

REASONS FOR LIVING: SCHOOL EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEARCH FOR MEANING, SPIRITUALITY AND IDENTITY

The question, "how can the curriculum and teaching/learning processes promote the spiritual and moral development of pupils" has long been a concern for both government and independent schools in Western countries -- even if in some situations, the practical attention given to it has been minimal. The study of religion as a subject has been a prominent, and often the principal expression of this concern, especially in religious schools; in government schools in different countries, the subject religion has had mixed fortunes.

How to address spiritual and moral dimensions across the whole school curriculum has had a chequered history. While the *intention* to do this has generally been regarded as important for education, there has not been enough coherent progression from intention to practice, even though there have been worthwhile developments. One reason for this gap between theory and practice is the naturally great complexity and understandable uncertainties in links between teaching practices and change in young people's attitudes, beliefs and values. In both intention and outcomes, to educate for 'personal change' is at a different level from educating in knowledge and skills; despite this, in the classroom, it remains at the very same level as any classroom teaching/learning -- it cannot use anything more than the normal and natural, day-to-day teaching/learning procedures available to teachers. Teachers cannot 'change gear' on cue to a spiritual dimension of teaching that automatically engages students at a personal level. Personal change is influenced by many factors outside the classroom teaching/learning process; personal change has to come freely from within the individual if it is to be authentic; if personal change is to have repercussions through an individual's personality, beliefs and behaviour, it is unlikely to happen 'then and there', on cue, in the classroom. It is, therefore, really more appropriate to use the phrase "education that might *dispose* pupils towards personal change" as a more accurate acknowledgement of the intention, and hence a more realistic starting point for relevant practice.

Another influential reason for this gap between intentions and practice is that various conceptions of spiritual/moral education across the curriculum have not been cogent and realistic enough to win the wide support of teachers. The majority of teachers in a school may be sympathetic to the aim, but if they remain unconvinced that a program can be carried through in an effective way that

harmonises with their experience of regular teaching/learning, then the implementation will fall short of what was expected. It may be that the expectations for student personal change are too high. Perhaps it may be more realistic to ensure that the curriculum and the teaching processes are pointed in a 'healthy direction' for personal change rather than focus too much on actual personal change in students. This acknowledges that not all pupils will move in this direction, neither will they move at the same pace. But it will be important for educators to know that they are doing their best to provide the educational environment, the values orientation, the content and process that can facilitate any movement in pupils' personal development.

Different across-curriculum approaches have been tried. One was to see how learning areas like English, History, Science and so forth can promote some form of spiritual learning in pupils. Some recent examples (among others) in Catholic schooling in Australia have been Ignatian Pedagogy in Jesuit schools (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, 1993) and the *A Sense of the Sacred* program in schools of the Archdiocese of Sydney (Catholic Education Office Archdiocese of Sydney, 1993). Some generic approaches, each with its own constructs and language, have also addressed this question: Values/moral education, holistic education, spiritual education, personal development, values infusion, life skills, citizenship education, and character education. In addition, there is the suggestion of some spiritual learning in psychological and/or learning theories that impinge on educational practice such as: multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, left/right brain learning, spiritual intelligence, lifelong learning, constructivist theory and so forth.

This article does not set out to add another new approach to this list. Rather, it introduces the argument that the constructs 'meaning', 'spirituality' and 'identity' can be very useful in helping educators make their ordinary across-the-curriculum teaching more relevant to the spiritual and moral development of pupils -- and in ways that do not compromise the integrity of their subject teaching. It is proposed that use of these three constructs can enhance spiritual/personal education within all the various approaches mentioned above, as well as within formal religious education. This proposal is developed in detail in a forthcoming book that has the same title as this

article. (The book is one of the studies in the *Meaning, Identity and Education Research Project*. For further information see <http://203.10.46.30/ren/search/>)

Search for Meaning

Don't talk to me about life's seasons. Don't ask me for answers, don't ask me for reasons. I don't want to hear; Don't want to hear it at all.
From the moment we're born we start to die; And a man can go crazy if he keeps askin' why.
That's just how it is. Don't look for a reason at all.

[But] There must be a reason. There must be a way, to make some sense of it; To try to find a reason for it all.
We're not born just so we can die. There must be an answer, and we've got to try; To make some sense of it. To try to find a reason for it all.
(Eric Bogle)

In a song called *A Reason for It All*, written in the late 1980s, Scottish/Australian musician Eric Bogle expressed some of the anxiety people can feel about meaning and purpose in life. They sense they are caught between feelings of despair that there may be no meaning to life, and a desire to find explanations and answers to bewildering events and experiences. They need some interpretation of what is going on in their lives and in the world that helps them cope and plan a hopeful future.

For many people, especially youth, religion -- a traditional source of meaning, values and purpose -- does not have the same cogency or credibility it seemed to have in the past. In contemporary Western societies, the pluralism and pace of life have affected the ways in which communities (even families) used to serve as frames of reference for beliefs and values. Along with the ever increasing emphasis on individualism, people feel more on their own in their search for a view of life that will sustain them. They do not seem to be getting enough help from outside when constructing a personal meaning system.

We acknowledge that people can live without giving much attention to ultimate meaning. They can appear to be self-centred, preoccupied with their own lifestyle, comfort and needs, and not concerned about any contribution to the community. *De facto*, this articulates the implied meaning in their lives -- a very individualistic one. We take a stance about the role of meaning in human life. We believe that a need for meaning

and purpose is a defining characteristic of the human being. Communities of meaning -- family, religion, other groups and the state -- have some role in handing on a basic set of meanings to the next generation, in ways that respect the emerging personal autonomy and individuality of young people. We propose the idea of a 'healthy' meaning in life as an important one for communities to develop to guide their care for the young and to inform the goals of education. This requires working out what sorts of basic meanings young individuals would need to feel an accepted and secure part of their community; this would give them a 'starting' interpretation of life and reference points for cultural identity -- a working theory, that could sustain their needs for values and purpose, which would be confirmed or modified later as individuals grew to maturity and took on more personal responsibility for their own meaning and purpose. Communities and families see their fundamental shared meanings as a cultural inheritance that needs to be available to the young to help them start their life journeys. If a search for meaning and values is a life long task, then individuals need some initial nourishment in meaning and identity to get them started when they are children. In opening up this concept of healthy meaning for further consideration, we suggest that it needs to include the following (among other things). This is like a basic set of goals for personal development:

- a sense of purpose and goals in life;
- awareness of individuals' rights and freedoms, complemented by a sense of responsibility;
- acknowledgement of and respect for the rights and freedoms of others, within the limits of tolerance set by the law of the land;
- constructive values and ethics that inform action;
- a commitment to the common good and a sense of justice;
- a view that healthy, satisfying personal relationships are a key to happiness and well being;
- an understanding of the human value of work and leisure;
- access to the basic shared understandings of one's family and primary community of meaning; for many this means the beliefs of the religious group to which the child's parents/guardians belong (whether or not they are practising members); at a more general

level, this can extend to some knowledge of the beliefs of other religious groups in the community (usually the most common ones) and a tolerance of religious diversity within the limits set by the law of the land;

- some understanding of the interconnectedness of humankind with the natural world, and a sense of environmental responsibility;
- some understanding of the ways in which people construct meaning and identity that would help individuals evaluate different cultural options; this implies that individuals' meaning and identity are open to some revision and development.

Most people will agree that young people need help with meaning in life. But when it comes to spelling out what this means in detail, especially what specific meanings need to be communicated, there will inevitably be different estimates of what is required, each reflecting different value positions. At this point, our intention is not to start a debate about what should be included or omitted from the above list. Rather, we want to draw attention to this important task that communities need to undertake, particularly with respect to the potential role for education.

At this point, we have referred to a place for religion and personal beliefs only in a general way as would be appropriate for a concept of healthy meaning pertinent to public education. To ignore the study of religion within public education would be to compromise the range of cultural meanings that should be accessed by young people in the educational context. Religion is primarily about ultimate and proximate meaning in life.

When we address the question of healthy meaning from the standpoint of a community of faith, it would be appropriate to refer to a transcendent, spiritual dimension to life, to belief in God and to the realms of theology, scripture and so forth as part of the meanings of that faith tradition. But even in the context of a community of faith, religious belief cannot be 'injected' into the next generation. The young can be socialised into the basic meanings and practices of their religious tradition from an early age, both in the family and in a local community of faith, and to some extent in a school. But whether or not they will become actively involved in religion will eventually be a matter of their own choice.

We are conscious that in highly secularised Western societies like Australia, many young people are only nominally connected with their religious tradition. Nevertheless, whether or not they become practising members, we believe that

educational access to their cultural religious heritage can make a valuable contribution to their personal development; the identification and understanding of religious meanings, as well as some critical thinking about spiritual and moral issues should be an integral part of young people's school education, in both public and private (church-related) schools.

One final word here about the evaluation of meaning. While the contemporary search for meaning is often said to be difficult for young people, there is no shortage of meanings available in society. The world is awash with meanings, suggesting how people should live their lives. In Western countries, this is amplified by the media, especially film and television, where consumerism is all pervasive -- this can even give an impression that meaning and satisfaction in life revolve around what one can buy. Some young people feel that they are wading through a virtual miasmal swamp of ideas about what it means to be alive, unique and independent and so forth. Identifying implied meanings that are being proposed, and judging their appropriateness and healthiness are therefore important skills that the young need to develop. The evaluation of meaning may ultimately be more pertinent than the concept 'search' for meaning. This is where education can be important.

Spirituality

As the title of this article suggests, we have bracketed the concepts 'spirituality' and 'identity' with meaning. We have done this because we consider it useful and important for contemporary education to address this trio of concepts together. All of the concepts are relevant to personal development. Hence, as might be expected, they also figure in the social sciences. They are becoming more important in education. But all of them are notoriously difficult to define. We do not want to devote space to debating the definitions in detail. But some clarification of these concepts is essential if they are to be used constructively in educational theory and practice. Our purpose is to use these concepts (and personal development themes) for heuristic purposes. As the dictionaries suggest about heuristic devices, we will use them:

- to identify and draw attention to issues;
- to stimulate interest in furthering investigations;
- to encourage learning; to discover, understand and solve problems; and,
- to provide explanatory interpretations.

Traditionally, the word spirituality has had a religious connotation -- the style of prayer and

spiritual practice that expresses a religious faith and a religious perspective on life. However, religion and spirituality are not coextensive. Our interest is in a broader definition of spirituality that comfortably allows for a religious contribution, but which also acknowledges a spiritual dimension to living that includes personal aspects, values and aesthetic concerns.

This is done for three reasons. Firstly, in Western societies, religion is not prominent in the lives of many people; secularisation is at a 'high water mark' level. Hence, a spiritual education, if it is to enhance the personal development of individuals and be of wider benefit in the community, has to do more than meet the needs of those who are active members of a local religious group. This applies particularly to young people, many of whom construct a spirituality without much reference to organised religion. While young people are not so likely to use the word spirituality with reference to their aspirations in life, they tend to have more affinity with the word 'spiritual' than with 'religion'.

Secondly, we do not want to play down the special interest that religion has long held in spirituality, nor underestimate the valuable contribution that a study of religion can make to people's education and personal development; one of our major concerns is to see how religious education sponsored by the church can contribute to the spiritual and moral development of young people.

Thirdly, by using a language of spirituality that is not limited to the religious, there is a better chance of articulating the spiritual and moral dimensions to general education. In liberal democratic societies, there is debate about the place of religion in public education. In the United Kingdom, religious education in the curriculum is required by law. In the United States, law requires that religion is strictly kept out of the curriculum (here, church-state legal language has stifled discussion about the place for study of religion in education). In Australia, a church sponsored religious education is permitted in limited circumstances in the state schools; legally, a more general study of religion taught by departmental teachers is allowed, but has never developed successfully in the state schools -- even though such programs, which we designate as state 'religion studies' courses, have been taken up by church-related schools, especially the Catholic schools. However, debate about the place for a study of religion in school education does not cover adequately the more general concerns about spirituality, values and ethics in the curriculum. Here, the language of spirituality, and of moral/values education is the more appropriate domain for working out these concerns.

Identity

One recent research consultation with youth in Australia reported that three major concerns of young people today were unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and identity and the search for meaning (Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, 1998). Though not seeming as immediately pressing as the problems of unemployment and drug and alcohol abuse, the need for young people to find ways of making meaning in their lives and developing an authentic sense of self are matters of great concern to them.

While meaning and identity are felt to be important, and are bound up with their attempts to make sense of the world and plot a hopeful path for their own lives, they may have vague, confused, but emotionally charged ideas of what these concepts mean. In addition, they are not sure of where to look for help, and they are not confident that adult institutions understand their questions, let alone have satisfying answers. As the report noted above went on to say: "Many young people talk of lacking purpose and meaning in life. They often lack helpful role models, feeling that the world in which they live bears little or no resemblance to that from which their parents emerged." (p. 15). In a changing social, economic and familial landscape, many of the support networks that existed for past generations are no longer there.

In the paragraph above, we have suggested that young people's interest in identity is often personal and psychological. On the other hand, the focus of community interest in identity is often sociological. Here the concern is to hand on some of the distinguishing characteristics of the community -- ethnic and religious identities in particular; and there is an interest in working out what contribution education can make to the process.

Identity is an important concept for personal and social development. However, what it means and how it develops are complex and controversial. For example, identity can be invoked to justify a wide range of action -- from support for a local football team to the extremes of ethnic cleansing. There is a close association between perceptions of identity and violence. We suggest that a clarification of what identity means and how it can be addressed in some way in education should be important community concerns. As with the concept meaning, it will be useful to develop an idea of what a 'healthy identity' might entail. We propose a definition of identity that is useful for educational purposes; it is a process in which the individual draws on both internal and external cultural resources for self-understanding and self-expression.

Interrelationships between Meaning, Spirituality and Identity

As we explore meaning, spirituality and identity, it will become more clear that they are not distinct. There is considerable overlap; there are many interrelationships. In some instances, meaning and identity may refer to the same ideas and activities, but they are interpreted from different perspectives. We do not set out to resolve all the definitional difficulties. Even though there may remain some 'rough edges' and potential inconsistencies with our use of the terms, we believe that despite these problems, there is value and utility in trying to clarify meaning for the three concepts, and in exploring how they offer valuable insights for the spiritual and moral dimensions to school education.

The Socio-Cultural Situation and the Contemporary Search for Meaning and Identity

The social situation in which young people find themselves makes the search for meaning, spirituality and identity a difficult task. The life environment young people experience does not seem as secure and purposeful as perhaps it was for their parents' generation. Traditional sources of meaning and their support networks are not perceived to be relevant. Beliefs about life's meaning and purpose drawn from religious convictions no longer seem to hold true. In an environment flooded with ways to make meaning and to find our 'true selves', there is an urgent need to help young people learn how to think more carefully and critically about issues in meaning, spirituality and identity.

On one hand, life expectations in Western countries have never been higher -- that is, if you believe all you see on television. There are so many possibilities offered. Images of the good life abound. People are constantly bombarded with materially seductive images in print, advertising billboards, radio, film and television. "The world is your oyster!" The impression given is that with the right consumer goods in hand (with the right brand labels), life is there for the taking. "Just do it!" Freedom and individuality are 'worshipped'. Any suggestion that life needs altruism, values, commitments, and fidelity, let alone some sacrifices, is notable by its absence. Perhaps it is easy to get the impression that life can be lived without them.

While young people can feel these expectations vividly in their own imaginations, their real life experience is often in stark contrast with their wish list. No matter how hard they try, they can never look as attractive as the marketing models or stars who seem to set the standards of beauty and desirability towards which all aspire. Satisfying personal relationships are not just there to pick up

like goods from a supermarket. And finding a good job and career can be fraught with failure, disappointment and self-doubt.

When they look at what is happening in the world, they find little there to encourage hope. One education document offered the following sociological analysis. While young people would probably not diagnose the situation in these same terms, many would have a vivid awareness of these problems impinging on their hopes for the future.

On the threshold of the third millennium education faces new challenges which are the result of a new socio-political and cultural context. First and foremost, we have a crisis of values which, in highly developed societies in particular, assumes the form, often exalted by the media, of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. The extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society leads to behaviour patterns which are at times so opposed to one another as to undermine any idea of community identity. Rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations and the globalisation of the economy affect human life more and more throughout the world. Rather than prospects of development for all, we witness the widening of the gap between rich and poor, as well as massive migration from underdeveloped to highly developed countries. The phenomena of multiculturalism and an increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious society are at the same time an enrichment and a source of further problems (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1999, p. 1.).

What is particularly problematic is the new prominence of nihilistic thinking -- a tendency to believe there is no meaning to life. This can coexist with a very pragmatic, existential and materialistic outlook. Having nothing much to believe in or hope for can contribute to the increasing levels of boredom, depression, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide in Western countries -- especially among youth.

This situation creates anxiety for adults, let alone young people. It makes the search for meaning, spirituality and identity difficult for all. It is the situation that families and communities have to address, trying to make some sense of it so they can guide children and young adults in charting a hopeful path forward.

Education and Reasons for Living

As noted earlier, we do not see education as the means of resolving these social problems. But

what it can do well is help young people become more well informed, and learn how to think critically about the contemporary socio-cultural situation and about spiritual and moral issues. It can help them discern the shaping influence of culture on beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. It can help them learn how to become critical interpreters and evaluators of culture. It cannot automatically make them wise, but it can point them in the direction of wisdom. A key to this constructive role for education is written into the title of this article (and in the song quoted earlier) -- *reasons for living*. Fundamental to education is an appeal to reason. Enhancing the capacity to think is central to the notion of education. Also, given the malaise in meaning that young people are experiencing, and given the negative feelings many of them have about finding a satisfactory purpose in life and achieving some authentic identity, there is a need to get them to consider positive reasons for living. We believe that education can provide a valuable forum in which young people are able to consider constructive, positive community interpretations of life as well as diagnoses of current social problems. The emphasis should be on student-centred study and research. The educational process needs to be a dialogical study - - avoiding a one-way adult communication of the normative views and values of the older generation. But neither should it neglect normative community views. This study needs to be directed at the 'meaning' of issues, at values and principles, and not just at descriptions and facts. As well as educating the young in the critical evaluation of meaning and identity, such study can provide resources from which young people can derive some working interpretations of present situations, and positive realistic meanings for life.

This proposal is likely to make sense to those involved in religious education, because this area of curriculum has long been concerned with spirituality. However, at first sight, while it sounds attractive, it is most likely perceived as unrealistic and inappropriate for general education. We see a very important challenge in arguing a case for this spiritual/moral role for general education, and to propose realistic ways in which it might be incorporated into learning and teaching.

Over the past thirty years government documentation on the aims and purposes of schooling have increasingly given attention to the role of education in promoting the spiritual and moral development of young people. For example, in 1990, the following aims statement appeared in the New South Wales Government white paper on education in state schools:

Values and Education: The moral, ethical and spiritual development of students is a

fundamental goal of education. It is clearly not confined to one area of the curriculum. *All* teachers, across *all* areas of the curriculum have a responsibility to inculcate in their students positive values and a capacity for moral and ethical judgment.

Government schools should actively promote the moral values which are shared by the majority of people in our community. There is merit in the clear statement of this responsibility.

In particular, this document will give greater emphasis to the link between education, work and personal fulfilment, as well as encouraging imagination, creativity, excellence and the search for meaning and purpose in life. It will give more recognition to the place of the family and family values in our society and the rights and responsibilities of parents in the area of morals and values. Greater stress will be placed on students achieving high standards of self-discipline, personal conduct and social responsibility. As recommended . . . the document will also acknowledge the importance of all students developing spiritual values (Metherell, 1990, p. 1.).

Statements like this provide a mandate for spiritual and moral education in schools, both government and non-government. This we believe is a very positive development. However, such statements create great problems for educators because there remains a significant gap between the aims and practice. The idea of all teachers across all curriculum areas being involved in some form of spiritual/moral education is at first sight fanciful to say the least. The challenge is to interpret this role in a modest, realistic way that clarifies what teachers can do as a natural part of their teaching /learning procedures without compromising the integrity of their given subject matter and academic discipline. If this is not done in a convincing way, it is unlikely that high principled statements about values in education will win the moral support of educators.

A need to clarify the spiritual and moral dimensions to the whole school curriculum in a practicable way is a very important current task for education. If this is not done satisfactorily, then the valuable spiritual/moral thrust in recent aims documents will dissipate. Worse still, if these more personal, holistic and humanistic aims for education are surrendered because they could not be realistically translated into practice, it will be

even easier for the more pragmatic, economic and employment oriented goals of education to dominate education even more than they do now.

The Role for School Education in Relation to Young People's Search for Meaning, Spirituality and Identity

Educational efforts to enhance meaning, spirituality and identity in young people, do not have the same sorts of neat and credentialled outcomes as there are for regular subjects in the school curriculum. While there are knowledge and skills involved, and while the use of reason is crucial, the *hopes* are for some first steps in personal change. However, we acknowledge that no educational program can automatically change young people personally, let alone benchmark such change with specified personal outcomes. Wisdom and values cannot be communicated like knowledge of facts. Educational experience can point young people in the desired direction, but a free personal response is an essential part of any authentic personal change. Nevertheless, these hopes are important for guiding the work of teachers; they help give direction and focus to the ways teachers address issues related to meaning, spirituality and identity -- helping them see when and where they can make constructive contributions; they affect the language, concepts and questions used to do this.

There are some subjects whose content naturally allows for a study of meaning, spirituality and identity -- like religious education, religion studies and personal development education. However, while particularly interested in these areas, we will comment briefly here on what might be done across the whole school curriculum to enhance the personal development of young people. This is a more difficult problem to address. Our starting point has been to ask why a number of the efforts to promote spiritual and moral development through across-the-curriculum strategies have not achieved the level of success that their promotion would have implied -- even though they were proposed as 'core' or 'fundamental' to the curriculum. The main problem has been that, while the intentions were noble, and while it was comparatively easy to make a list of desirable values and attitudinal outcomes, there has been a significant gap between the educational intentions and the actual teaching practice. Programs with intentions like "values across the curriculum", "values education" and "values infusion" have not often got to the stage of winning substantial teacher support, let alone achieving effective implementation (some would say that they did not even manage to get an adequate level of teacher understanding, but this was not because of any intellectual inability on the part of teachers, but because of naivety in their conceptualisation).

These programs came with a theory and framework that did not adequately fit the realities of the classroom learning environment as teachers experienced them, even though their protagonists believed that they should. They were perceived as an 'extra dimension' imposed on what teachers were already doing. Teachers felt that authorities were trying to 'inject' a spiritual/moral role into their teaching of a secular curriculum, and that this compromised the integrity of their subject matter and academic discipline. They naturally tended to resent being told that they must do this over and above what they were already doing. In any case, they were not trained for moral or spiritual education. We think that most teachers are not opposed to the idea of promoting student personal/spiritual development across the curriculum. But they considered that the official line for these programs gave them a status and a pre-eminence that were unrealistic; their proposed importance, and the extent of the values outcomes were out of proportion with what teachers knew was achievable in the classroom. In turn, teachers became sceptical of programs that had an almost 'propaganda' like feel to them; there was an apparent 'values overkill'.

The first step in approaching meaning, spirituality and identity across the curriculum is realism in acknowledging the limited role of the school in bringing about personal change in young people. This means accepting that the development of meaning, identity and spirituality are extraordinarily complex, influenced by many factors. Understanding the modest role of the school is the starting point for planning the valuable, realistic and effective contribution that the school curriculum can make to the personal and spiritual development of young people. For example, we know that we can successfully teach a young person quantum physics; but we cannot teach her/him not to take drugs! As long as educators and others use exactly the same language when they talk about "teaching values" as they do about "teaching mathematics and English", then they will continue to grossly overestimate the school's capacity to promote the personal/spiritual development of young people, and, regretfully, this will further inhibit the valuable but limited contribution that the school can make.

We have recommended caution to avoid unrealistic expectations of what the school might achieve in enhancing young people's meaning, spirituality and identity. Adding yet another program with this as the new title would not be the answer. Education has long suffered from the way that schools have been expected to solve social problems through the introduction of specific programs (e.g., with program titles like: peace, citizenship, values,

work, leisure, driving, conflict resolution, aids and so forth). We make this comment while acknowledging that such programs have made useful contributions.

We will propose that content on meaning, spirituality and identity can be studied both in subjects like religion and personal development, as well as in other learning areas across the curriculum. How the study is conducted, and how the students are engaged are all important. While we consider that across-the-curriculum teaching strategies (especially for the study of contemporary issues) are important, we think that the most appropriate long term approach to the promotion of meaning, spirituality and identity for young people in school is not necessarily to create specific curriculum space for the study of 'new' content. Rather, it is more important to educate teachers in terms of their own grasp of issues in meaning, spirituality and identity. If they can develop a more extensive and more sophisticated understanding of the issues, they will be better able to bring this into their teaching/learning interactions with students in a natural way. Teachers need logical categories, language and concepts that can help young people identify and explore meaning and identity related issues. These issues are there embedded in many of the topics now studied in different subjects; they do not have to be introduced from outside; there already is a sizeable amount of content in the curriculum that is naturally related to meaning, spirituality and identity, if handled appropriately. But it takes well informed and skilled teachers to be able to ask the telling questions, provide relevant information, comment on examples, refer to pertinent anecdotes and give vital leads to young people that can engage them in thinking about and debating these issues, and, hopefully, in considering the implications for their own personal lives.

The Importance of Teachers' Understanding of Meaning-Spirituality-Identity Related Issues

We are suggesting that the first and most important step is to enrich teachers' understanding of the human search for meaning, spirituality and identity, especially for the young. They also need to be convinced that their teaching has a valuable capacity to promote young people's education in this area, and contribute in some way to their personal/spiritual development. This presumes that if teachers are well educated in this area, they should have enough personal and professional wisdom to do something constructive about it in their own teaching, when and where this is appropriate. There will be places in the curriculum where spiritual and moral material is the formal content of study (e.g., religious education). However, a holistic education would not quarantine the investigation of spiritual/moral dimensions to

one particular subject. Hence the importance of educating teachers to address, and not to avoid, value sensitive issues that emerge in various classroom studies across the curriculum. The issues are already there, perhaps just beneath the surface; they need to be identified and considered with the students in a challenging way, without doing this excessively and distorting the study. Just to identify the emerging spiritual/moral issues is in itself a valuable exercise. Otherwise, there is a danger that this dimension is excluded de facto; this could give an impression that school education consciously ignores those issues, or worse, that they are not worth considering.

This approach may be more helpful for promoting the spiritual/moral dimension of school education across the curriculum than to provide teachers with a "how to do it" manual. It is not so much 'adding' to teachers' moral responsibilities, but enriching their teaching. It is bringing the naturally embedded spiritual/moral dimension to the surface appropriately. It can empower teachers to deal with this important dimension as a normal part of good education. There are other issues to be considered, for example, the educative place of teachers' own personal views and commitments, and a code of teaching ethics. Also, some attention to "how to do it" is still important for teachers who may not see how a study of spiritual/moral issues can be woven into their teaching in a seamless way.

An Education That Can Promote Meaning, Spirituality and Identity

Our task in this article has been to take some first steps towards a workable theory for promoting the spiritual and moral development of young people through across-the-curriculum studies, and especially through religious education. These are preliminary remarks to the theory building that is taken up in our forthcoming book.

It is essential for this theory not to neglect the students' perspective. We have already noted that young people are interested in spiritual and moral issues; they search for values and an authenticity in personal identity. But this does not mean that they will automatically be interested in an education that sets out to help them in this quest. Rather, there is a strange and complex irony. Often, the very studies that purport to give special attention to meaning, spirituality and identity, have their personal relevance subverted; students are uninterested. This has to do with what we call the 'psychology of the learning environment'.

Much of the high esteem for school education that has grown during this first century of compulsory schooling has come from the certification of achievement. Knowledge and skills success in Mathematics, English, Computer Studies and so

forth are acknowledged and benchmarked. Certificates are essential for entrance to further education and employment. The outcomes movement in education gives special attention to employment-oriented competencies. All of this influences what is called the 'mark status' of different subjects. Subjects that are more specifically concerned with personal development (Religion, or even Ethics) had no such 'tangible' or employment-related output. Teachers and parents may have vocally supported the ideals of a holistic education, and the importance of spiritual/moral studies, but this often 'cuts little ice' with the students. For example, despite the official high profile of religious education in church-related schools, many students have a poor regard for it. Even where students like the subject, they felt it has little relevance to their lives or future employment. The emergence of accredited state Religion Studies courses for senior classes in Australian schools has improved the academic status of religious education. But this has not solved the problem. Students can be expected to bring to the study of religion the same level of disinterest in religion that is common in contemporary society, usually the same level of disinterest shown by their parents.

This sort of problem is not limited to religious education. Studies in personal development in government schools have similar difficulties. An example: Where they were programmed into seminars on the last few days of the school year, the low status and perceived irrelevance of the work were amplified by the hidden curriculum -- the school treated personal development studies as a nominal, even peripheral, requirement.

Finally, there is another very influential element in students' negative perceptions of spiritual/moral studies that is difficult to counteract. They have an innate resistance to being told what to do in their own lives! Any school study to do with values, beliefs and behaviour can only too easily be perceived as an exhortation; and this is enough for them to keep the study at 'arms length'. This tendency militates against even the minimal level of intellectual engagement that is taken for granted in all secular subjects. It underlines the importance of making any spiritual/moral studies an open, inquiring, student-centred learning process; any approach that remotely resembles an exhortation from authority runs the risk of relegation to the 'irrelevant basket'. This is a natural problem that religious education in a church-related school has to acknowledge and address.

A Spiritual/Moral Dimension to Good Teaching

Teachers need to be wise enough to be able to prompt students to *attend to the greater meaning of what they are studying*; in other words, to take (and

not overlook) the opportunity to see that there is much personal meaning to be considered in the issues that arise in their studies. At this point it will help to illustrate with examples: In a senior English literature/poetry study, students look at the theme "changing self". A teacher could ensure that all of the structural requirements in the unit were attended to; but a good teacher, who understands some of the complexities in developing a sense of self, could help students see how the feelings, thinking and behaviour of the characters in the texts were not all that dissimilar from those people encounter in day-to-day life. The teaching/learning process does not consciously probe for personal responses from the students; rather, it *externalises* the personal issues and complexities by teasing them out from the text. In the neutral and safe area of textual interpretation, the students identify and reflect on what has prompted change in the protagonists in the texts. If done well, this allows *emotional resonance* with the characters. Students can come face to face with matters and questions like: personal change is complex and people do not always understand until later (and perhaps not even then) that some decisions lead to irrevocable changes in personal relationships; to what extent do people have control over change in their lives? What sorts of external factors bring about personal change? What is involved in progress from childhood to maturity?

It is not difficult for young people to reflect and think of comparisons with their own life experience. Teacher comments, questions and examples can help students with the textual interpretation. How the issues relate to them personally is usually better left to their own reflection, even though occasionally, students may want to say something about this. What teachers do find at a later stage, outside the classroom, is that some students will comment about how much they liked that study because it gave them something to think about at a personal level.

While the English studies on "Changing self" tend to focus on identity from a psychological perspective, another study called "Power play" looks at the dynamics of personal power and politics. This sort of study leads to reflection on social and political issues. Yet another English study "In the wild" looks at writers' depictions of the conflict that has arisen from ways humankind has perceived its provenance over the natural world. This shows what can happen when humans do not take environmental responsibility seriously.

Studies such as these (that can be paralleled in other subject areas in the curriculum) have the capacity to become *windows on contemporary life*, sensitising students to seeing things differently in

their own experience, helping them become better interpreters of both meaning in the texts and meaning in their own personal experience. Without doubt, where teachers can do this, they are educating their students in the spiritual and moral layers to life. But what is most important is that they are just being good teachers in their own subject area; they are attending to its natural spiritual/moral dimensions. This is not a separate layer of moral education added to their teaching from outside like a superstructure. It is not asking teachers to go above and beyond normal teaching requirements; and it is not 'adding' spiritual material to the curriculum. But what it is expressing is a holistic education. It is fostering what might be called *personal learning*. As we have proposed in our earlier books on religious education, this general approach has much pertinence to the teaching of religion -- a subject area where there have been unrealistic expectations about both the personal relevance of the content and the personal response of the students.

How much then of this sort of teaching and learning is needed across the curriculum? This is a matter that needs careful attention; it has to do with the overall personal relevance of the curriculum. In a subject area like religion or personal development, we would argue that there should be a significant amount of value-related content that has personal relevance for students. In secular subjects, if attention to spiritual/moral dimensions is to be a natural part of the teaching, then attempts to do this excessively would be counterproductive - undermining the integrity of the principal subject matter. These subjects have a consistency in their intended knowledge and skills outcomes. Some parts of the content may occasion personal learning by students; much of it may not. Personal relevance is not an element that can be readily or easily injected. So, the short answer to the "how much" question is "occasionally". This is consistent with the view that the school has a limited capacity to bring about personal change in young people.

The more insight teachers have into the development of meaning, spirituality and identity, the better equipped and more sensitive they will be in leading interpretative studies of value related questions where these emerge in the curriculum; in turn, this can increase the potential of these studies for being personally relevant to the students. While such studies are 'searching' and not confrontative, they can challenge young people to expand their own understanding of meaning and identity related issues, sharpening their focus on the factors and questions that impinge on their own personal development, and on their physical and social environment. We consider that articulating this

spiritual/moral role for teaching across the school curriculum is fundamentally important for restating aims for school education which give more attention to the overall personal development of young people. This is where we see vital links with meaning, spirituality and identity development.

Summary – Characteristics of Education That Enhances Meaning, Spirituality and Identity

We have made it clear that we do not see 'education in meaning, spirituality and identity' as yet another subject addition to an already crowded curriculum. Rather, if we are to use this term, then it should list characteristics that could be implemented in various ways in different subjects and content across the curriculum in a holistic way -- like a template to highlight the spiritual and moral dimensions.

Here, we summarise the principal concerns in three clusters:

- the responsibility of communities to give young people adequate educational access to their traditions of meaning, spirituality and identity; the content is like spiritual resources for personal development;
- the development of an understanding of the process of construction of meaning, spirituality and identity across the life cycle; and an appreciation of the psychological and social functions of meaning and identity;
- the acquisition of skills in the identification and evaluation of meaning, spirituality and identity, in the light of community values.

We believe that a holistic education should address these concerns. In proposing a role for school education in relation to meaning, spirituality and identity, we do not want to give an impression that we think that education is the principal means of communicating these to the young. Family and cultural experience are considerably more influential. What we want to stress are the ways in which education can enhance personal meaning and identity, how it can help young people think more critically about how these are communicated and developed. Our shorthand for all of this is an education that explores reasons for living. This proposes that people's meaning/spirituality/identity will be more healthy and constructive if it is open to educational improvement, particularly through the use of reason.

The window of opportunity for school education to actually bring about personal change in young people is limited. We believe that this revolves around helping them learn how to become well

informed and think critically. This educates them to learn better from their own experience. Hopefully, they can identify wise traditions from the past, as well as being able to make thoughtful appraisals of the social environment that has a shaping influence on people's thinking and behaviour.

Our hopes for promoting personal change in students are precisely that: 'hopes' -- not outcomes or competencies that can be measured. The idea of an education that will help young people become more wise, alert to the spiritual and moral dimensions to life, emotionally mature and environmentally responsible is very noble, but it must be understood in terms of the real possibilities and limitations of appealing to reason as the basis

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for personal change prompted by classroom studies. How the school models the values and virtues it proposes for the personal development of its pupils will also be an important contributing factor to any personal change on the part of pupils. Given this understanding of education for personal change, it is clear that hopes for wisdom, maturity and responsibility are hopes for across-the-curriculum studies; they cannot be limited to one subject area like religious education. Hence the importance of clarifying a holistic approach. This is one reason that teaching is aptly called a profession -- in the original sense of the word, describing the work of those whose contribution to the welfare of the community was like a vocation or personal calling to serve.

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