

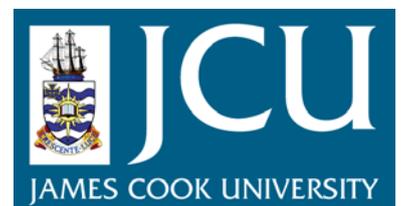
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An Investigation into Adolescent Male
Spirituality in Catholic Schools in the
Edmund Rice Tradition:
Examining the Implications of
Incorporating Spirituality into Counselling

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Statement of Contribution of Others Including Financial and Editorial Help

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Abstract

A change in the multicultural nature of Australian society over the last generation, a growing acceptance of pluralism and secularism and the exposure through the media of many varied faiths and religious practices has changed the cultural landscape of this country. This, combined with a decline in traditional cultural practices that supported and encouraged involvement and practice in mainstream Christian faiths, has led to many questions being raised as to the role of spirituality in the life of young people. The situation of increased questioning has been made more complex by the rise in the prominence of fundamentalism in some denominations.

Even though society has become more complex, there still exists in all, especially the young, a desire to ask questions around issues of a spiritual nature as this will assist them in the journey towards the articulation of their own identity. Another by-product of a society that embraces daily change and technological advances is an increase in the demand for the helping professions, especially ones of a psychological or counselling nature.

In exploring the idea of adolescent male spirituality, the 'context' (referring to aspects such as family type, socio-economic status, school environment, social network, ethnicity, religious beliefs and cultural experiences and practices) of an adolescent male's life was examined. The thesis also takes an in-depth look at developmental theory as relevant to this age group. More importantly, a theoretical framework around the key concepts of personal, professional and spiritual support for counsellors and school leaders who journey with adolescents daily was developed. To achieve this, an investigation into the relationship between spirituality and counselling was undertaken, looking specifically at the spiritual dimensions of the therapeutic relationship and therapeutic approaches to spirituality.

The key therapeutic theoretical framework that is explored is cognitive behaviour therapy. This is most appropriate, as it is a structured, short-term, present-oriented psychotherapy directed at solving current problems by modifying biased thinking and behaviour. It can be easily applied to teenagers.

The research investigated the role of spirituality in the life of adolescent males in Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition and any difference that can be made by psychotherapeutic interventions. This was done within the context of looking at developmental theory in its application to adolescents within an educational environment. The research methodology was a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. The initial research method used was the Delphi technique. This technique required the use of an expert panel in the process of developing the research instruments, thus ensuring relevance and the collection of reliable information. The research at the school stage followed a four level programmatic approach. The four phases were quantitative instrument, qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and the interviews with counsellors and adults. These followed a sequence progression method.

The results of the study revealed that adolescent males in a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice Tradition were attentive to a spiritual dimension in their lives. Entry points to this spiritual dimension are different from the traditional expectations typically identified within formal religious traditions. Spiritual engagement was found to be fostered by the experience of personal relationships, involvement in social justice activity and awareness of the impact of the environment on their spiritual journey. An openness exists to share experiences and reflection with counsellors on processes that nurture development across spiritual and associated developmental domains. A specific sensitivity exists to operate with trusted and appropriate adults, such as counsellors in areas of spiritual challenge and growth.

An interpretation of results centres around a discussion of spiritual development as a contributing factor to the expression of adolescent identity; student well-being as connected with spiritual development; the developmental stage of adolescence as a sensitive period for enhancing spiritual growth; a significant role for counsellors in supporting the spiritual journey of adolescents; the wider impact that holistic development has on teaching and learning; and the formation of a whole school approach to the support of adolescent spiritual development. A final observation was the need to ensure that the religious dimension of the school is consistent with the spiritual development of the individual.

The study concludes that Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition that proclaim to have a values focused education based on a religious background or tradition must constantly recognise the creative tension that exists between remaining faithful to their mission and meeting the developmental needs of the adolescent males who are coming to school from an increasingly pluralistic and complex society. The changing nature of the adolescents' search for spirituality and identity also necessitates that existing paradigms that define the response to these questions by church and schools need to be evaluated.

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