lesson but rise to the surface and be displayed in another time – weeks, or months, or even years – after the initial learning takes place. Thus, a person could learn something at 8 years of age but might not make sense of it in the affective or spiritual domains until much later in life (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008). Despite this, the affective and spiritual learning reported above which is indicative of the children's learning at the time of the study is quite revealing. Transformative learning is a real possibility within the Kids a.L.I.V.E. program although the extent this applies broadly beyond the 20 children in the sample is worthy of further study.

In the first two excerpts, the minds, hearts and souls of the children came to the fore as they related their understanding of the topics they had learnt in the program. What is interesting is that the students, in displaying their understanding and spirituality, were drawing mostly on the Islamic tradition, considered to be the received and authoritative wisdom. The student in the second excerpt did add personal meaning by thinking imaginatively about problems that mattered to her and affixing her own 'personal signature' to her understanding (Hay and Nye, 2006), but it may be argued that she was still operating within the Islamic worldview. In a world where children are exposed to a range of alternative social and cultural frameworks of meaning, e.g. the media, popular culture and the children's own peer group, it is remarkable that these students drew little upon these other sources and in fact were already converging on the Islamic framework at a very young age. This presents quite a different cultural context to other studies that were conducted in the western culture where children seemed to draw more openly on a more eclectic range of frameworks that enabled them to engage in their 'natural wonderings' in order to create meaning for themselves (Coles, 1990; Hyde, 2008a).

Perhaps it should not be too surprising that the findings suggest the existence of a convergence of worldviews lodged in Islam. That Islam seems to feature in the students' responses and thoughts may have been induced by the interview itself. The questions raised and the purpose of the interview may have invoked a religious response or conditioned them to relate to what they have learnt and understood on Islamic teachings and rituals. The response of the student in the third excerpt might provide another insight into the children's spirituality. Here, he showed a glimpse of his capacity to use a seemingly different framework of meaning other than Islamic – environmental consideration. But he also laced his response with the application of a religious practice – that clean water can be used to take ablution. It may be argued, however, that the two frameworks of meaning may not be totally unrelated. The need for a Muslim to be aware of his/her responsibility to both God and the world around is a quality enjoined in Islam (Renard, 1996) and is congruent with the aims of the aL.I.V.E. program.

Scholars have noted that socialisation (some call it indoctrination) into a particular adult form of spiritual awareness rather than attentiveness to the spiritual experiences of children does occur within religious disciplines (Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartain, 2006). In the context of this study, the socialisation could have occurred earlier in the program, or even at home where the cultural upbringing must have been a critical factor (Marks, 2004; Yildirim, 2006). If indeed this was the case, the children might not have felt constricted by the research setting but rather, the significance of the Islamic framework which they were culturally socialised into from an early age may have put a lid on any inclination they had to draw upon other sources to create personal meaning.

The above discussion suggests that the role of an Islamic education program such as Kids aL.I.V.E. is one of strengthening the already emerging convergence rather than acting as a counter-cultural exercise implied by some scholars in the case of western Christian education (de Souza, 2006, cited in Hyde, 2008b). The tension inherent is such a context between, on the one hand, a religious frame in which learning involves coming to see the 'truth' of the received and authoritative wisdom of the religious tradition, and on the other, the children's ontological predisposition to create their own meaning derived from the many other frameworks available to them (Erricker, 2001; Hyde, 2008b), does not arise in the case of the Kids aL.I.V.E. program. Clearly, further research in this area is required in order to obtain a more definitive picture of the nature of Muslim children's spirituality and its development. In relation to the present study, one might perhaps find answers in the children's initial years in the Kids aL.I.V.E program, or at home, the site where children's convergence towards the Islamic framework may find its roots and where the counter-cultural exercise may be actively enacted by the parents.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore and the participating mosques and families, without whom this paper could not have been written and ??????? reviewers, for their insightful suggestions.

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NB. This research was supported by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore awarded to Dr Mukhlis Abu Bakar

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CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP: THE PRIMORDIAL MODEL FOR COMPREHENSIVE CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY

(Utilising 8 Theological Categories for Integration and 6 Pedagogical Implementation Strategies)

*“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship;
and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
1937, *The Cost of Discipleship**

Abstract

This article addresses Christian discipleship: (1) as a primordial model for comprehensive Catholic youth ministry and (2) as a developmental theology for contemporary youth ministry. Moreover, it situates Christian discipleship in Catholic youth ministry and offers a systematic, intentional, and pragmatic approach for ministering to adolescents. Furthermore, the study offers 8 theological categories for integration into and enrichment for a Christian discipleship model of youth ministry. Finally, the essay provides 6 pedagogical and practical strategies for Catholic youth ministers to implement into their curriculum, and a praxis-oriented approach that Catholic practitioners will appreciate.

Introduction

This article maintains that Christian discipleship is the primordial model for comprehensive Catholic youth ministry. It presents a systematic approach for understanding discipleship and integrating it into comprehensive Catholic youth ministry. It addresses 8 theological categories for the youth ministry community and provides 6 pedagogical strategies for implementation into a youth ministry curriculum. The teleological goal of the Christian discipleship model is to challenge, empower, engage, and inspire young people on their faith journey. It is a model to be cultivated and sustained within Catholic youth ministry.

Situating Christian Discipleship in Catholic Youth Ministry

It may be worthwhile to articulate terminology. The title of the essay implores the term “primordial.” This is the case because by its definition it is “the first in a sequence,” “the first to be created.” The presupposition is that Christian discipleship is the foundation for all other models of youth ministry. Moreover, the word “comprehensive” is used to describe the systematic and intentional approach to ministry with Catholic adolescents, and is a holistic synthesis set forth by the U.S. Catholic bishops (Canales, 2007, p. 59). There are five guidelines for ministering to Catholic youth set by the U.S. Catholic bishops: (1) utilise each of the Church’s ministries—advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelisation, justice and service, leadership development, with adolescents; (2) provide developmentally appropriate programs and activities that promote personal pastoral care, prayer and worship—in an integrated approach to achieving the three goals for ministry and spiritual growth for young and older adolescents; (3) enrich family life and promote the faith growth of families of adolescents; (4) incorporate young people fully into all aspects of church life and engage them in ministry and leadership in the faith community; and (5) create partnerships among families, schools, churches, and community organisations in a common effort to promote positive youth development (RTV, 20). These guidelines for comprehensive youth ministry are an important dimension for Catholic youth ministry and provide a framework for engaging young people. Another generic phrase that is used is “Christian discipleship,” and it is meant to encompass several outcomes.

Regarding Christian discipleship several points emerge for Catholic youth ministry. Throughout the centuries, discipleship has been continuously affirmed and held in high esteem as being the predominant paradigm for devout and dedicated Christians. The phrase is biblically relevant and is repeated over 250 times in the Bible. The Greek term *mathetes* meaning “disciple” or “pupil” is used 260 times in the New Testament (Cahalan, 3). Predominately the term “discipleship” is found in all four Gospels and in Acts of the Apostles (Segovia, 2). The disciple is the one who follows Jesus and becomes his “apprentice” or “understudy.”

In a youth ministry sense, Christian discipleship is treated as the “learner” and “teacher” model. The learner/youth is treated as the disciple, who follows the instruction of others who are more knowledgeable and experienced in the faith and are considered the teacher(s)--usually the youth minister and adult youth leaders--(Webber, Singleton, Joyce & Dorissa, p. 209). In a Christological sense, Christian discipleship is identification with the Paschal Mystery--the life, ministry, suffering, dying and rising of Jesus the Christ--and the issues of imitating Christ that are initiated in the waters of baptism, sealed with oil at confirmation, and nourished at the Eucharistic table (Camp, pp. 119, 137, 165).

It is natural that youth ministers and religious educators desire adolescents to understand and embrace discipleship. Catholic teenagers are exposed to discipleship in various ways: participating in Sunday Eucharist, faith formation, religious education classes, and service. Perhaps the best way that Catholic youth are exposed to discipleship is through Christian living in their homes.

In a recent Australian study, it has been noted that, “Christian discipleship [is] an essential part of all youth ministry programs” (Webber, Singleton, Joyce & Dorissa, p. 209). Exposing adolescents to Christian discipleship varies from youth ministry to youth ministry, and it can be accomplished in a myriad of ways: Bible studies, prayer meetings, retreats, worship, and other spiritual endeavors.

Lex vivendi (law Christian living) is in actuality the essence of Christian discipleship. Living the Christian faith is experiencing discipleship and part of God’s vision (Canales, 2006, p. 220). Inevitably, the Church wants young people not only to know about God and Jesus intellectually and theoretically, but also desires that Catholic teens know God intuitively and experientially.

Discipleship is important to youth ministry because it allows Catholic juveniles to experience God in a tangible and profound sense. The U.S. Catholic Bishops’ (1997) definitive document for Catholic youth ministry (hereafter *RTV*), maintains that Christian discipleship is a major goal of Catholic youth ministry. The U.S. Catholic Bishops’ iterate the primordial significance of discipleship for comprehensive youth ministry is: “To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today” (*RTV*, iii, p. 9). The challenge of ministering to adolescents is empowering youth toward *lex vivendi*. *RTV* further notes, “All ministries with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good News of Jesus Christ and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples” (p. 10). Therefore, discipleship, *lex vivendi*, and catechesis maintain a symbiotic association.

Finally, Christian discipleship is at the heart of youth ministry, adolescent catechesis, evangelisation, and the Church’s mission. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997) states, “At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father. . . To catechise is to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God’s eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person” (n. 426). Christian catechesis is *sine qua non* for Christian discipleship; both are interdependent: discipleship echos the Catholic faith (catechesis) through the process of teaching (pedagogy) and experiential living (*lex vivendi*).

Developing a Theology of Christian Discipleship for Contemporary Youth Ministry

A theology of Christian discipleship for Catholic youth ministry illuminates adolescent pedagogy and praxis. There are five areas that are salubrious of exploration: (1) heeding God’s call, (2) having a deep abiding commitment for God, (3) experiencing God, (4) changing one’s horizon, and (5) living the call of holiness.

First, the call from God is the invitation that every baptised Christian receives to live a life of discipleship (Cahalan, 1). This invitation from God to serve God and to help usher in the kinship of God (Canales, 2003a, A9). Adolescents, like adults, are encouraged to heed God’s call upon their lives. It is the responsibility of parents and pastors to help young people discern and heed that call. The call is one that can easily be avoided

by saying: “No, not me, God.” or “I am not a religious person.” Whatever the excuse young people make, the simple truth, is that baptism is the entrance into the Christian community and the calling to serve neighbor as a disciple (Cahalan, p. 2). Baptism calls teenagers to live a life of discipleship. “Jesus calls. . . Christians in whatever state or age to the fullness of Christian life. . .” (USCCB, 2005, p. 7). The ways Christians individually and collectively respond to that call from God and community is an entirely different matter.

Second, God requires a certain standard of commitment that perhaps differs from the secular world. The deep and abiding commitment of the Christian disciple is one that turns the *status quo* upside down and may appear radical at times (Camp, pp. 23-24). It is a commitment to God which puts people first, despite religious affiliation, ethnicity, or the color of skin. Commitment to God is seeing Jesus in the other person, it is “walking” in their shoes, and it is loving enemy as neighbor (Canales, 2003b; D1). Young people, just as older people, are to be emboldened to commit themselves to God in a deep abiding way through the process of discipleship. Religious educators and youth workers can help this commitment to God by helping young people view themselves positively and in their fuller potential 20, 30 and/or 40 years from now.

Third, experiencing God is different for each person. Experiencing God’s self-communication to each believer that engages and empowers a person into a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God (Canales, 2002, p. 105). It is inescapable and quite impossible for a person *not* to have at least a rudimentary experience of God: “whether consciously or unconsciously, whether suppressed or accepted, whether rightly or wrongly interpreted, or whatever the way in which it is present” (Rahner, p. 195). Creating meaningful experiences of God for teenagers is one of the quintessential elements of youth ministry. Parents and youth ministers can strengthen and shape experiences of God for teenagers by helping them to become increasingly *attuned* to the presence of God in their lives. Therefore, a teenager’s experience of God—especially in youth ministry—cannot be aloof or so completely distant that it becomes ignored or misinterpreted. God can be experienced because God is ubiquitous, and at times clandestine, but never uninvolved (Canales, 2006, p. 220).

Fourth, the experience of God can lead people to change their horizon and make a paradigm shift in their own lives.

Christian disciples must move beyond their world-view, sphere of influence, or comfort zone. As their horizon expands so does their world-view, and a change of horizon can occur depending on different interests, converging points of view, protection of certain customs and traditions, and by the limits that people place upon themselves (Canales, 2002, pp. 105-106).

Discipleship is a process that expands and contracts as does a person’s field of vision and worldview. A change in a theological horizon can occur depending on different interests, converging points of view, protection of certain customs and traditions, and by the limits that people place upon themselves (Lonergan, pp. 235-236). Empowering youth to change their theological horizons is integral to youth ministry. Adolescent ministers can empower a change in a theological horizon by providing platforms for adolescents to shift their outlook on life: thinking, behaving, and spiritualising. This change in horizon leads a young person to deeper holiness.

A final responsibility of Christian discipleship is living the universal call to holiness. Pope John Paul II (2000) notes that the universal call to holiness *is* a Christian mandate, not only to live a virtuous life for God, but a passion-filled life for God; one that leads the believer to experience the risen Christ (n. 30). It is imperative that Christian discipleship is an *experience* in the risen Christ not an *experiment* in Christianity (Canales, 2002, p. 106).

Michael Carotta (2002) articulates developmental theories for catechising adolescents for Christian discipleship through three dimensions:

(1) the way one relates to God through prayer, worship, and religious practices (vertical); (2) the way one relates to God through moral interactions with others (horizontal); and (3) the way one experiences God’s ability to help deal with internal pain, stress, loneliness, fear, sadness, anger, and other emotions (internal) (p. 43).

Part of the adolescent’s journey toward Christian discipleship is one that strengthens, shapes, and challenges the adolescent in the above three dimensions. The three dimensions listed—vertical, horizontal, internal—will aid youth ministers and religious educators in developing a well-balanced discipleship program that

empowers adolescents to exercise Christian faith, ethical living, and emotional management. Understanding the journey and the complexity of discipleship will allow parents and pastors the ability to discern the faith life and spirituality of their adolescent population.

The Integration of 8 Theological Categories

All that Christian discipleship entails is at the core of the Gospel. Christian discipleship has many components; however, only 8 categories will be addressed: (1) community, (2) conversion, (3) faith, (4) leadership, (5) morality, (6) prayer, (7) service, and (8) spirituality (Canales, 2004, p. 34). These 8 categories--listed alphabetically and not by importance--are by no means exhaustive.¹ Taken together they represent a theology and model of praxis for Christian discipleship in relation to Catholic youth ministry.

Adolescents are the present and future of each community. The old adage "Children are to be seen, but not heard" is not applicable to youth ministry. It is imperative that youth ministry facilitate and strengthen the relationship between young people in the parish and the adults in the parish (Canales, 2006, p. 222). Adolescents contribute to the community by simply being themselves! *RTV* maintains that building and fostering a strong community with adolescents has several advantages. Community creates an atmosphere characterised by Gospel values that nurture meaningful relationships among teenagers, values which enhance the quality of adolescent and adult life (p. 35). Community develops the relationship-making and relationship-maintaining skills of youth that are grounded in Christian values (p. 35). Community enriches relationships within the family unit itself through various programs, activities, and faith initiatives supported by the parish (p. 35). It is easy to discern that community plays an integral role in adolescent life, culture, and discipleship.

Conversion is particularly important with regard to adolescents because adolescents are in constant flux between the demands of the teenage life and emerging adulthood. According to the U.S. Catholic Bishops' (2002), conversion is a process which is necessary for all who accept the Gospel and live as disciples.

This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! And we must be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit who will continue to convert us as we follow Christ. If our faith is alive, it will be aroused again and again as we mature as disciples (n. 14).

Youth ministers would be wise to have concrete steps in place to enable teenagers to identify with the conversion process. Adolescents may need help in articulating conversion in their own lives, but there are ample stories of conversion within the Christian tradition to demonstrate to young people the necessity for the conversion process in fostering Christian discipleship.

Teaching faith to adolescents is only one aspect of youth ministry; a more important aspect is fostering faith within the lives of teenagers. Goal 3 of *RTV* is "To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person" (p. 15). Catholic youth ministry is *always* concerned with fostering faith within a young person, which aims to achieve Catholic identity and discipleship. Adolescent catechesis would be wise to strive towards empowering young people to develop personal faith in Jesus Christ, which in turn, will be directly applicable to their Catholic faith and daily experiences. Learning the faith is a living reality that engages and inspires adolescents toward God. Faith is the foundation upon which the fountain of Christian life flows; it is the building block for furthering adolescent growth, gifts, and spirituality (Canales, 2004, p. 37).

Youth ministry is ripe for training young people to become Christian leaders. Adolescents are yearning for ways in which they might lead - with adult direction - in their faith communities. *RTV* states, "The ministry of leadership development *calls forth, affirms, and empowers* the diverse gifts, talents, and abilities of . . . young people in our faith communities . . ." (p. 40). A leading youth ministry strategy in Catholic circles is to try and infuse five operational principles of leadership development into Catholic youth ministry: (1) rooted in ministerial relationships, (2) integrate faith and prayer, (3) respect, support, and encourage other activities, (4) build meaningful roles, and (5) build upon existing strengths and assets (Moser, pp. 136-138). Youth ministers may want to train teenagers in parish leadership roles which encompass various settings: peer-leaders for faith-sharing talks, small group facilitators to be used on retreats and Bible studies, helping with religious education classes, and liturgical ministries for specialised youth-led liturgies.

Moral instruction is highly encouraged in a comprehensive youth ministry. Teaching moral principles such as conscience, character, making good choices, and living a virtuous life is ethically advantageous for Catholic young people (RTV, p. 31). Cultivating adolescent discipleship is to aid in the moral development of young people based on Christian principles, sacred Scripture, and holy tradition. The art of living Christian discipleship, coupled with morality, and navigating through a morally complex world looms large with adolescents. There is a theological axiom to this effect: *Deus impossibilia non iubet* (God does not command the impossible). The adage is applicable in describing moral growth. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that, all artists love that which they create: parents love their children; poets love their poems; craftsmen love their handiwork. Therefore, God could not hate a single thing since God is the artist of everything (ST, p. 1-1). Consequently, one aim of the discipleship is to become an artist of moral living.

Prayer is absolutely essential in cultivating Christian discipleship in adolescents (Canales, 2009b, p. 70). Youth ministers may want to adapt a strong prayer regiment within the youth ministry, one that introduces teenagers to a large spectrum of prayer forms and styles which enhance an encounter with God. Both liturgical and non-liturgical prayer forms are to be explored and fostered in Catholic youth ministry (RTV, pp. 44-45). Teenagers need encouragement and opportunities for prayer. "Providing an array of opportunities for adolescents to pray will allow them to encounter a 'smorgasbord' of meaningful spiritual activities" (Canales, 2009b, p. 71). Today's youth culture represents a distinctive expression that needs to be understood and appreciated in order for youth to feel incorporated into the church. Prayer is an important dynamic of adolescent discipleship; it fosters faith and spiritual wholeness (White, p. 141). Teenagers approach God differently and pray according to their disposition, culture, and tradition, and represent a wide spectrum of styles.

Service is a major component of Christian discipleship. The majority of adolescents enjoy participating in outreach activities and service projects which empower others to transform their lives (Canales, 2001, p. 73). Christian service occurs at three distinctive levels: (1) serving God and community; (2) serving friends and family; and (3) serving neighbors and strangers (Canales, 2004, p. 43). It is reported that teenagers who participate in religious activities sponsored by youth ministries tend to be involved in a variety of social service projects (Smith, Denton, p. 115). RTV states that service is an integral part of ministry with adolescents: "*Service nurtures* in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in the Catholic social teaching" (p. 38). The affirmation that adolescents glean from serving others through outreach initiatives will help them to recognise that they are working for justice and living as Christian disciples.

Adolescents are spiritual (Tacey, p. 30). Adolescents are on the path to learning and becoming spiritual people (Meehan, p. 39). Since baptised adolescents are Christians, they are already infused with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is an aim of Catholic youth ministry to facilitate a deeper sense of Christian spirituality within youth. Adolescent spirituality embraces teenagers in their present issues and needs as well as leading them to the source of life, which is found in Jesus Christ (Canales, 2005, p. 11). Christian adolescent spirituality should allow for free expression of personal abilities, gender, limitations, and personalities because a person's spirituality is a reflection of one's values and attitudes within a social and historical context (Cervantes, p. 96). The Christian life is to make us not simply better people - ethically upright and morally aware - but to make us divine, to conform us to a participation in the life of the Trinity (Barron, p. 29). The path to becoming spiritual means taking risks and demands courage because becoming spiritual is a lengthy process (Daloz Parks, pp. 42-43).

These eight integrated areas within Christian discipleship--community, conversion, faith, leadership, morality, prayer, service, and spirituality - will help youth ministers comprehend the dynamics of Christian living (Canales, 2006, p. 221). This is the challenge of Christian discipleship and of following Jesus, and it is at the center of the Church's mission. "All ministry with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good News of Jesus Christ and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples" (RTV, p. 10). Living authentic discipleship is difficult and demanding; nevertheless the Gospel invites adolescents to an authentic adventure into living a life of discipleship. The real challenge is to *integrate* Christian discipleship with contemporary pedagogy that will penetrate and impact adolescents in their schools, churches, and society (Canales, 2006, p. 221).

6 Suggested Pedagogical Strategies - Pastoral Strategies for Implementation

To reiterate, Goal 1 in *RTV*, is “to empower young people to live as *disciples* of Jesus Christ in our world today” (p. 9). The Catholic Church actually desires to foster discipleship in adolescents. *RTV* states, “All ministries with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good News of Jesus the Christ and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples” (p. 10). Ministry to adolescents must always be concerned with biblical values, catechesis, evangelisation, relationships, and social justice, which are the elements of Christian discipleship.

Before implementation of the Christian discipleship model it may be advisable for the youth minister to do some preliminary reading and studying on the subject, which will enhance pedagogical and pastoral success. Youth ministers are encouraged to purchase and read books on Christian discipleship (Barron, Bonhoeffer, Camp, Cunningham). It may be advantageous for youth ministers to take a class on or read books on Christology to situate Jesus’ earthly ministry and its impact for discipleship today. It may also be prudent for youth ministers to become familiar with the lives of saints, especially the young saints which are positive role models for teenagers such as Joan of Arc (1412-1431), Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591), John Bosco (1815-1888), Dominic Savio (1842-1857), Maria Goretti (1890-1902), Pier Giorgio Fassati (1901-1925), and Mary Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938). Knowing the saints will allow adolescents to fully comprehend the history of discipleship, and the ways that holy people lived their own discipleship.

In reality all youth ministry initiatives generate an atmosphere for Christian discipleship. Youth ministers would be judicious to assist adolescents to become sagacious disciples through knowledge of the Christian faith, the practice of morality, participating in social justice-learning and service projects (Canales, 2011, pp. 78-80), celebrating Liturgy of the Hours and Sunday Eucharist (Canales, 2009a, pp. 11-14) and developing Christian spirituality (Canales, 2009b, pp. 65-74). Such noble endeavors are encouraged since Catholic youth ministry is primarily concerned with Christian discipleship.

This next section provides 6 pedagogical and pastoral implementation strategies to support the advancement of the Christian discipleship model within Catholic youth ministry. The strategies presented are suggestions to contribute in fostering and sustaining adolescent Christian disciples; they are by no means exhaustive.

Strategy 1: One pastoral approach might be loosely following a high school academic calendar, in which these eight areas could be broken down into four parts, discussing one-quarter (25%) of each area once a month. Each month would represent a specific area within Christian discipleship. For example: September introduces students to Jesus of Nazareth; October addresses the conversion process; November studies the dynamics of faith; December investigates morality and ethical behavior; January examines the many facets of prayer; February explores the reality of community; March practices various types of Christian spirituality, April discovers service and social justice through hands-on experience; and May discusses styles of Christian leadership.

Another pastoral overture using the same strategy of implementation could be to discuss the eight themes of discipleship in any particular order; therefore, March might be the month to spend discussing morality issues with teenagers. For example, each week within the month of March a different topic is explored:

- Week one: an overview on Christian morality.
- Week two: the process of conscience and decision-making.
- Week three: morality and human sexuality.
- Week four: human dignity and human rights.

These weeks parallel *RTV* suggestions involving morality and teenagers (p. 33). There are numerous possibilities for discussion. Limiting each area to three or four weeks allows for the youth minister to select different topics in the forthcoming years, ensuring that students do not hear the same presentation each year.

Strategy 2: A second pedagogical method is to empower teenagers to live the Gospels and learn experiential ways to become advocates of change through action-reflection² and social justice-learning.³ Youth ministers may want to host catechetical workshops for both adolescents and adult volunteers to further enhance their

understanding of discipleship. One suggestion is to offer a day of reflection focusing on prayer which is an area of growth in discipleship. The day could provide four presentations followed by small faith-sharing groups, and resemble and focus on these topics:

- Presentation 1: The centrality of Christian prayer.
- Presentation 2: Public prayer: celebrating Liturgy of the Hours.
- Presentation 3: Sunday worship: celebrating Sunday Eucharist.
- Presentation 4: Private prayer: meditations, journaling, and the Rosary.

It may be beneficial if each presentation did not focus exclusively on the catechesis, albeit important, but also on “doing” prayer, and the pragmatic implications of prayer for discipleship. The aim of the day is not only reflection on prayer, but also teaching adolescents the ways to pray and to approach prayer with new awareness.

Strategy 3: As a third ministry proposition, the youth minister may want to have a mid-week Bible study. The Bible study theme could be “Discipleship and the Scriptures.” Each Bible course could highlight a different biblical book and the study of discipleship. Below are suggestions for coupling discipleship and Scripture. This strategy covers five biblical books and discipleship themes, and realistically last several weeks.

- Bible Course 1: Uncertain Faith: the Gospel of Matthew’s Portrait of the Disciples.
- Bible Course 2: Historical Accounts of Discipleship in the New Testament: Discipleship in Luke and Acts of the Apostles.
- Bible Course 3: “Peace I leave with You; My peace I Give to You”: Discipleship in the Gospel of John.
- Bible Course 4: “Be Imitators of God”: Discipleship in the Book of Ephesians.
- Bible Course 5: Friendship with God: Discipleship in the Book of James.

These suggested five Bible courses could be as in-depth or as cursory as the youth minister deems beneficial. It is highly recommended that a youth minister who wants to embark on a biblical exploration of Christian discipleship should first read diligently the work by Segovia. The book is a serious investigation of discipleship in the New Testament, but it is quite accessible for a lay person to read and retain valuable information. This strategy will take quite an effort by the youth ministry staff, but the results would be fantastic!

Strategy 4: A fourth practical procedure could utilise the summer months. Summer is a great time to accomplish faith formation and pedagogical success in adolescents. Two areas within adolescent discipleship jibe well during the summer months: service and leadership. Engaging in service opportunities and developing leadership skills are necessary in creating adolescent peer/core leaders within the youth ministry. There are three summer scenarios that are worth considering.

- **Scenario A:** A one-week work-camp trip could be scheduled during the early summer. The work-camp provides students with a great service opportunity away from their comfortable surroundings and usually takes place in a region of the country that is poor and depressed. The work-camp endeavor usually helps a poor neighborhood rebuild houses through construction work, under the supervision of professional contractors and builders. Students benefit from such an experiential learning activity, and it is both physically and spiritually edifying. There are work-camp organisations for Catholic and Protestant youth to participate.
- **Scenario B:** A two-week immersion trip which could be scheduled in the mid-summer summer. The immersion trip provides an opportunity for students to experience a Third World country in the Caribbean Islands, Central America, or South America to help a poor and remote village with daily labor or to build new construction. Such a trip is usually in conjunction with a mission relief organisation such as the Jesuit Volunteers International. Immersion trips are powerful Christian discipleship tools because they “plop” young people directly into the gritty realities of social poverty and personal despair, which is, typically, a startling contrast to the way the majority of middle-class adolescents live (Canales, 2011, p. 88). It allows youth to serve countries and people beyond their borders and limited worldview while embracing other cultures and ethnicities.

- **Scenario C:** A one-week Christian outdoor wilderness course could be scheduled in late summer. The course is constructed around regional outdoor activities such as hiking, canoeing, camping, ropes courses and rock climbing, which includes traveling to a destination that has real crag formations. Throughout the week teenagers will also learn about the four major models of Christian leadership: servant, moral, spiritual, and transformational (Canales, 2004, pp. 45-46), participate in Bible studies, hear brief presentations, and contribute to discussion groups. The purpose of the course is to foster Christian discipleship through leadership initiatives, which creates individual trust, reliability in others, and develops self-confidence. The ropes and climbing experiences allow a person to conquer their personal fears: fear of falling, fear of failure, and the fear of embarrassment. The goal is to demonstrate that life is full of opportunities and uncomfortable situations, and dealing with life's stressfulness often takes courage and overcoming fears.

Throughout each scenario, the youth minister should debrief and facilitate the experiences shortly after they happen. The facilitation session should not only check whether or not teens enjoyed the experiences (because not all will), but to name and claim the feelings they experienced and grappled with while in the midst of these initiatives. These experiences are known as "praxis-based education" and provides youth with a "Christo-centric formation that points to the trust that young people must go through as they put their faith in Christ and hope in God" (Canales, 2011, p. 84). Taken together, these three summer scenarios will create memories that last a lifetime as well as form social justice-oriented young people and develop valuable leadership knowledge.

Strategy 5: A fifth pedagogical strategy is to have a Christian leadership institute that specifically focuses on developing teenagers as Christian leaders to serve in their communities. The Christian leadership institute could offer regular courses perhaps once or twice a year. The institute could offer a series of presentations on Christian discipleship. The course could be titled "The Christian Discipleship and Leadership Challenge" and provide adolescents with five sessions, each about 45-minutes in length (see Kielbasa's (1997) book for details) consisting of these topics:

- Session 1: The Call to Conversion--"Come Follow Me;"
- Session 2: A Christian Disciple is a Person of Faith, Hope, and Love;
- Session 3: A Christian Disciple is a Person of Commitment and Action;
- Session 4: Christian Discipleship and Christian Leadership;
- Session 5: Discerning your Gifts as a Leader.

Ideally, a Christian leadership institute should cover Christian discipleship and other leadership themes, styles, traits, and models. This strategy can be easily integrated into a youth ministry curriculum.

Strategy 6: A sixth pragmatic approach is to formulate and offer Christian discipleship retreat. Retreats increase discipleship, particularly areas of faith and spirituality, and have the ability to captivate, inspire, and motivate adolescents into a more meaningful relationship with God (Canales, 2009, p. 72). The best retreat which I have witnessed works successfully with teenagers to stimulate discipleship "One-on-One Retreat." The retreat recalls and reaffirms the personal commitment that every baptised Christian must undertake in their lives. The retreat is demanding in terms of its format and content, but it focuses on following Jesus as a Christian disciple. It addresses the personal assent of faith based upon individual free will. Although the title of the retreat ("One-on-One") suggests a privatised spiritual experience ("me and Jesus"), but the retreat is meant to subsist as a communal immersion experience over the course of a weekend ("we and Jesus"). The retreat is designed to empower adolescents to experience the risen Christ in their lives through a series of presentations, small group sharing, Bible study, and community and peer-interaction. The ultimate goal is for the youth to personally articulate and commit and/or re-commit their lives to the Christ of faith--the present Lord and Savior of the Church and world and the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The *One-on-One Retreat* will offer teenagers the opportunity to encounter God, community, and self as they experience various activities that direct them toward a personal relationship with Jesus the Christ. The retreat will encourage young people in the following five ways: (a) adolescents will gain deeper insight about themselves as a person living in the world and society; (b) youth will begin to reflect upon their relationship with God, self, and others; (c) teenagers will be encouraged to cultivate a more meaningful relationship with Jesus the Christ;

(d) young people will be afforded the opportunities to commit and re-commit their lives to God through Jesus the Christ in a non-threatening and age-appropriate way; and (e) Catholic juveniles will begin to foster a Christo-centric spirituality that is rooted in Catholic post-Vatican II theology and ecclesiology.

The retreat is ideally implemented during a weekend format, because it has a greater potential to transform teenagers and call them more deeply into Christian discipleship (Canales, 2009, p. 72).

These six pastoral implementation strategies are pedagogical recommendations which may easily be integrated into a youth ministry curriculum. Many of the suggestions are inexpensive, but like most youth ministry initiatives, fund-raising may be a prerequisite. Comprehensive youth ministry will always be concerned with cultivating Christian discipleship, and it is the primordial model for developing Catholic faith, identity, and spirituality. These 8 categories and 6 strategies of Christian discipleship help to give pastoral clarity, theological explanation, pedagogical rationale, and experiential praxis to Christian discipleship and all its wonderful nuances within Catholic youth ministry.

Conclusion

Christian discipleship as the primordial model for youth ministry is rather encompassing because it involves many components of Christian living. Fostering Christian discipleship in adolescents is not an easy enterprise; nevertheless, it is a priority for Catholic youth ministry. The Christian discipleship model makes good theological and pastoral sense because learning the ways of discipleship can benefit adolescents and can easily be integrated into a parish youth ministry curriculum. Although the specific formats may vary, discipleship does merit exploration and integration into Catholic youth ministry.

The Christian discipleship model for Catholic youth ministry can be one of the most challenging, but rewarding models within the youth ministry. It is challenging because the youth minister must study and learn the various components of Christian discipleship. It is rewarding because it creates an atmosphere for young people to learn the ways to live and grow as Christians.

The task to create Christian disciples does *not* rest exclusively on the shoulders of the parish youth minister and volunteer catechists, but on the entire community of faith, which must seek to draw adolescents into the life of love, faith, and service (Canales, 2011, pp. 81-82). Adolescents are not alone in becoming Christian disciples: they have the community which calls them forth, their parents that fosters their faith, the parish youth ministry that cultivates their spirituality, and Christ who guides them in wisdom and prudence.

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Endnotes

- 1 Lee Camp (2004) in *Mere Discipleship* offers five categories of discipleship: worship, baptism, prayer, communion, and evangelisation; while Kathleen Cahalan (2010) in *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* provides six categories of discipleship: teaching, preaching, care, prayer and worship, social mercy and justice, and leadership and administration.
- 2 The term *action-reflection* refers to the “critical investigation and assessment of a theological enterprise, coupled with the identification of a pragmatic praxis of ministry. Action in and of itself lacks intellectual inquiry; therefore, action-reflection facilitates student-learning through critical introspection and personal reflection on a particular experience. Through action-reflection students move beyond their personal *status quo* and come to a different place, ideally a better place, through serious introspection and self-awareness, which leads to self-discovery and transformation” (Canales, 2004; 48). The integration of action-reflection within youth ministry has many rewarding benefits, but most especially incorporating theology with a teenager’s life experience, and empowering young people to become self-actualisers.
- 3 The term *social justice-learning* refers to the attempt to bridge the gap from a purely cerebral education to one that encourages students to learn through serving others with social justice in mind. In comprehensive Catholic youth ministry, the object of social justice-learning is to empower students to move beyond merely engaging in acts of service and charity and move into the realm of social justice, which is rooted in human dignity, empathy and compassion (Canales, 2004; 48). Social justice-learning refers to the experiential learner that is specific to enhancing adolescent’s knowledge about social justice issues and is committed to expanding their comprehension of the Catholic Church’s social justice teachings and principles. Social justice-learning is not tantamount to service-learning since not all service-learning is focused on social justice issues and concerns or the root systemic problem of unjust systems (Canales, 2011; p. 91).

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SETTING TEXTBOOK FRAMEWORKS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Abstract

One of the most significant recent issues for religious education in Catholic schools in the United States is the development, over a number of years, of a doctrinal content framework for approved textbooks. As the American experience has not been well documented this paper will focus on two tasks. Firstly, a description and contextualisation of the process that lead to the implementation of the current frameworks will be given. Secondly, some evaluative comments on the frameworks will be made with a view to initiating a dialogue on the place and role of textbooks in improving the quality of religious education in Catholic schools in the United States.

An overview of the framework

In 1995 the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) was released, a much revised and updated edition of the Roman catechism produced in the fifty years after the Council of Trent (Ratzinger, 1994). While not intended as an instrument to be used directly with students, the CCC had obvious and major implications for the conduct of religious education in Catholic schools the world over. In light of the release of the CCC the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops commissioned a study on the suitability of religious education textbooks that were then being used in Catholic schools in the United States. The commission, under the leadership of Archbishop Buechlein, issued its findings in 1997, in an oral report to the US bishops' conference. It nominated ten deficiencies in the material that was then available. The report noted, in particular, that the language used in many textbook was hesitant and did not reflect the Church's evangelical character. In addition, a number of key content areas, such as the Trinity, were not covered in adequate detail.¹

In 2002, after a period of consultation, the bishops proposed that a framework for approving new religious education texts be developed, resting on two foundational ideas, namely, authenticity to the CCC and completeness, that is, the texts needed to address all major beliefs and practices (Hughes, 2003). The bishops did not propose sponsoring a new catechetical series under their own auspices. Rather, they agreed to elaborate a series of principles that would determine what textbooks could be used in Catholic schools. The rationale here being that commercial publishers with expertise in the production of textbooks could develop their own series and that these would be approved for use in Catholic schools as long as they fell within the boundaries established by the bishops. In the initial stages these boundaries were referred to as a curriculum model or a scope and sequence but over time this view has been modified. They are now best described as a framework or guidelines for textbooks. This characterisation allowed for some freedom in how proposed textbooks are to be structured and what pedagogical approach is to be employed. The bishops also decided to develop a high school textbook framework as this was seen as the area with the greatest need for a more structured, national approach. In 2004 a draft framework was available for comment and review (Carotta, 2011). In light of this, the framework was modified and a second framework was proposed in 2007 and after further consultation the framework was accepted for use in all Catholic high schools in April 2010 (Nuzzi, 2011). The document; *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (DEC), drawing on *Catechesi Tradendae*, begins with a clear statement of the catechetical scope and intention of the framework:

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ (CT, no. 5). These ends are evident in this framework—designed to guide catechetical instruction for young people of high-school age wherever and however it takes place: in Catholic high schools, in parish religious education programs, with young people schooled at home, or within the context of the catechetical instruction which should be part of every youth ministry program. (DEC, 1)

In the United States religious education in Catholic schools proceeds from a strongly catechetical presumption. The utility of this approach can be discussed further but such a dialogue is beyond the scope of this paper. The framework developed by the United States bishops sits very well within a catechetical understanding of religious education in schools.

The framework is designed to shape an eight unit course of study. This is to be completed over four years, with two units being done each year. At the heart of the doctrinal framework are six mandated core courses. These all reflect a strong Christological emphasis reflective of the concern about earlier textbooks. While there is room for how a particular course is taught and whether a deductive or inductive pedagogy is followed the guidelines clearly stipulate that it is expected that the course must be taught in the following sequence and that textbooks should reflect this ordering:

1. The revelation of Jesus Christ in scripture
2. Who is Jesus Christ
3. The mission of Jesus Christ (the paschal mystery)
4. Jesus Christ's mission continues in the church
5. Sacraments as privileged encounters with Jesus Christ
6. Life in Jesus Christ

In addition five elective units are offered, of which two are to be selected. These can be completed in the final year of high school, or one in the penultimate year and one in the final year. These electives are:

1. Sacred Scripture
2. History of the Catholic Church
3. Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ in society
4. Responding to the call of Jesus Christ
5. Ecumenical and interreligious issues

Each topic is elaborated on in a series of sections, which gives more content information about what should be covered in approved textbooks. The introduction of the document makes clear, however, that this elaboration is not expected to be exhaustive but to give publishers a clear indication of the key concepts that must be covered if textbooks are to be approved for use. The first core unit, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ in scripture*, for example, is broken down into the following six sections:

1. How do we know about God?
2. About sacred scripture
3. Understanding scripture
4. Overview of the Bible
5. The Gospels
6. Challenges

With the exception of the final one, each of these sections expands on the central theme of the particular unit, relying heavily from material taken from the CCC. DEC speaks of this material as providing the building blocks around which a textbook can develop its own particular style and pedagogy. For instance in *How do we know about God?* Section B, part 1 is devoted to natural revelation and the following guidelines given:

God revealed in many ways:

- Natural Revelation (CCC, nos. 32-34). Natural Revelation attested to in Sacred Scripture (CCC, no. 32).
- Old Testament references, including Genesis and Wisdom, Paul's Letter to the Romans, Patristic testimony (CCC, no. 32).

- Scholastic theology's arguments for the existence of God (CCC, nos. 31, 34). St. Thomas Aquinas and the five proofs for the existence of God. Vatican I: we can grasp with certainty the existence of God through human reason (CCC, nos. 36-38, 46-47).
- Contemporary arguments based on the human person's opening to truth, beauty, moral goodness, freedom, voice of conscience (CCC, no. 33).

The final section, *Challenges*, is common to each of the units and specifically addresses issues that may challenge young Catholics living in a secular culture. This section has a deliberately apologetic emphasis. In the first core unit, for example, the first challenge that is listed is:

A. Is it true that Catholics do not use or read the Bible?

The following four responses are provided:

No. Catholics use the Bible regularly. The Bible or Scripture is an integral part of Catholic prayer life, forming part of every Mass, every sacramental celebration, and the official daily prayer of the Church—the Liturgy of the Hours (CCC, nos. 141, 1190).

The Church urges Catholics to use the Bible in personal prayer (CCC, nos. 2653-2654). Scripture study and prayer groups using Scripture are a common part of parish life. In the fourth century, St. Jerome said that “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”; this underlines the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church (CCC, no. 133). (DEC, p.4)

The wider context for the framework

Some contextual issues

Use of textbooks in general and in religious education in Catholic schools in particular has been well described in the literature (Altbach, 1987; Wishengrad, 1999; Boostrom, 2001; Engebretson, 2004; Rymarz and Engebretson, 2005). Use of textbooks in religious education in Catholic schools in the United State is characterised by a number of constraining factors. Nuzzi (2011) identified a number of national contextual issues that have influenced the development of the doctrinal framework for textbooks. In the United States there is no national curriculum, or even general approach, used for religious education in Catholic high schools (Sander, 2005; DeFiore et al., 2009). The frameworks could be seen as one way of providing a national focus for religious education in schools without the need to develop supporting infrastructure such as overseeing institutions. Catholic schools in the USA are undergoing a period of severe financial challenge and are not in a position to support further bureaucratic structures (Sander, 2001). This is not an argument against the efficacy of such organisations. Rather, it is a statement on the limited financial resources that Catholic schools districts throughout the country have to deal with (Greene and O’Keefe, 2001). By providing for some uniformity in textbooks a degree of constancy across Catholic high schools could be achieved. In a similar vein, there were no pre-existing mechanisms for regulating the quality of resources used in schools. A national doctrinal framework for textbooks could provide some type of benchmark as to what is expected to be the standard for instructional materials used in schools. This was also a key consideration of the bishops when they chose not to proceed with a national series themselves but to use existing commercial publishers. The reasoning being that commercial publishers had expertise in producing quality product.

In addition to a lack of a national approach to religious education, there is no national accreditation system for religious education teachers working in Catholic schools (Cook, 2000). Many who teach religious education lack equivalent qualifications to that of their other subject areas. This lack of background may necessitate providing more structure in the delivery of religious education in the classroom. One dimension of this structural support is provision of high quality textbooks and accompanying teacher notes. In a similar vein accredited textbooks could give those involved in the training of religious education teachers some sense of what content knowledge is required of teachers who intend to work in a particular district. This is not an ideal solution as the issue of RE teacher content knowledge is most adequately addressed by ensuring strong academic credentials of those entering teacher training. In the absence of this, however, a sense of what content areas are covered in high school classrooms could help focus instruction at the teacher training level.

The wider social context

The development of the doctrinal framework for religious education textbooks takes place within an ongoing discussion about the need for Catholic schools to be able to articulate a distinctive identity that is well grounded in theological principles. Joseph (2002) encapsulates this concern when he writes:

What makes catholic schools catholic are the theological truths which govern and give guidance to both the philosophy and to persons of catholic faith. These truths have made the Catholic Church countercultural...the failure on the part of catholic schools to understand that their guidance emanates from theology, and not solely from philosophy may account for their problems with identity and distinctness. (p. 29)

Religious education textbooks could be one aspect of addressing the rationale for Catholic schools as rooted in enduring theological principles. This is seen in the original critique of textbooks used in American Catholic schools. One of the key issues was a lack of clear focus on what makes Catholicism unique and distinct from other faith traditions. The need for this type of instruction, as part of a well developed curriculum, has been pointed out by a number of researchers (Griffith, 2001; Dulles 2005; D'Antonio et al., 2007).

The textbooks doctrinal framework arose in a period of significant realignment in the religious affiliation of many American teenagers. One of the largest on-going projects examining youth spirituality, led by Christian Smith, began by examining the religious affiliation of American teenagers (Smith & Denton, 2005). Much of this work supports the claim that many teenagers today express a form of religious affiliation that makes their beliefs and behaviours hard to distinguish from general cultural norms. In terms of connection and strong identification with their Tradition, Catholic teenagers have the second weakest affiliation just ahead of Jews, but well behind conservative Protestant groups and Mormons (Smith & Denton, 2005, p.23-37). Most US teenagers find it extremely difficult to explain what they believe. This is best expressed as a lack of technical language or vocabulary that would assist teenagers engage with religious traditions. This is especially important for younger people who have some connection with a faith community. In this context Smith and Denton argued that many religious communities are failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating their youth. Where engagement and education of youth by their religious communities is weak, the faith of teenagers tends to degenerate into "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (MTD) (Smith & Denton, 2005, pp.162-170). This belief, in essence, sees religion as a moral system which, at best, generates behaviours that benefit the individual. It is highly personal and positivistic and the notion of God is relegated, not unlike in the thought of some eighteenth-century philosophers, to a kind of impersonal, distant force that is part of the universe but not in an involved or decisive way. This type of belief is not unique to Christians, but forms the background of much influential social discourse in the United States (Bellah et al., 1986; Wuthnow, 1993, 1998). In many ways, MTD is a type of default position to which most without strong counter views can easily subscribe.

MTD can also be seen as an expression of a contemporary understanding of spirituality. This is not characterised by "a conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent" (Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007, p. 13), but a far more elusive sense that lacks discriminatory power. The fact that many younger people have not eschewed an abstract belief in God, and in some senses are trying to live a moral life, does not tell us much about them. Spirituality for them is not something that is transformative and which influences in a profound way how the person thinks or behaves (Smith & Denton, 2005). The spiritual dimension of life, at least in its original conception, is not strongly developed. A private, personal, and diffuse spirituality is often evident. This makes few demands and can be incorporated into a variety of worldviews, Christian or otherwise (Dean, 2010).

The religious trajectory of many young people seems to be away from strong religious commitment (Rymarz & Graham, 2006). In a five-year follow up study, participants in the original Smith and Denton study were re-interviewed (Smith & Snell, 2009). Here, emerging adults were the least religious group in the United States and the most likely to explicitly move away from religious origins. In the ensuing five years, for example, the proportion of the sample group identifying as Catholic had declined from 24% to 18%. By way of comparison, the not-religious group had risen from 14% to 27% (Smith & Snell, 2005, p. 114). Certainly, most emerging adults see religion as having a positive effect and as a place where basic moral principles are acquired, but

beyond this religion has an increasingly minor role to play. Smith and Snell (2009, p. 286) describe this as a view among many emerging adults that they have moved on from strong religious attachments retaining a more nostalgic connection.

All of this is indicative of what can be called a new mentality that is well entrenched amongst younger Catholics especially. The discussion around use of religious education textbooks in Catholic schools in the United States needs to take serious account of changes in the basic narrative and assumptions of many younger Catholics. The experience of, amongst other things, strong socialisation, which was so formative for older Catholics, is no longer a dominant discourse. What has replaced it is far more ineffable and more easily typified by what is absent and, as such, is not reactive or hostile. Many people today, especially younger ones, are aware of the options available to them and can be typified as consumers (D'Antonio et al., 2007, p. 149). Whilst the work of Catholic schools may be more difficult, it does present new opportunities for outreach, especially if religious communities are able to offer something of perceived value and if they can offer this in a clear and cogent fashion. In this sense the use of textbooks needs to be seen as part of a broader discussion on the role of religious education in a new societal context.

Evaluation of the framework

Textbooks and technical knowledge

An important question arising from this discussion is how to address the lack of technical knowledge. What, for example, are some ways that Catholics, especially younger ones can become more proficient in the technical language of the faith tradition? One approach could be a greater emphasis on empirically based pedagogical methods aimed at improving classroom teaching and learning using a variety of methods. In this regard provision of high quality textbooks could provide both a reference point and an initial stage of the teaching and learning process in religious education. This idea of providing students with a direct instruction on technical issues as a prelude to a more spontaneous learning dynamic is well captured in some contemporary learning theory, notably in the writings of Vygotsky and his followers. Vygotsky made a distinction between what he called spontaneous and scientific concepts in learning (Karpov, 2003). Spontaneous concepts are the result of generalisations based on typical human experience. Many of these are, however, incorrect. A person, for example, may conclude that the sun disappears at sunset and transforms into the moon. By contrast, scientific concepts are those that arise from the generalised experience of humanity, for example, the natural laws of the physical sciences, and be verified in some fashion. The scientific concept allows the student to see the world in a new way or to restructure and raise spontaneous concepts to a new level (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 220). In contrast to other theorists Vygotsky held that students should not be expected to discover these scientific concepts through their own devices. Rather the role of the teacher was to extend the student by providing enough structure in the form of instruction to allow students to use their new knowledge to reappraise their experience and prior learning. Vygotsky expresses this idea in the following terms, "scientific concepts...just start their development, rather than finish it, at a moment when the child learns the term or word-meaning denoting the new concept" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 159). If we can see some overlap between scientific concepts and the acquisition of technical theological concepts then we have a proposal that may assist younger Catholics in acquiring the necessary language to be able to, on a firm footing, understand, judge and decide. In this sense textbooks could serve a useful purpose as they can provide this type of instruction in a concise and engaging form. No one could be expected, for example, to come up with the monotheistic definitions of the Council of Nicaea. Whilst this is not a scientific concept in the strictly Vygotskian sense in that it cannot be verified, it does represent a significant example of technical theological language. A student who is presented with this information in an appropriate manner is much better able to stand outside of their experience and to become an independent thinker rather than one who is entirely dependent on either private or communal reflection.

Vygotsky favoured presenting students with precise verbal definitions of scientific concepts and students could also receive this type of assistance in understanding complex ideas, within the Catholic tradition, such as the divine and human Christ. As Dulles (2008) points out, "no analysis of contemporary experience can by itself disclose the contents of Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Resurrection which are only known from revelation" (p. 172). There is no impediment, then, for a clear, concise and confident presentation of major Catholic ideas in the form of textbooks, mindful always of recognising the human

pedagogical element. The teacher, however, who is technically strong but without a “feel” for teaching should always, be aware of their impact and the limits of disembodied technical instruction. Guardini (2005), for instance remarks, “My teacher of religion in high school was talented; he held a doctorate in theology. But he was absolutely unintelligible when he tried to teach. I learned nothing from him, and still less did he awaken in me a genuine interest in religious matters”, (p. 69). Provision of technical concepts via textbooks is not, of course, the end of understanding. Rather it should help empower the learner to make some type of judgment about what the tradition has to offer and how he or she can engage with this.

Textbooks and the RE teacher

Provision of textbooks is one step toward the goal of achieving high quality religious education in Catholic high schools. While cognisant of the restraints under which Catholic schools in the United States operate, textbooks in religious education cannot be seen as an expedient solution to underlying issues that require ongoing attention. The bishops, themselves, in the introduction to the framework acknowledge that the books need to be embedded in a well developed and supported curriculum. This is a critical understanding of how best to use textbooks in religious education (Engebretson, 2002). Rymarz and Engebretson (2004) have noted that whilst an important component of high school religious education, textbooks cannot substitute for some of the structural deficiencies that hinder religious education in Catholic schools. For instance, it has been noted that many Catholic school religious education teachers lack specialist content knowledge to teach the discipline. To address this issue adequately requires provision of assistance to teachers to develop their skills and competencies in this area. Textbooks should not be seen as the primary way of overcoming, in this case, relatively poor training and background on the part of RE teachers. Shulman (1986) has pointed out that for teaching mastery to be evident the teacher must be able to readily translate their own content knowledge into the narratives, metaphors and structured learning that mediates knowledge for students. The critical assumption here is that teachers themselves have the necessary content knowledge of their respective disciplines. If a teacher is, to use the well-known phrase, one page ahead of the student no matter what the quality of the text, it is unlikely that a genuine context for learning can be established.

Textbooks and the curriculum

In a similar vein textbooks cannot substitute for a well planned and supported curriculum. A good curriculum needs to be monitored, evaluated and revised in light of changing circumstances. An aspect of the RE curriculum can be use of mandated textbooks. The textbook, however, should support the objectives of the curriculum and be seen as its servant and not its master. In developing a quality RE curriculum the input of a variety of agencies should be sought and where possible the insights and experience of teachers be given a privileged place in planning deliberations (Braithwaite, 1993).

Textbooks can be especially useful in what Rymarz (2004) has termed ‘hard topics’ in religious education. These topics are germane on a conceptual level to religious education in Catholic schools but because of their complexity are often avoided (Rymarz, 2007). In addition they are usually areas that students do not have significant prior knowledge of or experience with. For instance, one such area that the bishops drew attention to in their critique of textbooks was Trinitarian teachings (Hughes, 2003, p. 419). If students lack strong content knowledge of a particular area then they find it difficult to orientate themselves if these topics are introduced (Mayer, 2004). What can happen in these instances is that the amount of exogenous material that students encounter can severely restrict new learning. In these situations, students have a relatively low saturation level, commonly understood as information overload (Mayer & Moreno, 2003). In these areas teachers should be aware that students can very quickly become disorientated and disengaged, when doing topics that they have very little connection to. In these instances quality textbooks can provide a mechanism by which students can enter into the conversation by at least giving them some key vocabulary and concepts. Textbooks should always be seen as part of an overall approach to learning. Many of the fears of teachers about using textbooks come from the experience of it being used as the sole or dominant form of instruction (Hopkins et al., 1997). University courses, for instance, make heavy use of textbooks as required reading. There is ample evidence that this is an unsatisfactory pedagogical model (Hattie, 2009). When using textbooks in religious education, a critical question is, “What comes next?” Textbooks need to be integrated into a learning strategy that aims to have student participating in an involved and engaged capacity.

Conclusion

The development of a national framework for religious education textbooks in the United States arises out of a particular societal context. In the absence of a national curriculum and recognising a series of constraints under which schools operate, textbooks represent one way of moving forward the debate about the quality of religious education in schools. It is important to stress that textbooks are best seen as a part of an overall approach that aims to deliver high quality religious education. If, however, too much emphasis is placed on the textbook at the expense of curriculum development and teacher recruitment and training then the prospects for an improvement in religious education are limited.

High quality textbooks also have the capacity to help shape the debate about religious education in Catholic schools in the United States on a more practical level. Issues such as, content knowledge, modes of assessment and implicit pedagogy are all given added direction if a textbook series serves as a starting point for these discussions. What is needed in the short term is some empirical data drawn from well constructed studies which examine the impact that approved textbooks have on religious education in the classroom. The scope of these studies is quite broad but one fruitful area for examination would be the impact textbooks have on learning outcomes in religious education.

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Endnotes

- 1 The ten deficiencies identified by Archbishop Buechlein were: 1) Insufficient attention to the Trinity and the Trinitarian structure of Catholic beliefs and teachings; 2) Obscured presentation of the centrality of Christ in salvation history and insufficient emphasis on the divinity of Christ; 3) Indistinct treatment of the ecclesial context of Catholic beliefs and magisterial teachings; 4) Inadequate sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology; 5) Insufficient emphasis on God's initiative in the world with a corresponding overemphasis on human action; 6) Insufficient recognition of the transforming effects of grace; 7) Inadequate presentation of the sacraments; 8) Deficient teaching on original sin and sin in general; 9) Meager exposition of Christian moral life; 10) Inadequate presentation of eschatology. *Obtained on 29/5/11 from: www.usccb.org/catechism/document/oralrpt.shtml*

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EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS: SOME PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Abstract

Continuous and effective professional learning is vital for all engaged in religious education (RE) and more especially all religious educators who are focussed on high quality learning for their students. Whilst there has been increased interest both internationally and nationally about what comprises effective professional learning, this preliminary report presents initial findings generated from a range of participants in the primary context of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia. Drawing on data that was collected using the methodology of grounded theory this article focuses on phase one of this study to explore the following overarching question: “What models/approaches to professional learning are best suited to the needs of religious educators in Catholic primary schools?” The study pursued this question through a set of coordinated electronic survey investigations with classroom religious educators designed to offer images of what is possible in Catholic primary schools that takes learning improvement in RE seriously. The findings may be particularly useful for all key stakeholders concerned with the quality of RE who seek to implement and evaluate RE professional learning and thus continue to improve the quality of the subject in the Catholic primary school.

Introduction

For all those committed to focus on the core matters of teaching and learning in Religious Education, (hereafter termed RE), a contemporary understanding of effective professional learning has much to offer. Mounting voices in the Australian context recognise the need to support religious teachers’ lifelong learning opportunities (Dowling, 2012; Harvey, 2009; Healy, 2011). Yet, a desire for effective professional learning is one thing to assert and another to enact. Stage One of this study has generated findings about the needs and issues associated with professional learning for religious educators in the Catholic primary setting. The content of this paper is presented in four broad sections. The first section provides a brief outline of the study. The second section succinctly explores the research design used to generate data regarding the perceptions of professional learning in RE. The third section describes and examines data generated by the initial online survey. The final section considers some of the implications of these preliminary findings for key stakeholders in RE.

The study

These initial findings outlined in this paper are part of a broader on-going study concerned with an exploration of the leadership role of the REC in the professional learning of religious educators in Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne Archdiocese, Australia. The research issue at the centre of this project is the dissonance between theory of effective professional learning for teachers and its actual practice with primary religious educators. Optimal ways to lead, understand, engage with and operationalise professional learning for religious educators are required. Whilst this study has provided an expansive understanding of the needs and issues associated with leading RE professional learning in the primary context, this paper is limited to discussion about the initial findings of the context specific online lime survey instrument. This instrument was designed to collect data on the models and approaches to professional learning best suited to the needs of religious educators in Catholic primary schools. The points of view of the RE classroom teachers concerning their professional learning needs are examined as they are significant stakeholders in the pursuit of quality RE. Their perspectives are relevant to all who value and wish to support RE teachers in their ongoing efforts to improve student learning in RE.

The findings were gained by a method specific technique: an anonymous, short online open-ended Lime survey. Whilst some papers reporting on the conditions for professional learning have already appeared in earlier editions of this journal, the research reported in this paper differs in that it provides some perspectives on professional learning from those directly responsible or experiencing these opportunities, the RE classroom teachers. In fact it gave classroom teachers of RE significant voice in identifying the operative understandings of their professional learning needs. Further given that the participants completed the survey anonymously, the results provided both frank and realistic testimonies which offer both opportunity and challenge to RE stakeholders at multiple levels of Catholic schools as they seek to develop individual and system capacity building in RE. Consequently, the data that emerged from the anonymous electronic survey are of particular interest because they raised pertinent issues about professional learning from the vantage point of key stakeholders. These findings may assist individuals responsible for professional learning in RE to reflect on their schools current practices and develop a realistic action plan to support the professional growth of their RE staff.

Research design

The qualitative domain allowed the researcher to perceive meaning which people (classroom teachers of RE) have constructed from events and experiences with professional learning. Hence the epistemological framework of constructionism was adopted (Crotty, 2003). A qualitative approach was selected because the human and social basis of the study ensured it was an appropriate and effective means of exploring the research question. It provided a suitable means to seek a deeper understanding and to explore the nuances of experiences of professional learning in RE, to extract the degree of detail not available by quantification.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was the foundation of the research methodology used to orchestrate the use of data gathering strategies. It provided a legitimate starting point for understanding and exploring the professional learning needed to develop as a RE teacher which emerged from the preliminary findings of numerous classroom teachers within schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. As the grounded theory approach drew on the professional learning experiences and perceptions of classroom religious educators, the study was enriched by data that focused on participants' lived experience and looked at the meaning people placed on the events, processes and structure in their lives. Grounded theory comprises a systematic, inductive and comparative approach to conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1). Through this process categories emerged which were 'grounded' through the process by which they are generated and the main issues of the participants were discovered. Therefore it was pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experience of each participant's reality.

In the context of the broad study, it was the author's intention to come to know and better understand professional learning for religious educators in the primary Catholic context cognisant of the need to not force the data but rather allow the categories to emerge from the data (Glaser, 1998). Consequently, when engaging in grounded theory methodology, it was necessary to deliberately suspend preconceptions in order to be open to discovery and the emergence of theory. Grounded theory enabled the researcher to identify four key categories which were features of religious educators' professional learning needs.

It was deemed beneficial to employ a survey early in the research to obtain a general picture and to decide how to focus other data methods. As surveys allow a large coverage of participants within a short time frame (Neuman, 2006) they provided valuable insights into the currently held beliefs, attitudes and opinions of participants (Creswell, 2009; Silverman, 2005). They also provided a low threat means of obtaining relevant confirmation about a participant's past experience anonymously. The survey was designed for interested classroom teachers to solicit opinions on a number of professional learning issues as well as descriptive information on professional learning activities and initiatives. It was a context specific instrument designed to collect data on the models and approaches to professional learning best suited to the needs of religious educators in Catholic primary schools. As response rates in surveys are commonly low, after investigation, an electronic Lime survey was devised to maximise the rate of potential participants. This tool enabled an efficient way of collecting and managing large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time. A further benefit of the electronic lime survey was that it was easy and efficient to use and provided the facility for respondents to save and return to the survey at any time.

To guard against ambiguous and vague language the survey was piloted. This pretest survey improved consistency, uniformity and assisted to make the questions more clear, concise and unambiguous so as to elicit the greatest amount of information from participants (Creswell, 2009). As the structured nature of a survey did not permit exploration of emerging and unanticipated issues, this lack of flexibility was reduced by the inclusion of a final optional box which was added to this data gathering instrument to invite participants to provide any additional comments observations or information about the professional learning of religious educators in the primary catholic context that they wished to share. This inclusion proved valuable as nearly half of the participants availed themselves of this opportunity.

A total of 250 invitations were distributed electronically to Catholic primary principals in the Melbourne Archdiocese. This email sought permission to invite interested classroom teachers to participate in a short electronic survey and informed and invited interested classroom teacher of RE to complete the survey. A reminder was sent via email four to six weeks later which increased the response rate. The use of an online reminder to non responding participants helped ameliorate a larger decrease in the survey response rate, as well as resulting in a faster turnaround time from survey dispatch in comparison to the traditional mail out means.

As a component of this study the survey provided valuable insights into the design of a more focused exploration through focus groups and unstructured interviews. This meant that the findings from early data collections helped to refine the structure of the interview process and inform the focus group and interview questions, thereby enabling the progressive construction of knowledge and meaning. As well the surveys enabled cross referencing to other data collection strategies used later in this study.

Classroom Participants

A total of 123 interested classroom teachers responded to the anonymous online survey and a further 14 participants partially responded to the electronic survey meaning that they did not answer all survey questions. The responses provided a valuable window from which to consider some key elements and conditions disclosed as fundamental to professional learning for religious educators. Overall the volunteer response rate indicated a comprehensive interest in this study demonstrated by willingness to commit to undertaking the anonymous survey. Whilst the survey response rate was pleasing, recruiting participants was aided by the opportunity for participants to contribute their expertise and experience to an issue which is of concern to all involved in this research.

Whilst this is a qualitative study, given the high response, it is convenient here to present some tables in numerical form to illustrate the range of responses from participants. Table 1.1 presented below summarises the range of teaching experience of interested primary RE classroom teachers from the Melbourne Archdiocese who responded to the survey. It reveals that the participants had a range of experience in teaching RE although predominantly they had been teaching for over 10 years.

Table 1.1

Teaching experiences of interested primary classroom teachers from the Melbourne Archdiocese who responded to the survey.

How long have you been teaching RE?		
Answer	Count	Percentage
Less than one year	2	1.63
1-2 years	5	4.07
3-4 years	8	6.50
5-6 years	11	8.94
7-10 years	11	8.94
More than 10 years	86	69.92

Although the range of participants' experiences varied it was valuable to gain perspectives from an array of classroom RE educators with limited experience. Respondents in the infancy of their teaching career as religious educators, (i.e. graduate teachers) as well as those with numerous years experience (ten or more) were needed to provide diversity in teacher characteristics, capabilities and sense of personal agency.

The next table, Table 1.2 demonstrates the range of respondents from each level of the school.

Table 1.2

Summary of participant at each year level from the Melbourne Archdiocese who responded to the survey.

Which year level do you teach RE?		
Answer	Count	Percentage
Prep	20	16
Year 1	11	9
Year 2	27	22
Year 3	16	13
Year 4	11	9
Year 5	8	7
Year 6	30	24

Table 1: 2 indicated there was a fairly even spread of respondents at each level of the school and it was possible to gain different perspectives from the junior, middle and senior RE classroom teachers thereby allowing a more complete view of RE educators needs at all levels of the primary school.

The next section provided insights into the "what" of RE professional learning and asked respondents to consider the professional learning they needed as religious educators. As might be expected when responding to the question "What professional learning do you need to develop as a RE teacher?" a broad a range of responses resulted, however, there were clear, dominant and recurring themes. These emerging categories and sub categories/properties are initially presented in Table 1.3 in decreasing order of frequency. After Table 1.3 the data generated is interpreted in more detail.

Table 1.3

Summary of emerging categories of professional learning needs of religious educators

Category	Sub Category	Junior	Middle	Senior	Total
1.Enhancing teacher pedagogical knowledge	Contemporary best practice RE teaching strategies	22	3	11	36
	Student Engagement	6	5	8	19
	Good Shepherd/Godly Play	12	2	1	15
	Curriculum CTKWL/MJR	2		12	14
	Assessment and reporting	6	3	4	13
	Critical/Reflective thinking strategies	4	1		5
	Inquiry learning	2	1	1	4
2.Enhancing teacher content knowledge	Catholic doctrine, beliefs, practices, traditions	9	10	11	30
	Scripture	7	11	10	28
	Mass/Prayer	7	1	3	11
	Sacraments	4	2	1	7

3. Enhancing Curriculum Supports	Resourcing	2	4	5	11
	ICT	1	2	2	5
	Multi faith			2	2
4. Enhancing professional learning partnerships	Accreditation	3		3	6
	Masters		1	2	3
	Grad Dip/Post grad	1	1	1	3

The data analysis revealed four key features of religious educators' professional learning needs which can complement and add to the current literature in this field.

Category One: Enhancing teacher pedagogical knowledge

The most frequent response concerned the need for pedagogical knowledge and responses indicated that some RE teachers held high expectations with regard to their professional learning needs in this category. Whilst responses were varied, improving teacher pedagogical knowledge was often articulated in relation to a variety of contemporary teaching/learning strategies in RE. By and large respondents argued strongly that professional learning in RE must be progressive and increase teachers' pedagogical knowledge based on what participants frequently described as "contemporary best practice". This was typified by the comment from participant 101, "We need to be constantly learning and working with world's best practice". Whilst arguably "best practice" is a phrase touted regularly in educational circles and is perhaps viewed as jargon, as it is questionable whether it is used correctly in the survey responses, those who used this term did so in the context of discussing contemporary teaching and learning pedagogy. This assertion was exemplified by the comment from participant 101, "I need an understanding of how children learn best in RE". Another participant, 102, asked for "professional learning in current trends in the most effective ways of teaching RE in the twenty-first century". Teachers wanted pedagogical knowledge, but it needed to be of the highest standard which indicated that progressive pedagogical thinking and standards can be applied to RE. These responses reinforced the contention forwarded in the RDECS: "it (Religious Instruction) should make use of the best educational methods available to schools today" (1988, # 70).

Respondents at the junior level were specific about their teacher pedagogical knowledge needs and recognised both the particularities of their students and the particular pedagogy assigned to early year's students in the Melbourne Archdiocese, namely, *The Good Shepherd Experience*. One participant (100) stated "I need to know/keep abreast with modern education and better understand how to engage students in the early years using contemporary pedagogical methods". Godly Play, an influence on early years learning, particular to the Archdiocese of Melbourne was another common professional learning pedagogical need expressed by teachers in the early years.

The need for teachers to know the content they teach, as well as knowing how students learn and how to teach them effectively is termed "*Pedagogical Content Knowledge*" (PCK) (Hashweh, 2005; Shulman, 1987). "PCK has emerged in recent times as a powerful and insightful way of analysing and discussing how teachers think and make decisions about teaching" (Mc Caughtry, 2005, p. 379). This conception of PCK relates to a teacher's beliefs about content and subject matter as well as general pedagogical knowledge. Participant 13 explained "I need to know content to be taught and have good teaching practices like any other curriculum area". This need alluded to an amalgamation of pedagogy and specific subject knowledge. This response suggested that, for this participant, RE was perceived with "the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge" (GDC, 1997, # 73). It must be noted that this argument was not universally held.

The interconnectedness of knowing subject matter, pedagogy curriculum and students was highlighted clearly by participant 28 who demonstrated an appreciation and application of this term in the RE context. He/she expressed a need for "A background in bible studies and the teachings of the Church as well as an understanding of how early years children learn best". The aforementioned thinking goes beyond just content knowledge and extends to knowing students and understanding the dynamics of PCK. The richness of these responses lies in the way that the participants' knowledge of students influences decisions about the selection

of content. The selection of RE content was integral to what it meant to teach RE with a focus on the particular ways young children learn. That is, the knowledge is used to transform subject matter content into forms more comprehensible to students. It seems that a good understanding of the key characteristics of students at each level has material implications for learning and teaching in RE.

Summary of this category

Schools and teachers need to plan and teach a RE curriculum that best accommodates the interests, needs and abilities of their students within their learning context. Responses illustrated that professional learning can help achieve this. As would be expected with all other areas of the curriculum, the RE teacher is challenged to facilitate classroom learning experiences that respect the integrity of the material to be explored, whilst being appropriate to the developmental level, prior learning, cultural experiences and other personal qualities of learners (CEOB, 2005, CEOM, 2008). Student diversity is a factor that influences the design and delivery of RE programs in Catholic schools. Given the range of subcategories which fall under the category teacher pedagogical knowledge, it seems RE teachers respect the need to know and use flexible, innovative teaching approaches designed to respond to individual differences in students' needs, abilities, interests and learning styles.

Category 2: Enhancing teacher content knowledge

The next most frequent response provided by classroom survey participants, although expressed differently, was categorised as enhancing teacher content knowledge. These responses indicated that professional learning helped RE teachers to be supported in the content knowledge they required in their role as classroom religious educators. Teacher content knowledge refers to the need for teachers to develop a competent level of content knowledge specific to RE and to feel confident in their own understandings of the various disciplines that underpin RE. This focus on content knowledge also provided insights into specific areas of content perceived as necessary for primary religious educators in the Melbourne context. Each sub-category indicated specific content knowledge or was topic specific to the curriculum materials called *Coming to Know Worship and Love, A Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*. Not surprisingly an understanding of Church teachings including Catholic doctrines, beliefs and traditions was the most frequent response. However other key foundational knowledge required in the teaching of RE was also proffered such as Scripture, Liturgy and the Sacraments. These sub categories validated the contention that RE has its own distinct and specific body of knowledge. Knowledge of this may be termed religious literacy.

Calls for greater levels of religious literacy of RE staff (Buchanan, 2009; Ryan, 2007; Rymarz, 2012) require teachers to be well versed in a number of religious disciplines and the survey responses confirmed this demand. In seeking to increase students' religious understanding of the content, teachers must also seek to develop their own religious literacy. The importance of knowing the riches of the Christian tradition was exemplified by participant 10 who explained simply: "I can't teach what I can't explain". Whilst the contemporary, changing religious landscape makes it increasingly difficult to presume any degree of knowledge, experience and participation in the Catholic faith of those who facilitate RE it was made clear that RE teachers need to understand the unit of work they are developing for their students. The significance of teachers developing their content knowledge and the important filtering process that can result from this was described by participant 12: "I need a real depth of knowledge of the RE content which I can expand upon to teach RE more effectively in the classroom". These sentiments reflected an educational approach to RE espoused by numerous contemporary RE scholars (Rummery, 1977; Crawford & Rossiter, 1985; 1988; Moran, 2002) which emphasises the quest for understanding of RE subject matter. This approach has slowly gained influence and acceptance in Australian Catholic school RE programs. In the current educational paradigm which has an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, it seems fitting that respondents highlighted that a key focus of staff professional learning should enable RE teachers to develop competencies to teach the content of the curriculum materials they must translate to the students in the RE classroom.

The key importance of teacher content knowledge and its implications was discussed by participant 43 who provided a perspective from the viewpoint of both a teacher of RE and a parent. The participant observed: "I don't expect teachers to be Catholic - the best religious education both my sons received was from an Anglican teacher. I do expect an adequate knowledge of doctrine". This expressed gap in knowledge and need for basic support to extend the depth of a teacher's content knowledge may logically also be an issue

for graduate teachers, those teachers not of a Catholic background/upbringing and those lacking formal RE training or qualifications. The importance of acquiring and applying content knowledge was explained by participant 109:

Having just finished my Masters (degree) in religious education, it has made me realise how “unprepared” in a theological sense classroom teachers are in delivering their lessons to their students. With the knowledge I have gained throughout my study, I use it in my lessons as much as possible and the children cheer and really look forward to the RE lessons. What does this tell you!

Another key learning from these findings for those responsible for the quality of RE in Catholic primary schools was that it is important to give voice to the experience of highly committed RE teachers, as much as it is to reflect on the practice of those RE teachers who may have difficulties with lack of content knowledge, yet who must teach RE in primary Catholic schools.

Whilst respondents had a diverse range of knowledge and appreciation of Catholic teachings, when respondents conceded little or no knowledge, some sought to address this inadequacy and viewed various channels of professional learning opportunities in RE as a valid means to improve/extend their own content knowledge. This was encouraging.

The degree of rigor needed for teacher content knowledge was confirmed by participant 44's response “You need a good solid contemporary knowledge of all areas of religious education especially the use of Scripture is important - analysing it, letting the student get to know it. Knowing it yourself first”. This and similar comments pointed to the understanding that RE teachers at all levels appreciated the need and importance of having a clear current religious understanding of the content they present. These sentiments correlated with contemporary religious scholarship (Buchanan, 2010; Lacey, 2011; Lovat, 2002; Rymarz; 2012) which insists that RE teachers must be trained specialists and cannot ignore contemporary theological and Church teachings which provide the foundation for each unit of work to be presented to students. A solid understanding of background knowledge for teachers is not just important, it is essential for effective student learning in RE.

Some observations and comparisons of professional learning in RE in relation to other learning areas provided an insight into the relationship between the needs expressed in RE and the professional learning needs in other key learning areas. Some serious allegations emerged. Participant 13 challenged: “It would be great to also have some refresher courses in RE, we constantly up date Maths and Literacy, but as for being contemporary in regards to religion very little is done”. This view observed that teacher professional learning in RE was perceived as not commensurate with other contemporary professional learning developments within the Catholic primary context and specific examples were named such as Contemporary Teaching and Learning Mathematics (CTLM) and Literacy. This sentiment was not an isolated comment as another participant 24 reflected “Teachers need to have regular PLTs in RE the same as we do in Maths and Literacy”. The extent of this issue and the frustration it caused was acknowledged by participant 117 who lamented:

An opportunity for teachers in classrooms to have much more PD offered. It is very lacking and falls far behind the push for Maths or Literacy and so in the eyes of many it comes in way down the list because these other subjects are given a huge amount of PD and religious education is just something you get to if you have the time. Heart breaking in a Catholic school system.

This perceived lack of recognition by some by classroom practitioners of the need and importance of RE professional learning, was in stark contrast to official church documents and local Catholic SIPs which claim that RE staff in Catholic schools are encouraged to engage in professional learning, always seeking innovative ways to improve their practice. If continuing profession learning is viewed as an essential component of school improvement and staff professional learning, then these comments highlight an anomaly between what is espoused in official Church, system and school documentation and the realities which occur in the local settings of Catholic primary schools. Such a finding begs the question “rhetoric or reality”. The perceived lack of importance and recognition noted by some participants affects the quality and status of professional learning in RE. In addition the professionalism of RE teachers and the integrity of RE as a school discipline are also threatened by criticisms such as these. Participant 120 with six years experience surprisingly revealed the

extent of this problem “This is the first year I am doing any professional learning in RE and I’m really looking forward to it.” Participant 6 reiterated this contention and claimed “I have not had much professional learning in the RE area.” The following extract from participant 72 compounds this issue and reflected a perception of the challenges generated by the nature and depth of RE professional learning. He/she claimed “In my experience it is very ad hoc and non-strategic in the way it is presented, if at all”.

To discuss the nature, extent and limits of these perceptions lies beyond the scope of present considerations. However one point needs to be made, that is there appears to be a need to investigate further and eliminate the wide disparity between how professional learning is situated in RE compared with other key learning areas. Although mounting voices in the Australian context have recognised the need to support religious teachers’ lifelong learning opportunities (Dowling, 2012; Harvey, 2009; Healy, 2011) it was apparent that a priority for professional learning is one thing to assert and another to enact.

Summary of this category

These findings in this category clearly demonstrated that teachers of RE require professional competence in specific content areas. The findings affirmed the established belief that sustained deep professional content knowledge is needed in all academic areas. Further, the data indicated that through all stages of their RE career, teachers need a developed sense of confidence and understanding in all matters pertaining to the local diocesan content requirements. Prior research (Buchanan, 2007; Healy, 2011) has observed that some RE teachers lacked a depth of understanding in terms of knowledge about the Catholic faith tradition. This data suggested that increased competencies in religious knowledge must continue to be a focus of professional learning for religious educators in order to improve teacher practice and potentially enhance student learning in RE. Whilst the findings in this category suggested subject matter knowledge was valued by participants, this alone is not enough. Whilst some participants prized opportunities to extend or master the knowledge content about a specific unit of work to be studied in the RE area, as the responses classified in category one have demonstrated, respondents also spoke highly of a better understanding of the pedagogy required to effectively implement the content into the RE curriculum. The current climate of accountability, outcomes based education and formalised assessment demands that RE teachers have greater understanding of content, learning theories, and pedagogy to develop and support their classroom RE practice. Therefore, it may be best to view category one and two as complementary to each other.

Category 3: Enhancing curriculum supports

Just as respondents identified a need for contemporary and innovative pedagogical ideas, this sentiment was also expressed in relation to a call for professional learning about a range of contemporary curriculum resources and tools. A clear example of this need was articulated by a Year Three teacher, participant 94, who requested “knowledge of contemporary RE resources in different media”. A Year Four teacher, participant 65, spoke of “how to quickly find a variety of engaging resources for the students to work with” and also requested “use of art works to explore the messages or teaching I am trying to convey”. These perspectives revealed that participants saw value in learning about new RE resources/mediums that would ultimately enhance their RE curriculum and teaching. In addition to the expressed need for curriculum supports was an added concern for time. This was illustrated by a prep teacher, participant 113, who requested “ideas and resources to stimulate student involvement and learning.” He/she also added a caveat “Time to look at these or see them being used effectively”. Another, participant 60, spoke of “learning about interactive whiteboard, songs, books and posters to engage students”. He/she likewise expressed the importance of “having the time to try out new things, having the time to explore and experiment with the resources”.

Together with a concern for time to experiment and learn more about the curriculum supports, was a call for resourcing to be contemporary and of a high quality. Participant 105 expressed this clearly “I think we need to become more up to date with some of our books and videos”. Participant 47 stated, “I need good resources that are suitable for use in the classroom”. There was a clear and consistent message given by all year levels which indicated a need for professional learning to use and access online curriculum support materials. However, mixed reviews about the Information Communication Technology (ICT) component make this data worthy of further investigation. Participant 69, a year six teacher, stated that “Any professional learning that is focused on using technology to teach RE is always helpful”. However he/she also expressed a

concern that “RE needs to continue to move forward with all other areas of the curriculum especially in the area of technology so it does not get left behind”. Interestingly, further congruence was demonstrated by a teacher in the junior school, a year one teacher, participant 32, echoed some perceived deficiencies in this area when he/she claimed “I have not found many ICT RE resources - I wonder if there is a shortage in this area”. An important finding is the need to not only incorporate ICT into RE professional learning experiences but to ensure that this is at least commensurate to the good practice which occurs in other learning areas.

Summary of this category

The data generated in this category suggested that teachers appreciated the opportunity to engage with innovative RE resources and viewed this as an occasion to enhance their classroom teaching practice or to better address student needs. ICT was espoused as an important curriculum resource although some data indicated deficiencies and challenges which needed to be addressed. The responses also underscored that the effective use of any of the nominated resources, is dependent on time for exploration and experimentation.

Category 4: Enhancing professional learning partnerships.

The next theme that emerged was the notion that professional learning in RE could develop and enhance professional partnerships with other stakeholders of RE. Respondents identified a variety of ways that professional learning could enhance their RE teaching and increase their professionalism. Some classroom teachers valued professional learning support in RE achieved through formal academic study as well as professional learning via the system or the central level as is indicated in the sub categories. One participant, participant 21, stated: “I need some academic studies, qualification and ongoing PD”. According to various participants a Graduate Certificate RE/Graduate Diploma RE can provide a relevant and challenging initial qualification for teachers wanting to teach RE. A rationale for this attention to accreditation is expressed in the National Catholic Education Commission’s (NCEC) Religious Education Accreditation Policy. They expressed the expectation “Teachers of religious education, as well as those leading Catholic schools require additional professional competence in scripture, theology, religious education and faith formation and a developed sense of confidence in their delivery” (NCEC, 2009, p. 1).

Classroom participants’ statements provided a picture of how RE professional learning needs for some, may be met through academic agencies including further theological studies and/or universities courses. The following response from participant 87 indicated that there are a range of avenues to do this:

I have been undertaking RE PD regularly - there is a lot on offer through CEOM, ACU, JP II Institute, etc. and local CEO Regions and Networks. CEOM also offers excellent study sponsorship in the area. I sincerely believe PD offered is very adequate- if people can't find it they aren't looking.

This sentiment was not unanimous. A note of caution was sounded by participant 50 who commented: “There is little professional development offered in RE. This is sad especially as most people find it difficult to teach”. Perhaps the response from participant 50 can be explained by a communication problem particular to his/her school whereby for some reason, relevant professional learning information does not get through to classroom teachers. The wide disparity in perceptions identified here challenges school communities to ensure that RE professional learning information/opportunities are consistently and readily made available to all RE staff. Where this is not the case, schools must reflect why this is not occurring and decide how to best alleviate this problem for RE staff.

While some respondents provided positive evidence of partnerships between schools and universities, of further interest were the challenges identified by participants when engaging in these partnerships, including time, funding and in some cases stress associated with formal tertiary learning. Compounding these considerations, other participants were scathing when they reflected on their professional learning partnerships at tertiary institutions and indicated that the knowledge gained needed to be more practical as is illustrated by the following comment:

I did not learn anything of use at uni, as I am currently completing the Graduate Certificate of RE; I feel the course would be better if it were directed more at teaching rather than academic content. It has not equipped me enough to teach Prep/1 students in an effective way (Participant 100).

Some other participants reiterated this viewpoint (10) “I attended a uni course and unfortunately it provided very little practical advice”. Closer scrutiny of all new and existing tertiary units may ensure the courses are of a high standard and meet the expressed needs of the classroom RE teachers as student participants. A review, at appropriate intervals, should be approached in a manner which enables teachers to see the ways in which RE is fundamental to teaching and learning and broaden teachers’ understandings of what it means to be an educator, in particular a religious educator. As Catholic classroom teachers are key stakeholders in the enterprise of RE, these multiple claims validate the need to seriously critique, review and strengthen accreditation arrangements and requirements. Ongoing collaboration with classroom teachers will be necessary to ensure that they participate actively in the reshaping and reforming of their work in contemporary Australian Catholic primary schools.

Participant 88 who noted the deficiencies of tertiary learning, pointed towards another approach viewed as viable which was collaborative, school based professional learning.

I found the RE that I did at ACU did not prepare me for teaching, the historical context was so far removed from what we teach. I required how to plan a Mass, what resources are best, more practical. It is about getting in and working in a school, that is your best professional development and planning and learning with each other.

These scenarios serve as brief examples, but point towards the conclusion that outside agencies used for professional learning have not proved to be a panacea, and it would be foolish to rely on this form of professional learning meeting the needs of all RE educators. It is important to consult with classroom stakeholders and relevant Catholic education authorities across the state to ensure that all courses offered in RE meets classroom teachers expressed needs. Further, finding a balance between school-based and external PD can be problematic according to participant 64, “I have only participated in school professional development such as religious focus curriculum days, so PD sourced from outside the school environment would be beneficial”.

Professional partnerships outside of the school were viewed more favourably if the theory explored included a practical component. A need to complement these partnerships with ongoing school based learning was also noted. Much educational literature has illustrated that a great deal of untapped knowledge about teaching and learning resides within the school itself (Killion & Harrison, 2006; Victorian Government report, 2009). This argument has been confirmed in two recent studies of professional learning in RE conducted in the primary context of Catholic schools in Tasmanian (Harvey 2010; Healey, 2011). This study in the Melbourne context appears at this stage to mirror these studies.

Summary of this category

Participants viewed opportunities to work with others to improve their professionalism in RE as valuable. Conversely they noted that there are some difficulties, real or perceived with some of these learning partnerships. Whilst both positive and negative experiences were expressed, the constraints provided valuable insights into how to address and improve these relationships in the future. Ongoing evaluation of these partnerships and closer collaboration between organisers and participants may help to overcome some of the perceived problems identified in this data.

Overall summary

It is imperative that RE professional learning be better understood in order that Catholic primary schools and school systems can ensure that they provide relevant and timely structures and supports to empower both individual classroom teachers and educational teams within the Catholic primary school. In turn, this builds the capacity of RE teachers to improve the RE curriculum and affect student learning in RE.

Based on a grounded theory approach, from an anonymous survey of over 123 participants four categories emerged from the data which provided valuable insights into the RE classroom teachers professional learning needs in the Catholic primary context.

They were:

(1) Enhancing teacher pedagogical knowledge.

The pragmatic concerns of participants in this study were clearly evident in this category where teachers prized opportunities to investigate and explore effective practices of teachers which might improve student learning. Classroom teachers added the caveat that such opportunities include contemporary best practice which enabled teachers to respond to the specific needs of the students within their charge.

(2) Enhancing teacher content knowledge

The next category highlighted the importance of strategic professional learning planning which is based on the knowledge of teachers' content needs. Without adequate and contemporary understandings of content RE teachers claimed they can be thwarted in their efforts to deliver quality RE. Further there was a not uncommon perception that professional learning endeavours in RE endeavours are not commensurate with other domains of learning.

(3) Enhancing teacher curriculum supports

The third emerging category identified that again participants wanted contemporary, high quality and innovative RE resources to support their successful implementation of RE. They also indicated that this needs to be privileged by time to experiment and evaluate these supports. To the extent that these requests are met in all local schools requires further investigation.

(4) Enhancing professional learning partnerships

Another point emerging from the data was a concern for further study in partnership with external providers like Universities or the central system which supports teachers in practical ways. This insight raised an issue that requires further consideration. To what extent is there ongoing collaboration with classroom teachers in the efforts to review and strengthen accreditation requirements and other professional partnerships with key RE stakeholders?

Summary

As part of an on-going study, the points of view of the RE classroom educators concerning their professional learning needs can help Catholic primary schools build viable and efficient pathways to support staff and student learning in RE. The findings expressed by a range of classroom teachers reiterated the need to have suitable trained and qualified teachers, supporting the intentions of RDE (CCE, 1988, par. 97) "Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained RE teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation".

The anonymous classroom teachers involved in this study suggested that professional learning in RE can support classroom teachers' teaching practice and help create the conditions that enable teachers and students to take an increased degree of responsibility for their own teaching and learning in RE. The insights raised here while pertinent to the contexts of the participants in this study have the potential to provide platforms for further exploration and discussion with different RE stakeholders within a school. The findings presented may be critiqued and challenged in local contexts to generate new, shared understandings and practices for improved professional learning for RE teachers as well as the shared goal for improved student learning in RE.

Conclusion

This paper has examined and articulated themes that dominate teachers' perceptions based on their experience of professional learning in religious education in a primary catholic school context. It has discussed some preliminary data and identified emergent themes which were used to sort and organise responses from the classroom teachers. It described four key areas identified by the classroom teachers as factors which

are important professional learning needs for religious educators. It has explored the implication of these categories. Consideration and recognition of these categories can support the professional learning of RE staff at every stage of their career.

Through an examination of the professional learning needs from a range of classroom teachers it is possible to become more fully aware of the possibilities and challenges of professional learning in primary schools today and perhaps to identify in a limited way what can be improved in the future. Understanding the needs and expectations of RE staff and fostering trusting and open relationships with them in facilitating professional learning, means that all stakeholders in RE can build their confidence in knowing how to promote professional learning, contribute to professional learning and respond to RE staff requests in professional learning. Effective RE professional learning must always be open to scrutiny and continuous review to ensure that professional learning opportunities provided do in fact build the confidence and skills of RE teachers and in turn build individual, team and system capability.

It is hoped that this ongoing research may continue to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of professional learning experiences for religious educators in Catholic primary schools.

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Why spirituality is a pivotal construct for contemporary religious education theory, practice and research

Religious education and the changing landscape of spirituality Understanding and acknowledging the changed situation of spirituality is crucial for the future of Catholic school religious education. Handing on the faith tradition remains the normative, central concern for Catholic school religious education. However, because of significant changes in the landscape of contemporary spirituality (related to social/cultural change), a relatively exclusive focus on 'handing on the tradition' (while still remaining valuable and important) is no longer an *adequate* approach to religious education in any religious schools. The majority of pupils and their families are no longer regular, practising members of any local community of faith. Their spiritual/moral needs are not being adequately met by religion curricula that are geared mainly towards regular church going families and the maintenance/continuity of the Church. This lack of congruence triggers various problems and issues in religious education. Addressing this hiatus is important for the future development of religious education theory, curriculum and pedagogy – hence its relevance as a focus of research.

Attention to spirituality when developing a contemporary, relevant identity for Catholic schools While this new situation tends to be generally acknowledged, it has never been adequately addressed in the normative Catholic religious education curriculum documents at diocesan level. Ongoing research-informed discourse about contemporary spirituality is therefore fundamentally important for directing and energising efforts to review the appropriateness of content and pedagogy in Catholic school religious education. The very constitution of Catholic schools today seems to endorse this view; they are no longer just Church institutions (like seminaries and theological colleges), but 'semi-state' schools funded by Commonwealth and State governments. The religious education component of the school's mission needs to be more relevant to the spiritual and moral needs of *all* its students. It is argued that steps taken in this direction will also be valuable and not compromising for the pupils who are regular church goers.

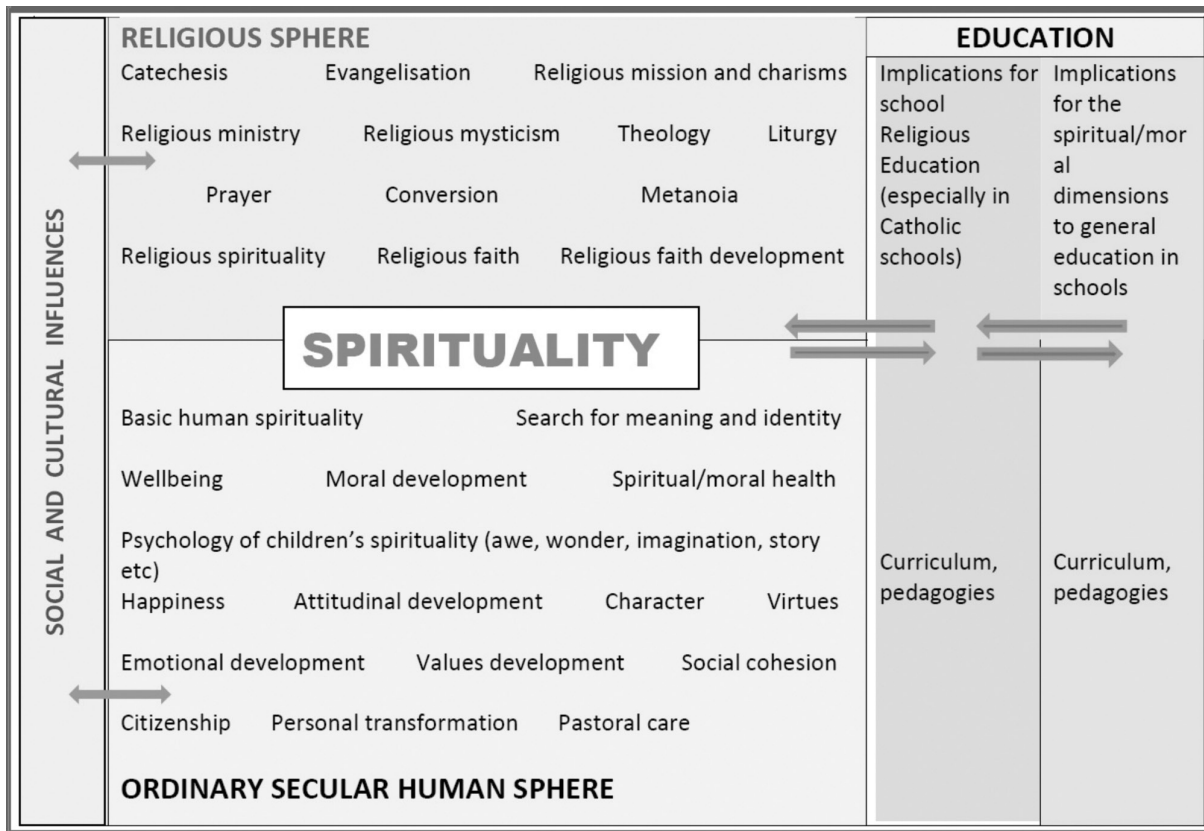
Further, it is argued that an authentic Australian Catholic identity today requires that these schools go beyond what might be regarded as more traditional and idiosyncratically Catholic concerns. They need to show how they are contributing to the common good; and while this involves retaining specifically Catholic religious interests, it also needs to flow over into the potential enhancement of Australian education generally. This can be fostered initially through leadership in the national discourse about promoting the spiritual/moral dimension to schooling for all Australian children. The distinctively Catholic school traditional interest in the spiritual needs to be broadened.

Pivotal place of spirituality as a 'connecting bridge' between the religious and secular spheres Sometimes theologians and others look at the extensive variety of what is covered by the term contemporary spirituality and they tend to dismiss it as 'wishy washy' and lacking substance. At times this judgment is warranted. But spirituality is a construct worth fighting for. It has significant roots in both the *religious sphere and the ordinary secular human sphere*. The word originated within Christianity; until relatively recent times, the words 'religious' and 'spiritual' were synonymous – spirituality was the equivalent of religiosity. It also has connections with contemporary secular constructs that attempt to interpret aspects of personal, spiritual and moral development. It is strategically located like a bridge connecting traditional religious ways of seeing people within God's universe with contemporary secular, psychological ways of trying to describe and interpret personal development – such as resilience, wellbeing etc. And the other valuable quality it displays is its growing connection with education (both religious and secular). These relationships are illustrated diagrammatically in the figure on the next page.

Spirituality, though problematic to define in a coherent way, can function like a mediating central construct in interpreting the spiritual/moral dimensions to religious life (in various religions), as well as in interpreting lives that do not engage with religion. Spirituality is like a 'meeting place' for those interested in the spiritual

dimension of the religious sphere, and for those concerned with the spiritual dimension to the secular sphere – hopefully to promote mutual interest in both spheres. This mediating function is becoming increasingly evident in contemporary writing on spirituality and education.

Diagram illustrating the strategic place of SPIRITUALITY as a ‘bridge’ between the religious and non-religious spheres, together with links to education and socio-cultural influences.



The lower half of the diagram (covering what might be called the *basic human spirituality* sphere) lists a range of psychological and social constructs that are being used in public discourse (especially in education) to interpret personal development in ways that are not necessarily religious, even though individuals may remain open to being informed by the religious dimension. For religious educators based within a religious school, there is a critical need to become literate in these constructs. They help explore the emergence and function of non-religious spiritualities, which now characterise the majority of students in religious schools. They also provide a common language for re-interpreting and applying traditional religious wisdoms and theology that may have become inaccessible to modern people. This is essentially the task of *recontextualising* the religious tradition which is at the heart of the writings of theologian Lieven Boeve; and this, in turn, is central to the current Catholic Schools Identity Research in Victoria conducted by Didier Pollefeyt. The diagram also shows where contemporary writing on children’s spirituality fits in the scheme – it explores and interprets the psychological dimensions to basic human spirituality in children.

The diagrammatic scheme is also useful for giving perspective to religious education research. What is valuable is its multiple focus. It has strong theological elements – but is not focused exclusively on theology; it attends to constructs such as faith and religious development. But it also addresses the psychological dimensions to personal, spiritual and moral development, and this can be used as a way of talking about religion today that can be more relevant to people than much theological/ecclesial language. It is not focusing just on personal/corporate spirituality, but on socio-cultural influences and on implications for religious education as well as implications for spiritual/moral dimension to general education.

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BOOK REVIEWS



John Coleman (2011). *The fruit of the Spirit for everyday life!*

Victoria, Australia: Spectrum Publishing Pty Ltd.

ISBN: 978-0-86786-218-8 (Standard paperback)

In St Paul's letter to the Galatians (5:22) we encounter the gifts the Spirit brings to each person who actively seeks to live a Christian life. These gifts may be reflected in expressions of love, peace, joy, kindness, patience, trustfulness, self-control, goodness and gentleness.

The author John Coleman is an experienced teacher and religious educator who has taught throughout Australia in primary, secondary and adult educational settings. He has also worked as a religious education consultant in Western Australia and holds tertiary qualifications in Theology, Psychology and Education. Among his many achievements is his latest publication entitled, *The fruit of the Spirit for everyday life!*

Coleman indicated that the aim of this small book is to enable teachers, catechists, parents and others to have a simple yet meaningful approach to teaching young people about the fruits of the Spirit as cited in Galatians 5:22. The approach adopted in the book aims to offer clear values to assist and enrich the lives of young Christians. From a Christian perspective Coleman perceives that clearly understanding and encountering such values may enable students to become the best people they can be.

While this book might be of significant value to teachers, catechists and parents involved in Confirmation preparation programmes, Coleman has designed this book with the intention of it being used as a part of one's lifelong journey and exploration. He believes that "growth as fully initiated Christians, may be reflected in the continued growth and manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit in our everyday lives" (p. vi).

The purpose of the book seems more relevant in contemporary times where "within our humanity we are challenged and do not always live out these fruits of the Spirit as we might desire" (p. vi). The book is divided into seven short chapters as well as a series of learning and teaching activities which are oriented towards helping people to embark on "a pathway for leading a good and wholesome life ..." (p. 1).

In Chapter One, An Awakening (How it all Began), Coleman effectively uses simple story telling as a means to help people take a step towards appreciating life's purpose and meaning. The book then proceeds to Chapter Two, Understanding the Fruit of the Spirit, where Coleman emphasises that "the fruit of the Spirit are a tangible way of expressing our inner growth as Christians or simply as people who are seekers for 'the more in life' (p. 5).

Practice, Patience and Perseverance is the title given to Chapter Three which invites the reader and / or learner to consider these virtues as a means to realistically keep the fruit of the Spirit at the forefront of ones thinking and to "seek ways to make it become a more natural part of our lifestyle or way of being" (p. 7). The book then progresses towards a look at the fruit of the Spirit in Chapter Four, The Nine Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This chapter provides a simple and clear understanding of the nine gifts of the spirit which would be helpful to educators as well as students.

Having explored the gifts of the Spirit in Chapter Four, Coleman proceed to “Let the Journey Begin”, which is also the title of Chapter Five. In this chapter Coleman offers “a pathway and an end point to what some may call discovering and living our ‘true self’ (p. 12). Some practical and structural ideas are offered in the following chapters.

Chapter Six titled, A Possible Introductory Timeframe provides a suggested approach on how to teach the fruit of the Spirit over an eleven week cycle (or timeframe). This Chapter is followed by Chapter Seven, Aides for the Journey, which outlines a number of suggested strategies that could be adapted or adopted to help teach about the gifts of the Spirit. Following on from the chapters is a number of appendices that could be used or adapted as black-line masters to aid learning activities.

The Fruit of the Spirit for Every Day Life! provides a simple but realistic approach to living and it can be adapted in several contexts including; school, church community as well as within families and by individuals. It is relevant to Christians who seek to deepen their inner awareness of “what our lives are really about”

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Mark Craig (2011). *God's shabby clothes: Exploring ultimate unity.*
Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller GmbH & Co. KG
ISBN 978-3-639-37753-8

The key underlying premise of Craig’s book is that religious language – in any religious tradition – cannot fully or completely articulate that which cannot be explained, that is, ultimate reality. It can only ever function as a sign post, pointing or signalling beyond itself towards a deeper and more encompassing whole. In the Christian tradition, many would name this deeper and more encompassing whole as God, and in particular, the Christian mystics would name this as the “God within”.

In his book Craig methodically and systematically sets about developing his central thesis. Beginning by noting the elusive nature of certainty, the early chapters of this work note and discuss the limitations inherent in language to express the ineffable. He notes that while various investigative fields, such as physics, biology, the social sciences and religion are each capable of addressing questions of ultimate concern, their effort to do will always be mediated by the particular language system that distinguishes each of these disciplines from each other. Further, Craig notes the ways in which socio-cultural and historical contexts impact upon such a discussion.

The book then sets out to engage some of these various disciplines in conversation, particularly religion (both theistic and non-theistic), atheism (or as Craig terms it, “Atheistic religion”), and science, and to explore the underlying reality that connects them all. It is these later chapters that provide a real spark of interest for the book, as Craig draws on insight from the various world religions, and cleverly juxtaposes these with atheistic and scientific perspectives.

Of particular interest for this reviewer was Craig’s chapter “A conversation with atheistic religion”. He argues that like religion, atheism comprises a set of beliefs requiring the assent of faith as it cannot be proven empirically that God/gods and/or the supernatural do or do not exist. Again, the importance of the limitations of language come to the fore, as Craig argues that Atheism can only ever reject the meanings of the signifying language – the sign posts – that has been traditionally associated with God and the supernatural. He posits that it is possibly the signposts that point towards ultimate reality rather than ultimate reality itself that atheists are essentially rejecting.

Academics will find this book of particular interest, as Craig’s writing style is scholarly and he engages with his chosen themes in an academic style. However, this does not negate the importance and potential interest of this work for practitioners of religious education. Craig has skilfully crafted the work to ensure its accessibility

to a wide audience, although I suspect that many practitioners will be concerned more with the pragmatic application of Craig's work – an area to which there has been little devoted in this particular work. And to be fair, it is not the focus of this particular work.

Perhaps the only other criticism of Craig's work is that many of the references are dated. Craig has drawn on many of the seminal philosophical works to inform his writing. However, one wonders whether these might have been balanced with some more recent and contemporary works. Nonetheless, Craig's work is innovative and this thesis thoroughly and systematically explored and presented. It will provide a valuable point of reference for both academics and practitioners of religious education.

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Lars Laird Iversen (2012). *Learning to be Norwegian: A case study of identity management in religious education in Norway*. Munster: Waxmann
ISBN 978 3 8309 2647 4, 186 pages

In an era of global movement in populations and, perhaps equally significantly, in ideas the formation of national identity has become a hotly contested issue. This is certainly true in Nordic countries. At one level they appear to be paradigms of northern European secularity. At the same time, however, they also demonstrate the tensions evident in dealing with religion in an increasingly globalised culture. Iversen has produced here both an empirical and conceptual study that examines what he calls identity management in a Norwegian context. The book is based on his doctoral work at the University of Warwick and adds a further lustre to this powerhouse of research on European religious education.

Iverson proposes identity management as a key concept in religious education and the national approach to civic formation in Norway. This can be contrasted with any type of overzealous missionary zeal and is very much in keeping with the dominant political philosophy in the country. Religion in Norwegian schools is presented as the repository of core values and as such serves as a major vehicle for generating social cohesion. The author's analysis of classroom interaction though problematises this notion. Here Iverson found no unifying values that all Norwegians be they Christian, secular or relatively new religious groups such as Muslims could subscribe to. He perceptively comments that religion teachers in Norway were not instillers of values but rather served as moderators of disagreement about them. And importantly, since the latest version of the core curriculum was instituted in 1997, the emphasis on values in the classroom has shifted from consideration of their ethical underpinnings to seeing values as instrumental in the construction of identity.

There is great utility in the type of mixed methodology that Iversen uses here. The first part of his analysis centres on a critical evaluation of key educational documents, most notably the various core and national curriculum statements that pertain to how religion is presented in Norwegian schools. His documentary analysis is based on the approach developed by Laclau and Mouffe and makes good use of the historical context in which curriculum planning occurs in Norway. This establishes a theoretical baseline and underscores the intentions of educational planners. Whilst this may be a worthwhile goal, there needs to be a grounding of the abstract with the actual and this is achieved in this book with a more empirical approach which the author provides with his second method of data collection. These are ethnographic notes that he made in schools where the ideal of the curriculum was matched against what actually occurred in classrooms.

I think ethnography is an appropriate research tool in this study design because it gives a strong sense of the complexity of teaching religion *in situ*, or as the author puts it, as variation within the case (p. 81). There is no doubt that richer data could have been generated if the author expanded the scope of the study beyond two schools. By its very nature, however, ethnography is complex and if well done can yield very nuanced results from small samples. Iversen's account of his ethnographic methodology describes its strengths and limitations and could serve as a model for other students considering using this as a research method. A key finding of his school observations was four key strategies for teaching about religion. These are: presenting the facts; facilitating personal sharing; leading discussions and creating consensus. In noting the similarities

between the two schools in which he worked Iversen observes that a key characteristic of both is that they were both very much aware of the cultural context in which they operated. This was emphatically secular and post Christian. As is anticipated in his introductory contextualisation this presents some challenges in reaching consensus and this generated much of the already noted disagreements that were the hallmark of identity formation.

This is a well grounded and interesting study of what will become an increasingly important field in religious education, especially in Europe, that of the role of religious education in forming national identity. The book examines in detail an approach to religious education that is based on an interpretive understanding of the discipline. It helps to set the stage for future research which would establish a broader empirical base for discussing the Norwegian context for religious education. As the author points out, one particularly fruitful area for future work is surveying religion teachers on their perceptions of the role that religious education should play in national identity formation.

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