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EDITORIAL

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY

A few weeks ago, Jan 26th, Australians celebrated Australia Day. A quick search on Google had numerous entries about how one could join the celebrations. A key event on this day is that many new Australians become citizens in ceremonies around the country. Thus, the essence of the day is about unity in diversity – that Australians, today, come in all different shapes, sizes and colour; that we are one; we are Australian. And yet, we were also reminded, as a result of the rather sensational reporting of the Tent Embassy protest in Canberra, that there are still too many people who are too often ignored and left out of the equation. In a VicHealth report (2011) on the Freedom of Religion and Belief, it was claimed that those most likely to be affected by discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, culture and religion are Indigenous Australians and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. This is a concern for all educators whose classrooms reflect a multitude of cultures and races. In particular, many religious educators constantly seek ways to address problems associated with teaching children to be inclusive, empathetic and compassionate. It can, indeed, be challenging in a society where such values are spoken about but not always acted upon. While individual teachers often succeed in instilling in their students respect for and acceptance of others within the religious education classroom walls, the obvious clash between the respective cultures of classroom and society is more than likely to create confusion and tension for the student who may become uncertain about the living in a particular religious way in a religiously diverse society.

The contributions to this issue of the journal reflect the problems of teaching religion in a diverse culture, especially when religion becomes the focus of political manoeuvres. We start with Hyde's discussion on religious education in early childhood which reports on research into how children learn using a dispositional framework. He uses a voice centred relational method in a longitudinal study with thirty teachers which highlights the importance of learning stories. Next, Ang considers the impact of the contemporary culture on adolescents and proposes four elements which he believes are essential to effectively engage students in secondary classrooms: Knowledge, Authenticity, Relevance and Relationships. Buchanan challenges the reader with the question: What has faith to do with classroom religious education? Undoubtedly, the problem of how religious education may be structured from faith and/or educational perspectives so as to achieve a balanced curriculum continues to attract differing opinions and Buchanan proactively contributes to this debate.

The next three articles by Rossiter, English and Sullivan respectively, focus on some generational aspects pertinent to religious education. Rossiter offers a particular perspective on children's spirituality in the cultural climate of today and investigates the implications for Catholic primary religious education. English examines transformative learning theory and aligns it with religious education pedagogy for women. Sullivan's article is generated by Newman's concept that interconnectedness should be a goal in Catholic university education. Accordingly, he argues that integration should be a key element in the learning that takes place in a Catholic university. The role of faith in religious education classes is the subject of the next article by Diponegoro and Waterworth. In particular, it highlights how this is played out in the different religious and political cultures of Indonesia and Australia. Finally, the impact of politics and social change is a feature of Meredith's article on a Christian Ethics programs in the Ukraine and he shows correlation between normative instruction and positive social change. Thus, the writings are reflections on diversity which is a feature of so many educational communities today, locally and globally and the writers examine various implications and offer inspiring insights for the religious educator in contemporary classrooms.

Marian de Souza
Editor

Reference
Klocker, N., Trenerry, B. & Webster, K. (2011). How does freedom of religion and belief affect health and wellbeing. A report prepared for VicHealth. Accessed 20th April, 2011, http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Freedom-of-religion-and-belief.aspx.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

2012 is a new year for the *Journal of Religious Education* in more ways than one. To begin with, I would like to welcome Dr Jan Grajczonek into the new position as Sub-Editor. Jan brings a wealth of academic and professional experience which will be of real benefit to the journal as we move forward with our plans for future growth and development.

Secondly, many of you have been enquiring about the subscription notices for 2012 which we did not include in the final issue of 2011. Instead, we did give you advance notice that this year, we will be going online to make the journal more accessible. We are hoping to have the website up shortly and all annual subscriptions will be paid online from now on. We will continue to post out the journal to subscribers and all subscribers will have access online to the current and past issues of the journal. However, there is also an option for subscribers to only access the journal online if they prefer not receive the printed copy.

Thirdly, we have made a decision that subscriptions will be maintained at the same rate that we have had for the past three years. Instead, we plan to have three issues per year. This decision has been made in light of the increasing costs of printing as well as our efforts to continue to maintain a high standard of content and presentation for the journal while keeping our subscription rates down.

We thank you for your ongoing support for the journal and hope that you will continue to find it informative and inspiring for your research and teaching.

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NOTE FROM THE SUB EDITOR

I thank Dr Marian de Souza for her welcome and would like to add how much I am looking forward to being a small part of the enormous and important contribution made by Marian and the previous editors, the Editorial Board, Consulting Editors and Editorial Advisory Committee of this journal to Religious Education. The *Journal of Religious Education* has maintained a significant readership not only here in Australia, but also across the world since its first inception as *Our Apostolate* in 1952 and then *Word in Life* in 1978. 2012 sees our journal expand its significant influence as it enters a new era with its online presence.

Religious Education includes a broad cross-section of areas and issues from around the world. Whilst each one of us involved in Religious Education has our own particular context, the many scholarly issues and interests published in our journal continue to assist us to remain well informed in our discipline. To have this opportunity of actively participating in the publication of the *Journal of Religious Education* is a privilege which I accept humbly and enthusiastically. Thank you.

*Brendan Hyde**

LEARNING STORIES AND DISPOSITIONAL FRAMEWORKS
IN EARLY YEARS' RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Abstract

This paper presents an initial report on a longitudinal project in which 30 teachers are tracking their students' learning in religious education in the early years' utilizing a dispositional framework (as opposed to a learning and teaching framework) in two Victorian dioceses. Dispositional frameworks place emphasis on the processes by which students learn rather than on the achievement of learning outcomes, and reflects approaches to curriculum which are being used in early childhood contexts. The notion of learning dispositions in religious education are detailed, as is the notion of a *learning story* – the tool that teachers are using in this project to track their students' learning. The voice-centred relational method used to analysis the transcribed interviews with early years' classroom teachers in this project is also detailed. Four steps typically comprise this form of analysis, and each is detailed by considering the transcripts of two particular interviewees in this project. The analysis of these transcripts reveals the complexity of the participants' experience in utilizing the learning story – a combination of frustration, struggle, and excitement.

Introduction

Early childhood educators have for some time now questioned approaches to education that focus solely on the development of thinking and rational cogitation, and have begun to favour *dispositional* frameworks in preference to learning frameworks (Perkins, Jay & Tishman, 1993; Brooker, 2002; Fisher with Claxton & Price, 2006). For although the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities is an essential facet of education, contemporary research indicates that the act of learning extends beyond rational thinking and concerns other non-cognitive dimensions (see for example de Souza, 2006; Buchanan & Hyde, 2008; Groome, 1998; Palmer, 1998). However, there is little evidence to suggest that dispositional frameworks have been utilized in religious education with early years' students in Catholic primary schools[1]. This presents a challenge for contemporary religious education in the early years' classrooms in which outcomes based philosophies focus upon demonstrable competencies as opposed to the *processes* or dispositions students utilize in their learning.

This paper reports on some initial findings of a longitudinal research project in which teachers in early years' classrooms in two Victorian dioceses are tracking students' learning in religious education in the early years' utilizing a dispositional framework[2]. The particular tool which is being used by teachers to track students' learning is known as the *learning story* (Carr, 2001; see also Walker, 2007). The research questions centre on whether teachers find the learning story an effective tool for tracking students' learning in religious education, and the insights they gain into the processes and dispositions utilized by their students in the act of learning. The paper briefly describes both the dispositional framework as it applies to religious education and the learning story tool. It outlines the research process employed and presents an analysis of two of the first series of interviews with the early years' teachers who are utilizing the dispositional framework using an adaptation of the voice-centred relational method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2006).

Deficiencies of outcomes-based approaches – the need for an alternative structure

Concerns in relation to outcomes-based approaches to religious education generally have been raised previously (see for example Ryan, 1998). However, in considering religious education in early years' contexts, there are some particular issues which also need to be articulated. Outcomes-based approaches privilege particular forms of knowledge (to the exclusion of other ways of knowing) which, it is assumed, can be measured, as well as promoting deterministic thinking which serves to create categories into which learners can be placed, accepting labelling of the Other as a natural occurrence (see for example Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Hyde, 2011). Such approaches, therefore, do not align with what is known about the ways in which young children develop. Early childhood literature maintains that children's development occurs along unpredictable and uneven trajectories (Cupit, 2007; Walker, 2007). Children develop at their own rate and in their own time. Since outcomes-based philosophies seek to impose standards, deemed to have been achieved by the reaching of "progression-points", such an approach is inappropriate for early childhood contexts. It fails to acknowledge the different rates and ways in which young children learn. An alternative approach to the outcomes-based philosophy is required when religious education in early years' contexts is being considered. A *dispositional* framework provides one such viable alternative.

Learning dispositions – an alternative framework

The concept of a disposition comes from developmental psychology. In common parlance, it is seen as a quality possessed by a person, and is often used to signal temperament, for example "she has a cheerful disposition". Such attributes have been variously termed dispositions (Katz, 1993; Perkins, Jay & Tishman, 1993), orientations (Dweck, 1999), and habits of mind (Costa, 2000). However, Carr (2001) notes that when, in relation to learning, the notion of motivation is considered in the description, learning dispositions comprise a set of participation repertoires from which the learner recognises, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities. Put another way, learning dispositions indicate that a learner is "ready, willing and able to participate in various ways: a combination of inclination, sensitivity to occasion, and the relevant skill and knowledge" (p. 21). In drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Comber (2000) argues that young children bring with them to school their "economic, cultural, social, symbolic and linguistic capital and their *habitus*, sets of dispositions acquired in daily life, that incline people to act in particular ways" (p. 46, my italics). Although children bring these sets of dispositions with them to school, Claxton (2008) argues that education can and should influence the development of these particular inclinations, as well as influencing the development of the knowledge and skills associated with different curriculum subject areas. Further, Claxton and Carr (2004) argue that when learning dispositions form the basis of an educational approach, such a framework draws attention to the long-term trajectories, rather than to the accumulation of particular bodies of knowledge, skills and understandings. In fact, Claxton (2007) goes so far as to argue that when educators think only in terms of teaching skills, or problem-solving competencies, while neglecting the need to cultivate dispositions, they often find that any apparent gains in acquiring such skills and competencies are relatively short lived – they fail to "last, spread or deepen" (p. 6).

It is pertinent to note then that a dispositional framework does not negate the teaching and learning of particular content, knowledge, skills and understandings. These are deemed as necessary and important, although they are viewed as one part of a much larger picture. A dispositional framework, then, is concerned not so much with the short-term aim of having students acquire particular content knowledge, skills and understandings, as it is with the long-term trajectory which includes the habits and orientations towards learning in general which are strengthened (or perhaps weakened) in the learning process. It is concerned with *how* students learn – the *process* – rather than with what they learn, since these processes can be applied across disciplines. A dispositional framework then shifts attention towards the process of learning, and the ways in which students' learning dispositions are growing and changing (Claxton, 2007).

In her work in early childhood contexts in New Zealand, and linked to the strands of the national early childhood curriculum *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), Carr (2001) identified five particular

domains of dispositions: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, communicating with others, and taking responsibility. The dispositions identified by Carr are intended to contribute towards the development of orientations, or habits of mind, across a range of discipline areas comprising the early childhood curriculum. In drawing initially upon the work of Carr, and through reference to the literature in both education generally and religious education specifically, Hyde (2010) refined these domains of learning dispositions for religious education in Catholic schools with early years' students, identifying the following five domains of learning disposition: curiosity, being dialogical, persisting and living with uncertainty, meaning-making, and taking responsibility[3].

Table 1: Learning Dispositions in Religious Education

	Description of Cues
CURIOSITY	A sense of wonder and awe Capturing interest Being drawn towards story, Liturgical action, symbol, sign, gesture, ritual Recognizing the familiar, enjoying the unfamiliar
BEING DIALOGICAL	Dialogue as play Dialogue partners in a game Engaging in dialogue with Self and Other Being playful with others and/or materials Deep listening Engaging in dialogue with story, Liturgical action, sign, symbol, gesture, ritual Trusting others
PERSISTING/LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY	Paying attention for a sustained period Sitting with ambiguity Deep questioning and wondering about Problem solving Lateral thinking
MEANING-MAKING	Being moved to express (verbal and kinaesthetic) Verbal and non-verbal communication Immersed in 'deep play' Intuitive response beyond words Discovering/unpacking Co-creator/constructor of the Tradition Communication of meaning – making meaning visible
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY	Taking action that matters Thinking the learning through into action Owning the learning Empower/commitment to a sense of justice Making a difference for the good

Hyde (2010)

Table 1 presents a summary outline of these five learning dispositions, together with a series of descriptions of cues which serve to both describe each of the five dispositions as well as to indicate their possible manifestation amongst learners. For a more detailed discussion of each of the five learning dispositions, as well as the literature which informed the development of these, see Hyde (2010). These five dispositions – curiosity, being dialogical, persisting and living with uncertainty, meaning-making, and taking responsibility – form the framework around which the longitudinal research project described in this

paper is based. The means by which to ascertain the dispositions which students bring to the act of learning in religious education, and by which to track their learning, is the learning story.

The learning story: A tool for tracking students' learning in religious education

The capability of stories to highlight critical incidences of children's learning in early childhood contexts are well attested to in the literature (see for example, Dunn, 1993; Gettinger & Stoiber, 1998; Lyle, 2000; Walker, 2007). Situating her work within this field, Carr (2001) presents the notion of learning stories, maintaining that they are similar to narrative style observations, but with greater structure since they are organized around each of the five domains of learning dispositions. They are observations carried out in everyday settings which, over time, "provide a cumulative series of qualitative 'snap-shots' or written vignettes of individual children" (p. 96) displaying one or more of the identified domains of learning dispositions. A single, isolated learning story may be of limited value. However, a series of learning stories, over time, begin to build a picture of the processes – the dispositions – each child brings to the act of learning. Learning stories may begin with a focus on one domain of learning disposition. However, Carr's research suggests that other dispositions are quickly brought into focus through such observation, and that *overlapping* – the process in which related domains work together – occurs. The critical point to note here is that the learning story is process-oriented. Its focus is not the learning outcome(s) which may or may not have been achieved, but rather the dispositions, orientations, or habits of mind which the child brings to the act of learning. In other words, the learning story attempts to describe *how* the child is disposed to learn.

A second important (and practical) feature of learning stories is that they are not intended to be lengthy. They comprise short, "snap-shot-like" descriptions of the observation. Brevity is of the essence. Key words and phrases are recorded which capture the kernel of the incident being observed. They may be accompanied (with the child's permission) by a photograph or sample of work which exemplifies the disposition(s) displayed in the observation. As well, it is not intended that one learning story be completed for each child every week. Rather, they are compiled over time. Two learning stories for each child each semester/half year is a more realistic undertaking. This renders the use of the learning story tool practical in situations where class sizes are large.

As a documented series of anecdotes, learning stories provide a valid and reliable record of children's learning. Using contemporary educational jargon, it may be said that learning stories provide the necessary *evidence* of the learning that is occurring. Teachers can then justifiably draw upon these when reporting on student progress in a variety of ways, including reporting to parents in parent-teacher, or indeed parent-teacher-child interview situations.

The project reported in this paper has utilized a single page learning story proforma structured around the five domains of learning dispositions in religious education outlined by Hyde (2010), presented in Table 2(a) below. The teachers participating in the research have agreed to document two learning stories for each of the children in their classroom each semester/half year. Also included on the proforma in Table 2 (b) below is an opportunity for teachers to decide upon how particular dispositions might be further enhanced or developed in the light of the learning story which has been written.

Table 2(a): Learning Story Proforma

	Examples or cues	A Learning Story (including evidence if appropriate – photographs, sample of art work, etc.)

CURIOSITY	A sense of wonder
	Capturing interest
	Being drawn towards story,
	    Liturgical action, sign,
	    symbol, gesture, ritual
	Recognizing the familiar,
	    enjoying the unfamiliar	

BEING DIALOGICAL	Dialogue as play
	Dialogue partners in a game
	Engaging in dialogue with Self
	    and Other
	Being playful with others
	    and/or materials
	Deep listening
	Engaging in dialogue with story,
	    Liturgical action, sign, symbol,
	    gesture, ritual
	Trusting others	

PERSISTING/LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY	Paying attention for a sustained
	    period
	Sitting with ambiguity
	Deep questioning and wondering
	    about…
	Problem solving
	Lateral thinking	

MEANING-MAKING	Being moved to express (verbal
	    and kinesthetic)
	Verbal and non-verbal
	    communication
	Immersed in 'deep play'
	Intuitive response beyond words
	Discovering/unpacking
	Co-creator/constructor of the
	    Tradition
	Making meaning visible	

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY	Taking action that matters Thinking the learning through into action Owning the learning Commitment to a sense of justice Making a difference for the good	

Table 2(b) Learning Story Proforma

Short Term Review	What Next?
Question: What learning did I think went on here (i.e., the main point(s) of the learning story?	Questions: How might I encourage this interest, ability, strategy, disposition, story to • Be more complex • Appear in different areas or activities in the program. • How might I encourage the next 'step' in the learning story framework?

The research process

The project reported in this paper presently consists of 30 early years' teachers in six Catholic primary schools – two in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and four in the Diocese of Sandhurst – using the learning story proforma (and the dispositional framework which underpins it) to track and monitor their students' learning in religious education. After some professional learning sessions with the researcher concerning the notion of a dispositional framework and the use of the learning story, the early years' classroom teachers in each school have begun to write learning stories for each of their students. The researcher will then interview each of these teachers twice a year (once in June, and once in November, using audiotape to record the conversation) over a period of three years. A semi-structured interview guide will be followed in order to ascertain whether these teachers have found the learning story useful, and to determine what they may now know about the processes their students bring to the act of learning[4]. The first series of these interviews have been conducted, transcribed, and an adaptation of the voice-centred relational method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2006), also known as *the listening guide*, has been drawn upon to analyse the content of these interviews. The following section details each of the steps involved in applying the voice-centred relational method as a means of analysis in this research project.

The voice-centred relational method

As described by Gilligan *et al*. (2006), the voice-centred relational method of analysis recognises that each person's voice is distinct. Each person's voice may be regarded as "a footprint of the psyche, bearing the marks…of that person's history, of culture in the form of language, and the myriad of ways in which human society and history shape the voice" (p. 253). It is influenced by clinical psychology, literary theory and reader response theory, as well as by the language of music: voice, resonance, counterpoint, and fugue. As such, this method of analysis follows the lead of the person being interviewed to discover the associated logic of the psyche and the construction of the mind. This method has been drawn upon in the research reported in this paper because it brings the researcher "into relationship with a person's distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person's expression with her or his experience" (p. 225) in relation to a particular context or phenomenon, in this instance, the use of the learning story and the dispositional framework which underpins it. The method comprises a series of sequential listenings, each of which requires the researcher's active presence and desire to engage with the unique subjectivity of the research participant. The transcribed texts of the interviews are read through multiple times, with each listening tuning into a particular aspect. Each step is referred to as a "listening" rather than a "reading" since the process requires the active participation on the part of both the teller (the interviewee – in this instance, the early years' classroom teacher) and the listener (the researcher). As well, each listening is not merely an analysis of the text, but rather is intended to guide the listener "in tuning into the story being told on multiple levels" (p. 256). Four listenings, or steps, typically comprise the analysis. These are detailed below considering, for the sake of ease and clarity, the texts of two particular

interviewees in this project.

Step 1: Listening for the plot

The first listening comprises two parts – listening for the plot and the listener's response to the interview. The transcript is read with the researcher attending to what the interviewee is saying and to the story which is being told. In this step, the researcher also attends to her or his own response to the narrative, explicitly bringing her or his own subjectivities into the process of interpretation. In qualitative research, a researcher is not, and can never be a neutral or objective observer (see for example, Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Morawski, 2001). Following the principles of reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998), the researcher then notes her or his own social location in relation to the participant, and the nature of her or his relationship with the participant.

In the two excerpts of the participants' transcripts that follow, both participants describe aspects of their use of the learning story in their early years' classrooms:

> I found there was blurring of the lines, especially between *curiosity* and *persisting and living with uncertainty*. Perhaps these need to be spelled out a bit more. And…I find this hard to do for each child on one topic because you don't get a chance to spend that much time with each child during it. In other subjects you spend more time with each child, and you get to find out what's going on in their minds. But I don't get to find out all that stuff in RE with these children. Usually with RE you take all the kids together and don't focus on individuals…You have to have the learning story right in front of you. If you had a folder and you saw something a child was doing, you could write it down quickly. I would use a highlighter to mark the cues on the learning story…
>
> So, maybe a clearer definition under each of the dispositions would be really good because I look at this and even now think about what it really means. Like, the cues are there, but a description might be helpful too. Looking at the cues now, they could actually be used as comments in a report form. So, yeah, I never thought about that. You could actually use the cues for each disposition as a tracking tool. I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report, for example "Christian was drawn to story, or symbol". How beautiful and insightful is that for a parent to hear? Yeah, I am feeling that there is no need for standards. The dispositions are much broader. These become a working document…

In listening for the plot, the researcher was aware of the way in which both of these participants had engaged with the learning story, and of the challenges and opportunities the learning story might present for two teachers who had not used this type of tool previously. In response to the two narratives, the researcher became aware of his own feelings of empathy with these two teachers in using a new and perhaps unfamiliar tool. Regardless of the possibilities using this might bring, the reality was that these teachers generously agreed to participate in this research and were now being faced with a difficult challenge amidst their already busy daily schedules.

Step 2: I poems

The second listening involves focusing on the use of the first-person pronouns in the transcript, and from these, constructing "I poems" (Gilligan, *et al*., 2006, p. 259). The purpose is to compel the researcher to listen to the participant's first-person voice, and to hear how this voice speaks about her or himself. To begin, the researcher underlines or colour-codes each first-person "I" within the text, as well as the accompanying words which seem important. Secondly, the researcher then extracts each of the underlined or colour-coded "I" phrases, keeping them in the order that they appear in the text, and places each phrase on a separate line, so that they appear as lines in a poem. Often this process results in the I poem capturing something not directly stated, but nonetheless central to what is being said, although it may not always render such a theme. In any case, the I poem "picks up on an associative stream of consciousness carried by a first-person voice, cutting across or running through a narrative rather than being contained by the structure of full sentences" (p. 260). This enables the aspect of the subjectivity of the participant to be

foregrounded, thereby providing the listener an opportunity to attend to the rhythms and shifts in the participant's usage of "I" in her or his narrative.

Two examples of I poems from the research reported in this paper are given below. The phrases have been extracted from the larger transcript excerpts above, and have been lined up, like the lines in a poem. The first appears as such:

I found there was a blurring of the lines…(between the various dispositions)
I find this hard to do for each child on one topic
I don't get to (find out all that stuff in RE with these children)
I would use a highlighter

In listening carefully to this I poem it would seem that the participant has experienced some challenges in using the learning story and the dispositional framework underpinning it. The blurring of the lines between each of the dispositions was experienced by this participant not as an instance of overlapping, as Carr (2001) described it (and as detailed earlier in this paper), but rather as something frustrating. As well, the "I" voice which is foregrounded expresses the difficulty experienced – I find this hard…I don't get to – and so forth. There appears to be a sense of both difficulty and challenge in using the learning story. However, there is also a hint of the willingness to nonetheless persevere (I would use a highlighter). As this was the first interview with this participant, it will be both interesting and valuable to compare this first-person voice with later I poems which result from subsequent interview transcripts with this same participant to see whether there are shifts in this person's narrative.

The second example, presented below, reveals quite a different and contrasting first-person voice:

I look at this and even now think about what it really means
I never thought about that. You could actually…
I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report…
I am feeling there is no need for standards…

The first-person voice being foregrounded in this particular I poem appears to be one of wondering and possibilities. In this passage the I poem highlights a different experience in using the learning story. While the listening reveals that this participant did experience some challenges (I look at this and even now think about what it really means; I never thought about that), it is also possible to see the shift in the participant's usage of "I" in this narrative towards the possibilities which using learning stories in religious education might bring (I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report…I am feeling there is no need for standards). The last line of the I poem is particularly interesting. The participant is intuiting, *feeling* that the use of learning stories in religious education may render the need for standards in religious education (consistent with the outcomes based philosophy) obsolete. In other words, this participant may see the learning story, with its focus on the way in which students are disposed to learn, as providing more information about the student than the indicating of an achieved outcome. It will be interesting to see whether other I poems from this participant composed from the transcripts of future interviews continue to reflect this perception.

Step 3: Listening for contrapuntal voices

This step offers a way of listening to and developing an understanding of the different layers of the participant's expressed experience in relation to the research question. The rationality behind this step is drawn from the musical notion of counterpoint, which consists of "the combination of two or more melodic lines" (Piston, cited in Gilligan *et al*., 2006, p. 262). In a musical score each melodic line has its own particular rhythm, but these are played simultaneously, and move in relationship with each other, sometimes resulting in harmony, sometimes in discord. Listening for contrapuntal voices enables the researcher to listen for the counterpoint in the texts being analysed – the multiple facets of the story being told. Gilligan and her colleagues have utilized this step in relation to individual participants. This involves reading through the interview transcript of the individual participant several times, each time tuning in to one particular aspect of the story being told – to one voice within the person's expression of her or his

experience. However, it is also possible to understand this step in the process as applying to all of the participants collectively. That is, it is possible to tune into particular aspects of the story being collectively told by the participants. The research reported in this paper viewed this third step in both of these ways, as pertaining to the individual participant *and* the participants collectively.

The second of the I poems above provides an example of listening for the counterpoint in an individual participant's expression of her or his experience. This participant's first person's pronoun reveals the emergence of two contrapuntal voices. First, there is the "I" that is challenged in relation to using the learning story (I look at this and even now think about what it really means; I never thought about that). This is the "I" that struggles to use the learning story in a meaningful and useful way. However, even within the few short lines of that I poem, it is possible to detect the emergence of second voice which seems to be excited by the possibilities presented by using learning stories in religious education (I think if you have two or three learning stories you could write a report; I am feeling there is no need for standards). There are two possible contrapuntal voices here – a voice of struggle and voice of possibility. In the counterpoint between these two voices it is possible to hear this participant's own struggle and excitement in using the learning story. Rather than having to choose which voice best characterizes what the participant is expressing, it is possible to listen for the relationship that exists between these two voices as this participant's struggle and perseverance in using the learning story results in some excitement at the possibilities that the use of the learning story might bring.

If both of the I poems are considered as a collective it is also possible to tune into particular aspects of the story being collectively told by the participants. The first I poem depicts a voice of frustration in relation to using the learning story (I find this hard; I don't get to). Yet, this participant continues to persevere. The second I poem, as discussed above, reveals a voice of excitement at the possibilities that the use of the learning story might bring. Both of these participants' voices reveal the complexity of the experience of working with and using the learning story. This is expressed in the relationship that exists between these two voices as the participants struggle, experience frustration, persevere, and possibly experience a sense of excitement in relation to the possibilities that might present themselves in using this tool in the classroom context.

Step 4: Composing an analysis
In the final step of the process, the researcher brings together what has been learnt from each of the listenings in relation to the research question. An interpretation of the interviews or transcripts is developed that synthesises what has been discovered. Through the analysis of the descriptions of the two participants considered in this paper, and in particularly through the I poems constructed about each, it is possible to hear the sense of frustration, struggle, and excitement experienced at the possibility of using learning stories in religious education. The complexity of the participants experience is foregrounded. It is not frustration, *or* struggle, *or* excitement that is experienced, but rather a combination of each of these experienced at different times.

Conclusion

Since the first round of interviews have only just been completed, and the teachers involved in this project have only just begun to utilize learning stories (and the dispositional framework which underpins them), it is too early to draw any definitive conclusions, particularly in relation to whether or not learning stories enable these teachers to gain insights into the processes and dispositions utilized by their students in the act of learning in religious education. At this stage, and as the I poems above suggest, the teachers are still becoming acquainted with the learning story tool, and experimenting with its usage. Their responses remain at a pragmatic and practical level in terms of their experience in using this tool. As would be expected, they are not in a position at this point to determine whether they have acquired insight into the processes and dispositions utilized by their students. Nonetheless, this study presents a challenge for educators to move away from the narrow confines of an outcomes based philosophy, with its emphasis on

cognition and demonstrable competencies, towards a wider series of horizons and perspectives in forging new pathways, frameworks and openings for more holistic curriculum development.

One of the strengths of the participatory nature of the research methodology being used in this project is that it honours the narrative conversations of the participants and offers a sensibility in listening to the vantage points, attending to the multiple voices of the participants and the resultant movements in their narratives. In giving visibility to such voices, the initial analysis does make clear the complexity of the participants' experience of working with and using the learning story. It will be interesting to see whether, given the longitudinal design of the project, the nature of this complexity changes, and whether teachers report positively in terms of gaining insight into the ways in which their students are predisposed to learn in religious education.

It is hoped that the utilization of the dispositional framework advocated being used in the study reported in this paper will make a valuable contribution to early childhood religious education and curriculum study. It is also hoped that the voice-centred relational method employed in this study will make a timely contribution to contemporary and scholarly inquiry about new research modalities and processes – and the trustworthiness of such practices in qualitative research in both religious education, and education generally.

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[1] A possible exception here would be the recent work of Eaude (2011) who advocates the use of attributes and dispositions in religious education generally.

[4] The same semi-structured interview guide – an interview with an agenda, yet utilizing open-ended questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Smithson, 2000) – will be utilized on each occasion the researcher meets with the teachers so that it may be possible to track, to some extent, the development and changes in the teachers' responses as they become more familiar with the dispositional framework and the learning story proforma.

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