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A DISCUSSION OF SOME AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH STUDIES THAT HAVE INFLUENCED THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE PAST FEW DECADES

Introduction

The nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools has continued to be a source of much speculation, discussion and reflection during the past few decades. Contributors to the field have operated out of varied contexts and concerns which reflect their different understandings of the nature and purpose of the subject. In addition, the contemporary Australian context has been influenced by cultural, political and technological changes which have impacted on the curriculum practice in the wider educational arena. Equally, Australian religious educators have been affected by accelerated changes in educational theory and practices in religious education and by the growing pluralism in theologies in the Catholic church (Welbourne, 1997). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that there are often varying levels of agreement concerning the practice of religious education which creates a compelling problem for educators who are trying to find the most effective way to make religious education challenging, meaningful and relevant for their students. A particular issue that appears to remain unresolved is finding the most appropriate way to promote both knowledge and meaningful engagement in classroom practice.

Such a situation has led many scholars and educators to attempt to find and provide answers through research studies in religious education, and some of these findings have had varying impact on different aspects relating to the practice of religious education. This article attempts to identify just a few of these scholars and their particular research findings which have influenced curriculum development in religious education over the past several years, thereby providing a brief historical overview, particularly in the areas of approaches to teaching and learning, assessment and the role ad characteristics of religious educators and religious education coordinators.

Background

Religious education in Catholic schools has traditionally been seen as an essential part of the mission of the church. Its nature and purpose were drawn from within the faith community and, as such, was an education in faith, that is, the objective was to increase knowledge, understanding and practice of the faith tradition with desire to promote personal faith development.

This has been explicitly expressed in church documents since Vatican II, for instance in *Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal* (RDECS), where the school was seen as a "pastoral instrument" of the church, an instrument that could become "more effective in proclaiming the Gospel and promoting human formation" (1988, #31). The following statement from the RDECS illustrated this thinking:

> The Catholic school is one of these pastoral instruments; its specific pastoral service consists in mediating between faith and culture: being faithful to the newness of the Gospel while at the same time respecting the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge (RDECS, 1988, #31).

Traditionally, there have been two elements of an education in faith. These are catechesis and evangelisation. The former provided the basis for traditional religious education programs since catechesis was:

> intended for those who have made, even implicitly, the fundamental choice of Christ and His Church. It is at the service of men. It takes into consideration their actual stages of Christian growth, their crises and their spiritual progress. It meets them as they are by a variety of means and methods suggested by the competent pastoral authority or the experience of those who are adults in the faith (REF, 1970, #31).

Hence, the main focus of the catechetical process is to help a person to continue to grow in faith within a community of believers which made it highly relevant to the context of Catholic schools in the past where most students were members of a church-going community.

The other element, evangelisation, is "that first announcement of salvation to someone who, for various reasons, has no knowledge of it, or does not yet believe it" (REF, 1970, #25). *The General Catechetical Directory* (GCD) (1971) recognised

that there was an interdependence between evangelisation and catechesis that arose from both their nature and practice and, responding to the pluralistic values of contemporary society, it suggested that:

> In times past, the cultural tradition favoured the transmission of the Faith to a greater extent than it does today; in our times, however, the cultural tradition has undergone considerable change, with the result that less and less can one depend on continued transmission by means of it … some renewal in evangelisation is needed for transmitting the same Faith to new generations … Christian faith requires explanations and new forms of expression so that it may take root in all successive cultures (GCD, 1971, #2).

Macdonald (1988), in acknowledgement of the compulsory nature of religious education in Catholic schools, and given the growing plurality of Australian society, suggested that teachers may sometimes decide that a catechetical approach is neither appropriate nor possible, then education in faith may be expressed as evangelisation so as to enable youth:

- to consider the human quest for meaning in life;
- to reflect on human experience in the light of various meaning and values systems;
- to develop a seriousness about human values;
- to become aware of the different belief systems within the community;
- to explore the different dimensions of religion;
- to develop a sensitive understanding of the religious systems by which people live, including Christian, non-Christian and traditionally non- religious systems, and
- to develop a critical understanding and appreciation of Christianity and of the Catholic faith tradition in particular (1988, p. 36).

Thus, in listing a number of different aspects related to the human search for meaning, Macdonald made it clear that, depending on the circumstances, education in faith can assume the forms of both catechesis and evangelisation in today's classroom.

Ryan and Malone (1996) also argued that there were appropriate times for adopting the evangelisation process for specific groups in religious education in a Catholic school. They described the two distinct functions provided by catechesis and evangelisation and asserted that the catechetical process placed emphasis on the sharing and the ongoing development of faith and it assumed that the context consisted of a community of believers who are attempting to live their lives according to the Catholic faith tradition. As this was not always an accurate situation in today's pluralist classrooms, the evangelical process was a necessary feature, where the emphasis or goal was to proclaim the Christian Gospel in such a way that students may be led to believe in it as the Word of God and accept it in their lives.

Early Influential Theorists

Two early influential writers who identified the implications of the growing pluralism of Australia and the implications of the developing awareness of post Vatican Catholic communities were Rummery (1975) and Rossiter (1981a), both pioneers amongst religious education theorists. Their work was conducted at a time when religious educators were coming to grips with the new learnings and understandings that proceeded from Vatican II, in particular, new understandings of Revelation (see *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum* in Flannery, 1996), the human person's right to religious freedom (see in Flannery, 1996), and the changed attitude of the Catholic church to people of other faith traditions (see *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate,* in Flannery, 1996).

Prior to Vatican II, the content of religious education had been based on the catechism, and the teaching approach was authoritative, proclaiming the message of the Catholic church (Rummery, 1975), that is, it was framed in a catechetical model. Rossiter (1981b) used the term "doctrinal" to describe this approach because the teaching was based on Christian doctrine which formed the content of the catechism. Lovat (1989) labelled it "Specific" or "Dogmatic" and described the approach as 'faith-forming'.

The most common teaching method used was the question and answer format which was consistent with the methodology of other subjects at that time. However, Rummery (1975) argued that the traditional approach, with its focus heavily on rote learning of the church's teachings, operated on the assumption that 'to know' was 'to believe' which was more likely to produce "a group of 'knowers' who might or might not be 'believers'" (Rummery, 1975, p. 6). Thus, it failed to distinguish between the shared faith and life of the church and the personal faith of the believer. It seemed to assume that church attendance was an expression of personal faith and did not appear to recognise that it could have been an act of conformity to prevailing practices (Rummery, 1975, p. 6).

Before any further discussion of Rummery's and Rossiter's respective contributions to what became a growing debate on different understandings of and approaches to religious education, it is necessary to look briefly at one of the key figures who had a significant influence on Australian religious educators. This was Gabriel Moran (1970) who suggested that, in order for religious education to gain any credibility in its own right, it should focus on the development of a new area of study which drew on theology and sound educational theory, the former providing the method and the latter providing the content (1970, p. 21). Thus, Moran was interested in putting catechesis into an educational framework rather than a faith-oriented one.

Moran (1970) had argued that the crisis in the catechetical movement at that time, which derived from the fact that, in practical terms, the role of the church had little meaning in modern society, created a demand for courses in religions other than Christianity. He proposed an ecumenical aspect for religious education which, he believed, had links to past approaches (catechetical) but completely transformed them in that it did not necessarily afford Christianity a normative position. He asserted that the aim of ecumenical education was the same as education, that is, "the lived truth of the humanized world" (Moran, 1970, p. 85) and that his approach would lead to "experience-centred" religious education that should be taught in an intellectually challenging framework which is free from a proselytising approach.

Drawing on Moran's writings, Rummery (1975) presented a detailed analysis of a range of approaches in catechesis, including the traditional approach, the kerygmatic approach and the life-centred approach and followed this by exploring their relevance to the teaching of religion in the pluralistic society of the 1970s. He suggested that the purpose of catechesis was to create dialogue and action between believers, and this group-sharing of their faith should lead to an enhancement of their personal faith. Rummery's contribution to the literature was significant in that it extended Moran's discussion on the relationship between the traditional approach of an education in faith and the broader concept of religious education as contained in a phenomenological approach (Smart, 1966). Rummery compared the catechetical approach with four other methods of approaching a study to religious education, that is, "teaching that, education in, teaching how and teaching about" (Rummery, 1975, p. 157).

According to Rummery's descriptions, the first approach, "teaching that", was closest to the catechetical approach. This involved teaching fundamental Christian truths to people who shared the same beliefs. The second approach referred to "education in religion" where the intent was to transmit a distinct form of knowledge (religion) without bias, so that no particular faith tradition was given more emphasis than another but there was enough depth to avoid superficiality. The third approach, "teaching how", was based on the phenomenological approach as devised by Smart (1966) which recognised religion as a form of knowledge and emphasised understanding so that individuals could make informed choices. The final approach, "teaching about", was similar to the third one but was problematic because it lacked the emotional and experiential aspect of religion, that is, it denied aspects that related to the actual nature of the subject. It focused on the cognitive component and could be reduced to a mere factual study (Rummery, 1975, p. 157).

Rummery made it clear that the aims of the traditional catechetical approach and the others were separate in that the latter incorporated a cognitive and intellectual approach which was quite distinct from the indoctrination or conditioning approach of the former. While the former depended on teaching and sharing activities amongst believers, the others did not necessarily require a commitment or a sharing of beliefs from either the teacher or the students. The strength of the phenomenological approach lay in its intent which was to attempt to teach religion more openly without expecting any allegiance to a particular faith tradition. While this was a more appropriate approach for an adolescent whose developmental stage was still at the point of exploration and experimentation rather than commitment, there were some questions about its suitability in a confessional school.

A further question that Rummery raised was whether catechesis, which is confessional in its approach, had any compatibility with the phenomenological approach which was non-confessional. Rummery suggested that there could be a point of convergence between the two, the latter stressing understanding, empathy and experience of religion viewed in multi-dimensional fashion and the former, at some stage, culminating in a dialogue of believers. He presented the theory that "catechesis may logically crown the phenomenological approach which, by its nature, prepares for and remains open to faith" (Rummery, 1975, p. 181) which could be a real strength in a multifaith society. This was an aspect of the phenomenological approach that was recognised as having some value for religious education in Catholic school. Thus, Rummery (1975) offered a different perspective to religious education which combined elements of catechesis with an approach that had a broader educational focus which gave greater emphasis to the cognitive aspects of the

subject. The former viewed the subject from a faith standpoint and the latter from an educational standpoint. These two dimensions, religious education from a faith perspective and religious education from an educational perspective, which had an intellectual base, became essential aspects of religious education programs in Catholic schools.

The other theorist, Rossiter, whose writings had a significant influence on religious educators also proposed an approach to religious education which viewed the subject through two lenses, faith and education. Rossiter suggested that closer attention needed to be paid to the nature of the catechesis/religious education relationship and argued that:

> A clearer differentiation between religious education and catechesis could foster more authentic and creative development of both aspects ... a revision of the foundations for religious education in Catholic schools would not want to exclude catechesis but would want to critically determine the possibilities and limitations for "faith-sharing" within the matrix of a more educational role for religion in the school ... a creative tension or dialectic between faith-oriented and educational concerns is needed. It is ironic that a "creative divorce" might be the very thing needed to promote **more** catechesis, as well as more **authentic** catechesis, sponsored by the Catholic school, rather than an uncritical lumping of all activities together under the cover-all, "catechetics", which may not always be authentic catechesis or good education (1981c, p. 163).

Rossiter (1981c) further argued that there was a need, therefore, to reformulate the theory of religious education for Catholic schools which would acknowledge the limited scope for catechesis in the classroom (p. 164). While it was important for the school's religious education program to educate in religion and specifically in the Catholic faith tradition, it also needed to provide some opportunities for pastoral catechesis. It was expected that the latter would complement the former (p. 164). Rossiter suggested there was:

> a need for more emphasis on an educational rather than on a faith-developing paradigm for the classroom curriculum. This curricula emphasis need not detract from the use of a more faith-oriented paradigm for other aspects of religious education such as community building, liturgical life,

retreats, voluntary youth groups and pupil-teacher relationships (1981c, p. 168).

In describing these two distinct perspectives, faith and educational, Rossiter recognised that they were interrelated and not mutually exclusive (1981a, p. 5), and asserted that religious education from a faith perspective, referred to a broader application in religious education than that defined by Moran. While its primary purpose was directed towards "better understanding of, and deeper personal faith in," a particular faith tradition (1981a, p. 4), the transmission of the faith was not confined to teaching activities within the formal curriculum. It also included liturgical and pastoral activities which were shared by the school community and there was an implicit religious influence of the school's social life which required the teacher to be a committed believer. This approach was most common in religious or church schools and assumed the recipients formed a community of believers (1981a, p. 4). Thereby, Rossiter, identified religious education as an aspect of the broader Catholic school curriculum which contributed to the religious education of students through both the formal religious education curriculum and through the informal curriculum which included activities such as school liturgies and retreats. Given this understanding, Rossiter argued for a more educational focus for the classroom program.

The educational perspective, according to Rossiter, provided a basis for an approach that was more concerned with "knowledge, understanding and affective appreciation of religion than with 'faith development' and 'faith responses' of pupils" (Rossiter 1981a, pp. 4-5; Crawford & Rossiter 1985, p. 45). The general framework in which this approach resided arose from the educational process and it made no assumptions about the religious beliefs of either the teacher or the student. It recognised religion as a distinct field of study that would make its own contribution to the general education of the student and, as such, it would take on historical (history of religions), sociological (the role and influence of religion in society) and psychological (an understanding of human behaviour and its links to religious motivation) aspects (Lovat, 1989, pp. 51-58).

This approach focused on activities contained within the formal curriculum and it was characterised by its intellectual approach to the study. It did not grow out of the concerns of a community of faith but was seen as a subject that could make a valid contribution to the secular curriculum, in its own right, just as any other subject would. Rossiter's approach was influenced by some of the developments in secular schools in

Australia which had attempted to incorporate Religion Studies into their programs in the seventies (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985).

In the years following the publication of Rossiter's thesis on the two perspectives, many religious educators in Australia appeared to misinterpret his argument regarding their interrelationship. Thus, an artificial polarity was assumed between the two which served to diminish the value that the two perspectives had for religious education in Catholic schools. Rather erroneously, certain presumptions were made about the faith development potential of some learning activities over others. In practice, some educators, in their attempts to develop a more intellectual program, over-emphasised the cognitive aspects of the program to the detriment of essential affective elements in religious education. Equally, programs that focused on affective learning sometimes failed to recognise the contribution that learning in the cognitive domain could make to the promotion of personal faith. Consequently, in many cases, the practical application of Rossiter's two perspectives, faith and education, reflected a shared misunderstanding about the interrelatedness of religious education from faith and/or educational perspectives, or that their aims were not at variance with one another but, indeed, had the capacity to share similar objectives.

Crawford and Rossiter (1985) also warned against laying too great an expectation on the school's religious education program as fully responsible for the religious education of the students and they pointed to the complementary roles of the home, church and school in religious education (1985, p. 1). This contention was supported by the later findings of Leavey et al. (1992); Fahy (1992) and Flynn (1993).

Finally, an examination of the broad aims of religious education presented a few years later Crawford and Rossiter (1985) clearly indicated the interrelation between the two perspectives that he had previously described. Once again, while the main focus of the classroom program was educational, both cognitive and affective learning areas were addressed across the broad religious education program. In brief, Crawford and Rossiter's proposal suggested that religious education should

- promote knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Catholic faith tradition and also of other religions so that students can develop an empathy with people of other faiths;
- lead students to a better understanding of the role of religion and personal faith in their own lives and that of others;

- develop the necessary skills to allow students to undertake a study of critical inquiry related to aspects of religion and to religious and social issues so that they are better able to make informed, personal decisions relating to their own religious development; and finally,
- contribute to the personal development and faith maturation of the students (1985, p. 42).

In more recent writings, Rossiter has turned his attention to spirituality and identity and the implications for religious education. In a recent article, Crawford and Rossiter have discussed the spiritual dimension of religious education (2005) and suggest that

> Religious educators need some perspective on the 'geography' of contemporary spirituality. They need some framework for interpreting the development and diversification of spirituality and its relationship with religion. They need to ask questions about what sort of spirituality is being offered today... and what is the role for religious spirituality? (p. 2).

Once again, the clear aim is about developing an intellectual understanding of spirituality and its links to religion to inform teaching practice.

Certainly, Rummery and Rossiter's early influences are still seen and felt in the ongoing discussions and debates about the inter-relationship of faith and educational perspectives as they are reflected in the different approaches adopted by contemporary religious education programs. In practice, they appear to translate into programs that are heavily focused on cognitive learning or programs that are more affective based.

Other Australian theorists who described approaches to religious education from an educational perspective were less influential on the practices in Catholic schools. However, their respective views did have some relevance for the state religion studies courses that were developed for senior secondary students, some of which became foundational for Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools. As such, a brief overview of their theories is relevant to this discussion.

Two of these approaches are the typological approach (Moore & Habel, 1982) and the Critical Model (Lovat, 1989). The first was devised by Moore and Habel in South Australia and was a refinement of Smart's (1973) phenomenological approach. It incorporated teaching strategies based on a step-by-step approach and included a study of the phenomena of different religions but it differed

from other similar approaches by placing much emphasis on the 'home tradition' of the student (Habel & Moore 1982, p. 121). The argument offered was that students needed to first know and recognise religious phenomena (for instance, beliefs, sacred stories and texts, rituals) in their own faith traditions and this could lead to a better understanding of these phenomena in other faith traditions. Despite Habel and Moore's claim that this feature would make it attractive for use in both confessional and non-confessional schools its use in Catholic schools was limited perhaps because its emphasis on studying the elements of a religion as a way of understanding religion ignored the spiritual and personal dimensions that were essential features of religious programs in Catholic schools. Besides, the aims of the typological approach did not entirely coincide with the purpose of religious education in Catholic education.

The second theorist, Lovat (1989), drew on the developments in modern social education in an attempt to define an integrated approach to religious education from an educational perspective. He proposed a Critical Model which had an integrated approach. It combined the methodology of the typological approach as described by Moore and Habel (1982) and the critical reflection step of the Shared Christian Praxis approach of Groome (1980). Lovat believed that the critical reflection stage was a serious omission in the process of the typological approach. By combining elements of the two approaches, Lovat believed that his Critical Model would be accessible to a wider variety of religious educators, from confessional and non-confessional schools alike. He argued that a Critical Model allowed students to freely respond to the invitation of faith development and that it had the capacity to allow students to "discover the Gospel as an ultimate and saving word about human existence" and to "facilitate a new and more relevant conception of Catholic identity" (Angelico, 1997, p. 58). Drawing, as it did, on social education, a Critical Model of religious education also encouraged students to study social and other topical issues while "retaining a *distinctive place* for the religious aspect of life and culture" (Lovat, 1989, p. 89). Lovat believed this made religious education more relevant to students and the model has had some impact on the way VCE and HSC courses were developed in Victoria and New South Wales.

A Look at Assessment
As curriculum development in religious education became more formalised in the shape of diocesan Religious Education Guidelines, a particular area emerged as one that needed attention. This was assessment and evaluation in religious education. Macdonald's (1988) conclusions in her doctoral

thesis advocated that the religious education curriculum needed regular review and evaluation as well as appropriate forms of student assessment since religious educators were accountable to the Catholic school community for the basis and development of the religious education curriculum. Further, she discussed the concept of accountability as it related to professional practice, which was to ensure that there was provision of adequate learning experiences to achieve the learning objectives. Finally, Macdonald stressed that religious education teachers were not accountable for the faith response and commitment of their students since faith was seen as a gift of God which required a free response from the individual.

Macdonald made the point that the cognitive dimension of religious education should be assessed in similar ways to other subject areas but alas argued for the case to assess affective objectives since religious education aimed not only at learning but also at developing attitudes, values, feelings and emotions (Macdonald, 1990, 1995). She acknowledged that affective measurement was more difficult to engage in, less valid and reliable and more controversial but that was not sufficient reason to neglect measurement in this area of learning. Indeed, there was a need to carefully and methodically assess students' progress in relation to the affective objectives as a group, which then provided useful data for curriculum evaluation purposes. Such assessment needed to respect the privacy and freedom of the student, and at no time was it meant to identify individual students or to assess their personal responses involving faith, beliefs, attitudes, values and practices. Further, Macdonald suggested that self-assessment techniques were the most appropriate strategies to use for this kind of assessment.

Macdonald's proposal to assess affective learning was received with mixed reactions, however, her work was influential in alerting religious educators to the importance and necessity of conducting appropriate and carefully planned assessment in religious education.

Teaching Scripture
Another area of the classroom religious education program that was identified as requiring attention was the teaching of scripture (Stead, 1994; 1996) and two relevant approaches which have had some influence are the KITE method (Stead) and a reworking of Stead's method which was known as the Composite Model (Carswell, 2001).

Stead's doctoral research aimed "to establish that the teaching of scripture to children must be informed by critical study, to document content, method and the influence of critical biblical study in Catholic primary schools in Victoria, and to

identify the problems and professional development needs of teachers in these schools (Stead, 1996, p. 260). Stead drew on the parallels between critical biblical study and the goals of English literature to argue that the teaching of scripture needed to be informed by critical study. More importantly, she asserted that scripture educators needed to have moved beyond the mythic/literal stage of faith development and have a working knowledge of methods used in critical interpretation of the bible, whereby they would be able to assist students to develop critical skills.

In an earlier publication, Stead (1994) introduced an approach to teaching scripture using the KITE model based on the following convictions:

- That children should be introduced to the bible itself, not to bible stories that are generally so overladen with interpretation and so watered down that it is difficult to recognise the original text.
- That children's first understanding of the bible will be literal, and that literal understanding is an essential stage of their faith development, but they should be taught by teachers who have moved beyond the literal understanding of the text.
- That the insecurity experienced by teachers in their use of the bible with children results from lack of knowledge and understanding of scripture, not from lack of teaching skill and expertise.
- That problems experienced in the use of scripture in classrooms will not be solved by new resources and/or activities, but by teacher who have come to know and love the word of God.
- That 'how' a passage of scripture might be used with children can be investigated only after the religious educator has engaged in careful study of the text.

The **KITE** model involved the following four processes:

Knowing the text – learning about the text;
Inspire the imagination – imaginative involvement in the text;
Translate to life – making connections between scripture and life;
Express the heart – prayerful engagement with the text.

The four distinct processes of the KITE model were useful for educators in that it offered a framework to develop strategies to teach scripture, as such it was adopted in many classrooms. Carswell (2001) refined the KITE model and produced the Composite Model which also has had an

encouraging response. Like the KITE model it clearly articulates three processes in the learning sequence which makes it more accessible for use: Prepare to hear the Word; Encounter the Word; Respond to the Word.

In general, then, the argument for an approach that uses a critical interpretation of biblical texts has been quite influential in the teaching of scripture in the past several years.

Teaching and Learning
Since the introduction of outcomes based education in Australia, teaching and learning across the curriculum have been focused on cognitive learning, usually based on Blooms taxonomy. Certainly, in religious education, the approach proposed in many diocesan guidelines has been largely cognitive, sometimes with little attention given to the affective domain. The aim has been to produce students who are better informed about their faith tradition and to develop content which would intellectually challenge them. However, religious education in the classroom has continued to be problematic for many teachers and students particularly in arriving at a balance between cognitive and affective learning. My own doctoral research (de Souza, 1999) highlighted the problems for teaching and learning in religious education at senior secondary levels, particularly where many students still appeared to have little indepth knowledge about the tradition and indicated that did not find the topics engaging since they lacked meaning and relevance for them. One of the key findings from this study stated that religious education for senior students should:

> Recognize and develop the complementary role of cognition and affectivity in the facilitation of knowledge and understanding, and faith and spiritual development (p. 380).

This has continued to pose a particular challenge for religious educators, that is, developing strategies that balance cognitive and affective learning. Indeed, my ongoing research has highlighted the need to address yet another dimension in the learning process in religious education, namely, the spiritual dimension and this approach has been attracting interest from a number of different practitioners. The approach has been drawn from new theories of emotional and spiritual intelligence which, in combination with traditional theories of rational intelligence, can provide a useful framework within which to situate an appropriate approach to religious education. I have discussed this approach in detail elsewhere (de Souza, 2001, 2003, 2004) but a brief overview may be useful here. The approach aims to address the outer and inner lives of the student so that it

includes the four processes of perceiving or sensing, thinking, feeling and intuiting or inner reflecting. While the focus in most learning programs, is on addressing different levels of thinking which has usually provided the basis for the selection of teaching and learning activities, strategies to explore feelings or to reflect inwardly have not always been utilised. The significance for religious education of a student's ability to access his/her inner life, and his/her need to reflect inwardly does need to be recognised, especially in contemporary contexts where the influences from so many external sources as well as the busyness of life has had a detrimental effect on human skills in these areas. This is also particularly important if the aim of religious education is for transformational learning. Indeed, the importance of emotional learning and inner reflection has been acknowledged in current literacy programs so that various strategies are being developed to assist students to engage in some kind of deeper reflection about their thoughts and feelings (Cartwright, 2005). An approach that addresses the three dimensions of learning, cognitive, affective and spiritual, needs to have learning outcomes articulated for each of these areas, although assessment is generally restricted to the achievement of the cognitive learning outcomes. An articulation of affective and spiritual learning outcomes serves the purpose of raising the awareness of the teacher to select learning activities that will address all three dimensions, rather than just learning in the cognitive domain.

Another effective approach to learning and teaching in religious education, and which is gaining influence, particularly at the primary level, resides in the DEEP framework (White, 2005) where thinking activities are designed to facilitate connections to prior learning in religious education, cater for individual differences and to have relevance to a real world context. This approach was the result of White's doctoral work which attempted to draw links between brain-based learning theory and pedagogy. It proposes four thinking quandrants: Analyse, Organize, Personalize and Synthesize and contends that learning experiences are generated when:

- Students are given the opportunity to generate their own understandings and meaning (**D**iscernment);
- Learning experiences cater for the individualised learning needs of each student (**E**nrichment);
- Students make a personal choice to be actively engaged in the learning experience (**E**ngagement);
- Students draw on the wisdom of the combined learning community
    (**P**articipation).

The main focus of the DEEP approach is on cognitive learning, although it does have the potential to include strategies that address the affective and spiritual domains.

One final area that is pertinent to this discussion of learning and teaching is the Critically Engaging Creative Arts approach that has been generated by Goldburg's doctoral work (2003). Goldburg argues that using the arts as a critically engaging teaching tool would provide a dynamic and innovative approach to the teaching of religious education and would greatly enhance text-book based curriculum approaches. A key element of Goldburg's rationale for the use of this approach lies in her discussion of the implications of the visual world which provides the backdrop for the lives of children and adolescents today. This surely provides a sound reason for the use of the creative arts to engage students critically with different faith traditions and texts. Such an approach would help students to develop skills of analysis as well as increase their visual multi-modal and religious literacy. In general, Goldburg's approach requires that students and teachers together will respond and attend to new and emerging literacies as well as to the multiple ways in which the senses engage when learning through the creative arts. Certainly, the approach has the potential to offer activities which will address the different dimensions of learning that have been discussed above, that is, the cognitive, affective and spiritual domains.

The Role of the Religious Educator

Two recent research studies that have been influential in the ongoing development of the role of the Religious Education Coordinator (REC) were undertaken in Sydney (Crotty, 2003) and in Melbourne (Fleming, 2003). The first study was generated by the significance of the Religious Education Coordinator for the mission of Catholic schools and in response to a range of identified concerns about it. Some of these concerns included the difficulties in attracting enough suitable applicants, criteria for selection, diverse dimensions of the REC position and emerging challenges for religious leadership in Catholic schools. The study generated findings from which theories were developed about the impact of the REC on religious education and religious leadership. It highlighted the challenges that exist for the mission of the Catholic school as part of the mission of the Catholic church in a changing social and ecclesial context, and identified potential for and anomalies in the relationship between the religious leadership of the principal and the REC. Further, it pointed to aspects of organisational arrangements that were in place to support the REC as a leadership position in Catholic schools in the Sydney diocese, and noted the relevance of the REC position for Catholic education and for religious leadership.

The second study, similarly, examined the nature of the role of the REC to determine the way in which the role had been conceptualised by agencies responsible for religious education in Catholic secondary schools in Melbourne. In addition, the documentation on the role as it had been developed at school level was investigated. The findings provided insights into the nature and status of the role of REC and highlighted the difficulties and challenges faced by current Religious Education Coordinators. They also identified the knowledge and skills required by those who held the role in Catholic secondary schools. Given the importance of this role in Catholic education and in religious leadership, the findings of these studies have been timely and necessary in informing ongoing decisions and discussions about the role of Religious Education Coordinator.

A further relevant study that focused on the religious educator was Welbourne's (1995) doctoral research. Welbourne focused on the kind of knowledge that would be required for the professional development of critical religious educators and examined the impact, if any, of graduate programs in religious education on the personal and professional growth of the educator. Welbourne argued that a critical examination of the tensions between tradition and the concrete reality of their beliefs provided the learners with greater ideological consciousness. They became aware of the hegemony of personal, social and ecclesial constraints, and this challenged them to dialogue critically with tradition, and reinterpret it in new and valid ways. In addition, emancipatory knowledge was:

- constitutive of the professional knowledge base of a critical religious educator that is expressed in terms of responsibility and critical consciousness;
- constitutive of transformative experiences for the religious educator in terms of renegotiation and contractual relationships with the institutional church; and
- constitutive of professional practice in terms of synthesis and praxis.

Ultimately, Welbourne's findings indicated that there was a relationship between the technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge that was gained by religious educators from pursuing recognised formal qualifications and their autonomy and freedom to be critical religious educators.

The importance of these final three research studies which focused on the teaching and leadership aspects of religious education are obvious since these two areas are significant in the promotion and maintenance of effective classroom practice in the subject.

To bring this discussion to a conclusion, it is important to note that this article has focused on a small selection of research studies that have had a particular impact on or have begun to influence various aspects of the development and practice of religious education in Australian Catholic schools. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all research that has been conducted in the field of Australian religious education, it acknowledges that many other studies have produced interesting and valuable findings about the subject in general and that there is a growing band of scholars and practitioners who are currently engaged in pertinent research which should continue to inform any future developments in the field. This is important if the theory and practice of religious education are to continue to be challenging, relevant and meaningful for today's students within a changing social context, where formal religious influences continue to decline and the teaching of religious education takes on the feeling of being counter cultural to the dominant themes of contemporary society.

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