

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR GRADUATE TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PRESERVICE EDUCATION

Abstract:

This paper reports on an initial part of a wider research study investigating professional teaching standards for teachers of Religious Education in Catholic schools in Victoria. Since the 1990s Australian education departments as well as a number of discipline specific associations such as Literacy, English, Music, ESL, and TESOL have developed and implemented professional teaching standards. Professional teaching standards have also been taken up by universities as they have integrated the various state and territory as well as subject specific professional standards into their preservice education courses. This paper presents initial findings of interviews conducted with graduate teachers of Religious Education across primary and secondary Catholic schools in two Victorian dioceses. These findings not only suggest tentative professional teaching standards for graduate Religious Education teachers but also raise a number of implications for preservice teacher education in the discipline of Religious Education.

Introduction

In this paper we introduce some initial and tentative findings from a research project which aims to articulate professional teaching standards for graduate (up to four years experience), accomplished (experienced in a range of schools and year levels) and leading teachers (those who have been given specific leadership roles in the curriculum) of Religious Education in Catholic schools. First the paper points to the development of general national teaching standards across Australia, before considering how these have been taken up in state documents and subject specific professional standards documents. A summary grid of this literature is provided in tables 1 and 2, before an argument is made for the development of professional teaching standards for teachers of Religious Education in Catholic schools. Next the research project and its aims are described along with the methodology of the research. Finally initial findings, which are the development of tentative professional standards for graduate teachers of Religious Education are proposed, as well as some implications these suggest for preservice education.

The authors of this paper are aware that not all educators are convinced of the necessity for professional standards for teaching, and the range of opinions about this is acknowledged. However it is beyond the scope of this paper to argue for or against the proposal of teaching standards, although this would be an interesting exercise, and perhaps the subject of new research after teaching standards have been in place for a time. It is a fact of Australian educational life that both federal and state governments are pursuing an excellence in education agenda that involves the setting of teaching standards, and it is against this background that the research described in this paper has proceeded. In addition despite views in the community that professional standards are either unnecessary or condescending to dedicated teachers, the fact remains that in Australian Religious Education there is all too much anecdotal evidence from teachers themselves, school leaders and students that teaching standards are often low. The proposing of standards offers a way for teacher education institutes, principals and employing bodies to seek to raise the educational value of this essential key learning area.

Background and context of the research


An important framework that directly influenced the development of professional teaching standards across Australia was *A National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching* (Ministerial Council on

Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2003). This framework provided a set of elements that were to serve as a starting point for Australian states and territories to develop their own “generic, specialist and subject-area specific professional standards” (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2003, p. 2). These elements were designed to enable and support the development of standards to “capture what it is that effective teachers know, do and value” (p. 3). They included: a) professional knowledge, b) professional practice, c) professional values, and d) professional relationships (p. 11). A further aspect of the framework was the recognition that the development of teacher knowledge, skills and practices occurs throughout teachers’ professional lives and is not a linear process. To this end, the framework suggested that the elements be developed at the appropriate level for each of four career dimensions: a) *Graduation*: At this level the graduate teacher “is not yet recognised as a competent and capable practitioner with full professional standing” (p. 10); b) *Competence*: This level signifies those teachers who have “formal and full entry to the profession” (p.10); c) *Accomplished*: Teachers at this level are “highly proficient and successful practitioners” (p. 10); and d) *Leadership*: This level acknowledges those teachers who have the capacity and the willingness to apply their professionalism in ways that are transformative for their profession” (p. 10).

Most of the Australian state and territory educational bodies have organised their own professional standards according to the career dimensions proposed by the *National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2003), that is, they distinguish between graduates, competent teachers, accomplished teachers and teachers as leaders.

The categories of professional standards and the career stages recognised by the state and territory documents that were developed from the National Framework are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Professional competences and career stages

CATEGORIES OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS	CAREER STAGES 			
	Graduate teacher	Competent teacher	Accomplished teacher	Leading teacher
Professional knowledge				
Professional practice				
Professional values				
Professional relationships				
Professional engagement				
Professional renewal				

In the primary documents on subject specific professional standards, which cover the teaching of Literacy, English, Music, ESL, TESOL, the following key categories occur: professional knowledgeⁱ, professional practiceⁱⁱ, professional engagementⁱⁱⁱ, professional relationships^{iv}, professional values^v, dispositions towards the subject^{vi}. Using the detailed descriptions provided under each of these competences we can now build the grid to its second stage.

Table 2: Professional competences and career stages (GT=graduate teacher; CT=competent teacher; AT=accomplished teacher; LT=leading teacher)

Categories and their standards	GT	CT	AT	LT
Professional knowledge <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Depth and complexity of content knowledge 2. Rationale for the subject 3. History of the subject 4. Knowledge of current curriculum policy and documents 5. Theory of the subject 				
Professional practice <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clear learning goals 2. Planning for effective learning 3. Knowledge of students cultural and educational backgrounds 4. Fostering a challenging, safe and supportive learning environment 5. Meaningful, regular assessment and reporting 6. Knowledge of diverse learning styles 7. Coherent, sequenced planning 8. Flexibility in planning 9. Use of a variety of resources and strategies including relevant technologies and community resources 10. Reflective practice and evaluation 11. Attention to students' backgrounds and prior knowledge 12. Active engagement of students 13. Interventions to encourage independent and critical thinking 14. Designing rich learning tasks 15. Keeping accurate and purposive records of students achievements 				
Professional relationships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constant, reflective collaboration with colleagues 2. Discussion of the effectiveness of their teaching with colleagues, students, parents, and caregivers 3. Collegiality in school and local communities 4. See themselves as part of a learning community 5. Utilise the resources of professional associations 6. Support and promote the professional growth of their colleagues 7. Able to work in a variety of learning contexts 				
Professional values <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural respect in appropriation and acknowledgement 2. Value different cultural traditions 3. Celebrate the cultural diversity of their students 4. High professional ethics for self and others 5. Ethical interactions with students, peers, colleagues, and members of the community 6. Awareness of and adherence to copyright and privacy legislation. . Espouse the values of cultural inclusivity, multiculturalism, multilingualism, reconciliation and anti-racism 				
Professional engagement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commitment to teaching and to their subject 2. Ongoing learning 3. Active members of the professional and wider community 				

Since this research was conducted and this paper drafted, in June 2012 the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) accepted the recommendations of a review of standards for teachers which will be applicable from September 2012. These national standards focus on subject knowledge, managing behavior and teaching pupils with a variety of special needs. The recommendations of the review included a) improving the rigor of teaching standards and ensuring they focus more on the essential teaching skills required in the classroom; b) having a single set of standards for all teachers; c), replacing the duplication of different standards from different bodies and d) reducing the number and complexity of the previous standards. When completed the development of standards for teachers of Religious Education will be aligned with the categories of the agreed national standards which it is expected will be completed by the end of 2012.

The research: Professional teaching standards and Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) is acknowledged in Church documents and individual schools and diocesan mission statements as an essential key learning area in all Catholic schools, yet there has been no work to date that applies the considerable literature on professional teaching standards to Religious Education. Since Religious Education is largely the concern of religiously affiliated schools, we cannot expect state or federal attention to this issue. However, appropriately, the research described in the rest of this paper is being carried out in a partnership between the four Victorian Catholic dioceses and academics in Australian Catholic University under a funding arrangement with the Victorian Bishops' grant for excellence in Religious Education.

The overall aim of the project is to develop a list of professional standards for each of the three groups of graduate, accomplished and leading teachers of Religious Education in Catholic schools in Victoria. The data discussed and analysed in this paper was drawn from 41 interviews in 5 primary schools and 2 secondary schools in the diocese of Sandhurst, and two primary schools and 6 secondary schools in the diocese of Sale. The dioceses are two of the four in Victoria, and the data represent only half (approximately) of what the authors hope to gather. Therefore this description and analysis must be considered to be preliminary, representing work in progress. While earlier in this paper the authors defended the decision to work towards professional standards for Religious Education teachers, they are also aware that the rich data that are being collected from teachers may well point to other research on what Australian Religious Education teachers think about their work

In conducting the research to this stage, the first step was to develop a literature review on professional standards in teaching generally and in specific curriculum areas. The development of this literature review led to the general categories of: a) professional knowledge, b) professional practice, c) professional relationships, d) professional values and e) professional engagement. The literature review also identified four groups of teachers to whom professional standards could be applied, these being graduate, competent, accomplished and leading teachers. The sub-categories in each of the five categories of professional stands, and the four levels of teacher experience are shown in tables 1 and 2 of this paper. Since the literature recommends that professional standards be developed in conversation and close consultation with practitioners (Sachs, 2003), the second step was to seek the advice of the four diocesan Catholic Education Offices (CEOs) in Victoria about schools that were known by the CEOs to have high quality practice in Religious Education. We hoped that in the smaller regional dioceses, Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale three primary schools and three secondary schools would be selected, and more in the larger region of the archdiocese of Melbourne. Up to this stage of the project (April, 2012) the data gathering has been completed in the dioceses of Sandhurst and Sale with the two remaining dioceses to be completed this year. The third step then was to approach each of the recommended schools, asking the Principal to identify an exemplary graduate teacher of Religious Education, an exemplary accomplished teacher of Religious Education and an exemplary leading teacher of Religious Education, and to give us permission to interview these teachers. As noted earlier in this paper, the National Framework identified four career stages these being *Graduation*, *Competence*, *Accomplished* and *Leadership*. For this research we settled on just the three categories of graduation, accomplished and leadership leaving out the "competent" category. The reason for this was that in the National framework "competence" is described as "formal and full entry

to the profession” (p.10) implying a level of postgraduate qualifications which it cannot be assumed Religious Education teachers have. To insist on this would have severely limited the number of teachers we could interview.

Sample

Since the contexts of the selected schools were quite different we chose not to provide criteria for the selection of the graduate, accomplished and leading teachers, but to rely on the wisdom and experience of the Principals to select them. Because of the availability and willingness of schools to be involved, always a variable in research, we gathered data in 5 primary schools and 2 secondary schools in the diocese of Sandhurst, and two primary schools and 6 secondary schools in the diocese of Sale. In all, to this stage of the research we have conducted 41 interviews, approximately one-third of these being graduate teachers, another third being accomplished teachers and the final third being leading teachers.

Research method

The rest of this paper concentrates on the research that we conducted with eleven graduate teachers across the two dioceses. Four of these were primary teachers and seven were secondary. We began with a general interview outline for each of the three groups of teachers, focusing on the categories identified in the literature, professional knowledge, professional practice, professional relationships, professional values and professional engagement, but we were prepared to be flexible and open to new categories that might emerge. We also chose to treat the interview outline flexibly and to give as much attention as possible to the real knowledge and experience of the teachers without being bound by the categories. Some examples of the questions we used are shown in Table 3, although the use of these would have varied among the three researchers.

Table 3: Interview questions

Professional knowledge	What content knowledge do you wish you had before you started to teach RE? From where did you gain content knowledge? What questions from students make you stop and think?
Professional practice	How do you use and apply the diocesan RE curriculum? How do you go about your programming and unit planning? What religious diversity is there among the students and how do you cater for that? How long does it take for you to plan your RE program? What process do you use in your RE planning? How do you think students learn best in RE? What successes have you had? What hasn't worked?
Professional relationships	What do you learn from other teachers? Describe a specific instance of collaboration with a colleague? Who has been a mentor for you in your RE teaching?
Professional values	What values does a good RE teacher need to have? What does it mean to you to be an ethical teacher in RE? What kind of RE teacher would you like to be in the future?
Professional engagement	What challenges do you face as an RE teacher? How do you know the students are engaged in RE? What makes you enthusiastic about being an RE teacher? What plans do you have to develop yourself as an RE teacher?

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and closely analysed using a qualitative approach by way of constant comparative data analysis (Creswell, 2008) wherein repeating ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) in interviewees' comments were grouped into common topics and in turn, further clustered into categories.

From each of the collected responses in each category we were then able to distil a general finding which ultimately was translated into a professional standard.

The graduate teachers: Research findings

The categories and sub-categories we identified from the interviews with the graduate teachers are shown in table 4. In addition to the five categories we had previously identified from the literature, one more (professional learning) emerged, making six key categories which are now discussed.

Table 4: Categories and sub-categories from the interviews with the graduate teachers

Categories	Subcategories
Professional knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content knowledge • I have gained content knowledge from • Where I go for help with content knowledge • What I want the students to know • Challenging questions from students
Professional practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical knowledge • How we plan • The diocesan curriculum • Strategies I use • Things that have worked • Mistakes I've made • How I know it's going well • Assessment • Evaluation
Professional relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking help from mentors
Professional values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why RE is really important • Personal attributes
Professional engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing leadership • Enthusiasm/passion for RE
Professional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further study • Develop teaching skills • Get more experience

Preservice RE qualifications

Seven of the graduate teachers had studied RE method as part of their preservice training, others cited local diocesan accreditation, in one case general accreditation and two others accreditation to teach RE. Only one had no preservice qualifications for RE. Most cited a strong Catholic family life and Catholic education as important both in their choice of Catholic education as a career and in their content knowledge.

Professional knowledge

All of the graduate teachers recognised that their content knowledge was limited and that they needed to continue learning. The most important area that emerged was knowledge of Scripture, not only being more familiar with Scripture, but the ability to analyse the intention of the biblical author, place a text in context for themselves and their students, and the ability to help the students to analyse Scripture in an informed way. One teacher spoke of his relief when he was informed by the CEO RE person that it was "OK" to educate in the critical-historical approach to Scripture.

I think it would have been the start of my second year where I had that PD, where the person

giving the PD said, "It's okay to say that certain parts of the bible are story to help the message". (K3)

When giving examples of challenging questions from the students, two of the teachers demonstrated a very simplistic understanding of the context of a Scripture passage that had caused their responses to the students to be muddled and unconvincing. Here is one example:

I just got stumped today. I was talking about the Passover, the first Passover, and the plague that hit the Egyptians, and one of the students said, "Well, how can that be justified because God has basically said, 'do not kill'. How can he justify ... like there seems to be one standard for him and another for us." It was quite difficult ... and in a sense, their perception is correct because one of the Commandments is "Do not kill". I couldn't really answer that. All I said to him was God did warn and give them plenty of chances and threatening, in a sense, said to them some judgement thing will happen if you don't release my people (K6).

Having Grade Prep very interesting to try and get points across through Religious Education. I think some of the ideas are quite broad and a little bit too complex for kids to understand. We've just done the Easter unit last term and I found that quite hard to deal with, the question about Jesus' death, and where he goes, and what happens with his body, (M2)

Other topics where the teachers believed they needed more knowledge were the Eucharist, other religions, the liturgical year and Catholic ethical teaching.

Looking back, what I would wish for would be more particular knowledge, because we learnt general knowledge, and then once we have been offered a job in a specific school we then have to go back and put all this general knowledge into specific topics. All I knew was what I didn't know. (J2)

The teachers cited various sources from which they had gained content knowledge, with Catholic childhood and education being significant. Various professional learning activities, especially those provided by the local CEOs were identified as well as the assistance of other teachers. Five of the eleven went to the local RE curriculum document for help with content knowledge and five went directly to the Religious Education co-ordinator in the school. Others mentioned the school library, the CEO RE resource person, the school chaplain in one case and various internal and external textbook resources.

And I think having that Catholic knowledge (childhood and Catholic education) is really valuable. I think if you did not have that Catholic knowledge and you came in here, any Catholic school, I think it would be very scary. So me being brought up in this Catholic school and with all the Catholic values and Catholic morals, I think that really did help me, going into teaching RE. (K1)

Being a graduate teacher, I do tend to be involved in a lot of professional development, and that includes PD on the diocesan curriculum. I also had one on Godly Play; so being new to the teaching system is also very valuable and rewarding in that aspect that I am new and I get to be involved in a lot professional development. (K1)

The diocesan RE curriculum document has a great balance in that it has background reading and sometimes the theological understanding as well. So you can depth your knowledge there, without having to look everywhere. (K3).

When discussing what they especially wanted the students to know, the teachers tended to focus on the topic they were teaching at the time, for example "the liturgical year", "stories about Jesus" "God's world". Others however took a more reflective approach to the question: "I want them to know that they are unconditionally loved by God"; "Where the tradition has come from"; "What it means to be Catholic". Four spoke of challenging questions from the students, and the common question about the truth of the Bible was cited as well as personal questions directed at the teacher.

Professional practice

The eleven graduate teachers had been selected by their Principals and/or RECs as exemplary for their level of experience, and so it is not surprising that overall they were comfortable in the classroom. They were organised, generally relaxed when challenged by the students, welcomed students' questions and, with occasional exceptions as demonstrated in the earlier section of this paper on Scriptural knowledge, handled them confidently. They were able to think on their feet, took a flexible approach to the movements in a lesson/unit and were able to use different approaches in different contexts. They knew that they could not assume background knowledge on the part of the students.

Well, I don't presume that anyone's gone to Mass. Because a lot of the things that we talk about in RE might have happened in Church that week, so I just assume that they have got a very basic understanding because there's only three or four in my class who do have that higher understanding. And I try and then get them to explain things to the class, so if they were there at Mass on Sunday and they went to children's liturgy, I might get them to explain what they've heard. Or I might then get them to tell us why we have the special colour for Lent and all those sorts of things. So I try and involve them and they feel like they're giving some of their knowledge. But I really try and keep it quite basic because I know that the vast majority of them don't go to Mass on a weekly basis or don't have a very good understanding. (K7)

They were also aware that their teaching in RE was an educational process not an exercise in sharing their own opinions and beliefs. Nevertheless, they were not afraid of sharing their own life experiences if the situation warranted this. "I find they like hearing about my life experience" (J2)

When talking about the planning of their Religious Education programme, it was clear that the planning was based on the local diocesan curriculum document, usually as the school had appropriated and interpreted it. It was also clear that the planning was, for the most part, collaboratively done in regular planning days, and/or year levels. Only one of the teachers said that she never had the opportunity to plan with others. Those who commented on this also said that they spent two or three hours a week in individual planning.

Well we use it (the diocesan RE curriculum document) in our planning, on our planning days. So on a planning day the Preps are actually separate from the Grade ones and twos, but the three Prep teachers will get together with the RE Co-ordinator, or with the CEO RE person and she will take us through the planning for the term. (K1)

I use it (the diocesan RE curriculum) it in every single RE lesson. So, we develop our plans from the curriculum document and we use the outcomes and assessment tools that are provided. A specific example would be taking a lesson from the proposed ones that they give you and developing that with the students. (M2)

If you go up to the school server, you can print off a break down, day by day, week by week. So I follow that and it has a list of the different handouts that they used, what needs to be taught in each class in terms of content and topic. So that's what I look at, that's probably the first thing that I go to and then I think about how using the resources that I have to use, how I can teach that effectively and interestingly. (K2)

When asked about the teaching strategies they used, the teachers mentioned 35 different strategies altogether, high on the list being visual activities, class discussions, and Godly Play cited by the junior primary teachers. All were at ease with using a wide range of different strategies, although two demonstrated lack of judgment and the lack of advice from the school RE leader in their use of particular inappropriate feature length films. Most had made mistakes and had learned from these. One had used a DVD that was too complex for the students, another had invited a guest speaker without realising that there was a list of school approved speakers, another had used an unsuitable disciplinary measure while another found that her role play activity made the students noisy and unfocused. However, in their work

with the students they were able to tell when the process was going well, in the engagement and interest of the students and their willingness to respond.

I think it depends on the students, because they like to talk so much I let them, so in discussions, they learn from each other.You can tell when they're learning something new. They'll ask some questions or they're sort of listening. (J1)

Just as teaching strategies varied, assessment protocols were also very varied, usually worked out alongside the school RE curriculum based on the diocesan curriculum document. Seventeen different kinds of tasks were mentioned. The teachers also regularly evaluated their work both formally and informally.

People say that I have a way with the kids where, I don't know how to describe it, but where they just listen, I don't know. I have a range of strategies, like I make sure that I'm not just talking all class. I've got visuals, I make sure that I've got PowerPoints and the brick testament, so looking at the Old Testament through Lego men, and so little things like that just to touch with them. It's just different ways to learn that, tactile ways as well. Laminated cards especially when it comes to parables, having them up on the board laminated in colour. (K5)

Professional relationships

Not surprisingly the professional relationship of the graduate teachers showed a high level of mentoring by school RE leaders as well as by more experienced teachers. For two of the teachers the CEO RE resource person had been a helpful mentor but others had called on colleagues at the school. All demonstrated not only willingness, but eagerness to learn from others and this attitude was summed up by one of the teachers in the advice: "Ask for help when you need it":

A lot of the time I won't know all of it (the content) but this year I thought along the same lines as someone else, so we both learnt it together. (J1)

Professional values

Two sub-categories emerged here, the first being the sense of why Religious Education was important and the second the personal attributes the teachers believed they needed to have to be an effective RE teachers. They argued that Religious Education was essential for different reasons with the most common being the belief that the students should have the opportunity to grow in their own religious tradition. Personal values were dedication, passion, and organisation, fondness for the students, compassion and kindness, good teaching skills, confidence in teaching content and believing what one teaches, and being there for "the right reason".

In Catholic schools its background and the kids need to have some sort of an understanding of why they belong to this community, why they come to a school that teaches Religious Education. (J1)

It's the base tradition but also parents have made the decision to send their children to a Catholic school and I think that's probably either to reinforce what they're learning at home or to instil the knowledge. (J2)

Being a Catholic school, the students are required to learn Religious Education as part of the heritage of the school and its part of the ethos and it underpins everything that we do at the school. (K2).

We have a pretty open classroom where kids are very well entitled to their opinion and the other day someone said, "What do we have to do RE for?" And I said, "Well, that's a decision that your parents made sending you here to a Catholic school." You know, there's no surprise that at a Catholic school you will do Religious Education. But they're generally pretty positive about it. And we had a good discussion then, "Well, why do we do it?" "Well, because we're a Catholic school." "Why else?" And they said, "Oh well, there's history there. There's ..." (K3)

Professional engagement

All but one of the graduate teachers expressed enthusiasm for their RE teaching because of their own Catholic background and education, their personal religious beliefs, their enjoyment of the students, and various other reasons. One of the teachers communicated a sense of being rather overwhelmed and interestingly this was the same teacher who said that he/she never had time to plan with other teachers.

We're not talking to each other and I find that really hard. There are no faculty meetings, it's very rare for any department and it's mainly because there's no time. We're tied up with meetings every night after school. It's very hard. (M1)

I think RE's really important, you have to be passionate with it, if it does get a bit boring or a bit dry you're not putting your heart and soul into it. And I personally really love teaching RE because I believe it's really quite important for the children. It's really quite life building. And so I think having my own passion and real love of teaching RE makes me a bit more motivated to do it and have the kids enjoy it as well. (K7)

Even in these early years of their careers four of the graduate teachers had demonstrated leadership in the RE curriculum, helping other teachers with ideas and planning, taking leadership in school liturgies, making resources for the use of other teachers, and one intended to take on a part of the REC's role in the following year.

I'm actually the junior coordinator this year for the curriculum of RE, just Years 7 and 8 and we've done a lot this year of building up resources because we have, well we have two teachers on call and 15 classes, and we have two of us that are trained to teach RE. So a lot of teacher are coming to me and asking me questions about, "What's the Catholic teaching on this?" Or, "What resource do we have?" Because the teachers don't have the historical background. (K7)

I did the Godly Play planning at the start of the year and a lot of people were worried that we didn't have the kits. It's not that hard just to use a bit of creative thinking, and you can soon make things. It's certainly not, I wouldn't say, "I'm not going to do that Godly Play because I don't have the things I need." So it's easy enough to make things. (K6)

I was actually a junior unit leader this year, half way through the year I became the junior unit leader. So we actually held a Mass last term, so that was, I was getting the Grade preps, one's and two's involved in that. So it was good, it was good for me to be able to have a part of Religious Education in the Grade one's and two's.

Professional learning

All of the graduate teachers expressed professional learning goals, some of these being formal study and others less formal plans. Four said that they wanted to do more study in RE; another wanted to complete the diocesan accreditation to teach RE. Other goals included "continually find new ways to teach"; "be a leader in RE"; "experience other Catholic schools"; "teach more RE classes to gain experience"; "make use of CEO professional learning activities".

There are a few things that I'm actually talking about with the Head of Teaching and Learning, to look at in the next couple of years, and I'm looking at different Masters units and things like that. (K6)

Professional teaching standards for graduate teachers of Religious Education

At this first stage of the research, mindful that we intend to interview graduate teachers from the remaining two dioceses during the rest of 2012, we tentatively propose this list of professional standards for graduate teachers of Religious Education in Victoria's Catholic schools in the understanding that they will be revisited and revised as the research continues.

Professional knowledge

1. Has an awareness of the need to continually learn;
2. Has an informed knowledge of contemporary Catholic approaches to understanding Scripture;
3. Is able to use knowledge of contemporary approaches to Scripture to answer students' questions in an informed way;
4. Actively seeks information from a variety of sources to develop content knowledge;
5. Uses diocesan curriculum documents for assistance with content;
6. Has a cognitively rich approach to content in RE;
7. Is aware that RE is not an exercise in talking about their own beliefs;
8. Has an overall view of the knowledge they want the students to gain;
9. Asks for assistance when it is needed.

Professional practice

1. Is confident in working with students in ways that are flexible and informed by relevant content and pedagogical content knowledge;
2. Has strategies for dealing with challenging questions from students;
3. Plans collaboratively and individually;
4. Uses diocesan curriculum to inform planning and teaching;
5. Has clear cognitively focused learning outcomes;
6. Uses a wide range of strategies to engage students;
7. Learns from successes as well as failures;
8. Is able to make judgments about appropriate resources to use including ICT, print, visual and digital media;
9. Is realistic about the level of student experience and knowledge of religion;
10. Is able to ascertain student interest and engagement and to adapt strategies accordingly;
11. Plans assessment collaboratively and uses a range of age appropriate strategies;
12. Evaluates RE teaching formally and informally, collaboratively and individually.

Professional relationships

1. Knows on who to call for assistance and support and is positive about doing this;
2. Plans collaboratively with other teachers.

Professional values

1. Believes in the value of the RE curriculum;
2. Has professional qualities of dedication, organisation, openness, kindness, tolerance, and is committed to the task of RE;
3. Knows appropriate ways of handling difficult situations.

Professional engagement

1. Takes initiative and shows leadership albeit in a limited way;
2. Faces up to challenges and seeks concrete ways of addressing them;
3. Enjoys teaching RE and is enthusiastic about it.

Professional learning

Has specific goals for professional learning in RE appropriate to stage of career.

Discussion: Implications for preservice teacher education

The above tentative teaching standards have important implications for preservice teacher education in Religious Education. The first implication concerns the two areas of professional knowledge and professional practice. The analysis of the data revealed two significant findings for preservice teacher education in terms of ensuring the provision of basic teacher content knowledge and effective pedagogical content knowledge. Many graduate teachers interviewed felt their own content knowledge was limited and further, that this limitation negatively affected their confidence and ability to respond informatively and

confidently to students' questions. It also affected their choice of appropriate and relevant resources to support their teaching and learning episodes. Such insights impel preservice Religious Education providers to pay close attention to the overall effects of their courses, ensuring that not only do they contain ample foundational knowledge which would support all key areas of diocesan curriculum documents, but also that this foundational knowledge is integrated with effective pedagogical content knowledge. Scripture was an area often named as challenging. Preservice teachers require basic knowledge and understanding of both scripture and scripture exegesis, but this knowledge needs to be integrated with how it informs, shapes and guides the teaching decision-making process with regards to effective pedagogy appropriate to the specific students being taught. Preservice teacher Religious Education courses need to ensure that all content units such as scripture, sacraments, Catholic social teaching and the like, be taught in conjunction with pedagogical content knowledge units. Preservice religious educators need to know and understand how the background/content knowledge of the various topics in curriculum is linked to *what* and *how* they teach that content. These two essential aspects of Religious Education courses should not be taught in isolation.

A second key insight gained from this study concerns professional relationships as a number of graduate teachers referred to key staff mentors as well as to CEO personnel who provided valuable professional assistance in their planning and implementation of Religious Education. This finding has two implications for both undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education. First at the undergraduate level, to ensure that an explicit course component includes a section on developing and promoting professional relationships with teaching partners, staff mentors and local diocesan education personnel. Second at the level of postgraduate teacher education, it would be important to ensure that teachers be made explicitly aware of their professional responsibilities to early career teachers. Often in the overall design of individual units in postgraduate courses emphasis is placed on the nature of a specific unit rather than how that unit might 'fit' within the whole course being offered. Whilst teachers gain deep and critical knowledge of such specific areas within the overall course, more particular aspects such as their professional responsibilities (for example their roles as mentors) can be lost.

A third implication for preservice Religious Education relates to ensuring that preservice teachers understand the notion of both professional values and engagement and their place in the life of the religious educator. Again these are areas that can be lost due to the emphasis of other course requirements and demands, but if preservice teachers are not explicitly acquainted with the value and engagement of Religious Education beyond the often stated "I do Religious Education because I need it to get a job into system", then their enthusiasm for and engagement with the subject is jeopardised.

Conclusion

This initial report of our wider study has highlighted a number of key insights into graduate teachers' approaches to their teaching of Religious Education. Not only has it made important links to the implementation of professional teaching standards generally, but more importantly it has raised significant aspects specific to Religious Education that have thus far not been articulated and therefore not explicitly contemplated. To document such standards will promote the discipline at two key levels: first, at the school level where the subject stands to gain greater status and emphasis, and also at the teacher education tertiary level where a wider view needs to be taken at the course provision levels.

Acknowledgements:

The research team acknowledges with gratitude the generous funding by the Victorian Bishops' Grant for Excellence in Religious Education which has been made this research study possible. They also acknowledge the contribution by Dr Marian de Souza who was part of the initial data collection.

References

- Auerbach, C.F., & Silverstein, L.B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. Retrieved 8 January, 2009, from <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy2.acu.edu.au/lib/australiancathu/Top?channelName=australiancathu&cpage=1&docID=10078435&f00=text&frm=smp.x&hitsPerPage=20&layout=document&p00=qualitative+data&sortBy=score&sortOrder=desc>
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. New Jersey: Pearson.
- Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs. (2003). A national framework for professional standards for teaching., from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/national_framework_file.pdf
- Sachs, J. (2003). Teacher professional standards: Controlling or developing teaching? *Teacher and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 9(2), 175-186.

-
- ⁱ Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) / Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA). (2005). Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA). <http://www.stella.org.au/pdf/AllStds.pdf>
 Australian Society for Music Education (ASME). (2005). *ASME National Framework for Music Teaching Standards*. http://www.asme.edu.au/ASME_Standards05.pdf
 Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT). (2006). *Standards for excellence in teaching mathematics in Australian schools*. AAMT Inc. Downloaded from <http://www.aamt.edu.au/Standards/Standards-document/AAMT-Standards-2006-edition>.
 English as a Second Language (ESL) and Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL): Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA). (2004). *Professional Teaching standards for TESOL practitioners*. http://www.tesol.org.au/ted/std_t.htm
- ⁱⁱ Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) / Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA). (2005). Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA). <http://www.stella.org.au/pdf/AllStds.pdf>.
 Australian Society for Music Education (ASME). (2005). *ASME National Framework for Music Teaching Standards*. http://www.asme.edu.au/ASME_Standards05.pdf.
 Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT). (2006). *Standards for excellence in teaching mathematics in Australian schools*. AAMT Inc. Downloaded from <http://www.aamt.edu.au/Standards/Standards-document/AAMT-Standards-2006-edition>.
 Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations. (AFMLTA) (2008). *Professional Standards for accomplished teaching of languages and cultures*, http://www.pspl.unisa.edu.au/doclib/annotation_italian.pdf.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) / Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA). (2005). Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA). <http://www.stella.org.au/pdf/AllStds.pdf>;
- ^{iv} Australian Society for Music Education (ASME). (2005). *ASME National Framework for Music Teaching Standards*. http://www.asme.edu.au/ASME_Standards05.pdf
- ^v Australian Society for Music Education (ASME). (2005). *ASME National Framework for Music Teaching Standards*. http://www.asme.edu.au/ASME_Standards05.pdf
- ^{vi} English as a Second Language (ESL) and Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL): Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA). (2004). *Professional Teaching standards for TESOL practitioners*. http://www.tesol.org.au/ted/std_t.htm

* Associate Professor Kath Engebretson lectures in the National School of Religious Education at St Patrick's Campus, Australian Catholic University.

* Dr Jan Grajczonek is senior lecturer in the National School of Religious Education at McAuley Campus, Australian Catholic University.