

## TOWARDS A CREATIVE ARTS APPROACH FOR THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### Introduction

This paper proposes a new approach for the classroom teaching of religious education. The approach draws on my research into how the creative arts, particularly the visual arts and film might be used to enable students to examine how biblical texts have been interpreted and represented through the arts. The Creative Arts approach proposed in this paper is a prospection, a looking forward with possibilities for the future built on what has been helpful from the past. It is a 'constructive' approach in the sense that it lays out possibilities and attempts to draw on what has been done in the past and then moves beyond contemporary notions of religious education.

### Background to the Creative Arts Approach

Through the proposed Creative Arts approach I will argue that classroom religious education needs to develop a culture of critical inquiry that is able to display and reflect what Fiorenza (1999) calls the "rhetoricity of all knowledge" (p. 77). A critical rhetoric of inquiry requires religious educators not only to identify and examine positivist practices but also to acknowledge the theoretical frameworks and socio-political and cultural interests that undergird their approach to teaching religious education. In addition, the inquiry should also critically and systematically reflect on the predominantly discursive practices used by teachers in religious education classrooms. Continuing to rely on discursive practices excludes innovative and imaginative approaches now being employed in other disciplines. Recent advances made in curriculum development through the hermeneutic tradition, critical theory and arts-related investigations have made it possible to construct a new approach to religious education that is creative, engaging, emancipatory and liberating.

A Creative Arts approach to the teaching of religious education pays particular attention to "Critical Framing", a term coined by Cope and Kalantzis (2000), which involves learners in creating a personal and theoretical distance from what they have learned so that they can critically interpret the social and cultural contexts of a text's meaning in relation to its context.

As well as drawing on the work of educationists, the proposed Creative Arts approach draws upon and develops ideas proposed by Kreitzer (1993, 1994), Exum (1993, 1996), Bal (1987, 1999) and Bach (1997, 1999). Initially, Kreitzer (1993, 1994) explored the relatively unmapped territory of the

relationship between theology and film. Kreitzer (1993, 1994) believed that the 'hermeneutical flow could be reversed' by studying representations of biblical texts in films and then returning to examine the biblical text with fresh eyes. He saw representations of biblical texts as a form of midrash, an imaginative expansion of the biblical tradition. He believed that, when viewers are able to identify the midrashic character of film, they may be alerted to the presence of midrash within biblical texts themselves. He acknowledged that while many people have no trouble recognising embellishments in modern reinterpretations of biblical texts, few people realise that the biblical text is also embellished. He saw films and other representations as a way of pointing to the multilayered character of biblical texts. Kreitzer's approach is described below.

Kreitzer (1993) began his exploration of film and the Bible by asking what could be added to our understanding of scripture through a close examination of literary heritage (p. 12). In other words, he explored how we might better understand the scriptures by interacting with some of the twentieth century voices which dialogue with biblical texts. He believed that literary texts might be the very instruments that would help facilitate clarification and redefinition, and provide the means for us to engage anew in the hermeneutical circle (p. 12). While acknowledging that cultural expressions have been important vehicles through which we have accessed biblical materials, he, like many others, has been struck by the increasing dominance of the visual media as the means through which we gain new information. The growing popularity of film as a teaching tool can be evidenced in many disciplines, particularly in the way many English teachers have used film as a means of entry into the works of Shakespeare and other literary classics. Likewise he saw cinematic interpretations of biblical texts as providing a doorway through which we can enter the hermeneutical area of biblical studies.

One of the advantages in using and adapting Kreitzer's idea of reversing the hermeneutical flow is that it allows students to take their place in the hermeneutical circle and to explore how much of their own ideas and influences they bring to the table when interpreting texts. It also enables students to examine the interface between the world of the Bible and the world/s of the creative arts. It is a cross-disciplinary study that allows participants to pay attention to the creative arts and to recognise

their influence upon us. It is only within the last ten to fifteen years that religious educators have drawn attention to the interface between religious education and other disciplines (Jackson, 1990). A cross-disciplinary approach such as the Creative Arts approach is designed to tap into students' interest areas and to reflect and develop current thinking in the area of religious education. Kreitzer's idea was primarily concerned with how films re-presented parts of the biblical text for modern audiences. He did not, however, explore how the 'new texts' may influence interpretations of the 'old texts'. While Kreitzer's idea introduced a way of using films as an insight into biblical texts, there are even more possibilities for teachers who incorporate the work of contemporary feminist biblical scholars into their teaching approach. A combination of these insights forms the core of the Creative Arts approach.

In recent times feminist scholars such as Bal, Exum and Bach have also investigated the role that the arts have played in the retelling of biblical stories. They, unlike Kreitzer, do not privilege the biblical text or indeed any particular retelling. What they tend to do is question how stories of biblical woman are altered, expanded or invented and how gender ideology of the biblical text is reinscribed and challenged by cultural appropriations. For many of them, the role of the reader is central in determining textual meaning and so there is a "plurality of interpretive possibilities" (Exum, 1993). Their two-pronged approach, while centring on the role and interpretation of women in the text, is also concerned with the social and cultural assumptions that cluster around sexual difference and the influence these have on representation and interpretation. Feminist readings are not neutral readings. They challenge people with counter-readings of texts.

The proposed Creative Arts approach combines elements of Kreitzer's reversing the hermeneutical flow with the hermeneutic possibilities presented by feminist scholars and so offers teachers of religious education alternative ways of approaching biblical texts and indeed other areas within the curriculum of religious education.

The Creative Arts approach outlined in this paper attempts to broaden the concept of what is included in the cultural backdrop of religious education. It does not propose to limit the use of the creative arts to merely a practical application and extension activity as Robinson (1977)<sup>1</sup> suggests. Robinson's

approach was criticised by Jackson (1990) for blurring the distinction between religious and aesthetic experience. He believed that Robinson's approach lacked critical analysis. The Creative Arts approach proposed in this paper reflects a shift taking place within religious education, a shift which acknowledges the wide variety of ideas and influences that impact upon religious education. Religious education is no longer seen as the messenger boy of theology (Lee, 1971) but rather as a discipline in its own right whose conversation partners are many and varied and include education, sociology, psychology, literature, art, music and film.

The paper proposes a definite move from faith-forming or catechetical approaches that assume that all members of the class are of the one faith and mindset to an educational model focusing on understanding and learning about religion. The Creative Arts approach proposed in this paper has drawn on the use of the arts by the Christian church in instruction and faith development over the centuries. The current proposal incorporates classic and contemporary creative arts into an educational approach to religious education.

The discussion of biblical texts and characters that has taken place in previous articles has been from the perspective of text reading or textual analysis. Considering a painting or a film as a text is different from appreciating its contribution to art history or to cinematic theory. The Creative Arts approach attempts to explore how culture reads textual and visual images and acknowledges that reading is not neutral. My enthusiasm for using the creative arts in religious education has been confirmed not only because they increase student interest in and engagement with the biblical texts but also because they are seen by me to be the mode of communication for students of the third millennium. While the previous section has provided a theoretical justification for the development of the Creative Arts approach to religious education, the following section highlights the literacies one would need to acquire to maximise the approach.

### Literacies

The Creative Arts approach to religious education aims to increase knowledge and develop literacy – visual literacy, religious literacy and multimodal<sup>2</sup> literacy. Teaching and learning within this approach not only take account of the social and

<sup>1</sup> Building on his research on the spiritual lives of young children, Robinson suggests that a unique and universal spiritual dimension of experience could be awakened through studying religion via the practical use of the creative arts.

<sup>2</sup> According to Kress (2000) all texts are multimodal. No text exists in a single mode even though one modality may dominate. "The concept of multimodality forces a rethinking of the distinctions usually made between communication and use, and in particular between reading and use" (pp. 187-188).

cultural contexts of the learners and 'texts'<sup>3</sup> and also aim to develop critical thinking skills. When students are given opportunities to examine a wide range of texts critically in both print and visual media, they develop more complex ability to interact more intentionally with everything they read and see.

Language is only one of a number of symbol systems which people use to express and share meaning and must therefore be appreciated in its relationship to other forms of expression such as images, sounds, music and electronic communication (Hobbs, 1996a). Changes in communication technologies over the past one hundred years have created a cultural environment that has extended and reshaped understandings of literacy. Literacy is no longer simply a matter of acquiring and decoding, comprehending and producing but now includes the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate in a variety of modes. It is, as Dwyer (2001) suggests, more an "integrated complex of language and thinking processes and skills incorporating a range of habits, attitudes, interest and knowledge, serving a range of purposes in different contexts" (p. 118). An expanded concept of text now operates to include texts of all types and from various cultural contexts. Where being literate once meant that a person could read and write, today a literate person is competent in reading and understanding all manner of texts and is able to function responsibly as a citizen. Literacy is not viewed as a single unitary skill to be applied across disciplines but as various social practices and abilities that relate to purpose and contexts and are intricately connected to practice.

### Religious Literacy

The naming of curriculum literacies<sup>4</sup> has also become common practice. One such curriculum literacy is 'religious literacy'. Religious literacy is different from what Lo Bianco (2000) calls religious-based literacy, a practice of devotional reading of holy books or holy words that is often restricted by gender and by age (p. 103). Religious literacy must encompass the kind of competencies that Green (1988) suggests as essential dimensions of literacy: the operational, the cultural and the critical dimensions. The operational dimension involves "competency with regard to the language system" (p. 160). It is concerned with the way individuals use "language in literacy tasks in order to operate effectively in specific contexts" (Green, 1988, p. 160). The cultural dimension encompasses the meaning aspect of literacy including events that are not only "context specific

but also entail a specific *content*" (p. 160). The cultural dimension recognises that there is a mutually informing relationship between the language system and the meaning system. The critical dimension has to do with the "social construction of knowledge" (p. 162). Implicit in this dimension of literacy is critique, which for Green means that "individuals should not simply participate in culture but should in various ways transform and actively produce it" (p. 163). Religious literacy, at base level, involves learning and understanding the language associated with a particular religious tradition but further implies that a level of interpretation and analysis is available. In today's religiously plural world, religious literacy also requires some knowledge and understanding of at least the major world religions and appreciation for the contribution religion makes to culture.

Dwyer (2001) supports the idea and sees certain advantages in bringing the term 'religious literacy' to the literacy table. He describes it as a metaphor for an approach to religious education that is strictly educational rather than catechetical in nature, and while he has other reservations regarding the term 'literacy' because of its broad interpretations within the community, he promotes bringing religious literacy into general discussion. He asks if there is a specific language for religious education and what its connection to other curriculum areas might be. He also considers the conversation regarding different understandings of religious education (Dwyer, 2001, pp. 120-121).

The term "religious literacy" is mainly used by Australian religious educators who emphasise an educational approach to the teaching of religion and who may be reflecting the Australian Government's discourse on achieving higher levels of literacy and numeracy. Religious literacy may, as Moran (1989) says, "hold the key to thinking through a developed meaning of religious education" (p. 225) just as the interaction between traditional religious language and secular language might find a new "mediation to confront ancient wisdom with modern knowledge and at the same time uncover the religious traditions in secular language" (Moran, 1989, p. 29).

### Visual Literacy

Since the invention of the printing press and the subsequent concentration on achieving mass literacy, schools and other institutions of learning have relied particularly on the printed word. Today, however, there are many literacies and some scholars argue that too much time in schools is being spent on print literacy to the detriment of other literacies. One of the literacies needing further development is visual literacy. While the

<sup>3</sup> 'Texts' include written, visual, aural and film.

<sup>4</sup> Literacies such as verbal, media, visual, computer, technological, aesthetic and environmental.

concept of visual literacy did not appear to capture the attention of educators until film and television were identified as two of the most powerful influences on the behaviour and knowledge of students, it nonetheless is an important ability to acquire.

Dondis (1973) challenges teachers to increase understandings of visual literacy when he says:

if the invention of moveable type created a mandate for universal verbal literacy, surely the invention of the camera and all its collateral and continually developing forms makes the achievement of universal visual literacy as an educational necessity long overdue (p. ix).

Visual literacy theory has developed and borrowed ideas from philosophy, art, linguistics, perceptual psychology, imagery theory and communication research. It is different from verbal literacy because each image, illustrative text or film requires an understanding of the visual grammar used. Whether singly or in sequence all pictures have a lexicon of their own. Knowing how messages are constructed helps the reader better interpret the meaning of the work.

The predominance of images as a means of communication cannot be overstated. We are all influenced, taught and manipulated by all kinds of visual information from television, computers, advertisements, body language and films. The ability to read and write well in verbal languages is no longer sufficient. It is now essential to develop the ability to read visual images.

Mitchell (1994) also postulates that visual images are now more important in communicating meaning than words. Kress (1990) suggests that the traditional roles assigned to written and visual texts have been reversed and that visual texts now carry most of the meaning, while written texts are used merely to comment on visual texts.

People construct their identities and futures in relation to the cultural texts they encounter. "Seeing comes before words... the child looks and recognises before it can speak... Seeing establishes our place in the world" (Berger, 1972, p. 7). Children are introduced to the world through images and for some time they continue to learn in multidimensional environments. It has been suggested that perhaps as much as eighty per cent of what we know we have learned visually. Learning from images requires a different skill from learning from printed words. In print we learn from static lines that were directed by the technology of the printing press; information was therefore linear and often sequential. Today,

however, the traditional linear way of thinking is being complemented by a relational, interdependent mode of thinking with interactive images (Fredette, 1994).

To date little has been done in religious education classrooms to enhance or harness the visual literacy of students. While many teachers use a variety of texts to enrich the teaching of religion and appear to be comfortable moving between textbook, newspaper, film and videotape, they nonetheless provide little instructional support in helping students analyse the messages of such texts. Films are currently used in classrooms to illustrate what is being said rather than as texts which interact with the biblical text. While a few teachers have made efforts at teaching visual literacy, it has not been part of the official curriculum of religious education.

The incorporation of visual literacy as an essential component of the Creative Arts approach to religious education should empower students to critique images and ultimately become critical readers and interpreters of texts, whether verbal or multimodal.

### Multimodal Literacy

Over the last two to three decades a revolution has taken place in the area of communication. It is now widely recognised that meaning is transmitted through a variety of modes such as images, page layout, screen formats; audio modes comprising music, and sound effects; gestural modes such as body languages and sensuality; spatial modes including the meanings of environmental space, architectural space. Thus all meaning-making is multimodal (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 28).

The dominance of the visual in many areas of public communication has in Kress' (2000) opinion dislodged written language from the central position it once held. According to Kress (2000), multimodality can be thought of in three ways:

First, all texts are multimodal...no texts can exist in a single mode, so that all texts are always multimodal although one modality among these can dominate. Second, there are texts and objects (of a semiotic kind) which exist predominantly in a mode or modes other than the (multi) mode of language. And third, there are systems of communication and representation which are acknowledged in culture to be multimodal (pp. 187-188).

An ancient form of multimodality is said to be the religious practice of reading holy books accompanied by rocking and other gestural



practices. These movements and gestures were seen to be critical to the reading process since

relation between reader and text involves transcendence. Committing sacred words to the body, that is infusing the body or embodying the word and its transcendent knowledge, is a meaning-making (or meaning-receiving) form of communication that is not readily identifiable in English or any other Western practice (Lo Bianco, 2000, p. 104).

Some practices used by Shakers and Christian mystics could be also considered as multimodal (Lo Bianco, 2000, p. 104).

According to Cope and Kalantzis (2000), the key to understanding multimodal meaning is hybridity and intertextuality. Hybridity "highlights the mechanisms of creativity and of culture-as-process as particularly salient in contemporary society" (p. 29). Today people create by "hybridising", using established materials and conventions in new ways and within new areas of meaning. Some popular music provides examples of hybridity in that it uses and combines music from various cultures and traditions. For example, religious music such as Gregorian Chant has in some recordings been interwoven with electronic music. Intertextuality refers to the multifaceted way in which meaning is formed (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 30) and relies on the reader to make links and references across texts.

According to Lo Bianco (2000), "many students already utilize complex literacy awareness daily: literacies which invoke ethnic, ideological, religious, script-technical and nation-identity statuses" (p. 101). Multimodal literacy should provide students with a durable and transportable knowledge and skills for participation in a rapidly evolving communication environment.

### **Towards Practice: Reading Texts**

'Seeing' pictures may appear to be a simple matter, but it is not. The act of seeing is cognitively driven (Fredette, 1994). Studies have revealed that viewers of all ages do not divide their attention equally among the different areas to be seen and indeed may miss some aspects altogether. If, for example, students have not noticed certain aspects of a visual text, teachers may find it useful to guide their students' attention. Students could learn to read a text through being encouraged to focus on a particular level and gradually, through a series of exercises that explore a particular aspect such as description, analysis of form, creative interpretation, and critical interpretation, could gain increased facility in reading. According to Fredette

(1994), attention to sensory and formal properties is an important starting point for novice viewers. By being asked questions about what they see, novice viewers begin to focus and name what they are seeing and then, by paying attention to various properties, they begin to develop skills in analytical seeing, pattern determining, organising and reorganising information, and paying attention to fine details. Fredette adds the levels of creative and critical interpretation, which are higher-level process skills. Critical interpretation of a visual image involves responses to certain types of visual content that may directly illustrate the cultural or the socio-political context of a work. Expanding prior knowledge through a cultural studies investigation also helps to facilitate critical interpretation and to unpack multiple meanings contained in texts. Rather than the teacher using a 'teacher centred instruction' approach, it will be of more educational value to students if an inquiry process is employed.

Crumlin (2001), building on Freedberg (1989), suggests that a way to enter a work of art is to explore it in four layers. The first layer is uncovered when people respond to the question, 'What do you see?' The second layer, iconography<sup>5</sup>, is the story or narrative to which the text refers. The third, iconology, involves researching the cultural, social and political context of the artist and the time in which the work was created and how this is reflected in the work. The fourth layer referred to, as the beholder layer, beyond subject matter and recognition of iconography and involves the relationship developed between viewer and text. Entering into the work this way may bring the viewer to new knowledge or push the viewer to the edge (the boundaries of what they know and understand) to where they may not want to go.

The creative arts may be used at many levels of the teaching process. The ability to learn from the creative arts is determined by two important factors. These are what the learner knows and what skills the learner has acquired for interpreting the creative arts. The 'texts' selected should encourage students to think about what they are seeing and experiencing in relation to what they are learning. Another important factor in the process is the strategy the teacher uses to guide or direct the learner's attention to the central attributes of the

<sup>5</sup> Iconography, "the study of visual images, is devoted to elucidating the original meanings of works of art by reference to the literary sources of narrative compositions and by investigating the symbols and types of allegory used by artists in different places and periods" (Honour & Fleming, 1999, p. 25).

'texts'<sup>6</sup>. "Knowing how messages are constructed helps the reader appreciate the artistry involved and helps better interpret the meaning of the work" (Hobbs, 1998, p. 3). Access to the message entails being able to decode symbols, and to locate, organise and retrieve information. The ability to analyse a message is assisted by knowing the historical, political or economic contexts of its production and the history of its consumption. Every reading of a 'text' has the potential to produce multiple meanings.

### Film and Television

The uses to which teachers put film and television in the classroom are many and vary from enrichment or motivation to 'teaching the lesson'. When television is used merely as a way of delivering facts or information, it reflects Bruner's transmission model where learning is a process of sending information by those who know more to those who know less. On the other hand, when television, video and other media are used well, they can be significant aids in the teaching and learning process (Hobbs, 1996a). The most inefficient usage occurs when these media are used as time-fillers. Even when film and television are being carefully used as a teaching tool, teachers face two impediments to their usefulness as students have been conditioned by years of habitual viewing that has reinforced their belief that film and television are casual pastimes and exist solely to entertain. Hobbs (1996a) tells us that students associate their viewing of television at school with their home viewing, which is casual and relaxed. Postman (1986) identifies the entertainment dimension of film and television as dangerous to teaching. He further perceives the style of learning promoted on shows like *Sesame Street* as hostile to book or school learning since it reinforces the view that television is synonymous with entertainment. For Postman (1986),

Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death (p. 4).

Many would not totally agree with Postman but teachers would do well to take his views into consideration.

Over twenty years ago, Apple (1979) demonstrated how political and economic forces rather than pedagogy and epistemology shaped the content and

format of textbooks. These forces also shape multimedia. Multimedia allow more subtle influences than those available through the written text and Polin (2000) urges educators to pay attention not only to the motivation behind publishing and production decisions but also to the classroom uses to which the material is put.

DeVaney (1994) identifies popular culture as another of the influences that impacts on the teaching and learning process. She says:

Popular culture remains as a teacher who competes with the classroom teacher for students from pre-school through college, whether educators care to acknowledge it or not. It has a profound effect on the construction of student knowledge. It has a profound effect on the internal construction of students' perception of the Other. These effects should not be ignored (DeVaney, 1994, pp. 356-357).

Therefore it is essential that religious educators pay attention to the visual images they use in religious education classrooms.

Films impact strongly on popular culture, grappling in various ways with people's questions, values and meaning, making these available for reflection and interpretation even while reshaping them. As visual stories that use imaginative constructs and story in sight, sound, and movement, films can invite people to explore religious issues.

The power of mass media messages and how individuals interpret them is often underestimated. The influence of television on shaping opinions on such serious issues as war is a new phenomenon. Bray (2001) has drawn our attention to television and how it

has shaped our perceptions of war. Footage from America's war in Vietnam – the first to receive comprehensive television coverage – profoundly changed how many in the United States, and Australia, perceived war. Moving pictures of the grim carnage there destroyed forever any glorious fantasies of derring-do which may have survived World War II (Bray, 2001)

Bray further believes that war, in turn, is shaping television and instances the number of film and television shows cancelled after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack in New York. Schools need to help students process this complex interaction.

### A New Proposal

Harris (1979) believes that we have not paid sufficient attention to the arts in religious education

<sup>6</sup> For example Rembrandt's inclusion of empty slippers, small house dog, and red clothes signal the viewer that the scene is in a house of ill repute.

nor have we studied aesthetic or artistic development. Rather we have tended to concentrate and rely on fields such as educational psychology, pedagogy, theology and epistemology to develop the curriculum area. She argues that the gap between the arts and the teaching of religion should be bridged:

(Religious education is) a field where the religious intersects with education, and the aesthetic is a dimension of both...Religion, with its ties to creativity and feeling, has always been the vehicle through which peoples have expressed their relationship to the divine. Education, with its focus on the intentional reconstruction of experience, has relied strongly on the creation of *conceptual* form, but is in need of the *perceptible* form more proper to art. Thus, the field can only be enhanced by inclusion of the aesthetic (p. 143).

It is from such a position that the Creative Arts approach to the teaching of religious education makes its departure.

### **A Critically Engaging Creative Arts Approach**

Building on sound educational practice, the Critically Engaging Creative Arts (CECA) Approach to religious education proposed in this paper begins with known or familiar material then moves to the unknown or unfamiliar. The Critically Engaging Creative Arts (CECA) Approach to teaching religion, unlike other approaches, is not specifically related to content but rather to the way students are invited to take part in the process of learning through critical engagement with the arts. The proposed CECA Approach comprises three movements, an Inquiry movement, an Investigation movement, and an Appraisal and Demonstration movement. The three movements are briefly described below. While this paper has confined itself to one area of religious education, namely biblical education, my contention is that the CECA Approach could be used in many, if not all, areas available for study within religious education.

The Inquiry movement invites students to recall what they know about a particular character or event and if possible to identify how they acquired this information. The Investigation movement can be broken into two parts. The first part deals with various artistic interpretations of the chosen character or event while the second part deals with relevant biblical texts relating to the character or event. The final movement, the Critical Appraisal and Demonstration movement, requires that students not only critically appraise the texts in the light of their investigations but also demonstrate or

represent their acquired knowledge in a new or unfamiliar context.

### **General Introduction to the CECA Approach**

Teachers interested in using a CECA Approach need to begin by selecting a biblical story, character or event. Consider, for example, a series of lessons based on the book of Ruth. In preparation for the class, the teacher would collect a wide variety of 'texts' (pictures, songs, movies, children's books, artworks, statues) retelling the story of Ruth. The following paragraphs outline how the CECA Approach would operate.

### **Inquiry Movement**

The teacher elicits students' knowledge of the story, event or character chosen ensuring that students indicate sources of their information, that is, whether they remember it from children's Bible stories, movies, pictures or songs. The information provided by the students is sorted and analysed.

### **Investigation Movement**

This movement assists students to gain new knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the story, character or event and is best presented in two parts.

### **Part A**

Part A of the movement focuses on creative arts 'texts' that deal with the chosen character, event or story. Students are provided with or find for themselves examples of texts which retell or represent the biblical text in a different mode. Students then examine, investigate and research the artistic texts using a modified form of cultural analysis<sup>7</sup>. When this section of the investigation is

<sup>7</sup> Cultural analysis is "based on a keen awareness of the critic's situatedness in the present, the social and cultural present from which we look, and look back, at the objects that are always already of the past, objects that we take to define our present culture. Thus, it can be summarised by the phrase 'cultural memory in the present.' As such, it is immediately obvious that cultural analysis entertains an ambivalent relation to history as it is or has been traditionally practiced...Far from being indifferent to history, cultural analysis problematises history's silent assumption in order to come to an understanding of the past that is different. This understanding is not based on an attempt to isolate and enshrine the past in an objectivist 'reconstruction', nor on an effort to project it on an evolutionist line not altogether left behind in current historical practice. Nor is it committed to deceptive synchronism. Instead, cultural analysis seeks to understand the past as *part of* the present, as what we have around us, and without which no culture would be able to exist" (Bal, 1999, p. 1).

complete students should be able to use the evidence they have uncovered to draw some conclusions regarding various perspectives presented in the artistic texts.

### **Part B**

Part B examines biblical texts related to the story, character or event and introduces students to some of the approaches of contemporary biblical investigation to enhance their research and analysis of relevant biblical texts. For instance the idea of a hermeneutic of suspicion or reading the story looking for gaps and omissions may be introduced to the students. When this section is complete, students should be able to use the evidence they have uncovered to draw some conclusions regarding various perspectives presented in the biblical texts.

### **Critical Appraisal and Demonstration Movement**

This movement is in two parts and requires students to critically engage with the biblical texts presented and demonstrate or represent their knowledge in a new or unfamiliar context.

### **Part A**

Using the information gathered from their research and analysis in the Investigation movement, students begin to reinterpret all of the relevant texts in the light of their newly acquired information.

### **Part B**

When all the information has been presented and collated, students are invited to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge by re-presenting the character or event in the light of what they have learned. They may for instance write a children's book or a newspaper article or a song incorporating their newfound knowledge.

While my experience with the CECA Approach has been predominantly with secondary level students, I nevertheless believe that the approach has possibilities for every level of education from Pre-school to Year 12 and beyond. What follows is a sample unit outlining how the CECA Approach might be used in a senior secondary classroom.

In order to make the example as helpful as possible, I have arranged it in a way that most educational authorities would recognise, using the standard headings of: Unit Title, Lessons Series, Year Level, Key Concepts, Holistic Objective and General Objectives. The learning objectives are of four kinds: Knowledge objectives, Process objectives, Communication and Research objectives and Affective objectives. The first three domains can be clearly linked to assessment tasks, while the affective objectives describe attitudes, values and

feelings that the approach aims to develop, but that are not intended to be assessed. The elements of this approach are most clearly discernible within the unit example.

When the CECA Approach is applied to different age levels, the three movements remain basically the same, but the emphasis would be different for each age level. In the early childhood years more emphasis would be given to knowing and understanding the biblical text via the creative arts while at senior secondary level a greater emphasis would be placed on cultural analysis of selected 'texts' both from the creative arts and the Bible.

### **SENIOR SECONDARY CLASSROOM EXAMPLE**

**Unit Title:** Women in the Christian Scriptures

**Lesson Series:** Mary Magdalene

**Year Level:** 11/12 (ages 16 - 18)

**Key Concepts:** Women in the time of Jesus, androcentric interpretations of biblical texts and characters, women in the early Christian period, patriarchy and its influence through time, the influence of the creative arts on popular opinion.

**Holistic Objective:** At the culmination of this series of lessons, students will have been assisted to analyse and critique various representations of Mary Magdalene.

They will demonstrate their understanding by working cooperatively as a group to create a web site which explores the character of Mary Magdalene and her role in society. The website should include historical information, various texts depicting Mary Magdalene, contemporary scholarship relating to Mary Magdalene, cultural analysis of Mary Magdalene 'texts', and analysis of reasons for historical distortions of Mary Magdalene's character which persist in contemporary understanding.

### **General Objectives**

The learning activities designed for this unit will assist students to:

### **Knowledge objectives:**

- ❖ Become familiar with various 'texts' relating to Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Describe the cultural settings and influence of various 'texts' relating to Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Report on various interpretations relating to the character of Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Review current biblical research relating to Mary Magdalene



- ❖ Identify examples of gender bias and androcentric interpretations relating to Mary Magdalene

#### Process Objectives:

- ❖ Compare and contrast various 'texts' relating to Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Integrate ideas and predict trends in contemporary interpretations of Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Hypothesise reasons for shifts in the early Christian Church's interpretations of Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Test hypotheses against available evidence
- ❖ Justify conclusions using evidence
- ❖ Defend hypothesis in the light of research

#### Communication and Research Objectives:

- ❖ Select and gather information about Mary Magdalene from a variety of sources
- ❖ Organise information by summarising research notes, referencing and creating bibliographies
- ❖ Identify issues for investigation relating to Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Frame research questions relating to Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Present information using appropriate genres and language conventions appropriate to the task

#### Affective Objectives:

- ❖ Move beyond current stereotypes of Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Appreciate issues such as gender bias
- ❖ Develop appreciation of Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Value knowledge of how attitudes are formed
- ❖ Appreciate contextual factors contributing to shaping portrayals of Mary Magdalene

#### Applying the CECA Approach Inquiry Movement

##### Who is Mary Magdalene?

Responses to this question are incorporated into an activity such as the 'Snowball Activity' which follows.

##### Snowball Activity

- Students are invited to record on a piece of paper a statement, phrase or comment about Mary Magdalene.
- When all have completed their comment or phrase, students are directed to scrunch their piece of paper and to throw it across the room.
- Class members pick up a paper, read what is written on it and then either respond to the statement or phrase or write something new.

- Repeat process three or four times.
- Students are then invited to share with the class comments recorded on their current piece of paper.
- Record and collate responses into positive and negative images of Mary Magdalene.
- Students are asked to think about where they obtained the information that influenced their comments.
- Record these sources.
- Discuss emergent information and student responses.

#### Investigation Movement

Learning activities are based around creative arts 'texts' of Mary Magdalene

##### Part A

- ❖ Students are invited to find a variety of 'texts' representing Mary Magdalene. The 'texts' could include art works (Classical and Modern), poetry and prose, songs, and excerpts from movies such as *King of Kings*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Jesus of Montreal*, and educational videos.
- ❖ Display 'texts', inviting students to comment on any commonality in the representations.
- ❖ Invite students to select an image or representation of Mary Magdalene and research it using a cultural studies approach.
- ❖ Research questions could include:
  - Who painted, wrote, created the image?
  - What was the social and cultural context during the production phase of the text?
  - What social, political, economic or religious ideology can be identified in the image?
  - What social and cultural influences are evident in the text?
  - What explicit message is presented by the 'text'?
  - Do you discern implicit messages presented by the 'text'?
- ❖ Individual students present their findings to the class for general discussion of their discoveries.
- ❖ Students analyse, synthesise and evaluate the information gathered.
- ❖ Students propose conclusions based on the evidence gathered thus far.

##### Part B

Learning activities are based around biblical and extra-biblical 'texts' related to Mary Magdalene

- ❖ Students divide into small groups to analyse the following biblical texts.
- ❖ Biblical texts which name Mary Magdalene
  - *Witness to the crucifixion*
    - Matthew 27:55-56
    - Mark 15:40-41
    - Luke 23:49
    - John 19:25-27
  - *Women at the tomb*
    - Matthew 28: 1-8
    - Mark 16:1-8
    - Luke 24:1-12
    - John 20:1-13
  - *Women who travelled with Jesus*
    - Luke 8:1-3
- ❖ Texts commonly wrongly identified as referring to Mary Magdalene
  - *Anointing and wiping feet with hair*
    - Luke 7:36-50
    - Matthew 26:1-13
    - Mark 14:1-9
    - John 12:1-11
- ❖ Texts wrongly identified by some as referring to Mary Magdalene
  - *Mary and Martha*
    - Luke 10:38-42
  - *Woman caught in adultery*
    - John 8:1-11
- ❖ Students compile a comparative chart recording evidence from the biblical texts relating to Mary Magdalene.
- ❖ Students draw conclusions based on the information they have found in the biblical texts.
- ❖ Compare these conclusions with those drawn from the creative arts.
- ❖ Students search for and examine extra-canonical materials and church traditions that have influenced thinking regarding Mary Magdalene such as the Gospels of Mary and of Philip, Patristic texts and homilies of Gregory the Great.
- ❖ Students analyse, synthesise and evaluate the information gathered.
- ❖ Students reach a series of conclusions based on the evidence gathered.

### Critical Appraisal and Demonstration Movement

#### Part A

- ❖ Using the information gathered in the *Investigation Movement*, students critically appraise the evidence collected and develop a hypothesis about Mary Magdalene and her place in society.

#### Part B

- ❖ Students demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge by working cooperatively in small groups to develop various sections of the web site such as the following.
  - historical information
  - representations in the creative arts
  - relevant biblical texts
  - contemporary scholarship
  - common misconceptions
  - analysis of causes of misconceptions

#### Evaluative Conclusion

- ❖ Students journal their learnings regarding Mary Magdalene through the cooperative process of the CECA Approach.

#### Conclusion

The Critically Engaging Creative Arts Approach described in this paper has provided an example of how the creative arts might be utilised and applied to the classroom teaching of religion. The discussion in the first section of the paper, which focused on religious, visual and multimodal literacy, combined with counter readings such as feminist approaches to scripture, illuminated the 'end' of the Critically Engaging Creative Arts Approach. The approach was then presented in generic form and developed in an exemplar unit for use in senior secondary classrooms. While this paper has confined itself to one area of religious education, namely biblical education, my contention is that the Critically Engaging Creative Arts Approach could be used in many if not all areas available for study within religious education and that it provides a creative and interesting way to dialogue with 'texts'.

#### References

- Apple, M. (1979). *Ideology and curriculum*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bach, A. (1997b). *Women, seduction and betrayal in biblical narrative*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Bach, A. (1999). Cracking the production code: Watching biblical scholars read films. *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*, 7, 11-34.
- Bal, M. (1987). *Lethal love: Feminist literary readings of biblical love stories*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Bal, M. (Ed.). (1999). *The practice of cultural analysis: Exposing interdisciplinary interpretation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.

- Bray, N. (2001, 29 September). *television*. *The Courier Mail*, pp. 2.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. South Yarra: Macmillan.
- Crumlin, R. (2001, November 23). *Floortalk*. Paper presented at the O Soul O Spirit O Fire, celebrating fifty years of the Blake Prize for Religious Art, Queensland University of Technology Art Museum.
- DeVaney, A. (1994). Ethical considerations of visuals in the classroom: African-Americans and Hollywood film. In D. M. Moore & F. M. Dwyer (Eds.), *Visual literacy: A spectrum of visual learning* (pp. 355-368). New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications.
- Dondis, D. (1973). *A primer of visual literacy*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Dwyer, B. (2001). Religious literacy: A useful concept? In M. Ryan (Ed.), *Echo and silence: Contemporary issues for Australian religious educators* (pp. 117-125). Katoomba: Social Science Press.
- Exum, J. C. (1993). *Fragmented women: Feminist (sub)versions of biblical narratives*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International.
- Exum, J. C. (1996a). Bathsheba plotted, shot and painted. *SEMEIA*, 74, 47-74.
- Fiorenza, E. S. (1999). *Rhetoric and ethic: The politics of biblical studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Freedberg, D. (1989). *The power of images: Studies in the history and theory of response*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fredette, B., W. (1994). Use of visuals in schools (curriculum and instruction). In D. M. Moore & F. M. Dwyer (Eds.), *Visual literacy: A spectrum of visual learning* (pp. 235-256). New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications.
- Green, B. (1988). Subject-specific literacy and school learning: A focus on writing. *Australian Journal of Education*, 32(2), 156-179.
- Harris, M. (1979). A model for aesthetic education. In G. Durka, & Smith, J. (Ed.), *Aesthetic dimensions of religious education*. (pp. 141-152). New York: Paulist Press.
- Hobbs, R. (1996a). *Expanding the concept of literacy*. Available: <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/FA/mlhobbs/expanding.html> [2000, 18 October].
- Hobbs, R. (1998). Literacy for the information age. In J. Flood & D. Lapp & B. Heath (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts* (pp. 7-14). New York: Macmillan.
- Jackson, R. (1990). Religious studies and developments in religious education in England and Wales. In U. King (Ed.), *Turning points in religious studies: Essays in honour of Geoffrey Parrinder* (pp. 102-116). Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 182-202). South Yarra: Macmillan.
- Kreitzer, L. J. (1993). *The New Testament in fiction and film: On reversing the hermeneutical flow*. Sheffield: JSOT.
- Kreitzer, L. J. (1994). *The Old Testament in fiction and film: On reversing the hermeneutical flow*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Lee, J. M. (1971). *The shape of religious instruction*. Mishawaka: Religious Education Press Inc.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2000). Multiliteracies and multilingualism. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 92-105). London: Macmillan.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Moran, G. (1989). *Religious education as a second language*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press.
- Polin, L. *Examining the Emperor's New Clothes: The use of existing video in multimedia packages*, [webpage]. Available: <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/FA/MLArticleFolder/emperor.html> [2000, 18 October].
- Postman, N. (1986). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. London: Heinemann.
- Robinson, E. (1977). *The original vision: A study of the religious experience of childhood*. Oxford: The Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College.

**\*Dr Peta Goldberg rsm** is based in Brisbane and is Head of the School of Religious Education at Australian Catholic University. Her research interests are primarily focused on the arts and religious education and the teaching of world religions.