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**Exploring Perceptions of Interreligious Learning and Teaching and the Interplay with
Religious Identity**

Dissertation submitted by

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Statement of the Contribution of Others

This thesis contains my own work, except for the normal contributions of my supervisors. In addition, chapters 4, 5 and 6 were jointly published papers and chapters 7 and 8 are co-authored papers currently under review in journals. The contributions of others to published chapters are described in detail below, as well as acknowledged at the beginning of the respective chapter in the reference.

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Chapter 4 Identity and Dialogue: Learnings from a Personal Interreligious Encounter

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Chapter 5: Interreligious Learning and Teaching: Unfolding Layers of Meaning in Lived Experience to Inform Possibilities for Students in Catholic Schools.

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Chapter 7: A Case Study of Students' Perspectives of Engagement in Interreligious Learning and Teaching: A Community of Learners

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I planned and conducted the data collection, planned and conducted the data analysis, wrote the manuscript, will address reviewer feedback, and make revisions. The contribution of the co-authors is outlined below:

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Chapter 8 A case study of parent perspectives on interreligious learning and teaching in a diverse Catholic school context; ‘Building a civilisation of love’.

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Contribution of Others to Chapters Included in the Appendices

Appendix A

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I planned and conducted the literature search, planned and conducted the literature analysis, wrote the manuscript, addressed reviewer feedback, and made revisions.

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I confirm the candidate's contribution to this paper and consent to the inclusion of the paper in the appendix of the thesis.

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| Professor Maree Dinan-Thompson | |

The consent of the publisher has been given via the email and included in *Appendix A*

Abstract

Contemporary Australia is becoming progressively more culturally and religiously pluralised and this reality is also evident in the context of Australian Catholic schools. How a Catholic school engages authentically with diversity while remaining faithful to its particular religious worldviews is a challenge in these modern times. A review of the literature suggests there is a variety of approaches to Religious Education within Australia which are underpinned by differing theoretical and theological perspectives. The concept of personal identity, including spiritual or religious identity and opportunities to educate for identity development are explored. The religious identity of Catholic schools and how this may be measured is also investigated. The literature indicates interreligious learning and teaching as a part of Religious Education, could be a potential pathway to developing a harmonious future that supports the common good of all.

This study has explored the overarching question: How do individuals perceive engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how might this interplay with religious identity? The investigation has included three studies with ever-widening perspectives and utilised methodologies and methods appropriate to the aim and purpose of each study. The first exploration was an autoethnographic study of a personal experience of ‘interreligious learning and teaching’ in which the researcher participated. The second, a hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenological investigation uncovered layers of meaning around the interreligious learning and teaching experiences of five adults. The final study, explored the bounded case of one Catholic School investigating how leadership team members, staff, students and parents perceived their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and its possible interplay with religious identity.

The integration of the findings from the three studies evidenced key themes of relationships, openness to diversity, learning within an educational framework, transformation/transfer and religious identity, and educating for identity development. The complete study has revealed considerations for Religious Education and Leadership in Catholic schools. The overall investigation uncovered the potential for a Reconceptualist approach to Religious Education to enable learners to ‘recontextualise’ the Catholic narrative within a pluralised world. The opportunity that a re-conceptualising of ‘revelation’ could offer Religious Education and the importance of effective leadership of a Catholic school to enable engagement in the work of interreligious learning and teaching are identified. The study highlights possibilities for future investigations into the effectiveness and relevance of a Reconceptualist approach to teaching Religious Education, the potential for interreligious learning and teaching to positively resource the individual’s identity development, and the role of Leadership in fostering a willingness and capacity to engage in interreligious learning and teaching.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Stimulus for the Study

The story of an eleven year old girl...

Having crossed the highway from school to the roadhouse (tuckshop), I discovered a 2-year-old wandering aimlessly, close to the busy road. My immediate response was to shepherd her to safety. I quickly deduced that she was from the nearby Settlement and urged my companions to assist me to take her home. They were not inclined - the Settlement was no place for white girls!

“Mr Brown ‘ll kill us!” they insisted as they headed back to school.

I couldn’t leave the child, she’d be hit by a car. So I started alone down the dirt road, when Pamela, an Aboriginal girl from my class spotted me as she exited the roadhouse.

“Where ya goin’?” “she called.

“Take her home, she was near the road” I responded nervously.

“I’ll come!” she offered.

I was secretly relieved, though Pamela wasn’t from the Settlement. Her family lived in the town centre amidst white families. I wondered what she was feeling inside. We walked in silence, maybe we both felt strangers in this land. I was anxious ... Would I get into trouble? Was it good that Pamela was with me? Finally, we hesitantly walked up to the first house.

“I found this little one near the road, do you know where she lives?” I inquired politely.

“Yeah, in that house, halfway down the street,” the adults pointed helpfully.

“I’ll take ya”, one of them offered.

There were no tones of hostility or suspicion. However, I was greatly relieved when we finally reached the house, returned the child, and raced back to school.

Our return brought the dread of being sent to the Principal’s office. Thankfully our friends had refrained from dobbing, but were quick to convince me, my parents would hit the roof! Mindful of this, I surmised it best to confess before my siblings sold me out! To my relief and bewilderment, my parents said nothing about going into the Settlement. However, they were delighted that the young girl had been safely returned to her family .

This is my first strong recollection of otherness and one that has had a lasting impression on my life. Whilst not cognisant of it as a child, the community I was raised in carried the scars of a segregated population with the existence of an Aboriginal settlement on the outskirts of the town. This settlement was a street behind a roadhouse located on the highway, and on the opposite side of the road was the local state Primary school. I attended the state school for seven years and completed my secondary education at a Catholic boarding school. My family was not overtly Catholic; we were occasional mass attendees, engaged in the sacramental program and regularly attended State school Religious Instruction. It wasn't until I went to secondary school that I was enculturated into a robust Catholic confessional culture, and I became more aware of and affiliated with my (Catholic) religious identity.

Identity is central to the human person and is a complex construct with the potential interplay of culture, ethnicity, religion, family, and one's personal sense of self. During the adolescent years many individuals consciously grapple with, and reflect upon, issues or questions of personal identity relating to the various individual and social influences entwined in their lives (Erikson, 1968). With the wisdom of years, I recognise my childhood experience of the *Settlement* as seminal. It was my initial significant confrontation with otherness and was entangled in my personal sense of ethics, parental influence and complicated by the impact of peer and community mores. The sense of fear was tangible as I feared being reprimanded for entering a world from which I was separate and through social osmosis believed I had no right to engage with. Paradoxically, I had no hesitation in acting to ensure the child's safety. Entering the Settlement triggered enormous anxiety; I was vulnerable and yet open, and my intent was sincere. The subsequent encounter produced a sense of integrity as there appeared a reciprocity in the afforded dignity and genuineness. That day I learnt that my instincts were trustworthy, and fear was a physical indicator of vulnerability. Ultimately the experience was an encounter of human persons.

Some ten years later, I had another seminal moment that would change the way I frame and understand the purpose, process, and potential outcomes for Religious Education in a Catholic School.

The story of a twenty-one year old woman...

"Okay, let's have each group share about the 'tradition' that they've focused on," the lecturer asked as she called the small groups back to the plenary.

"Let's start with 'Ecclesial Enculturation Tradition'. Who's going to feedback for that group?"

'That will be me' a student replied.

He continues, "So Scott proposes the Ecclesial Enculturation Tradition is catechesis and is an 'Inner Border Model'. He says this is the 'nurturing of faith' type education and religious socialisation. It's confessional and is concerned about developing and nourishing one's personal belief – the handing

of the tradition so to speak. It's part of the church ministry. It claims to respect the territorial rights of others, but its prevailing concern is to be vigilant about its borders. It's a life-long process and the work of the entire Christian community. Its main objective is closely related to practical outcomes: practicing church membership, transmission of the heritage, handing on the symbols of the tradition and deepening of loyalty to one's beliefs, meanings, and values.

That's about it in a nutshell, unless anyone else wants to add anything?"

There is an awkward silence. My eyes are cast down to the floor in the great hope that I don't get asked to comment. The section my group had done had made us all feel a little discombobulated and I had to present the summary.

"Thanks Jack" the lecturer interjects, "how about we hear about the other two and then we can open up the discussion. Group 2, The Revisionist Tradition, thanks Denise."

"Scott calls this tradition the Revisionist Tradition and describes it as a Dialectical Border Model which is represented by Christian Religious Education. He proposes current representatives of this form in the Catholic tradition are Thomas Groome and Mary C. Boys. Its frame of reference is the intersection of religious tradition and contemporary human experience. Its proponents claim theology and education inform and transform each other however Scott suggests it may in effect become a practical theology. The Christian religious educator navigates within and between the broader contexts of the Christian community and the current social environment. For this tradition, the educational process involves the application of modern critical reason to the beliefs, symbols, values, texts and lived life of the Christian tradition. This tradition engages persons in dialogue with the Christian tradition (past, present, and future). It aims to engage persons in intelligent participation in living Christian community and to make tradition available which can lead to personal and social transformation.

I think that's enough for now"

"Thanks Denise and the final group – the Reconceptualist Tradition. Let's hear a brief synopsis. Thanks Toni, is that you?"

"That's me. Well this tradition was new to all in our group so I'll do my best.

Scott suggests that the Reconceptualist tradition is a Border Crossing Model. Its vision, he says, transcends the local ecclesial community, without negating it. It opens up or crosses over into a large public context. He suggests that Gabriel Moran and Maria Harris are leading proponents of this tradition. The tradition holds that education is the arena for dealing with critical religious issues and concerns of life. It is the setting in which diverse religious traditions (Catholic Protestant, Jew etc.) can converse on education matters. A reconceptualised Religious Education is a way of being religious in "a new key" – in a context of education. We are challenged to face up to religious issues in an

educationally appropriate way. It's not a cold exercise in comparative religions but rather genuine intra- and inter- religious dialogue is sought through a process of self-reflection, sympathetic understanding, open encounter, and mutual exchange. Religious Education in a reconceptualised mode is the way we go about understanding our own religious tradition, convictions, and our God against the religious identity of 'the other', the stranger. The purpose of Religious Education in this tradition is to make us at home in this world but discontent with its limits. It is a way of learning to live intelligently and religiously in a modern world. This world of religious diversity is an intellectual and spiritual fact for contemporary life. A reconceptualist Religious Education seeks educational space where public dialogue can ensue between religious traditions and between the religious and non-religious on the pressing religious questions of our time. Its ultimate goal is to assist people to think, feel, imagine, act, and grow religiously in an intelligent manner.

I'm not sure if that captures it – it's quite a different approach.”

“So you're feeling a little uneasy with this approach, what is it that you're finding challenging?” the lecturer probed.

“Well, I guess it just isn't my experience. It's not my understanding of what I do in my classroom. What about the faith? Where is that in this paradigm?” I responded awkwardly.

The synopses of the 'Three Traditions of Religious Education' in this story comes directly from the so named article by Kieran Scott (1984, pp. 324 - 336) which was a paper studied by the researcher in a university post-graduate course. I acknowledge the mention of *Maria Harris* who has since passed and has left an indelible imprint on my work and life.

The story from my childhood continued to loom large in my thinking as I began my teaching career in a Catholic school and anyone who was 'other' seemed to capture my attention. At the same time my strong Catholic 'enculturation' throughout my formative adolescent years had significantly nurtured my faith and I began my teaching career thinking that every child should be swept up in the Catholic faith, so they could have what I had. My encounter with Scott's (1984) 'Three Traditions' continued to niggle at me and quite quickly started to stretch my thinking towards considering the purposes and processes of the traditions as framed in this article. I began to consider my own loss in not being open to the 'religious other' to genuinely encounter and learn about them and in turn to learn more about myself through understandings of religious experiences that were foreign to me. It was a case of 'having heard' or learnt about the 'Reconceptualist approach' to Religious Education, I could not 'unhear' or unlearn.

Scott's (1984) article was bewildering and unsettling at the time, but as I began to unpack it, reflect upon it, and come to some understanding of what the author was writing about, it became an

epiphany in my life. Scott's purpose for the article was 'to satisfy "a blessed rage for order" in the current field of Religious Education' (p. 323), yet my current experience tells me that an 'order' is still to eventuate, and the 'rage' may well be an unwelcome guest within the frame of some religious educators. Almost forty years after this article was published, approaches to Religious Education continue to be robustly contested in the literature (Buchanan, 2005; Hyde, 2017; Groome, 2019; Scott, 2019; Rossiter, 2020). At an International Conference on Catholic Education which I attended as a neophyte researcher, the paradigmatic divide of approaches to Religious Education was palpable. I was shocked that academic debate could become so enraging for scholars of Religious Education and theology. As I reflected on this experience, and those of my early life, I continued to wonder what was so challenging or frightening about this approach? Was it a fear of Catholics losing their identity? Was it a fear of losing Catholics to other religious affiliations or that they may abandon their religion altogether? I wondered about experiences of interreligious dialogue or learning. What might engaging with the 'religious other' look like for the average person? What might it look like in the classroom? How might these encounters interact with an individual's religious identity?

Research Questions

From these wonderings the research questions began to formulate. The overarching question being: How do individuals perceive engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how might this interplay with religious identity? The questions that underpinned the investigation were:

- How do I experience interreligious learning and teaching? How does it interplay with my religious identity?
- What are the interreligious learning and teaching 'lived experiences' of others?

In a School Context:

- How do staff, students and parents describe their experiences of interreligious learning and teaching?
- What does this look like in a classroom?
- How do or why don't these participants think the ways in which the learning is presented plays a role in a student's ability to participate in interreligious learning and teaching?
- How might this learning assist learners (or not) to develop their religious/non-religious identity?

These questions were explored through the literature review and theoretical perspectives, an autoethnographic study, a hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenological investigation using the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 2014) and a case study of one Catholic school. The researcher has endeavoured to take an 'every widening scope' (See Figure 1.1) in probing perspectives for this investigation. The researcher acknowledges that perspectives of this phenomenon are akin to Rabbi

Stephen Wylen's (2005) notion of the 'Seventy faces of Torah' - like a gemstone that can be viewed through many diverse facets (perspectives) and each time the gem is turned, even slightly there is the opportunity to see it differently. There is a myriad of perspectives, ways, and levels of interpreting what we experience, as it is with interreligious encounters.

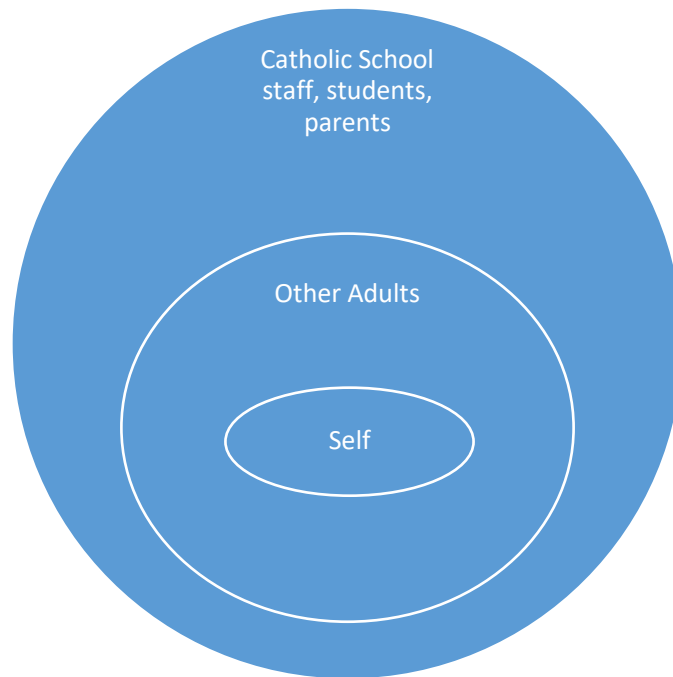


Figure 1.1 The Widening Scope - Expanding Perspectives of the Study

Purpose and Aim of the Study

This study seeks to explore the perceptions of individuals engaged in interreligious learning and teaching to uncover what might be possible for students in contemporary Catholic schools. The reality of Australian Catholic schools is that they are pluralising contexts, and this is occurring in a similar pattern and at a similar rate to that of the general population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022; Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018). This implies that many Catholic schools have a clientele that is religiously and non-religiously diverse. Dealing with this diversity in a respectful and meaningful way has the potential to yield benefits for all (religious and non-religious) and to contribute to addressing the educational goals for all Australians as articulated in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) (Education Council, 2019). This investigation has the lofty ambition of contributing to this agenda with some possibilities that might resonate with and be viable in other contexts looking to address evolving opportunities to invest in the future of our young learners. The journey of this investigation will ensue.

Overview of Chapters

The chapters in this thesis are structured to reflect the metaphoric ‘turning of the gemstone’ to explore the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching and its interplay with religious identity from multiple perspectives. This introduction has revealed the researcher’s stimulus for the study and began to explicate the theoretical frame that has led to the research questions and the overall purpose and aim of the study. Chapter 2, the Literature Review and Theoretical perspectives provides a background for the research by exploring the contemporary Catholic school, approaches to Religious Education in Australia, contemporary educational agendas, interreligious dialogue and learning and teaching, the Enhancing Catholic school identity typologies, approaches to interreligious relations and a brief understanding of revelation. The chapter explicates the theoretical perspectives that underpin the study.

Chapter 3 describes the researcher’s philosophical perspective and outlines the design strategy, methodologies, methods, and data collection strategies that support the three investigations of the study adding to and working towards answering the research questions. Chapter 4, (a published paper), presents the researcher’s personal experience of interreligious learning and teaching and utilises autoethnography to interrogate this personal story in conversation with the theoretical literature. Chapter 5, (a published paper) opens up the exploration to look a little wider at the interreligious learning and teaching ‘lived experience’ (van Manen, 2012) of five adult participants. This exploration employs the lifeworld existentials to uncover layers of meaning about this phenomenon through lived experience descriptions.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 look at the perspectives of the staff, students, and parents respectively, in a case study of one Catholic school focussing on their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching. The staff perspectives paper has been published and the other two papers are presently undergoing peer review. These chapters explore the perceptions of these three groups within the school and utilise basic qualitative inquiry to uncover themes that are discussed with reference to the literature. Chapter 9 is a review of the contribution of each of the studies, an over-all discussion of the themes that have been revealed, addressing of biases and limitations, and finally looking at where this study might lead.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter will situate the contemporary Catholic school in its context and explore the call to dialogue. It will review the literature relating to Religious Education, interreligious dialogue, and interreligious learning and teaching. It will also briefly explore the theology of religions and understandings of revelation which underpin interreligious learning and teaching. The chapter will explicate the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) which proposes a way to frame 'Catholic identity' in a school with a baseline measure and indications of the school's future direction.

Part of this chapter was published as a book chapter and is reproduced in part and updated with the permission of the Editors. The complete manuscript is included in *Appendix A*. The literature in this chapter is further explicated in the publications in Chapters 4 – 8 with some additional material also explored.

Foley, T. & Dinan-Thompson, M., (2019). Other Religions and No Religion: A Classroom approach to interreligious dialogue in Religious Education. In *Moving from Theory to Practice: Religious Educators in the Classroom* edited by R. Rymarz & P. Sharkey (pp.306 – 322) Mulgrave: Vaughan Publishing.

Introduction

The advancing tide of 'no religious' affiliation and the increased diversity of institutional religious identity in Australia continues to highlight the pervasive reality of a pluralistic society (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022; Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018; Bouma & Halafoff, 2017; McCrindle, 2017). Globalisation through immigration, along with cultural changes has brought diversity within religions and a plethora of options for religious and non-religious worldviews. Catholic schools are no longer primarily populated by Catholics nor necessarily staffed by practicing Catholics with strong personal faith. Many students in contemporary Catholic schools are products of a de-traditionalising society and often not beneficiaries of religious or other traditions handed down through generations (Boeve, 2012). Modern Catholic schools, however, have evolved with and through the influence of many factors including globalisation, changes in education, a decreased engagement with institutional Church, digital technology advancements and economic and environmental developments, to name a few.

The 2022 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population census revealed that in the category of religious affiliation, adherents to 'no religion' now make up the largest group with approximately 38.9% (ABS, 2022). According to the ABS, 'no religion' in this census included secular and other

spiritual beliefs and the highest proportion of adherents in this group are in the younger age brackets (under 55 years of age). McCrindle (2017, p.7) in investigating faith and belief in Australia, drilled deeper into the ‘total Christianity’ numbers to identify that approximately 14% of those who may have identified with Christianity in the past, when given the option, choose to identify as ‘spiritual not religious’. This perhaps indicates an openness to the spiritual rather than the simplistic assumption of hostility or indifference towards formal religions. Nonetheless, the plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews in the general Australian population is evident and many Catholic and Independent schools are finding their school populations aligning with this trend (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018). Such changes in religious, social, and cultural factors have impacted reality in Catholic Schools with students and teachers potentially from other religions or no religion. Catholic schools have had to continue to respond to the changes in curriculum, legislation, culture, clientele, educational theory and developments in theology, to remain compliant with educational funding requirements and plausible in the contemporary world. Hence the context of the modern Catholic school is evolving and will now be explored.

The Contemporary Catholic School

The educational landscape of 21st century is one of rapid change with students being prepared for future occupations that may not yet exist (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Wiliam, 2011a). Fullan and Langworthy (2014) propose that the new aim of education needs to be deep learning that prepares students for a future that requires agile thinking and continuous problem-solving. The authors propose:

The goals of deep learning are that students will gain the competencies and dispositions that will prepare them to be creative, connected, and collaborative life-long problem solvers and to be healthy, holistic human beings who not only contribute to but also create the common good in today’s knowledge-based, creative, interdependent world (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 2).

The intention is for all students to flourish as holistic, connected, contributing human beings. The Education Council (2019) states that the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Education Declaration (the Declaration) emphasises the desire for the wellbeing of all students which is consistent with Fullan and Langworthy’s (2014) aim. This wellbeing is inclusive of the spiritual and aspires for all to ‘appreciate and respect Australia’s rich social, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity and embrace opportunities to communicate and share knowledge and experiences’ (Education Council, 2019, p. 8). The Declaration (Educational Council, 2019) and leading scholars in education, recognize the importance of a holistic education which embraces diversity in preparing students to be future citizens creating a world for the common good of all. The Declaration (Educational Council 2019) also highlights the importance of the school leaders ‘creating and sustaining high quality learning environments and conditions under which quality teaching and learning takes place’ (p. 11). The interleaving of learning and teaching,

recognising it as a dynamic process which holds the learners at the centre, and *knowing* the learners, is acknowledged as important for successful outcomes for students (William, 2006, 2011b, 2014; Sharratt, 2019; Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Hattie & Smith, 2021). This has implications for the teaching of Religion in a Catholic school.

In further extending the vision for education in Catholic institutions, The Congregation for Catholic Education challenges educational institutions to create valid educational projects, offering education that is:

sound and open, that pulls down the walls of exclusivity, promoting the richness and diversity of individual talents and extending the classroom to embrace every corner of social experience in which education can generate solidarity, sharing and communion. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017, para. 20)

This guides Catholic educational leaders to draw deeply from the particularity of their social context to ensure education is real and relevant to the lives of their students. It urges educators to use these contexts as a basis to share their humanity through which Jesus Christ may be encountered in the witness of the Christian. In the contemporary societal context, the Catholic school has become more inclusive of the diversity of religious and non-religious affiliations of students and teachers, and hence the school population is reflective of the general societal population (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018; ABS, 2022). The ever-evolving context of the Catholic school has implications for how the school might approach Religious Education in this pluralising reality.

The Call to Dialogue

The Congregation for Catholic Education's document *Educating to fraternal humanism: Building a "civilization of love"* offers a possible pathway for Catholic education amidst the difficulties of the ever-increasing plurality of contexts, advocating that a culture of true dialogue is required and that this dialogue:

takes place within an ethical framework of requirements and attitudes for formation, as well as social objectives. The ethical requirements for dialogue are freedom and equality: the participants in the dialogue must be free from their contingent interests and must be prepared to recognize the dignity of all parties. It is a "grammar of dialogue," as pointed out by Pope Francis, able to "build bridges and ... to find answers to the challenges of our time". (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017 para. 22)

The call to dialogue has resounded in numerous Church documents from Vatican II to the present (Second Vatican Council, 1966; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991; Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013) and is a challenge that the Church addresses to all

Christians. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991) reminds the church of the forms of dialogue spoken of in its 1984 document proposing four forms of dialogue:

- a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
- b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.
- d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991, para 42)

Hence all Christians are called to dialogue, and this may take any of these forms depending on the appropriateness of the context and the persons engaged in it. Catholic schools, as an integral part of the Church, are called to mission, therefore, called to engage respectfully and authentically in dialogue to support and educate new generations into a way of being in communion with all of humanity. The enablement of interreligious dialogue raises questions for a Catholic school.

Dialogue and Learning that is Interreligious

The introduction of interreligious and/or intercultural learning which can be facilitated through dialogue, has become a consideration and issue of debate for all Australian schools that reflect the diversity of contemporary society. This was highlighted in the development and 2014 review of the Australian Curriculum. Many Australian scholars (Halafoff, 2015; Halafoff & Lam, 2015; Lovat, 2018; Maddox, 2014) called for the place of *education about religions and worldviews* in the curriculum of Australian schools as a strategy for social cohesion and countering violent extremism. Though the topic of religion in schools remains hotly contested, Halafoff (2015) acknowledges it has been largely ignored in the Executive Summary and Recommendations of the *Review of the Australian Curriculum* (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). This further emphasizes that for the Catholic school, where Religion is a compulsory subject from Prep to Year 10, the reality of other religions and 'no religion' needs to be addressed. 'Dialogue' is a strategy that the Church urges all Christians, including Catholic schools, to engage in to find answers to our challenging times.

In considering the concept of interreligious dialogue within the context of all Australian classrooms, Erebus International proposed, 'maximum benefit will be gained from dialogue when we have some knowledge of the culture or faith we are encountering' (2006, p. 102). Students would require some general knowledge about religions and non-religious worldviews, including their own Tradition or perspective, to be able to enter meaningfully into a dialogical encounter. The Congregation for Catholic Education (2013) advocates the starting point for intercultural/interreligious dialogue is 'discovering the multicultural nature of one's own situation' (para 2). This, the Congregation suggests, should be followed by 'overcoming prejudices by living and working in harmony' and then 'educating oneself "by means of the other" to a global vision and sense of citizenship' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, para 2). Educating oneself by means of the other offers the opportunity for this to be taken seriously in the learning and teaching processes of a Catholic school.

Roebben (2009) in reviewing *Interreligious Learning* edited by Pollefeyt (2007) summarises interreligious learning as:

Young people are involved in learning to recognize, know, and appreciate differences. At a more profound level, this implies an encounter not only with differences, but also with the otherness of the other. (Roebben, 2009, p. 103)

The intent of interreligious learning, whilst developing knowledge and understanding that explores differences as well as similarities, could be to connect students at the more personal level in which they are called to dig deep and encounter each other in dialogue within a respectful reciprocity. Such an encounter demands an openness to the inclusion of the social and cultural dimensions of the religious/non-religious experience as this is part of the lived human experience and is intimately linked to the individual's search for meaning through interpretation of the world. Authentic interreligious dialogue would therefore require some vulnerability and fear freeing; necessitating the establishment of respectful relationships and protocols for engagement which create a space of openness, sensitivity, and safety.

Approaches to Religious Education

Approaches to Religious Education continue to be contested throughout the literature in Australia and the world (Buchanan, 2005; Hyde, 2017; Groome, 2019; Scott, 2019; Rossiter 2020). Hyde (2017) in exploring a comparison of approaches to Religious Education in four Catholic dioceses across Australia, acknowledges the uniqueness of the Brisbane Archdiocese's use of the reconceptualist (a border crossing) approach (Scott, 1984) while the other three dioceses 'share a common catechetical approach' (p. 298). The approach taken by the three dioceses aligns with Groome (2003):

Catholics tend to use the term *catechesis* to describe the *formative* process of nurturing Christian identity, and *Religious Education* as *informative* pedagogy in a faith tradition... Both Religious Education and catechesis are necessary for educating the Christian person and community. With an appropriate pedagogy... both can be done as dual emphases within the same enterprise. (p.1 emphasis in original)

This approach, Scott (1984) contends belongs to the 'Revisionist Tradition' and is a Dialectic Border Model. That is, dialogue for this approach is *with* the Christian tradition and opens up possibilities for renewal of the tradition and the people within it (Scott, 1984). Scott (1984) critiques it by contending that this tradition is largely a revised form of the ecclesial enculturation (catechetical) paradigm which is an Inner border model rooted in its own language and identity.

Groome (2019) maintains that in the contemporary pluralised contexts, 'even with such diversity, every expression of Christian Religious Education is to educate for faith, to encourage all students to embrace a Transcendent take on life' (p. 15). The author holds that:

The proposal that all Christian Religious Education is to educate for faith might be situated historically within the tired debate between catechesis and Religious Education. There are proponents still who separate these two, even posing a conflict of interests between them. The proposal here, however, poses catechesis and Christian Religious Education as a faith-education on a shared continuum rather than categorically separated enterprises. (Groome, 2019, p. 16)

While Groome proposes the two enterprises as 'faith-education' on a continuum, the dignity, respect, and engagement of the non-religious or non-believer may be challenging to uphold when faith is presumed. It is difficult to conceive how such an initiative is not confined within its own borders (catechetical) though some dialogue around the Christian faith may be engaged in.

Scott (1984) in explicating a reconceptualist paradigm for Religious Education suggests in this most mature form of Religious Education:

Genuine intra- and inter-religious dialogue is sought through a process of self-reflection, sympathetic understanding, open encounter and mutual exchange. An analogical and educational imagination plays a central role in a re-claiming and transcending of one's own religious standpoint. (Scott, 1984, p. 334)

Scott highlights the need for intra- and inter- religious dialogue and mutual exchange, identifying that not all perspectives are the same even within a religion and that mutual exchange can enhance one's religious, (or non-religious) standpoint. In proposing suitable content for teaching about

religions and non-religious worldviews, Jackson (2014) outlines that the knowledge and understanding could include:

- The key concepts associated with a particular religion/religious tradition
- The perspectives, practices, and beliefs of groups within a particular religion
- Examples of key texts and relevant history
- Knowledge of examples of showing diversity of belief and practice within religions
- Awareness of one's own views and assumptions
- Sharing knowledge and experience of others in the class (Jackson, 2014, pp. 39 – 40)

Such content can successfully be explored through the classroom teaching of Religion in a Catholic school employing a reconceptualist paradigm for Religious Education as 'education' is the arena in which this is processed. Education provides the context in which all participants can be engaged respectfully with such content, requiring pedagogical expertise, and not relying on the faith of the individuals. The educational context can provide opportunity for students and teachers to engage in genuine dialogue between various religious and non-religious perspectives.

Engagement in Interreligious Learning and Teaching

Increased levels of religious knowledge support students' capacity to engage in dialogue, and concurrent development of capabilities may be necessary to facilitate dialogue for learning and teaching purposes. Such capacity and skill development is well supported through the Australian Curriculum (F-10) General Capabilities (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d) which are refined and identified as 21st Century skills in the senior curriculum syllabuses. These capabilities, updated in the version 9 of the Australian curriculum, include, critical and creative thinking, digital literacy, personal and social capabilities, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, literacy and numeracy. These could be effectively utilised in interreligious learning and teaching, including dialogue where students are called to engage in religious learning that also encompasses the 'real world' responsibility of one's own religious perspective. Thus, learners are challenged to be critical, manage themselves in social interactions and to move beyond detachment or indifference to identify and *own* their developing worldview or perspective. Managing open discussions about religion and religious issues in a classroom is challenging for both teachers and students. It necessitates holding multiple perspectives in creative tension with students requiring skills and dispositions to manage themselves respectfully within this diversity of viewpoints. In such contexts the approach to Religious Education may provide support in negotiating this territory.

Reconceptualist Approach

Key to the considerations for interreligious learning and teaching within Catholic schools is the approach to Religious Education, and for a growing number of Australian schools, the Enhancing Catholic school identity (ECSI) typologies (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The typologies which propose options for how a school might deal with the challenge of shaping its religious identity in the pluralising multicultural/ multireligious context, will be explored subsequently. The Reconceptualist approach to Religious Education has potential to support a Catholic school's engagement in interreligious learning and teaching through authentic dialogue.

Scott (1984) proposes 'a reconceptualized Religious Education takes *education* as its overarching frame of reference. It self-consciously works out of an educational rather than ministerial framework' (p.333). The author highlights the 'Border Crossing' (p. 324) potential of this approach and the capacity 'to foster greater appreciation of one's own religious life and less misunderstanding of other people's' (p.335). This approach, Scott (1984) suggests can set us on a 'corporate search for truth, value and identity'. It will lead to the reconstruction of our religious imagination and the expansion of the horizon of our tradition' (p. 336). In contrast, Groome (2019) advocates from a different perspective:

Regardless of its social or school context, all Catholic Religious Education must educate from and for faith, teaching about our own and other religious traditions in ways that encourage people to learn from them and, if they so choose, learn into them. (p.17)

This approach espouses the predetermined starting point and outcome to be faith and hence the power of the educative process is somewhat circumvented with the answer to the religious question settled before commencing the learning and teaching. This 'Dialectic border' approach (Scott, 1984) may allow dialogue within the Tradition but it may limit dialogue or encounter with 'the other' as a result of an inability to 'really' hear what others have to offer. The potential for interreligious learning and teaching is evident in the theory of the Reconceptualist approach and thus how this might manifest itself in practical terms requires consideration.

Religious Education Curriculum in Queensland Catholic Schools

The Archdiocese of Brisbane's *Religious Education Curriculum P – 12* (2020) espouses alignment with the reconceptualist approach and, 'seeks to develop students' religious literacy in light of the Catholic Christian tradition, so that they might participate critically and authentically in contemporary culture' (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020, p. 11). This curriculum is modelled on Moran's (1989; 1998) conceptualisation of Religious Education as two complementary dimensions; teaching people religion and teaching people to be religious in a particular way. The Religious Education

curriculum (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020) therefore comprises two parts; the classroom Religion curriculum and the Religious life of the school, both of which ‘draw upon the Catholic Christian tradition in ways that are mindful of local contexts and the ecumenical and multi-faith realities of contemporary culture’ (p.12). These dimensions provide scope for interreligious learning and teaching through dialogue and effective processes for engaging learners in curriculum content. This potential is facilitated through the development of religious literacy exploring religious knowledge and understanding beyond that of the Catholic Tradition utilising the developmental Religion curriculum with its age-appropriate content.

Contained within the Religion curriculum (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020) is a sub-strand ‘World Religions’, which begins in the Preparatory year. Judaism, with its natural link to Christianity, is the prime focus of this strand in the primary school and this is expanded to include the five major world religions in the secondary curriculum. While Judaism is an explicit focus in the P-6 curriculum, there are organic opportunities for teachers, who ‘know their learners’ to include the perspectives of other religions or non-religious worldviews for example when dealing with environmental sustainability. Additionally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and *spiritualities* are included as one of the cross-curriculum priorities aligning with the Australian Curriculum and extending it to include the spiritual dimension.

The curriculum also provides the scope for interreligious learning and teaching in the Religious life of the School. The components within this dimension; Religious Identity and Culture, Social Action for Justice, Prayer and Worship, and Evangelisation and Faith Formation (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020, pp. 206 – 234), contain elements that can potentially be occasions to engage in intra- and interreligious dialogue and interreligious learning and teaching. These elements could potentially be activities that have regularly occurred in the school but shifted slightly in focus to include ‘those beyond the border’ and encouraging authentic connections with ‘the other’. In this way, the reconceptualist approach might assist in ‘transform[ing] religious traditions, increase[ing] tolerance and nurtur[ing] mutual understanding’ (Scott, 1984, p. 336). Flourishing of relationships and embracing the diversity within the classroom, the school, and the wider community, is invaluable in this contemporary world of religious plurality and global conflict. This notion is supported by the ECSI project, in which many Queensland and Australian schools are engaged. Some of the underpinnings will briefly be explored.

Enhancing Catholic School Identity Typologies

Pollefeyt (2007), the lead researcher in the ECSI project, advocates the starting point for interreligious dialogue in the school setting is ‘radical openness to diversity within the classroom’ (2007, p. XII). In promoting and developing the ECSI preferred typologies, the researchers propose, the Catholic Dialogue school (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014; Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020) nurtures Post-critical belief and authentic open dialogue with plurality to support students in the exploration of the

contemporary culture and potentially to come to renewed understandings of their own religious tradition and religious identity (Recontextualisation). The Melbourne scale typology (see Figure 2.1), based on the work of Boeve (2006; 2012) is the core of the ECSI research with the aspiration for Catholic schools to lead their communities to ‘give shape to their identity in a changing cultural context’ (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 52) through Recontextualisation.

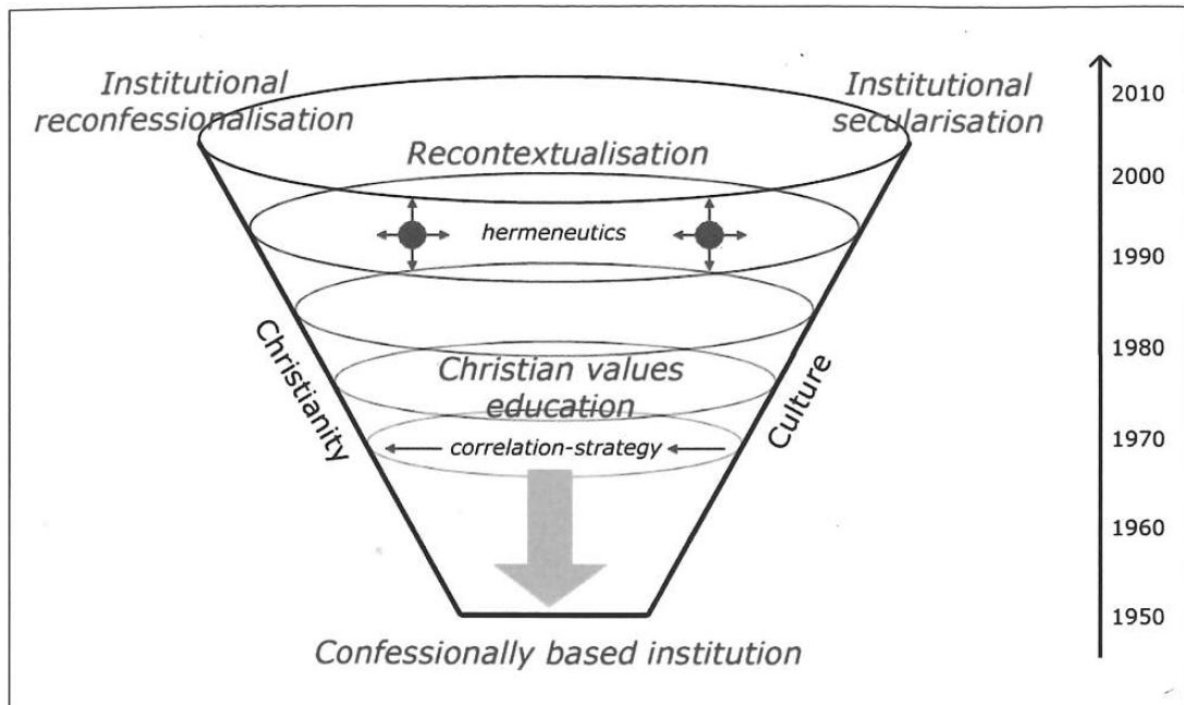


Figure 2.1 The Melbourne Scale.

From “Identity in Dialogue: Assessing and enhancing Catholic School Identity research methodology and research results in Catholic schools in Victoria, Australia” by D. Pollefeyt & J. Bouwens, 2014, p. 52. Copyright 2014 by Lit Verlag GmbH & Co.

The Melbourne scale typology (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) proposes options for how a Catholic school might engage Christianity with culture in a way that is meaningful and plausible for contemporary learners. In Catholic schools of the past, this was not so challenging as these institutions could rely upon the Catholic culture which had been handed down the generations in a relatively homogenous society. This produced confessionally based schools that were confident in their strong Catholic identity. Over time, secularisation, detraditionalization and more recently pluralisation have progressively challenged this once strong confessionality (see Boeve, 2002) and put the Catholic identity of many schools under pressure (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The typology proposes there are four options for dealing with this: Christian Values Education, Institutional Reconessionalisation,

Institutional Secularisation, and based on the research, the ECSI theologically preferred option, Recontextualisation (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014).

Christian Values Education is a strategy that many schools have undertaken and continue to undertake to try to reduce the gap that has developed over time between Christianity and culture. The researchers posit this strategy ‘aims at a compromise between culture and Catholic tradition in the attempt to maintain a Catholic school identity that “keeps up with the times” and with which anyone can reconcile’ (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 53). This strategy *hopes* ‘that a pluralising student population can continue to be addressed on the subject of faith’ (p. 53). The strategy, according to the researchers, can be effective if the student population is able to recognise the confessionality of the school, the Christian inspiration upon which the values draw meaning. Christian Values Education as a strategy runs the risk of losing its potential when the strategy is recognised as a predictable one-to-one strategy and students are no longer able to make an authentic connection between the values and the Christian story. This reduces the strategy to an ethical code and ultimately leads to secularisation (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014).

Institutional Secularisation is a strategy that may creep up unknowingly on a Catholic school and is not likely to be an intentional conscious decision. The researchers propose that the Institutional Secularisation option ‘parallels the cultural context’ (p. 55). ‘The Catholic nature and the preferential option for Catholicism erodes away slowly until nothing is left of them in daily school life’ (p. 55). This strategy is not chosen by a school but unconsciously inches its way in and hence, the ESCI researchers propose a proactive school may need to make a conscious decision about its strategy for dealing with the pluralising culture.

Another option schools may take is the Reconfessionalisation of their school. This strategy attempts to bring the ‘school culture closer to Catholicism again, the Catholic nature of the school is explicitly and publicly profiled. It is taken for granted that a substantial part of the school population is practicing Catholic or should be, and the aim is faith formation for all students in a Catholic Environment’ (p. 54). This option is avoiding or ignoring the reality of the pluralising context in which most contemporary Catholic schools are situated and may become untenable in the modern school context.

The final option offered by the researchers’ typology is that of Recontextualisation. Utilising this strategy is to choose to ‘deliberately search for a renewed Catholic profile in and through conversation with plurality. It tries to understand the Catholic faith re-interpreted in a contemporary cultural context’ (p. 56). The researchers propose that this is a multi-correlative strategy in which ‘in dialogue with otherness, [students] learn to know themselves, and how to take responsibility for personal choices. [They] show [their] individuality in tension with dissimilarities’ (p.56 [my inserts]). A school that recontextualises ‘challenges people to give shape to their personal identity in conversations with

others, against a background of a dialogue and sometimes a confrontation with the Catholic tradition' (p. 37). The researchers advocate 'the conversation between religious and philosophical visions is reflected upon from a preferential option for Catholicism' (p. 56). The promoters suggest that the Catholic voice is always present but is one among many and the intent of the strategy is not religious conversion but rather to let students 'be challenged and enriched by the offer of the Catholic narrative' (p. 57). The Catholic school's religious identity is being renewed through the process of Recontextualisation and the individual's religious identity offered the possibility to be reshaped through the encounters between plurality and the Catholic narrative. This strategy, the research proposes, is well supported when the school population has the supportive attitudes of Post-Critical Belief and a Dialogue school pedagogical perspective aspiring to create a 'Catholic Dialogue school'.

The Catholic Dialogue school, promoted by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2014), endeavours to offer opportunities that can guide students to access their own religious/non-religious experience and to search for, be open to, and discerning of, the many religious and non-religious interpretations offered to them through the dialogical encounter, with 'the other'. The encounter invites the individual to take responsibility for his/her own developing religious or non-religious viewpoint and to embrace new or renewed understandings and meanings. The Catholic Dialogue school (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) intends to *invite* students into belief through experiences in the learning and teaching process, and through the witness of individuals living their faith and taking responsibility for their religious viewpoint, though this is not a measurable outcome. Interreligious learning and teaching in the modern classroom is tasked with engaging students from a plethora of cultural, religious, and non-religious backgrounds and learners with a variety of cognitive belief styles, as identified by the ECSI research. The contemporary Catholic school could, therefore, be well placed to prepare for interreligious dialogue, a strategy in the learning and teaching process, by discovering the diversity (religious, non-religious and cultural) within the classroom and building general knowledge of the various religious and non-religious perspectives within the school, and beyond, regardless of cognitive belief styles.

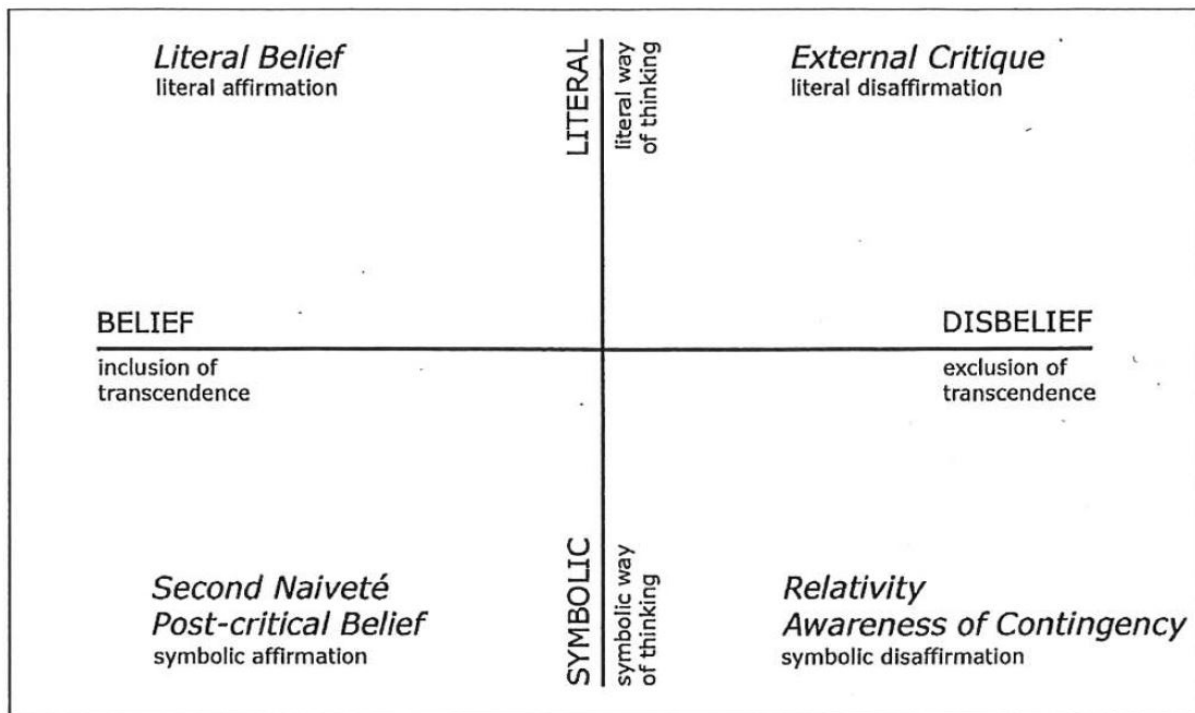


Figure 2.2 Post Critical Belief Scale.

From “Identity in Dialogue: Assessing and enhancing Catholic School Identity research methodology and research results in Catholic schools in Victoria, Australia” by D. Pollefeyt & J. Bouwens, 2014, p. 44. Copyright 2014 by Lit Verlag GmbH & Co.

The Post-Critical Belief scale is a cognitive belief typology (see Figure 2.2) that proposes a schema for how individuals deal with belief or non-belief, and their thinking attitude – literal or symbolic. The empirical instrument was established by Hutsebaut (1996), a Dutch psychologist of religion, and is grounded in the work of Wulff (1991), an American psychologist of religion. The schema provides a model of four options or styles of belief/non-belief that an individual may operationalise when dealing with religious content. These options being; Literal Belief, External Critique (literal disbelief), Relativism (Awareness of Contingence) and the ECSI preferred position, based on the research, Post Critical Belief (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The Literal Belief style is as its name suggests ‘a literal affirmation of doctrinal belief content’ and ‘it assumes a direct, immediate access to the transcendent reality’ (p. 45). For this believing style the contents of faith including Bible texts, doctrine and prayers are mostly interpreted literally and the believer relies upon ‘a personal, immutable God and in fixed religious truth claims’ (p. 45). The style is almost the complete opposite of the External Critique or literal disbelief position. The External Critique position holds a ‘literal rejection of the belief content, in other words, a direct critique on religion from an external point of

view' (p. 45). This 'disbelief' style is often dismissive of religious content as the literal interpretation renders it untenable – Noah could not have all those animals on one ark! So all religious content is dismissed.

The Relativism (Awareness of Contingency) position holds an 'awareness of the symbolic and hermeneutical nature of religious faith' yet relativists 'themselves do not believe in God or an Ultimate reality' (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 46). The researchers propose the relativist holds that 'all religions are "equally true" and thus, actually "equally untrue"; there exists no God and so finally religion comes down to nothing' (p. 47). The Relativism position, however, does not reject religion altogether as External Critique does, but instead puts it into perspective as subjective and bound by its historical context. The researchers postulate 'relativists cultivate a great openness and receptivity towards various philosophical and religious traditions, as long as no coercion is used' (p. 47). This position can therefore become an 'awareness of contingency' where adherents refrain from making a positive or negative stance in regard to religion.

The Post-Critical Belief position symbolically affirms faith content and 'is characterised by faith in a transcendent God and in a religious interpretation of reality in which the transcendent is not considered literally present but is represented symbolically (p. 47). This is the ECSI research's preferred position as the researchers contend it will place individuals in the most supportive position for Recontextualisation. The researchers advocate this belief style engages in 'a continuous process of symbolic interpretation; the revelation of new layers of significance in the symbolic relationship with God' (p. 47). For the Post Critical believer, belief is only possible and meaningful after there has been interpretation in which critique and critical thinking has contributed. Such a believer is 'searching for religious significance and meaning without ever finding a final, absolute, established and certain answer' (p. 48). This belief style engages in the continuous process of reinterpretation of religious content with the individual remaining open and receptive to new ideas and the perspectives of others. This stance supports an attitude that the ECSI researchers propose is best situated to be able to 'recontextualise' in a world that presents a multitude of religious and non-religious perspectives. The pedagogical or professional perspectives that the ECSI offer are now explicated.

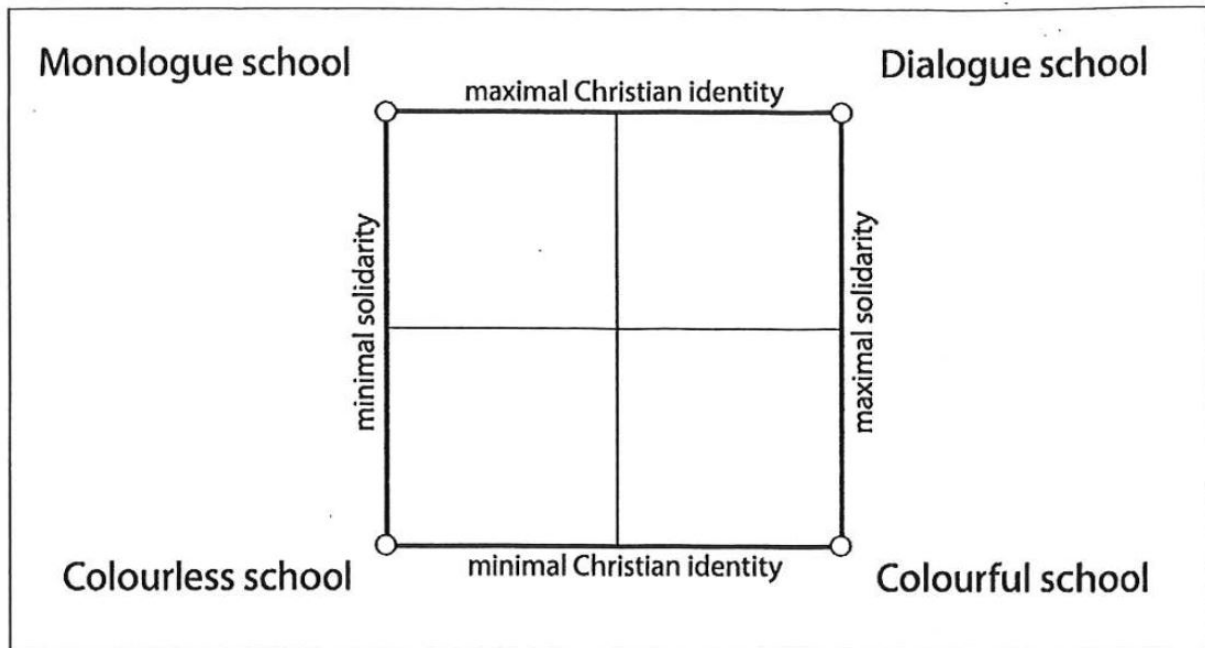


Figure 2.3 The Victoria Scale.

From “Identity in Dialogue: Assessing and enhancing Catholic School Identity research methodology and research results in Catholic schools in Victoria, Australia” by D. Pollefeyt & J. Bouwens, 2014, p. 60. Copyright 2014 by Lit Verlag GmbH & Co.

The Victoria scale empirical instrument was developed by the ECSI researchers informed by the Dutch researchers ter Horst (1995) and Hermans (Hermans & van Vuygt, 1997) and like the Post Critical Belief (PCB) scale has two dimensions producing four pedagogical options for a Catholic school’s engagement with Christianity and the diversity of cultural perspectives. The typologies (see Figure 2.3) constitute the four combinations of maximal/minimal Christian identity and maximal/minimal solidarity with ‘the other’ creating four school pedagogical perspectives: The Monologue school, the Colourless school, the Colourful school and the ECSI research preferred school type of Dialogue school (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The Monologue school presents a professional or pedagogical stance of maximal Christian identity and minimal solidarity with other perspectives and ‘promotes a traditionalist, non-emancipatory form of Catholicism in which the Catholic faith is interpreted as a “closed story” with a resolute truth claim’ (p. 61). This school type is for Catholics and staffed by Catholics with little or no openness to ‘the non-Catholic external world, which is considered a threat to the Catholic specificity’ (p. 61). This school is a bastion for the faith and presents a worldview that is certain and safeguards religious truths for Catholics.

In contrast, the Colourless school with minimal Catholic identity and minimal solidarity with others, protects the privacy of the individual and is concerned with the task of education and is non-committal about religion or community. The ECSI researchers suggest this school shows ‘great

openness and tolerance for all kinds of philosophies of life and religions, but this openness is not framed in a common religious project' and 'the focus is on the individual not the school community' (p. 62). This school type can present so strongly for the individuals that it becomes indifferent to community connections and takes a neutral stance towards religion as it is a private matter. This school provides sound education, but the spiritual domain is not its concern. Catholic schools focussed solely on their educational improvement agenda and not cognisant of the inclusion of the Religious life of the school, may be critiqued as taking this pedagogical stance.

The Colourful school type encourages maximal support for solidarity with the other and minimal support for Christian identity. This school type, the ECSI research suggests, is enticing for young people because it strongly advocates for the solidarity of others and has a robust social justice focus. In this school, time and effort on community service and 'care for the spiritual wellbeing of others' (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p.62) is undertaken. However, the researchers suggest there is 'little or no room available for the proclamation of the Gospel and for pastoral education' (p. 62). The researchers pose this school 'puts itself in a neutral-pluralist position: the dialogue among different views should be encouraged but without any preference for one particular perspective' (p. 62). This school does not publicly espouse a preference for a Catholic Christian worldview, so this school type will not directly support the enhancement of the school's Catholic identity.

The Dialogue school with its pedagogical preference for maximal Christian identity and maximal solidarity with the other, is the attitude the ECSI research suggests is optimal in the support of a school pursuing Recontextualisation (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). This option promotes support for 'a Catholic school in the middle of cultural and religious plurality in which both Catholics and other believers can develop themselves maximally' (p. 63). The school type boasts an openness to the diversity of perspectives, and this is deemed to make a positive contribution to the welcoming Catholic environment. The researchers propose 'the conversation among philosophical views is conducted with a preferential option for Catholicism in mind. In the midst of plurality, one is looking to be a Catholic; from being a Catholic, one lives in plurality'" (p.63). This option aims to start 'from its Catholic individuality and through a dialogue with different life views, it wants to be a guide for the philosophical and religious growth of all students' (p. 63). The ECSI researchers suggest that it is through the pedagogical combination of solidarity and a Catholic worldview that both elements can be prosperous for the wellbeing of all. One of the challenges for this school type may be for the teachers who are not Catholic. They may be able to present a Catholic perspective, but unable to engage in the Religious life of the school as a member of the Catholic church community. Yet another challenge, acknowledged by Pollefeyt and Richard (2020), is the clear presentation of Catholic perspectives and faith witness amidst engagement with diverse perspectives needs to be genuinely multi-correlative or it could risk becoming inclusivistic or a Monologue type school. These ECSI typologies and the approaches to Religious

Education in Catholic schools are underpinned by theological paradigms of religions, which can inform how Catholics may have differing understandings about engagement with other religions.

Engagement with Other Religions

The Vatican II document 'Nostra Aetate' (1965) opened the door in the modern period, albeit slightly, to the Catholic church being open to dialogue with other religions and the possibility that 'others' may have something for Catholics to learn. This document proposes:

other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She [sic] regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she [sic] holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men [sic]. Indeed, she [sic] proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men [sic] may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself [sic]. (Vatican II, 1965, para 5)

This document holds to the Catholic Church's understanding that 'other religions' may 'hold a ray of Truth' while the Catholic Church holds the full certainty of 'Christ' "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Nostra Aetate presents a way of understanding the relationship between Christianity and other non-Christian faiths. This understanding or paradigm, while still the official Church position (inclusivism) on interreligious relations, is not the only way that modern theologians propose this relationship can be understood, and central to the paradigms is the theological concept of 'salvation' – how one is saved.

D'Costa (2005) offers a brief description of the key tenant of the three traditional approaches to interreligious relations:

Pluralism: all religions are equal and valid paths to the one divine reality and Christ is one revelation among many equally important revelations.

Exclusivism: only those who hear the gospel proclaimed and explicitly confess Christ are saved.

Inclusivism: Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church, but this salvation is always from Christ (p. 627 order in original)

The exclusivism paradigm holds that there is no salvation outside the church which is a familiar axiom with which many older generation Catholics may be well acquainted. A school, if operating from this theological paradigm would not be welcoming of the contribution of non-Catholics and would deem the school's role to bring the non-Catholics into the Catholic fold. This paradigm is untenable in a contemporary Catholic school with the plurality of faiths in many modern contexts, as authentic dialogue between religions (broader crossing) is not possible.

The inclusivism paradigm, the official position of the Church since Vatican II (see Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020b), proposes that salvation comes only through Christ and though there is the possibility of a ray of truth beyond the Catholic Church, this is only possible through Christ. The concept of the 'anonymous Christian', as explicated by Rahner (1964) enables the possibility of the non-Christian to be saved without them consciously knowing Christ. When engaging in interreligious dialogue utilising this paradigm Pollefeyt and Richards (2020b) suggest 'one does not come to acknowledge the true 'otherness' of the other, but rather sees alterity only as something superficial – nothing more substantial than a mask of difference' (p. 316). This is an important consideration in the teaching of religion in a multi-faith context, lest the voices of non-Christians or non-religious be relegated to the unimportant and implications for the dignity, or 'lesser' dignity of human persons.

The pluralism paradigm proposes that all religions are equally valid pathways to a divine reality. The criticisms of this paradigm bring to the fore issues around the loss of the particularity of religions and that the centrality of Christ for the Christian could be bypassed (D'Costa, 2005). Theologians and proponents interested in progressing the interreligious dialogue agenda have looked beyond these three traditional models to explore other ways that such dialogue can be framed theologically. A more recent paradigm, that of Particularism, has emerged as a response to pluralism's perceived 'indifference' and its proponents want to 'save the particulars' (Moyaert, 2014). That is, they focus on what is their religious difference rather than looking for common ground. From this perspective, Pollefeyt and Richards (2020b) suggest:

An external interpretation of a reality (an experience, a religious tradition) is not possible. If one wants to understand something about (a particular) religion, for example, one must immerse oneself in the worldview and culture of that tradition: not only an immersion into its scriptures, doctrines, practices, and philosophy of life, but also among a group of belief-affirming 'insiders' (akin to the "immersion-learning" approach of "shared Christian praxis", Groome, 1991). In this way, RE is thought to happen only internally within the context of a given religious tradition' (p. 318)

While particularists recognise the radical 'otherness', there is no common ground for religions, so many scholars would propose that interreligious dialogue or learning and teaching would not be

possible from this paradigm (Moyaert, 2014) and Religious Education would be a 'Dialectic border' or 'Inner border model'.

A fifth paradigm, which Pollefeyt and Richards (2020b) propose 'lies somewhere in the liminal space between and beyond pluralism and particularism' (p. 318) draws upon the task of translation and the work of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (2004). Moyaert (2014) advocates that Ricoeur 'suggests the appropriate attitude to the religious stranger consists of what he calls "linguistic hospitality", which entails a double duty: "to expropriate oneself as one appropriates the other" (p. 143). D'Costa (2005) challenged by the inadequacies of the three traditional paradigms suggests that "Christians use the resources of trinitarian theology to reflect on the particular engagement with differing religions, eschewing overall theologies of religions which fix the "other"" (p. 638). Moyaert (2010, 2011) advocates a paradigm drawing from Ricoeur's (2006) work on 'linguistic hospitality' and the theology of the Trinity to propose the interreligious encounter as possible through interpreting or 'translating' the other's views in the language of one's own religion. This translation will never be perfect as the translation from one language to another is never perfect, but the potential for new meaning is emphasised. While the paradigm debate is one that will be likely to continue and expand long into the future (D'Costa, 2005), there are other considerations that may have greater impact for the school context. Some scholars (Scott, 2020; Moran 2002, 2009, 2021) suggest 'a re-situating of the meaning of revelation' (Scott, 2020) in the Catholic church, could provide opportunity for a sustainable foundation for religious educators to engage their learners in the contemporary world of religious plurality.

Understandings of Revelation

The Constitution on Divine Revelation, '*Dei Verbum*' (Vatican II, 1966), addresses 'a fundamental and central religious category' with this category an 'organising principle holding everything together' (Scott, 2020, p. 5). The original draft '*Dei Verbum*' document was addressed at the very beginning of the Vatican II council but was rejected because it was deemed to simply reaffirm understandings from the council of Trent and Vatican I, 'namely that there are two sources of revelation: the revealed truths that the Church teaches are contained in Scripture and tradition' (Moran, 2009, p. 54). The final document was not approved until the last session of the Council and on the whole, 'it moved the Catholic Church into a new world of dialogical possibilities' (p, 58). However, Scott (2020) proposes the document is a comprise as it:

'commences without proposing a definitive definition of revelation. ... referring to revelation at points as "religious truths" and faith as "full submission of intellect and will" (DV 5.6). The weakness is further evident in the second chapter titled, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation". The idea of transmitting revelation is unintelligible. Revelation happens, as a living interpersonal event, in the depth of

human experience. The church can transmit documents, written records, doctrines, art, and practices of the tradition but not divine revelation. (p. 7)

Moran (2009) advocated, '[i]f the church is to become a world church, universal or catholic in more than name, the idea of divine revelation needs more radical rethinking than Vatican II could manage' (p. 59). Embracing the reality of human persons having the potential for deep personal experiences that are alive with 'revelations of God' and that can flow into the lived experience of the individual and community offers potential for the evolution of a world church. Consequently, the worldview, theoretical or theological frame that one brings to interreligious learning and teaching may be an indicator of what one is able to receive from it. For interreligious learning and teaching to be possible and potentially transformative, it appears learners are best positioned with a sound knowledge of their own religious or non-religious perspective and a capacity to think symbolically, allowing openness to other perspectives. Scott (2020) advocates a reconceptualised meaning of 'revelation' could assist the Catholic Church (and Catholic schools) to 'credibly address the critical issues facing it as it encounters the secular world and the world of religious plurality' (p. 19). Engaging learners in the Religion curriculum including interreligious learning and teaching, may be more successful when the participants perceive it as credible.

Some Considerations for Interreligious Learning and Teaching in a Catholic School

Teachers of Religion in Queensland Catholic Schools have curriculum documents that offer opportunities for interreligious learning and teaching. However, the reality of contemporary Catholic schools is such that many teachers who are required to teach Religion, are themselves likely to have nominal formal religious affiliation (ABS, 2016; Rossiter, 2018). This diversifying of staff populations may require, like other subject areas, on-going professional learning enhancing subject-specific knowledge and effective pedagogical practices to support teachers' capacity to engage students in successful learning and teaching in Religion. This poses a challenge and an opportunity for schools, but one that aligns with the school improvement agenda of most Australian schools through the Australian Council for Educational Research's *National School Improvement Tool* (2016). Some contemporary teachers of Religion, who aren't steeped in the richness of the Catholic Tradition, may lack confidence in their ability to engage in rigorous learning and teaching of Religion. They may avoid interreligious learning and teaching opportunities as a result of their lack of knowledge or understanding about why it may value-add to student learning, and potentially as a consequence of a fear of insufficient understanding of the theological underpinnings. However, this confusion could be in part a result of the teachers' lack of clarity about whether they are engaged in 'Church ministry' or 'school teaching in education' (Scott, 2019). The Reconceptualist approach utilised in the Catholic dioceses of Queensland, clearly situates the teaching of Religion in an educational context with similar requirements to other curriculum areas. Whilst the learning and teaching of Religion can, and hopefully will, positively

impact the students' faith, its primary purpose is education, and thus can reasonably be expected to 'resource the spirituality of young people no matter their level of religiosity' (Rossiter, 2018, p. 2). Teachers in Catholic schools, espousing a religious affiliation or not, have a professional responsibility to engage their learners in good learning and teaching in all subject areas.

It is apparent that teacher professional learning in many subject areas could be enhanced with the up-skilling and utilisation of appropriate pedagogies, the use of the General Capabilities, subject-specific knowledge, and assessment literacy (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Hattie, 2019; Sharratt, 2019). This is an on-going process of improvement, promoting deep learning and requiring teachers to be agile thinkers who are open, adaptive, and student-centred. Some contemporary Catholic schools have purposefully included Religion in their Professional Learning Communities (Stoll, Bolan, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006) so that teaching practices are critically investigated, and teachers are focused on learning and growth for themselves and their students. This is reflective of schools' overall improvement agenda and places the Religion curriculum in its educational context, maintaining the emphasis on *educating* which is a resource for life and offering opportunity for the Recontextualisation of the Catholic school's identity and potential for the development of the individual's religious identity.

Modern Catholic schools also have the benefit of being able to invite teachers and students into opportunities to enhance, or to initially experience, their personal faith journey through retreats, prayer, and social justice activities, to name a few. These opportunities, whilst always invitational, offer a lived experience of a religious life and complement the knowledge and understanding of the classroom teaching of religion presenting openings for the Recontextualisation of the school's Catholic identity and potentially the individual's religious identity. Teachers and students who are open to engagement in such experiences may develop their capacity for PCB and enhance their capability to be open to the experience of interreligious learning and teaching which in turn could possibly be personally transformative. There may also be an invitation for respectful reciprocity in engaging in the religious/non-religious experiences of the other. Current data (ABS, 2022; McCrindle, 2017) suggest that, particularly the younger generations are open to the spiritual (rather than the religious), and thus encouraging individuals to participate in meaningful spiritual practices and activities may potentially engage them. Such engagement along with the potential learnings from interreligious learning and teaching experiences in the classroom teaching of Religion are possible material for the development of personal identity.

Personal Identity Development

The Declaration (Educational Council, 2019) commits the Australian Government to ‘working with the education community to support all young Australians to become confident and creative individuals who have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing’ (p. 6). This places the resourcing of the learner’s personal identity within the scope of support provided through the school context. Erickson’s (1968, 1985) psychosocial theory, which has identity formation at the centre, proposes that individuals progress through 8 stages of development that are influenced by the external demands of one’s environment. At each of the stages of development the individual is required to resolve a particular identity crisis or dilemma in order to progress to the next level or stage. Erikson (1980) proposed:

The growing child must derive a vitalizing sense of reality from the awareness that his [sic] individual way of mastering experience (his [sic] ego synthesis) is a successful variant of a group identity and is in accord with its space-time and life plan. (p. 21)

For the majority of primary school aged children (6 – 11yrs), the task of this stage according to Erikson’s (1968; 1985) theory of psychosocial development is one of movement from play to academic performance and the learning of academic and social skills, with the opinions of others becoming increasingly important. The task of this stage is ‘Industry vs. Inferiority’ and education is the students’ key undertaking employing their effort towards becoming competent in the work of the school both academically and socially. Students, at this stage endeavour to learn new skills while evading feelings of failure or inadequacy. This stage, according to Erikson’s theory is a delicate balance of acquiring acceptable academic success with sufficient social recognition in order to maintain well-being and be enabled to progress to the next stage of development.

In adolescence (12 – 18yrs), which begins in the primary school for many students, Erikson’s (1968; 1985) stage 5 identified task is that of ‘Identity vs. Role Confusion’. For the adolescent the peer group is key to an individual’s task of forming an identity that is linked to group identity and the students develop a loyalty to groups to which they belong. Schwartz et al. (2008) propose ‘for Erikson, personal identity represents one’s set of goals, values, and beliefs and the extent to which these are ‘internally consistent and, taken together, form a coherent sense of self’ (p. 635). The contexts in which young people are developing their identities become important as these contexts provide resources or materials for helping the individual’s identity to develop.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) posit ‘for educational purposes, *personal identity* can be conceptualised as a process in which individuals draw on both internal and cultural resources for their self-understanding and self-expression’ (p. 126). The cultural resources being content or material from

religion, school, family, or other elements that interplay with the individual's beliefs, goals and values and assists the person to develop and understand the self. In this way Crawford and Rossiter suggest:

Personal identity development needs some basic socialisation into the beliefs, values and culture of the individual's family and immediate community, and into some sense of the identities of the groups in which they will participate – hopefully positive and non-exclusive. These components should not be fixed and unchangeable, but open to confirmation, evaluation and modification. (p. 128)

A basic 'socialisation' into beliefs, values and culture in the Catholic school context could be supported through interreligious dialogue as a strategy for interreligious learning and teaching in the classroom or through organic links to the Religious life of the school. Exploring the diversity of cultures and faiths within the community offers authentic opportunities for students to be open to confirmation, evaluation and possible modifications to their developing identities which include religious or spiritual identity.

Faith Development and Religious Education

James Fowler's (1981) stages of faith development has been an influential theory of 'religious/spiritual development' (Parker, 2006, p. 337) that has provided a foundation for work in Religious Education for many decades (Parker, 2010). While there are 6 developmental stages, stages 2, 3 and 4 are associated with the years of compulsory schooling with these being; Stage 2. Intuitive-Projective Faith (Toddlerhood to Early Childhood) Stage 3. Mythic-Literal Faith (childhood to young adolescents) and Stage 4 Individuative-Reflective Faith (late adolescence/ young adulthood and beyond) (Fowler, 1981), Parker (2010) highlights that Fowler's theory;

'sought to wed together the psychosocial psychology of Erik Erikson (1968) with the more cognitive-structural psychologies of Piaget (1970) and Kohlberg (1976) to illumine the various developmental paths by which people made sense of and related to what he termed their "ultimate environment" (Fowler, 1981). (p. 234)

It is the melding of the different models that Parker (2010, p. 234) claims Fowler used to assert the robustness of his theory and he situated 'faith development squarely within the domain of human developmental processes' (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992, p. 74). While Fowler (1981) proposes his stages are hierarchical and invariant, other scholars argue that Fowler's and subsequent research suggests this may not be a substantiated claim (Parker, 2010, Jardine & Viljoen, 1992).

Fowler's theory, taken up by many religious educators, has provided a model for personal and spiritual development which affects the possible outcomes of Religious Education. This, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) propose is problematic for Religious Education if, 'goals are expressed more or less exclusively in terms of faith development, which involves high order, personal change that is not open

to scrutiny by observers' (p. 421). Faith development is personal and therefore can be a 'hoped' for outcome but not a measurable outcome in the classroom. If the stages of development are considered invariant, classroom teachers of Religion in the primary years strongly influenced by Fowler's theory, may be tempted to support young learners through literal interpretations of religious texts rather than assisting them to connect to a more symbolic interpretation of the grand religious stories.

Within the ECSI PCB attitude scale, utilising Fowler's faith development stages, may suggest that primary school aged learners are locked into a 'literal belief' stage and the challenge of alternate interpretations of biblical texts may not be offered (see Pollefeyt & Bieringer, 2010). Dillen (2007) in proposing a 'hermeneutical-communicative model' of Religious Education for young children, advocates that young children from the age of four are 'able to see different perspectives and interpretations of reality' (p.41). Relying on Fowler's faith development stages to inform Religious Education could prove limiting to educational outcomes and may move the focus to the 'hoped for' realm of 'faith development'. While the development of an individual's faith is always desirable, and opportunities in the Religious life of the school can nurture faith, the classroom learning and teaching of Religion, in an educational context, needs educative outcomes.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly the world in which contemporary students are immersed is pluralistic and educational institutions are steeped within this reality while attempting to prepare students for jobs and a future yet to be imagined. Haers (2004) proposes that 'the open exploration of community life in schools provides a playground to enact and design how future society will look' (p. 313) and insightfully foregrounds interreligious dialogue (a strategy of interreligious learning and teaching) as a touchstone element for the formation of students as future citizens, many of whom will be global citizens. Education about religions and worldviews as part of the curriculum for all Australians has been called for by several scholars because of the multi-religious or 'no religion' nature of our context and the need to learn to live harmoniously.

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2014) propose that individuals with a PCB cognitive belief style are in the optimal position to engage in interreligious learning and teaching as the individual is open to the complexity of interpretations of symbolic mediations as pointers to the divine reality. The Dialogue school's pedagogical option of maximal solidarity and maximal Catholic identity could potentially ground schools in the desire to strive for authentic dialogue, as a vehicle for interreligious learning and teaching and an opportunity to learn to live harmoniously. This, Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2014) suggest can provide an openness to diversity while keeping a keen eye on the particularity of the Catholic Tradition and offering opportunities for renewed meanings for all (Recontextualisation).

Seriously engaging with the plurality of contemporary contexts while also authentically presenting a Catholic Worldview is challenging and potentially risks becoming inclusivism if the

purpose of the engagement isn't kept in sharp focus. Clearly situating the teaching of Religion, including interreligious learning and teaching, within an educative paradigm, as opposed to catechetical paradigm, could assist in keeping this purpose clear. This may offer teachers of Religion clarity and assist them to engage their learners in interreligious learning and teaching through the Religion curriculum and possibly the Religious life of the school.

The challenge/opportunity for contemporary Catholic schools is multifaceted. Not only do students require good learning and teaching about the Catholic tradition and other religious traditions along with the invitation to engage in a religious faith journey, but teachers, many of whom are also heirs of a detraditionalizing society, may require similar learning and spiritual opportunities. Openness to interreligious learning and teaching through dialogue, requires a level of subject knowledge and underpinning theologies, engagement in effective pedagogy, and learning dispositions and skills that support respectful and sensitive engagement with this rich task. Through interreligious learning and teaching, students and teachers, can engage authentically in the reality of our times; the plurality of religions and cultures, and potentially take up the opportunity to discern and take responsibility for their own developing religious or non-religious perspective. The development of new or renewed understandings and meanings through interreligious learning and teaching may well support individuals to recontextualise their own faith and create plausible meanings for their religious identity within this rapidly changing world. For those with non-religious worldviews, at the very least, a comprehensive educational grounding in the religious and spiritual dimensions of life (Rossiter, 2018). The promotion of deep learning, the aim of all future-orientated education contributing to and creating the common good of all, could be an aspiration for effective interreligious learning and teaching acting as a playground (Haers, 2004) for designing a harmonious future for society.

This chapter has explored the literature relating to the context and theoretical frames for Religious Education and in particular interreligious learning and teaching. The ECSI typologies and personal identity development in a school are also presented. The literature suggests the potential for interreligious learning and teaching to be relevant and future orientated, offering a way to resource and enrich harmonious living in the school and beyond. The following chapter conveys the design, methods and methodologies employed through the multiple studies conducted in the overall project.

Chapter 3 – Methods

Introduction

The purpose of the research reported in this thesis was to explore the participants' perceptions of engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how this might interplay with religious identity. The previous chapter reviewed literature in the field of Religious Education, religious identity and interreligious learning and teaching revealing the theoretical frame for the study. This chapter outlines the philosophical foundations, the research design and the chosen methodologies and methods of collecting data to explore meanings as interpreted by the participants in the study. The researcher is seeking to understand how individuals engage in interreligious learning and teaching, how this is experienced and how this may or may not interplay with religious identity. The questions under investigation were:

- How do individuals describe their experiences of interreligious learning and teaching?
- What are 'lived experiences' of interreligious learning and teaching?

In a school context:

- How do participants understand their role (or for parents their child's role) in interreligious learning and teaching?
- What things are done in the classroom when learning in this area?
- How do or why don't you think the ways in which the learning is presented plays a role in students' ability to participate in interreligious learning and teaching?
- How might this learning assist learners to develop (or not) their religious/non-religious identity?

The research approach, methodologies and methods for collecting data will be explicated in this chapter. The Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) empirical research project scales are presented, and validity, reliability and ethics are addressed. The chapter concludes with a justification of the research methodologies.

Philosophical Foundations to the Research

The researcher's philosophical position helps to position the research among the many forms available to investigators. This positioning reveals what one believes about the nature of existence or being (ontology) and the nature of how one knows (epistemology). Philosophical positions are discussed frequently in the literature and are often associated with types of research (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). While a fixed definition of qualitative research is challenging because of its ever-changing nature (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), Creswell proposes a working definition:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals, or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p.44)

This study is striving to understand through exploring participants' perceptions of their reality of interreligious learning and teaching and how this might interplay with religious identity, therefore a qualitative inquiry aligns with the purpose of the exploration. As the phenomenon under investigation is complex and requires a deep and detailed understanding, an Interpretivist or Constructivist (Lincoln et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013) philosophical foundation is appropriate. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) propose 'Interpretive which is the most common type of qualitative research, assumes that reality is socially constructed' (p.9). Humans construct their reality in their context and through engagement in social interactions, hence there are likely to be multiple possible interpretations. 'As researchers we must participate in the research process with our subjects to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 210). The Interpretivist therefore will be engaged with the participants and stay close to the data through the interpretation process.

Epistemologically, the Interpretivist is 'Subjectivist: Inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two' (Guba, 1990, p. 27). Exploring participants' perceptions of interreligious learning and teaching requires being present in their context, asking open-ended questions, and authentically encountering those who are immersed in the experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) propose the way of knowing for the Interpretivist is 'shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects' (p. 212). This highlights the inseparability of who we are and what we know for the Interpretivists. The researcher's philosophical assumptions flow into the choice of an appropriate research design.

Research Design

The design of this study has incorporated five small studies and utilised three different methodologies with their associated language and methods. Table 3.1 presents an overview of the overall design of the study.

Table 3.1: *Overview of the Research Design*

| Philosophical foundations Interpretivist (or Constructivism) Gaining understanding by interpreting subject perceptions (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 103) | | Design Strategy | Methodologies | Methods |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| Ontology | Epistemology | | | |
| <i>Relativist</i> 'Realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them' (Guba, 1990, p.27). | <i>Constructivism /Social Constructivism</i> People construct their own understanding of reality; we construct meaning based on our interactions with our surroundings (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 114) | Purposeful Sampling (Patton, 2015) | Autoethnography (Chang, 2008) Phenomenology of Practice (van Manen, 2014) Case study - Basic Qualitative Inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) | Researcher's Personal story (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008) Participant anecdotes of lived practice (van Manen, 2014) Semi-structured Interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) Semi Structured Focus group interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) |

Interpretivism with the associated ontological and epistemological assumptions underpin this research and positions the inquiry comfortably within a qualitative paradigm. This paradigm being one in which the inquirer seeks to describe, understand, and interpret a phenomenon in a specific context, bodes well for this investigation. The exploring of perceptions requires a process which incorporates the researcher as an important factor in the collection and analysis of data, as the understandings are revealed inductively. To explore the perceptions of engagement in interreligious learning and teaching, a qualitative study was a natural fit as it involves considerable exploration to reveal interpretations of what it is, and how participants might partake in it. As it is a phenomenon in which experience is

paramount, a primary consideration for the researcher was sample selection. It became apparent that purposeful sampling (Cresswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) would be key in the design of the study. Patton (2015) proposes:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalisations. (p. 264 emphasis in original)

The purposeful selection of cases is crucial to the research being able to uncover perceptions and interpret meanings about engagement in interreligious learning and teaching in a Catholic school and how this may interplay with religious identity. The researcher needed to select participants with the knowledge and articulacy to depict their experience.

To explore, through describing and beginning to understand this phenomenon, the researcher commenced by exploring her own adult experience of interreligious learning and teaching, then searched to understand other adults' experiences. This was an effort to try to understand the phenomenon from divergent perspectives and consider how it may interplay with religious identity. Finally, the researcher explored how interreligious learning and teaching is experienced and understood by individuals (teachers, leadership teams, school officers, students, and parents) in a Catholic school context and its possible interplay with an individual's religious identity. These inquiries utilised three methodologies to dig deeply into the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching, what it might look like, how it is experienced and described by participants and how it might interplay with religious identity.

Methodologies

Methodological choices flow from the researcher's philosophical assumptions and design strategy. With purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) specifically chosen to guide the inquiry, the researcher discerned that her own experience was the logical place to start to explore interreligious learning and teaching through a personal lens and thus the use of Autoethnography. From this personal inquiry, the researcher was drawn to understand the experience of other adults and thus *Phenomenology of Practice* (van Manen, 2014) was employed to explore the lived experience of other adults before seeking to understand interreligious learning and teaching from the perspective of participants in a Case study of one Catholic school context. The case study exploration utilised a basic qualitative inquiry methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to further reveal insights about the research questions. The methodologies will subsequently be explored individually and then validity and reliability discussed collectively.

Autoethnography

Given the questions in this study have evolved over time out of personal experiences that have significantly impacted the trajectory of the researcher's life and work, an autoethnographic methodological approach was deemed an intuitive place to begin the inquiry. Autoethnography 'operates as a bridge, connecting autobiography and ethnography in order to study the intersection of others, self and culture' (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 446). Making sense of interreligious learning and teaching through interrogating the researcher's personal experience and inner dialogue as it intersects with others and culture offers opportunity to critically probe this phenomenon from the inside. Autoethnography is utilised in Chapter 4 explicating a personal interreligious encounter in which the researcher engaged thus undertaking a constructive interpretation process.

Autoethnography is a relatively recent methodology that has been utilised within a diverse range of disciplines and can provide a strategic frame to probe the core inquiry question 'How does my own experience of my culture offer insights about this culture, situation, event and way of life?' (Patton, 2015, p. 101). With the specific inquiry asking: How do I experience interreligious learning and teaching? How does it interplay with my religious identity? Denzin and Lincoln (2013) propose:

Autoethnography is research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical to the cultural, social and political through the study of a culture or phenomenon of which one is a part, integrated with relational and personal experiences. (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p.599)

This is a strategy of exploiting one's own experiences to gain insight into a situation or event of which one is part, and the larger culture of which one is also a part. Holman Jones (2015) suggests autoethnography can 'move writers and readers, subjects and objects, tellers and listeners into [a] space of dialogue, debate and change' (p.764). This dialogue being both 'inner' and 'outer' as the researcher grapples with understandings that are personal and public as a means of digging deeply into the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching and attempting to examine and understand it for practice and for life.

Autoethnography, according to Chang (2008) is 'self-narratives [that] can be used as cultural texts through which the cultural understanding of self and others can be gained' (p.13). This requires reflection, analysis, and interpretation within a cultural and social context. Culture might be considered from the perspective of 'out there in the public world' or 'in here, in the private sphere of the self' (De Munck, 2000, p.8). In the context of Autoethnography, Chang (2008) proposes:

Culture as a product of interactions between self and others in a community of practice. ... an individual becomes a basic unit of culture. From this individual's point of view, self is the starting point for cultural acquisition and transmission. (p. 23)

The author highlights the aspects of community and culture emanating from the interactions of the human persons (self and other). The researcher (self) in autoethnography positions him/herself within a specific context (culture) to describe, reflect upon and analyse that experience. Chang (2008) offers 'cultural understandings of others begins with genuine encounters with them through which insider perspectives are gained' (p.27).

The encounter from a Christian perspective, acknowledges the human dignity of every individual and the respectful open dialogue between persons (Vatican II Council, 1965; Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020; Chang, 2008; Pohl, 1999). In this encounter Chang (2008) postulates:

Self may need to start with "denying" self by putting aside its own standards, crossing its own cultural boundaries, and "immersing" self in others' cultures (Lingenfelder, 1996). ... Yet leaving one's standards momentarily and observing and analyzing (sic) differences between self and others from a distance are helpful practices in understanding others of difference. (p. 28)

Autoethnography can be a means of better understanding the relationship between the self and others and cultures or communities in which the individuals are intertwined. This being the case in the researcher's decision to begin this inquiry with a personal experience of the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching.

Data Collection

Stories from personal memory including recall of events or encounters are rich fodder for the autoethnographer and can be analysed in conjunction with self-observational and self-reflective data from the researcher's present time to bring past and present perspectives to one's life experience (Chang, 2009). The stories created by the researcher serve the dual purposes of 'helping the reader... to understand and [to] feel the phenomena under scrutiny' (Bochner, 2000, p. 270). The autoethnographer can also draw data from literature that provides a theoretical perspective that may frame the study (Chang, 2009). In this way, in Chapter 4, the researcher has used her own stories, her self-reflection and literature to dialogue between personal experience and theoretical perspectives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of the autoethnographic inquiry was to search for understanding about perceptions of engagement in interreligious learning and teaching from an 'inside' perspective. Chang (2008)

indicates ‘autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation involve, shifting your attention back and forth between self and others, the personal and the social context’ (p. 125). The process ‘requires the researcher’s holistic insight, a creative mixing of multiple approaches, and patience with uncertainty’ (p. 126). This necessitates the researcher’s engagement in the connecting of the present with the past, using ‘logical reasoning, imagination, and intuition’ (p. 134) and while it’s not possible to determine clear causal relationships, approximations can be reasonably established. In addition, the analysis of relationships between the self and others of difference, are important for this study exploring interreligious learning and teaching. ‘The others of difference, represent communities of practices, sets of values, and identities different from yours or unfamiliar to you’ (p. 134) and in this inquiry was a Jewish community. The strategy of utilising a frame from the literature was also adopted in this analysis to employ ‘a theory to explain phenomena in [the] autobiographical data’ (p. 137). This analysis and interpretation is searching for perceptions that are personally and culturally meaningful and can be compared with others in society. The researcher then moved her attention to the experiences of others’ ‘lived experiences’ of interreligious learning and teaching, employing a hermeneutical (pedagogical) phenomenological (van Manen, 2014) methodology.

Hermeneutical (Pedagogical) Phenomenology

Phenomenology is both a school of philosophical thought and a type of qualitative inquiry. Creswell (2013) proposes ‘a *phenomenological study* describes the common meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon’. (p. 76). From the initial autoethnographic study, the researcher moved into an inquiry focused on; What are the interreligious learning and teaching ‘lived experiences’ of others? van Manen’s (2014) hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenology analysis opened opportunities for a process for researching lived experience and provided a consistent pathway for the researcher utilising participants’ experiences written as anecdotes for inquiring into the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching. van Manen (1997) proposes, ‘[p]henomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the “texts” of life’ (p.4). This approach is developed in Chapter 5 to unfold layers of meaning of five participants’ lived interreligious learning and teaching experiences.

Van Manen (1997) posits:

Lived experience is the starting point and the end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into textual expressions of essence -in such a way that the effect of the text is at once reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

The lived experience is intimately intertwined with everyday life and phenomenology accesses these pre-reflective experiences as a focus for questioning and reflection. Understanding ‘the notion of phenomenology as method that involves the enigma of the epoché and the reduction’ (van Manen, 2014, p.28) is important for the kind of reflection required.

In phenomenology, the epoché and the reduction are two movements of the method of the reduction. Van Manen (2014) explicates:

The reduction consists of two methodical opposing moves that complement each other. Negatively it suspends or removes what obstructs access to the phenomenon – this move is called the epoché or bracketing. And positively it returns, leads back to the mode of appearing of the phenomenon – this move is called the reduction (Taminiaux, 1991, p. 34). (p. 215)

The epoché and reduction have risen out of the work of Edmund Husserl, one of the founding fathers of phenomenological philosophy (van Manen, 2017). It is not strategy but ‘[r]ather, the reduction is an attentive turning to the world when in an open state of mind effectuated by the epoché’ (p. 218). This openness offers opportunity for insight into the phenomenon, though it is not assured. Hermeneutic reduction ‘requires that the various dimensions of lived meaning of some selected human experience are investigated for their various sources and layers of meaning rather than being overlaid with a particular frame of meaning (p. 224). The phenomenological analysis requires an appropriate question and pre-reflective experiential material that can be reflected upon.

While phenomenology inquiry employs movements of the reduction, it may also require the *vocative*. This dimension of the inquiry process, ‘[t]ries to find expressive means to penetrate and stir up the pre-reflective substrates of experience as we live them. The experiential writing of the text should aim to create a sense of resonance in the reader’ (van Manen 2017, p. 240). The resonance is such that the reader is able to acknowledge the moment/feeling/occasion as possible even if it has not been personally experienced. van Manen (1997) advocates that ‘[t]hrough meditations, conversations, daydreams, inspirations and other interpretative acts we assign meaning to the phenomena in lived life’ (p. 37). The hermeneutic importance of the lived experience is gained as one gives memory to it and subsequently reflect upon it. The use of story or anecdote is a common device in phenomenology (van Manen, 1977) and gathering ‘lived experience descriptions (LEDs)’ (van Manen, 2014, 298) requires the researcher to obtain experiential accounts and personal stories for investigation. In the phenomenological study explicated in Chapter 5, the researcher again used purposeful sampling, employing snowball sampling (Patton, 2015, Cohen et al., 2007) to seek out ‘information-rich key informants’ (Patton, 2015, p. 298) and then through their networks found five participant volunteers to join the study.

Data Collection

The participants were invited to either be interviewed by the researcher and the researcher would subsequently write a succinct story of their lived experience or they could write the story themselves, using guiding questions provided to them. All the participants chose to write their own 'description of lived experience' (LED) (See Appendix B for information sheet). Participants were asked to think of a specific instance (their first experience if possible) of interreligious learning and teaching and then consider the following as a guide to writing their anecdote.

- When exactly did this happen?
- What were you doing?
- Who said what?
- How did you feel?
- What did you say then?
- What happened next?
- What else do you remember about the event?

(Adapted from van Manen, 2014, pp. 314 – 316)

Once the participants had completed the LEDs, the researcher read them through and checked for clarification of the recounts so the researcher's interpretation was not influenced.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The reflective inquiry process of analysing and interpreting the LEDs was guided by 'the existentials of lived relation (relationality), lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived things and technology (materiality)' (van Manen, 2014, p. 302) to explore interreligious learning and teaching searching for insights the researcher may glean from the experiences. The existentials are themes of life that all have the opportunity to encounter in and through life. They were used to guide the meanings of the experience of interreligious learning and teaching in the moment of the lives of these individuals. The reflection is guided by questions that each theme can illicit, and these are further explicated in Chapter 5 as they are utilised in the inquiry.

The LEDs were initially read as a whole and a word or phrase was formulated to try to express an essential meaning for the whole LED and then subsequently the texts were interrogated line by line, exploring the existentials one at a time rather than exploring the one text with the five existentials at once. Immersion in the data revealed 'lived relations' as a significant existential in all the lived experiences and interconnected with the others so it was decided to consider this last. The 'lived body' was also brought to the fore in many of the LEDs, so it was decided to consider this first, followed by lived space, time, things and finally relations. The analysis and interpretation of these 'lived

experiences' offered possibilities for the experiences of others, and the researcher then turned the attention of the inquiry to participants in one Catholic school as a case study.

Case Study - Basic Qualitative Inquiry

A case study inquiry was deemed an appropriate approach for the final phases of the overall study as the researcher wanted to investigate a Catholic school in which the community was engaged in interreligious learning and teaching. Stake (2005) claims 'case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied' (p.443). Definitions of what a 'case study' is abound in the literature (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln; 2011; 2013; 2017; Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) and there is considerable debate as to whether it is an inquiry design, methodology, method, or a combination of these elements. For the purpose of this investigation, a case study is deemed 'an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 36). The authors go on to advise, 'the unit of analysis, not the *topic* of investigation, characterizes a case study' (p.38). The single bounded system in this case study is one Catholic Primary school in the Brisbane Archdiocese. The bounded system (a Primary school) defines the type of study and not the research focus and therefore 'other types of studies can be combined with the case study' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 39). The investigation applied a basic qualitative inquiry in a purposefully chosen case.

The case, Good Shepherd Primary school, was chosen as an 'intrinsic' case (Stake, 1995) or 'an exemplar of [the] phenomenon of interest' (Patton, 2015). The Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) project, empirical quantitative research conducted by a team from Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven in partnership with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), has identified it as a school with a large sub-population of participants who would opt for Recontextualising the Catholic identity of the school. One of the features of Recontextualisation requires the engagement of the multiplicity of religious and non-religious voices within a context in dialogue with the Catholic tradition. The school has a significant multicultural/multifaith context and how these voices are engaged in interreligious learning and teaching was pertinent to the focus of this investigation. The ECSI research project will be explored in more depth below. Once the bounded system was identified, a system for sampling participants was devised. The researcher was interested in how engagement in interreligious learning and teaching is perceived by staff, students, and parents and how this might interplay with the individuals' religious identity.

The case study participants were all volunteers. The staff were recruited during the researcher's second visit to the school site, through a researcher-led presentation in which the research questions were outlined. Seven teachers and three leadership team members volunteered post the presentation. In addition, four self-interested school officers/administration staff members offered to join the project through snowball sampling (Patton, 2015; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The sample was 14 participants out of a total 37 staff members which was 38% of the total. Upon reviewing the sample,

prior to data collection, the researcher confirmed that the participant sample was a heterogeneous sample (Patton, 2015) with a mix of male/ female, various year levels, different staff roles, multiple age brackets, diverse religious affiliations, and included a person with an identified disability. As the sample had randomly produced a diverse sample, the researcher did not recruit further participants beyond these volunteers.

The student participants were enlisted during the researcher's third visit to the school, which was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The twelve student participants were a purposeful random sample (Patton, 2015) selected from a volunteer group of students aged between 8 and 12 years (Primary years 3 – 6). The students were invited to a researcher-led discussion during a lunch break to explain what the research was about. They were given an information sheet at the end of the session and encouraged to consider their subsequent participation. The students were informed that if more than twelve students volunteered, three students would be chosen randomly from each of the year levels 3 – 6. The total of twelve students aligned with the university ethics conditions and were chosen as two groups of six, one from the Year 3/4 learning pod (Ignatius) and one from the Year 5/6 learning pod (Hildegard).

Parent participants were also recruited during the researcher's third visit to the school. The data collection had been delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and parents had limited access to the school site. Consequently, a researcher-led discussion was not permissible at this time and so the information sheet was distributed to parents via the school's regular processes. Volunteers were asked to contact the researcher via return form to their child's teacher. Subsequently eight parents volunteered for the project with one parent having a child who participated in the focus group while the remaining parents did not have children associated with the project. Upon reviewing the sample of volunteers, prior to interviews, the researcher was aware that the sample was reasonably homogeneous (Patton, 2015) with all the participants being female, the majority nominating as Catholic or Christian, the majority of a similar age-bracket and cultural background. With the restrictions of the pandemic and the time constraints, further recruitment was not possible.

Data Collection

For each of the three participant groups semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (see *Appendix C* for sample guiding questions) were conducted after obtaining written and verbal consent as per the ethics protocol. Staff interviews were conducted by the researcher in a private room on the school site. They were recorded with the participant's permission using an iPhone, and subsequently the recordings were transliterated. The leadership team interviews were for up to one hour while the staff interviews were for up to twenty minutes aligning with the ethics conditions. The student participants were given the option to be interviewed in a focus group (learning pod group) or individually. All students chose to be interviewed in the group situation. All students provided written

and verbal consent, and their parents also gave written consent allowing their child to participate in the focus group interviews and for it to be recorded. The interviews were conducted in the school library for up to twenty minutes in accordance with the ethics protocol. The parent participants were interviewed individually and provided written and verbal consent to participate in, and to have the interviews recorded. These interviews were conducted on a bench outside the school to comply with the COVID-19 restrictions and were for up to 20 minutes in accordance with the ethics protocol. All recorded interviews were listened to, and the researcher sought clarification as necessary. The interviews were transcribed and after the initial reading the researcher sought further clarification where necessary and offered the participants the opportunity to make any adjustments or add further details or illuminations as required.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher set about the process of endeavouring to make meaning out of the data collected and trying to understand how each of these groups in this bounded system perceive their experiences (or their students / children's experiences) of engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how this might interplay with religious identity. The transcribed interview data sets were analysed in order of the three groupings, staff, students and finally parents. They were viewed through the lens of the interpretivist, trying to understand through interpreting the perceptions of the various groups of participants. The researcher's analysis was searching for codes and then categories or themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) within the data sets.

The data sets were analysed separately and at different times with the staff data considered first followed by the students and finally the parents. The complex process began with the interview transcripts in each data set read initially with consideration of the study purpose, the study questions, and the theoretical frame (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This reading captured the initial coding of the interactions with words or phrases that were pertinent to the research questions. After this initial coding, the researcher considered the codes in light of the study questions, asking how these might respond to the research questions. The researcher returned to the data to check that the individual data transcripts were verifying the identified codes. The researcher repeated this process several times, trying to look for what may be researcher biases constricting the interpretation, including considerations of researcher 'positionality', 'beliefs' and 'life experience' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Measures taken will be outlined in the final discussion chapter of this study.

Through subsequent readings of the data sets, themes emerged that were applied across the interview transcripts. This process was operationalised manually and utilised margin notes, colour coding, and recording of codes or words which were then linked together with a running list of codes. Through this inductive process some of the themes were renamed as they were able to be combined together, or a more precise name reflected the data. All the relevant data was then coded to the themes.

These themes were subsequently considered in the light of the school context and the data from the ECSI research project, the school website public documents and the successive data sets as they became available. The process at this stage was slightly deductive as the researcher tried to identify if the category existed in other data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The names of the categories were selected as a response to the purpose of the data, reflective of what was in the data and compatible with the theoretical framework of the study. The ECSI Research report was considered in the testing of the themes to look for consistencies or inconsistencies with this data set and then across the three data sets from the groups of interviews.

Enhancing Catholic School Identity

The Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) project is an empirical research project that many Catholic schools across Australia and the world have engaged in, and past project data was utilised to test categories in this study. The project focused ‘on the religious identity of Catholic schools and other institutions involved in Catholic education facing the challenge today of *Recontextualising* their Catholic identity in a detraditionalising, secularising and pluralising culture’ (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 10 emphasis in original). The ECSI project employed three multivariant scales; The Post Critical Belief scale, The Melbourne Scale, and the Victoria scale which have been developed from theoretical models. In addition, the research includes two profile questionnaires; the Profile Questionnaire and The Doyle Questionnaire which collect background information on the participants and their attitudes toward aspects of the Catholic school to build a contextual picture. The ECSI project team also included a qualitative component to their research which schools can choose to engage in or they may choose only the quantitative component of the research. The ECSI project team proposed:

The ECSIP project offers support to on-going processes of self-assessment that form the basis for ongoing dynamics of self-assessment of Catholic institutional identity. The identity research enables Catholic schools and other institutions to understand themselves more completely and thoroughly, so that they are in a better position to improve their Catholic identity in ways that are both theologically legitimate and culturally plausible in the short and long term. (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 11)

The project offers a self-assessment of ‘Catholic Identity’ via the surveys and questionnaires (quantitative analysis) and the option of a qualitative analysis. The assessment seeks to quantify the school’s current position and recommendations are offered to support the direction the school might take to enhance its Catholic identity amidst present contemporary culture and into the future. This assessment and subsequent enhancement process has been viewed by many schools and school jurisdictions as an urgent task as a consequence of the decline of religious affiliation, the loss of the handing-on of religious traditions in the home and the increase in migration and mobility of populations leading to increased plurality of cultures and religions.

The profile questionnaires of the research provide background information that is cross-referenced with the scales to give a more holistic picture of the population including categories such as gender, role, religious affiliation, nationality, attitudes to prayer and the Catholic faith, church praxis, recognition of the school's Catholic identity, Religious Education practices, use of scripture at the school and other themes (see Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, pp. 41 – 42). The Melbourne scale, which is crucial in the ECSI analysis, operationalises a typology developed by Lieven Boeve (see Boeve, 2016), 'based on the theological analysis of the contemporary relation between faith and culture' (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 24). The Melbourne scale is supported by the two attitude scales, the Post-Critical Belief scale, and the Victoria scale. These scales collect information regarding 'belief styles of the school population and the way in which the school deals with the tension between Catholic identity and diversity' (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 24). The scales have a dual measurement that measures the participants' estimation of the 'current level of practice' and their 'ideal school' (p. 30) level of practice of various identified components. The future orientated measure indicating the direction that participants would like to see the school potentially undertake. The quantitative data from the ECSI report for Good Shepherd Primary (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019) has been utilised in this study in the theoretical triangulation which is a strategy to support the validity of the case study investigation.

Validity and Reliability

Research needs to be conducted with rigor and if the findings are to offer insight, the constructs of validity and reliability need to be addressed. In this study the primary goal is to explore, involving being able to describe, understand and interpret, so this has implications for the above concepts. The philosophical perspective of interpretive research holds:

[I]ndividuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences.... These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views.... Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interactions with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. (Creswell, 2013, pp. 24-25)

These philosophical underpinnings support qualitative study and acknowledge reality and meanings as complex and ever-changing as they are formed through interactions with others. Aligning with these assumptions the authenticity and trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) of this study is considered more congruent with the terms, credibility, consistency/dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba (1985) rather than internal validity, reliability, and external validity. 'Because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.

243). This places the researcher 'close to the reality' being interpreted, enabling complexities to be better understood rather than interpreting through objective instruments of data collection.

This study has employed three methodologies to explore questions around interreligious learning and teaching and how this experience might interplay with an individual's religious identity. The autoethnographic data source was personal stories, this gave the researcher familiarity from the outset and the process enabled a greater knowing of self, others and culture which can potentially provide insight into educational contexts. The purpose of the inquiry was to explore the researcher's own experience so that others may 'imagine their own uses and applications' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42). Bochner (2000) cautions '[t]raditionally, we have worried much more about how we are judged as 'scientist' by other scientists than about whether our work is useful, insightful, or meaningful – and to whom' (p. 267). The power of the story to resonate with the 'other' and give insight into the complexity of life experiences gives authenticity to this research method.

The second methodology undertaken in this study utilised van Manen's (2014) Hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenology to explore the lived experience of five adult participants' engagement in interreligious learning and teaching. The research was searching to explore the question: What are 'lived experiences' of interreligious learning and teaching? The researcher is probing to uncover meanings of a phenomena. Van Manen (2014) proposes;

a phenomenological study can be assessed on the criteria of its suspension of personal or systemic bias, its originality or insight, and its scholarly treatment of sources. Such validation criteria presume an informed and scholarly competence on the part of the reader and reviewer of the phenomenological study and text. (p.347)

While the researcher gave the draft manuscript of this study to participants to check that the analysis of their experience continued to resonate authentically with them, this does not validate the interpretation by the researcher. 'Validity of a phenomenological study has to be sought in the appraisal of the originality of insights and soundness of interpretive processes demonstrated in the study (p. 348). Some questions that van Manen (2014) suggests may be addressed in a phenomenological study's level of validity include:

Is the study based on a valid phenomenological question?...What is this human experience like? How is this phenomenon or event experienced?... Is the analysis performed on experientially descriptive accounts?... (Does the analysis avoid empirical material that mostly consists of perceptions, opinions, beliefs, views?)... Is the study properly rooted in primary and scholarly phenomenological literature? Does the study avoid trying to legitimate itself with validation criteria derived from

sources that are concerned with other (non-phenomenological) methodologies? (pp. 350-351)

The phenomenological study's validity is realised in its appraisal, and reliability is not a construct that can be applied to such a study as a researcher may study a phenomenon that has been addressed previously but strive for 'new and surprising insights' (p.351). Generalizations from a phenomenological study may take the form of 'existential' or 'singular' generalizations (p. 352). The existential generalisation points 'to what is universal or essential about a phenomenon in an existential sense' (p.252) making it possible to recognise recurring aspects of a phenomenon. The singular generalisation points towards what is unique about a phenomenon (p.252) and sometimes 'makes it possible to recognize what is universal' (p. 252). These generalisations are not empirical generalisations but related to the phenomenon itself.

The final investigation in this study was a case study conducted at Good Shepherd Primary and utilising a basic qualitative inquiry. In such an inquiry, Patton (2015) advocates 'triangulation, in whatever form, increase credibility and quality by countering the concern (or accusation) that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source or a single investigator's blinders' (p. 674). In the case investigation bounded in the Good Shepherd school context, there were multiple opportunities for data triangulation, with the interviews of the staff comprising of three groups leadership team members, teachers, and school officers (classroom support personnel/ administration officers). This provided the opportunity to look for consistency across the differing perspectives of these groups. The subsequent data collections of students included focus groups interviews with two student groups, one of students in Years 3/4 and the other, students in Years 5/6 and finally parents. The researcher was able to look across the data sets to triangulate data from the various participant perspectives, thus increasing the credibility of the findings. Patton (2015) proposes that the researcher can also triangulate by 'using different theoretical perspectives to look at the same data' (p. 671). In this study theoretical triangulation has been utilised to make sense of the data and to explain some of the themes that were revealed. '*Theoretical triangulation* involves examining the data through different theoretical lenses to see what theoretical framework (or combination) aligns most convincingly with the data (best fit) (p. 673). This can illuminate the same findings in the light of differing perspectives.

The researcher was immersed in the school context, initially observing in the classrooms, engaging in the school induction program, attending staff briefings and staff prayer, participating in staff professional learning sessions, spending time in the staff room and conversing with staff from a plethora of roles. Over a two-year period, the researcher had three separate site visits with approximately three weeks in total spent in the school context. During these visits, the researcher was able to check in with staff members (respondents) to validate the preliminary analysis to ensure that it sat comfortably with their experience. The draft student and parent analyses were verified via phone conversation with the

Principal who was able to check in with some of the respondents. The process of member checks (Creswell, 2013, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and time spent in the context offered the researcher opportunity to support the credibility of the findings by confirming that the findings were congruent with the respondents' understandings. Additionally, the publications which have arisen from this research (Chapters, 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8) have been through a rigorous blind peer review process prior to publication in a variety of respected national and international journals and books.

In qualitative research the question of reliability is challenging (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) as the researcher's exploration is seeking to describe, understand and interpret the world as it is experienced by individuals. Human behaviour and thought are ever evolving and different from person to person, so the replication of results is most likely not possible. The more important consideration for qualitative study 'is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 251), hence 'dependability' or 'credibility' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is a more appropriate construct. This study has employed the strategies of triangulation, peer examination and the investigator's philosophical position to ensure the consistency or dependability of the investigation.

The researcher's detailed thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, Patton, 2015) of her own experience, the experience of other adults and the perspectives of the respondents in the bounded system (Good Shepherd Primary) have been explored in an ever-widening circle of perspectives to interrogate the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching and its potential interplay with religious identity. This study is a qualitative exploration and thus findings in this study are not intended to be generalisable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Rather, the investigation seeks, through the use of thick, rich descriptions of the context and perspectives to offer opportunity for readers to find resonances which may transfer to their own context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2013). 'Transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) suggests 'the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do' (p. 298). The researcher's role is thus to provide as much descriptive data as possible to allow transferability to be imaginable.

Purposeful sample selection has been strategically employed in this study to locate maximum variation in the samples of each study, where possible. This included variations in gender, religious affiliation, age, and roles where this was possible given the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions throughout the data collection period. The diversity of samples selected permits the possibility of greater transferability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study also indicates the possibility of extrapolations (Patton, 2015) moving beyond the findings. It is proposed;

Unlike the usual meaning of the term generalization, an extrapolation clearly connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the findings. Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, case derived and problem orientated rather than statistical and probabilistic'. (Patton, 2015, p. 255 emphasis in original)

An extrapolation can offer possibilities for the reader to solve a problem through the extension of findings and is akin to a working hypothesis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to take to a new context.

Ethics

The autoethnographic study included the researchers own story with the participants deidentified. The researcher checked with the participants, who were given pseudonyms in the text and gained permission to use the stories. The researcher also consulted the persons reflected in the story to confirm that the stories resonated with their recollection of the events. Before collecting data for the second investigation via the LEDs, approval was confirmed by James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee, application ID H7849 approved on 23rd July 2019 (see *Appendix D*). The research at Good Shepherd was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic constraints and the restricted access to schools. When access to the schools was opened, it was tentative, so a decision was made to begin the study with staff interviews only. These interviews commenced after approval was confirmed by James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee, application ID H8146 approved on 22nd June 2020 (see *Appendix E*) and Brisbane Catholic Education Research Advisory Panel, reference number 450, endorsed on 17th November, 2020 (see *Appendix F*). An amendment was sought for these applications to include the students and parent participants in the study. The amendments were approved by the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee, application ID H8146, approved amendment on 20th January 2021 (see *Appendix G*) and the Brisbane Catholic Education Research Advisory Panel, reference number 450, endorsed 11th April 2021 (see *Appendix H*). The Principal of the school after reading the draft of Chapter 6 asked that the school be named rather than using a pseudonym, and a confirmation email was sent to the researcher to approve this request (see *Appendix I*).

Justification of Research Methodologies

This study investigates perceptions of engagement in interreligious learning and teaching experiences and the interplay this may or may not have with an individual's religious identity. The researcher began with her own experience utilising autoethnography to reveal meanings from a personal experience of interreligious learning and teaching. The study then extended to explore the 'lived experiences' (van Manen, 2014) of other adults to uncover further layers of meaning about perceptions of interreligious learning and teaching experiences. Finally, the researcher explored one school context (a bounded case) seeking to understand the perceptions of staff, students, and parents about their (or their students/children's) engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how this may interplay with their religious identity. Systematic purposeful sampling has guided the researcher in the gradual expansion of perspectives to try to uncover the layers of meaning and explore how interreligious learning and teaching might be perceived and its potential interplay with religious identity in a contemporary Catholic school.

The criticisms of the various methodologies have been responded to and the appropriateness of each research methodology for this study explicated. The researcher has endeavoured to explore interreligious learning and teaching from multiple perspectives, utilising multiple appropriate methodologies to investigate how different people and groups of people may experience it. The study has explored first from the insider experience to a wider perspective of other adults and then the perspective of individuals engaged in this work in a school context. It has been an attempt to see some of the 'many facets of the one gemstone'.

Chapter 4 - Identity and Dialogue: Learnings from a Personal Interreligious Encounter

This chapter explores the researcher's personal experience of interreligious learning and teaching through autoethnography and was published as Chapter 45 in *Global perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in schools*. The paper poses questions and possibilities for students in Catholic schools.

Foley, T. & Dinan-Thompson, M. (2019a). Identity and dialogue: Learnings from a personal interreligious encounter. In M. Buchanan & A. Gellel (Eds.), *Global perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in schools* (pp. 563–573). Springer.

Abstract

Addressing conceptualisations of Catholic identity in Religious Education and acknowledging the reality of identity as polyvalent and paradoxically both static and changing, I grapple with my own experience of religious identity determined by encounters with religious others. By applying autoethnography, an approach developed to help researchers better understand cultural experience, to understanding religious experience, I utilise my experience of attending a Shabbat service with a Jewish colleague to organically engage my understanding of my Catholic identity in dialogue with the religious other. The process expanded my knowledge of both traditions, including the function of prayer, the concept of relationship with God, the role of community and the religious life of the individual. Critical reflection upon this encounter, while steeped within the discourse of my own prior knowledge and experience, offered me new possibilities for interreligious learning. It stretched my consciousness in relation to how I live my life, how I encounter diversity and what questions I ask. This reflection, and the subsequent internal and external dialogue it evoked, has created new insights into pedagogical opportunities for working with students and highlighted the importance of relationships and encounter with the other. This lived experience offers possibilities for the learning and teaching of religion in the contemporary classroom. Encountering religious diversity in the flesh, approached with the appropriate dispositions and skilful critical reflection, potentially offers students an expanded understanding of their own religious identity and the opportunity to breakdown negative stereotypes and humanise the religious other.

Introduction

Currently, there is considerable attention given to conceptualisations of Catholic identity or identities in the Religious Education and theological literature (Arbuckle, 2013; D'Orsa, 2013; Lombaerts & Pollefeyt, 2004; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; Rossiter, 2013a, 2013b; Sharkey, 2017; Sultmann & Brown, 2011) that acknowledges the reality of identity as polyvalent and paradoxically, static and changing. Identity is both personal and communal and is born out of one's social, cultural

and religious experiences, reflection and critique. In the past, Catholics in Australia have benefited from a strong religious tribal culture as part of the fabric of community life. However, over time gradual changes in religious affiliation have evolved with approximately 30% of Australians now identifying as 'no religion' and most adherents of this group are in the younger age brackets (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). What is clear, is that Australia is a religiously diverse nation and this reality will be confronted by most. Coming to new attitudes and understandings about one's religious identity is enhanced by knowing even one other religious tradition beyond one's own (Boys & Lee, 2006) and the first author's personal encounter with the religious other, experienced in attending a Shabbat service and meal, provides lived experience of the identity and dialogue milieu. An autoethnographical account is constructed to bring to light learnings that could be utilised in the contemporary religion classroom given the plurality of the modern world.

Using Autoethnography

Autoethnography provides a method for exploration of the first author's interreligious encounter and is an established methodology in the health, education and social science fields (Attard & Armour, 2005; Brooks & DinanThompson, 2015; McMahon, Penney, & DinanThompson, 2011). The method brings together features of autobiography and ethnography. The auto biographer often "writes about "epiphanies" - remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 275). These epiphanies provide opportunities for an individual to reflect and to uncover ways that future situations might be negotiated. The ethnographic researcher studies "a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture" (Maso, 2001, p. 138). The researcher scrutinizes the cultural experience through attempting to bring the insider and the outsider into a conversation potentially exposing better understandings. Utilising autoethnography, I am reflecting upon thoughts, feelings, conversations and learnings I experienced in an interreligious encounter and critiquing that against typologies of cognitive belief styles and pedagogical identity options for Catholic institutions (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). I am therefore studying myself within personal, cultural and religious spaces. Autoethnographic research "wants to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible and evocative research, grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 736). This methodology uses the first author's personal stories therefore ethics approval is not required, yet it enables the researcher to uncover discourses and learnings that can potentially be utilised in the classroom teaching of religion.

In this paper, the reflection and analysis is framed as a dialogue between personal and socio-cultural/religious voice (adapted from Brooks & DinanThompson, 2015; McMahon & DinanThompson,

2008). The personal voice or stories are authentic, subjective, emotional and evocative and the socio-cultural/religious voice provides critical reflection and analysis of the encounter. Through reflection on my experience and associated emotions, I will link my personal experiences with an explanation of the interreligious encounter from my perspective so that my stories and reflections resonate (or not) with others to provoke potential learnings.

Typologies for Identity Discourses

The Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSCIP) is research which has evolved in Australia as a partnership between the Victorian Catholic Education Commission and the Catholic University in Belgium. The researchers have produced three multivariant scales (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014) which identify typologies of cognitive belief styles, institutional theological identity options and pedagogical identity options concerning Catholic identity in a pluralising cultural context. The scales; the Post Critical Belief (PCB), the Melbourne, and the Victoria, provide a framework for discussion around identity in Catholic schools. Sharkey (2017) presents a succinct austere summary of the ECSIP in accessible language and emphasises that it is one tool for shedding light on the Catholic identity options taken up in a school. While the scales correlate, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus predominately on the PCB Scale which is a typology for cognitive belief styles and the Victoria Scale a typology of pedagogical identity options in a culturally and religiously pluralising context.

The degree to which one believes (or not) in God (however named), is subjective and varies on a spectrum from total disbelief or atheism, to holding a deep and intense awareness of an ontological referent. This essentially describes what one believes and can be considered simultaneously with how one believes. How an individual believes is potentially on a continuum from a literal to a symbolic interpretation of belief. These 'what' and 'how' dimensions form the basis of the PCB scale which identifies four types of cognitive engagement based on combinations of belief or not in transcendence and literal or symbolic interpretations of that reality. The belief types, Literal Belief, External Critique, Relativism and Post Critical Belief are represented in four quadrants (see <http://www.schoolidentity.net/introduction/>).

Literal Belief, is characterised by belief in a transcendent God that is interpreted literally. Proponents of the belief style interpret faith mediations such as sacred texts, prayers, and rituals in a literal way and hold steadfastly to belief in the one true God and indeed one way to God. The External Critique supporters are those who don't believe in God, however they interpret expressions of faith literally. Thus, religious content is interpreted literally and dismissed as unbelievable, resulting in a substantially critical standpoint which disregards or ridicules belief. The Relativist position holds a personal disbelief in God, however there is openness to others who do believe, as belief is interpreted symbolically. The Relativist is aware that the world is open to interpretation and there may be many credible truths, however these adherents don't personally hold to any truth axiom regarding

transcendence. Post Critical Belief is a faith position which utilises symbolic mediations as a means of interpreting religion. It is a complex believing style attained through the ability to critique and the capacity to consider multiple interpretations of religious content within a discerning frame. Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2014) have developed a PCB survey that measures the extent to which an individual (and a group) identifies with the belief/nonbelief positions. The researchers acknowledge that the belief styles are extreme positions and an individual is likely to hold a combination of the belief styles, as is a group, and belief styles may be more dominant at various times in one's life. The ECSIP researchers have articulated the preferred cognitive belief style on theological grounds as Post Critical Belief.

Within the education sector there is considerable discussion focussed on pedagogy and its impact on learning and student outcomes (Fullan, 2012; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Hattie, 2011; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Fullan and Langworthy (2013) advocate the necessity of deep learning to establish connection and enable human flourishing. The plurality of cultures, religions and worldviews populating many school contexts presents an additional dimension to developing cultures of connectedness. The Victoria Scale (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) provides a typology for discussion of pedagogical identity options for schools in relation to religious content and core educational activities of the Catholic school. The Victoria scale was developed on a typology that is also based on two axes; one indicating minimal to maximal openness to Catholic identity and the other minimal or maximal openness to public solidarity with diversity.

The Victoria scale identifies the perception of the school's pedagogical engagement with Catholic identity and solidarity. The Monologue school opts for maximal Catholic identity and minimal solidarity. Pedagogically, the school offers strong public support for Catholic identity and minimal openness to engaging other worldviews or beliefs. The narrative of the school openly tells the Catholic story but offers little opportunity to consider other ways of being in the world. The Colourless school is one that chooses to minimize engagement with the diversity of beliefs and minimizes engagement with the Catholic story in public discourses. This school type keeps its pedagogical eye on the students' educational outcomes with minimal reference to a Catholic worldview or the cultural/religious diversity of society. The Colourful school in contrast, takes the diversity of the contemporary world seriously and engages with its colourfulness. Pedagogically, this school is open to including a multitude of voices in its public discourse with the Catholic voice simply one of many. This school is inclusive of all with no public priority for the religious or Catholic story. The Dialogue school prioritises Catholic identity and openness to other worldviews in the school's pedagogy. This requires attentiveness to teaching and learning that engages Catholic religious content alongside other religious/cultural content and provides opportunity to build cultures of connectedness and enhance human flourishing. This school publicly engages with the Catholic story in relation to other worldviews and while prioritizing the Catholic view is open and welcoming of the encounter with the other perspective. It is also possible that a school's pedagogical engagement may not be captured in one box or corner but exists within the boundaries and

perhaps aligns closer to an axis. This may also represent a journeying of identity across time, interactions and changes in worldviews and beliefs. The ECSIP researchers, based on theological grounds, have identified the Dialogue School as the preferred pedagogical identity option.

Encountering the Other

As a Catholic educator, I was invited to a course focussing on Jewish life and religious practices. As part of this experience, I joined an educator for the 'Kabbalat Shabbat' prayer service at an Orthodox synagogue and afterwards shared a Shabbat meal. This experience brought me face-to-face with the religious other and presented an opportunity to bring a real-life experience into conversation with the typologies of the PCB and Victoria Scales.

Personal Voice

Walking into the synagogue via secure gates and guards wasn't the welcome I had expected. The guards questioned me seeking justification for my connection to a regular congregant. Thoughts of anti-Semitism, injustice, disbelief, flashed through my head. An anxious wait for Roberta, then she ushered me into the synagogue with a "Shalom Shabbat" and handshake from the Rabbi as I entered. Ladies headed upstairs and men on the main level. I scurried after Roberta, still feeling affronted by the guards. We found our prayer book and seats then surprisingly to me, we went out to a lobby area to enjoy whiskey and cake with the men.

The Rabbi teased, "This is some fellowship, and a way of enjoying ourselves while we wait for the stragglers!"

The presence of the guards was disturbing, and their interrogation left me feeling vulnerable and anxious. I had prepared for prayer, not a grilling from guards. My understanding of 'imago Dei' was confronted, and I felt like an accomplice in a society that perpetuated the indignity of human persons. My thoughts flagged injustices of this world and childhood memories of being confronted with cultural difference came flooding back. I had metaphorically been here before – encountering otherness from a minority perspective. My prior experience told me this was an opportunity to listen and be open to the encounter that was offered. The welcoming hand of the Rabbi brought a sense of knowing and yet the internal turmoil immediately returned with the abrupt separation of the men and women. I felt a vacillating within, knowing to unknowing, searching desperately to latch on to elements of my religious experience to assist me in making meaning of this strange situation. Anstley (2004) indicates listening deeply to a religious tradition's powerful concepts, rituals, music and practices can transform us. Hence, a listening ear and openness were a means to appreciate and learn about this unfamiliar text.

The reality of our contemporary world is such that encountering diversity of language, culture and religion is inevitable, thus presenting the opportunity to develop and maintain human connectedness through translation. While experience indicates it is possible to understand foreign languages and to

translate, there is often a preoccupation with the discourse of untranslatability (Moyaert, 2014). In interpreting the work of Paul Ricoeur, Moyaert advises:

...statements concerning the impossibility of translation express the real resistance any translator may encounter, regardless of whether they move between languages, cultures or religions. This resistance, which arises both on the part of the host language and on the part of the guest language, flow for the most part from a desire for perfection and purity, a desire that underlies the typical human desire for mastery and invulnerability. (Moyaert, 2014, p. 145)

The experience of moving from the known to the unknown, albeit in relation to language, religion, culture or a combination can be disturbing, evoke anxiety and result in loss. This is challenging and requires a level of commitment and vulnerability to continue to be open to grappling with the uncertainty and welcoming exposure to new possibilities. Translation of religious experience is possible, but it calls for the translator to be open to the possibility of interpretation and reinterpretation through a variety of mediations and expressions of religiosity.

A Post-Critical believing style is seemingly optimal for allowing the possibility of translation and learning in the interreligious encounter. To enter the synagogue experience with a literal believing stance, would have immediately closed me off to the possibilities that the experience offered. I wouldn't have been receptive to allowing the experience of another way of being religious to touch me and expand me beyond my current understanding. Entering such an experience from a predominately disbelieving stand would also have limited the potential of the religious encounter.

Personal Voice

I sat on the balcony beside the Rabbi's wife and to my amazement, she began chatting and telling me about the synagogue, the prayer, and what was happening below where the praying had commenced. As other women came in, they greeted and chatted freely as the praying continued. The Rabbi's wife could see my angst and inquired cheerfully,

"Don't you talk during your services?"

"No," I silently shook my head.

She smiled and re-assured me, "It's okay to talk here, that's how it works."

This was foreign, and my discomfort lingered, allayed somewhat by the invitation to follow the prayer in English.

"We're all in relationship with God," my hostess reassured, "we don't have to earn it!"

Below in the main level of the synagogue, a world of strange besieged me. I watched like a gallery spectator – prayers were being chanted in Hebrew. Some men wandered around catching up with friends, others rocked back and forth totally engaged in prayer, yet others chanted as a group. As a livelier chant began, men spontaneously danced and clapped around the cantor. Other congregants clapped as the prayer was joyfully intoned. Young girls and boys wandered freely in and out of the congregation on the main level. Two boys with a football chased each-other around as the praying continued.

“This would never be tolerated in a Catholic Church!” my immediate thought.

Amidst the cacophony of sounds, the young cantor enwrapped in a prayer shawl and kippah continued to lead the chanting, apparently oblivious to what appeared to be chaos around him.

“What is prayer?” I mused silently.

As the prayer was coming to an end, the young boys awkwardly scrambled up to the central lectern and with the encouragement of the male adults, led the final singing.

Attending prayer in the synagogue presented me with an experience of ‘otherness’ regarding religious practice and I chose to engage in the work of translation so that I might make meaning of the experience. Had I taken an External Critique position, I may have ridiculed the experience or from a Relativist position possibly enjoyed the experience but not engaged in critical reflection with a desire for learning about religiosity. From a literal stance, I would have struggled to reflect and explore what the encounter could offer me in my life now. Instead, I chose to listen and be open to how this way of being religious might translate for me - to discover things that my prior experiences/ knowledge had in common with this experience of a Jewish tradition and things that were vastly different. Such translation, Moyaert (2014) suggests;

brings forth a creative encounter between two worlds and makes meaning move. It develops new semantic resonances, makes unexpected allusions, and points to surprising new possibilities. It expands the horizon of meaning of the translated text.
(p. 149)

The synagogue encounter highlighted how meanings can move through and within the relationships that exist and that are being developed.

Amidst the cacophony of sounds, there was visible testimony of the participants’ relationships with each other, with God and with the stranger, somewhat indicative of the home. It looked and sounded like an open narrative, inviting me to engage with it. Subsequent reflection has invoked the desire to explore my participation in liturgies, uncovering an openness to life around me and the potential meanings in relation to God. For Catholics, liturgy is communal and has a power of its own. Yet through

my encounter in the synagogue, I've expanded my understandings and considered choosing to welcome the disruption. Subsequently, I've become more attentive to the in-breaking of God in surprising ways. This 'translation' has enabled a development in me and offered me the joy of a deeper experience of liturgy where all is welcome and has meaning. This is perhaps, a spiritual effect of an interpreter engaged in "a genuine conversation (in which) something emerges that is contained in neither of the partners by himself (sic)" (Gadamer (1982) cited in Astley, 2004).

Personal Voice

After the service, we walked swiftly to Roberta's house. Despite our haste, I was caught in my own thoughts... what had just transpired in that prayer service? How did it fit with what I know? Would the toilet light be on in Roberta's house? Was it okay to turn it on? How should I greet? What would I say? Suddenly, we arrived. The door adorned with an elaborate mezuzah, was wide open and we walked straight in to be warmly greeted by Roberta's parents, two siblings, their partners and young children. Immediately, there was a sense of homeliness and welcome.

The gathering was noisy with sibling banter and the coos and cries of babies. There was an atmosphere of genuine love – everyone helped with the children and bringing the meal to the table. The women lit the Shabbat candles and the wine and challah bread blessed. The parents blessed each other and their children. Then the feasting began.... we ate, and we drank Some more family arrived... we ate, and we drank... we discussed, we debated, we laughed, and we shared. The gathering was timeless and boundless – conversations, jokes, sharing of cultural and religious practices, a lot of eating and drinking... There was a deep sense of not wanting to leave this space.

The Shabbat meal manifested as an extension of the synagogue service, providing opportunity to grapple with an interreligious encounter and search for and create new understandings. My initial reservation, founded on a desire to be respectful, was quickly dispelled through the meeting of human persons. The receptive manner with which I was welcomed laid a foundation for dialogue that was genuine and established space for engaging richly and deeply with the other. Any desire for mastership and invulnerability dissipated. Haers (2004), proposes in relation to the school context, which he suggests is a playground to enact and design future life, one needs to be conscious that:

More important than an anxious defence of one's own identity or of one's own point of view, is the awareness of a conversational space in which points of view and identities arise, always connected to other points of view and identities. It is important to 'play' the encounter as the articulation and enactment of a fundamental togetherness of people. (Haers, 2004, p. 329)

The challenge Haers (2004) explains is akin to a frontier, where one either chooses borderlines that separate, or searches for and creates new ground or thick spaces, that hold a togetherness of people.

This requires commitment and genuine openness, particularly when the participants are not equally represented resulting in minority/majority groups. The conversational space holds different attitudes, languages, religions or cultures and diverse positions that potentially push against one another in their vulnerability, uncovering something of the other and in-turn revealing something of oneself. The challenge is to identify frontier spaces within the community, including the school community, and to engage in dialogical encounters that foster connectedness, as this is a positive and necessary endeavour for the future of humanity. The frontier is a fragile space, potentially offering encounter as opposed to battle. In the present social and religious climate, many adults appear to need educating into this space and the students in our schools may also require education and support to negotiate these frontiers and build a new world alternative.

Discussion

In the Australian context, it's been proposed that substantial focus on education in identity would provide rich and fruitful content for Religious Education, particularly in the secondary context (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; McGrath, 2017; Rossiter, 2013b, 2017). Such an emphasis in a Catholic school context would engage students in a critique of culture and academic study of the Catholic Tradition with reference to other religious traditions (Engebretson, Souza, Rymarz, & Buchanan, 2008; Rossiter, 2012, 2017; Ryan, 2014; Rymarz, 2017) thus providing a platform for responsibly interrogating contemporary world issues. This potentially affords students a religious voice that is authentic and plausible for engagement in the modern world. Such an endeavour necessitates the development of knowledge and skills and potentially dispositions and protocols for encountering otherness. This identity development offers the possibility of religious, cultural or personal certainties being offered a new or richer perspective. An open, mutually respectful and listening disposition is paramount to such encounters.

The ECSIP in Australia has provided data for schools highlighting a decrease in Literal Belief as students get older and a simultaneous decrease in PCB. In addition, the data identifies an increased option for External Critique and Relativism as the students' age increases (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 163). Hence in many Australian Catholic schools, as students are getting older they are choosing a non-believing cognitive belief style. Many secondary students are also opting for a Colourful school as the preferred pedagogical option for the future (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 208), which is a pedagogical identity option that maximizes solidarity with diversity but minimises public engagement with the Catholic story. The younger students also indicate less future resistance to the Colourful school (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 206). Thus, as students are maturing in Australian Catholic schools, many are opting for non-believing cognitive belief styles and solidarity with the diversity without public reference to the Catholic story.

The ECSIP preferred options on theological grounds are for PCB and a Dialogue school, thereby challenging schools engaged in this project to plan for the prioritising of these positions. My experience of the Shabbat service and meal highlights the advantage and potential for learning of an individual operating predominately from PCB. Additionally, having an open, respectful and listening disposition in negotiating the dialogical encounter enabled potential learning. In the Australian classroom context, it seems apparent from the ECSIP data that students may require intentional education into this more complex cognitive believing style along-side the appropriate dispositions and dialogical pedagogical practices, to robustly grapple with an interreligious encounter and seize opportune learning. This necessitates thoughtful development of religious knowledge and skills and the dispositions and pedagogical practices required for such encounters. Exploring pedagogies that encourage students to encounter each other in an open and mutually respectful way and to listen to the religious other, offer possibilities for deepening one's living of their home tradition and creates cultures of connectedness.

Conclusion

Personal Voice

My reflection on the Shabbat experience, has expanded my understanding of who I am as a faith-filled Catholic woman. I have re-examined my engagement in liturgy and my role as a member of a prayer community, as well as developed relationships with members of a religion beyond my own. The experience was a fragile one, I was vulnerable as those I encountered potentially were. However, I prepared myself for new dialogue to be included and chose to engage with an open mind and a sincere listening heart. I reflect to see that my religious belief style supported the encounter with an openness to a multitude of avenues through which one can express faith or come to know God or the Divine.

A Post Critical Belief style, founded on the inherent dignity of every human person (Gen 1:26) enables an individual to be open to multiply ways of encountering the Divine and to discerning engagement through symbolic mediations. This believing style supports authentic dialogue with the religious other and promotes grappling with how contemporary individuals live life, consequently affording insights born of human encounter. Teaching and learning in the contemporary Australian classroom encourages pedagogies of inquiry that interrogate, and that dig deeply into the learning content searching for meaning and connection. In the context of the Australian Catholic School, developing students' capacity to believe symbolically will include a capacity to engage with multiple interpretations of religious/belief context and to critique such content in the light of a home tradition and contemporary culture. For students to engage in dialogue in the religion classroom, which is indeed at the core of any educational endeavour, they could benefit from developing dispositions for dialogue. True dialogue requires respect, openness, equality and inclusivity and interreligious dialogue founded on such dispositions offers the possibility of genuinely expanding understandings and humanizing the religious other. It presents an opportunity to choose the frontier space over the borderlines, facilitating

creational togetherness where new possibilities can emerge both within and beyond the school community. This could provide a platform for re-contextualising faith in this complex world, promote human flourishing and continue to actualise the ‘kingdom of God’ (Mk1:15).

This autoethnographic study then led the researcher to move into an inquiry focused on: What are the interreligious learning and teaching ‘lived experiences’ of others? The following chapter explores the ‘lived experiences’ of five adult participants.

Chapter 5 - Interreligious Learning and Teaching: Unfolding Layers of Meaning in Lived Experience to Inform Possibilities for Students in Catholic Schools.

This chapter explores the interreligious learning and teaching ‘lived experiences’ (van Manen, 2014) of five adults utilising hermeneutical (pedagogical) phenomenology (van Manen, 2014) and the lifeworld existentials to uncover layers of meaning and other perspectives on the phenomena. The paper was published in the *Journal of Religious Education*.

Foley, T., Dinan-Thompson, M. & Caltabiano, N. (2020). Interreligious Learning and Teaching: Unfolding Layers of Meaning in Lived Experience to Inform Possibilities for Students in Catholic school. *Journal of Religious Education*, 68, 141- 160. doi: 10.1007/s40839-020-00099-2.

Abstract

This paper explores the question, “What is the individual’s experience of interreligious learning and teaching?” It utilises hermeneutic phenomenology to interpret the rich and hidden meanings of lived experiences. van Manen’s (2014) lifeworld existentials provide a frame for guiding the exploration to uncover insights through lived relation (relationality), lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived things (materiality). Current global events have highlighted to the world the tragedy of religious intolerance in extreme forms and the need to cultivate tolerance and sensitivities towards religions and non-religious philosophies and diverse life perspectives. Investigating the phenomena of ‘interreligious learning and teaching’ as it is lived by individuals, offers insight into what could be one’s own or another’s lived experience, and how this might influence one’s religious identity. Such understandings can provide a foundation for seeking out and engaging students in valuable interreligious learning and teaching experiences and pose opportunities/challenges for Primary and Secondary contexts to rigorously grapple with diversity; a global reality.

Key words: *Interreligious, phenomenology, religious identity, Religious Education, lifeworld existentials, pedagogical typologies*

Introduction

Globalization has brought diversity to the doorstep of almost every Australian. Living in a pluralistic community is the lived reality of many Australians and the opportunities to encounter a culture, religion or worldview other than one's own is becoming increasingly likely. The global and Australian climate highlights the emerging relevance of engaging in interreligious learning and teaching to foster relationships, enhance religious identity and possibly build beneficial partnerships for the good of all.

This study explores the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching. The lived experiences of five participants are explored through the frame of van Manen's (2014) lifeworld existentials to investigate individual experiences of interreligious learning and teaching. The layers of meaning uncovered in this research, conducted with mostly adult participants, offers insights into what has potential for students in Catholic schools. Contemporary students have been born into a diverse context, often replicated in the school (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018) and hence the opportunities and skills to engage in interreligious learning and teaching would seem necessary for the thriving of school communities.

The lived experiences of interreligious learning and teaching have also been considered in light of the Post Critical Belief typology and the Victoria Scale pedagogical typology. What and how one believes (or not) and pedagogical options are explored to inform how these might play out in real life experiences of interreligious learning and teaching. To begin this exploration, it's appropriate to consider the terminology employed and be clear about what is it that's being considered.

Clarification of Nomenclature

In the Religious Education literature, there are terms employed such as *interreligious*, *multireligious*, *monoreligious* and *intrareligious* learning that sometimes lack clarity in their contextual meaning. For the purposes of this study the authors have taken the understanding of *monoreligious* learning to be single denominational Religious Education that takes place within a context of a religiously homogeneous group, or one that is assumed to be so (Hermans, 2003; Pollefeyt, 2007). Such learning is that which has taken place in the traditional confessional Catholic school. *Multireligious* learning is a neutral Religious Education which facilitates learning about religions that are of equal or relative worth (Hermans, 2003; Pollefeyt, 2007, Roux, 2007). Multireligious learning in the Australian context first became evident in Moore and Habel's (1982) typological approach to teaching religion. *Interreligious* learning is learning that utilises the diversity of religions and non-religious worldviews indicative of today's society, as a learning opportunity. It is "an encounter and dialogue between different religious convictions" (Pollefeyt, 2007 p, XII) where individuals come to the learning from their own particular religious standpoint or tradition whilst maintaining an openness to transformation (Cornille, 2008; Hermans 2003; Lombaerts, 2007; Pollefeyt, 2007). This learning requires the individual

to engage with the 'religious other' whilst being cognisant of one's own religious/non-religious worldview. *Intrareligious* learning on the other hand is "critical inquiry and interaction between different groups/denominations of the same religion" (Roux, 2007 p. 107). Roux (2007) proposes that understanding the internal variations of one's tradition through critique and dialogue assists with the learning from other traditions.

The religious demographic trend of contemporary Australian society, as with many countries in the modern world, highlights the increasing presence of individuals identifying as "no religion". To be inclusive of all life convictions, Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2019) proposed the term *interconvictional* which could be inclusive of all personal/group convictions; religious, non-religious, spiritual or variations within the same worldview. This term could be inclusive of all the learning and teaching within and beyond convictions, religious and non-religious. The concept of learning and teaching also requires some explication for clarity in purpose and practice.

The instructional process according to Wiliam (2006; 2011), includes learning and teaching as both elements are required for a successful outcome. This presents the learning and teaching process as dynamic with pedagogical and learning practices part of the interface. Pedagogical practices such as inquiry-based learning, design thinking, explicit instruction and dialogue can be utilised for particular educative outcomes. In developing culturally appropriate learning and teaching, the process of relationally responsive pedagogy (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities Regional Aboriginal Education Team, Western area, 2012) identifies a frame for engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in learning and teaching which honours the importance of relationship and connection of all entities (human and non-human). Such pedagogy reiterates the intertwining of the learning and teaching process and the quality of interactions between the learner and the teacher/other which may enhance learning for all. Hence, for the purposes of this paper, interreligious learning and teaching is considered the appropriate term to include the potential reciprocity between individuals and various convictions (religious/ non-religious/ spiritual/cultural). The learning and teaching process engages the *person* and so the individual's identity is potentially confirmed or challenged or seen as dynamic/fluid through such interactions. The individual's *religious* identity becomes a consideration in interreligious learning and teaching.

Religious identities have been grappled with in the face of the secularising tendencies of the modern pluralistic world. Moyaert (2010) drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, highlights that just as our own self-identity is not static or fixed, so religious identities continue to evolve and change. This change or enrichment can be as a response to an encounter with another religion. Hutsebaut, the developer of the Post Critical Belief typology proposes that:

... religious development does not end at secondary school, but that pupils need time to develop further. At the end of adolescence, a certain system has been developed,

but this does not mean that there can be no further developments through the confrontation with certain cultural particularities. Education gives the initiative, and offers opportunities to think, but the pupils themselves must continue the process in their growth towards adulthood (Hutsebaut, 2007 p. 290).

The continued development of religious identity into adulthood is emphasised and the skills for continued growth are cultivated in learning and teaching in the school context. The focus of the inquiry is to consider individuals' lived experience of interreligious learning and teaching and consider how this might reveal meanings that could inform the learning and teaching in contemporary Catholic school classrooms and enhance the development of religious identity.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws from the theoretical framework of hermeneutical phenomenology to guide the reflection, interpretation and insight into the lived experiences of interreligious learning and teaching. It is important to recognise phenomenology as both a philosophy, originating from the writing of Husserl (1970) and a qualitative research inquiry methodology that has evolved into numerous strands of phenomenological scholarship. Sharkey (2001) advocates that "research in the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to genuinely engage with what happened in the field (experience) and to communicate the meaning and truth of what was encountered in that disclosive engagement" (p.34). Such research, with which this inquiry aligns, is exploring phenomena as they are experienced and probing them for meaning. In engaging with this methodology, the researchers have drawn from van Manen's (2014) lifeworld existentials as a frame for exploring and uncovering insights into interreligious learning and teaching through lived relation (relationality), lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived things (materiality).

In engaging in interreligious learning and teaching, one is called to interact or come face-to-face with 'the other'; one who may have a different religious worldview. This evokes questions of religious identity and the researchers also draw from the theoretical typologies of the Post Critical Belief (PCB) Scale (Hutsebaut, 1996; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014) to interrogate meanings that may be interpreted from the participants' lived experience. The four typologies of the PCB scale operationalised in the PCB questionnaire (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; 2014) are Literal Belief, External Critique, Relativism, and Post Critical Belief. The typologies identify the 'what' and 'how' of belief or nonbelief (for more details see Foley & Dinan-Thompson, 2019a; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014, Sharkey, 2017). The schema gives a frame for further interpretation of lived experience as it offers insight into how an individual may deal with the contents of belief through their religious identity style.

Interreligious learning and teaching demands engagement in the dynamic learning and teaching process, hence pedagogical options become a consideration. The Victoria Scale (Pollefeyt & Bouwens 2010; 2014) operationalises a typology for the pedagogical options of a Catholic school when dealing

with Catholic religious identity. The typologies; Monologue, Dialogue, Colourful and Colourless schools (for further details see Foley & Dinan-Thompson, 2019a, Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; 2014; Sharkey, 2017) provide a framework for discussing the ways in which a Catholic school might consider the learning and teaching of religious content with respect to a Catholic worldview and solidarity with ‘the other’. These considerations can frame and guide further reflection on lived experiences of interreligious learning and teaching.

Life World Existentials

Hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenology using the lifeworld existentials (van Manen 1997, 2014), has been utilised in research in education (see, for example, Brown, Castle, Rogers, Feuerhelm & Chimblo, 2007; Hyde, 2003, 2005) and nursing (see, for example Eggenberger & Nelms, 2006; Rich, Graham, Taket, & Shelley, 2013;) and offers one possible way of exploring the phenomenon under investigation. The lifeworld existentials offer a way to guide the reflective inquiry into the lived experience of interreligious learning and teaching. van Manen (2014) proposes “the notions of lived relation, body, space, time and things, are existentials in the sense that they belong to everyone’s lifeworld – they are universal themes of life” (p. 302). They are common to all experience and therefore can be utilised as a meaning structure to explore particular phenomenon.

Lived relations refers to the experience of how one connects to self and others with respect to the phenomenon being studied. van Manen (2014) suggests to “explore the relational aspects of a phenomenon is to ask: How are people or things connected? What meaning of community? What ethics of being together?” (p. 303). Lived relation may include the communication and relationships or non-relationships that are experienced with others and that occur through space, time, body and things. Asking questions of how a phenomenon is an experience of relation gives insight into the phenomenon itself.

The existential theme of *Lived Body* (corporeality) can guide reflection on how the body is experienced in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. The lived body encapsulates the experiences of presence, sensations and movement of the physical body. Questions such as “How and when do we become aware of our bodies? How do our desires, fears, cheerfulness, anxieties, incarnate themselves in the world in which we dwell? How is the phenomenon we study perceived, sensed, touched by the body?” (van Manen, 2014, p. 304). Corporeality is part of the human experience and as such can offer insight into the lived experience through sensory knowing.

Spatiality or *Lived Space* is the felt space or the individual experience of space. This sense of lived space can affect the way one feels or vice versa, the way one feels can affect the way a particular space is experienced. This existential theme evokes wonderings such as; “How do we shape space and how does space shape us? How is space experienced differently from place? How do we experience the

worldly or unworldly moods of certain places?” (van Manen, 2014 p. 305). The Lived Space theme raises awareness of the experience of space, where we find ourselves and how it feels in that space.

Lived Time or temporality provides a guide for reflecting on phenomena. Lived time is subjective time and in relation to a phenomenon can be experienced as time speeding up in an enjoyable experience or slowing down when one is uninterested or uneasy (van Manen, 2014). van Manen (1990) maintains “temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape” (p. 104). These landscapes can, at times merge together for example when an individual reflects and reinterprets past events in light of who they are now or are dreaming of becoming in the future.

The existential theme of *Lived Materiality* or lived things guides reflection on questioning how things are experienced in relation to the phenomenon being studied. “Things” are part of all our lives, and how they are experienced can contribute to the meaning of a phenomenon. Inquiry engaged in this theme might consider “How are things extensions of our minds or bodies? How can things be experienced as intimate or strange?” (van Manen, 2014, p.307). The question of materiality may help to elicit insights into personal items, objects or even thoughts and events casting light on how these things are lived. Each of the lifeworld existentials offers a perspective or focus for exploring the phenomenon, however, they're not easily separable and they form part of the holistic lifeworld of individuals. The lived experiences of the individuals in this study reiterate this interconnection.

Participants

Participants in the study were self-interested volunteers recruited through snowball sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007 p.116). The primary researcher asked acquaintances and colleagues to enquire in their networks regarding individuals who may wish to be part of the study. Five participants volunteered, two males and three females (see Table 5.1 for details). All participants were given pseudonyms and were baptised Catholics, educated in Australian Catholic Schools and willing to share an experience they considered to be interreligious learning and teaching. One participant (Steve) shared two experiences, firstly, one of intrareligious learning and teaching which subsequently enabled a deeper engagement in an interreligious learning and teaching experience in an ecumenical group.

Table 5.1: *Participant Background Information*

| Name | Age | Gender | Age at time of experience | Religious Practice | Affiliation/ | Life Stage | Self-nominated Belief stance |
|--|-----|--------|---------------------------|--|--------------|---|--|
| Allan | 19 | Male | 17 | Baptised Catholic Special occasion/ family practice (weddings/Christmas) | | Adolescence | I don't know |
| Jill | 43 | Female | 42 | Baptised Catholic Regular attendee at Sunday Mass – not every week | | Middle years | Believes in a transcendent God |
| Vanessa | 53 | Female | 44 | Baptised Catholic Regular attendee at Sunday Mass – not every week | | Middle years | Believes in a transcendent God |
| Monika | 46 | Female | 26 | Baptised Catholic – converted to non-orthodox Judaism approximately 12 years ago | | Middle years Experience in early adulthood | No belief in transcendence but believes people find meaning and community in religion. |
| Steve (2 experiences Intra & Inter) | 57 | Male | 23 | Baptised Catholic Regular attendee at Sunday Mass – not always every week | | Middle years Experience in early adulthood | Believes in a transcendent God |

Procedure

The five research participants were offered the opportunity to participate in an interview with the primary researcher answering questions about their lived experience of interreligious learning and teaching or to write their own lived experience description (LED) (van Manen, 2014 p. 314). All participants chose to write their own LED. The writing of the LED was guided by an information sheet that outlined that it was to be a single experience and that it should include where possible concrete details, appropriate dialogue and avoid explanations, generalisation or interpretations. Questions that were posed included; When exactly did this happen? What were you doing? Who said what? How did you feel?

Once all the LEDs were completed. The researchers began the analysis by reading each description through in its entirety. van Manen (1990) advocates “when a person shares with us a certain experience then there will always be something there for us to gather” (p.92). Subsequently the holistic

reading of each text was then discussed, and a phrase was formulated to try to express an essential meaning of each whole LED. The individual texts were then explored for particular phrases or statements that were revealing of the phenomenon (interreligious learning and teaching) and then a detailed exploration of every sentence was conducted exploring what might be revealed.

These thematic statements and insights gleaned from the data were then explored in light of the lifeworld existentials: lived space, lived time, lived body, lived relations and lived materials. After some deliberation, the researchers decided to explore the lifeworld existentials one at a time and interrogate the texts for each of these rather than exploring the one text with the five existentials at a time. There was also a decision to be made about the order of exploration of the lifeworld existentials. Immersion in the data revealed lived relations as a core existential in all the lived experiences and was often intertwined with the others and so was considered last, as this existential drew many of the others together. Most of the experiences also resonated with lived body, so it was decided to explore this existential first. Lived space, time and materials were then explored in turn. Hence, the existentials were considered one at a time to the complete body of data, in order of, body, space, time, things and relations.

Lived Body

The physical body is an important way in which human beings can physically engage or 'be' in life. Bodily sensations can delight us or awaken us to felt knowings and yet can often be overlooked or ignored. How the body is experienced with respect to a phenomenon can potentially reveal layers of meaning otherwise invisible or silent (van Manen, 2014). In exploring the participants' experiences of interreligious or intrareligious learning and teaching, the *lived body* disclosed revealing moments of the encounters. Steve, in recalling an experience of interreligious learning and teaching that occurred over time remembered:

I unleashed in me, an insatiable desire for holistic engagement in my personal spiritual journey – head, heart and hands – an embodied faith. (Steve, age 57)

This interreligious experience which evolved after a significant learning and teaching encounter within his own religious denomination, gave Steve the impetus to seize his own spiritual journey and stirred a desire to physically live his faith through every fibre of his being. The interreligious learning and teaching resulted in deeper certainty in his own religious convictions and brought to his consciousness the need to give expression to it through the whole of his body. The lived body experience can also alert an individual to unease in the interreligious encounter, as Allan (age 19) indicates;

One of the students asked the Imam to speak about Sharia law. There was a quick drop of eyes and heads as we anticipated the answer. (Allan age 19).

It's possible the lived bodily experiences of Allan and his classmates manifested in awkwardness and uncomfortableness as the students may have had a preconceived idea of what the

response to the question might be. This predetermined understanding produced restlessness, which was unfounded. The interreligious learning and teaching experience can be interrupted or even stifled by a lack of openness that may emanate from misconceptions or what one thinks one knows.

How the interreligious encounter is experienced bodily may also be an absence of 'feeling' as identified by Monika (age 46 years) who remembers engaging as a 26-year old (after the experience of the loss of a significant other), in a Buddhist meditation practice;

Having something offered to me that could take me out of myself, no matter what religion it was, was a godsend. (Monika, age 46 years)

A Buddhist practice took Monika, 'out of her lived body' which was reeling in grief and this experience, though she may not have fully understood it, seemed to ease the pain she held in her body. The interreligious learning and teaching can potentially be focused on practice and not necessarily a religious or spiritual encounter. The lived body might also signal strong engagement in the interreligious encounter as Vanessa (age 53 years) engaging with a young aboriginal man and Jill (age 43) participating in a Seder meal, attest:

Ritual, food, wine, song and storytelling was accompanied by a troupe of young and energetic female vocalists with big band musicians. My senses were reeling. (Vanessa, age 53)

...the young Aboriginal leader stopped and called out in language across the small gully. The sound of his call reverberated through the forest and through my body, producing goose-bumps over my head and down my arms and legs. Then silence. The call was heart-felt. (Jill age 43)

These experiences reveal moments of deep interreligious encounter where the experience is fully lived in the body as a profound knowing. The body can be a significant guide in the interreligious learning and teaching experience revealing, deep connection with the encounter through physical manifestations. The lived body could also expose unease with what the encounter is offering or the absence of feeling in the body signalling something learned or embraced through a physical practice, though not necessarily a connection to the religious significance.

Lived Space

Interreligious learning and teaching is connected to the religious or spiritual dimension of life and appears to be recognisable in a variety of places as indicated by the lived experiences of the research participants in this study; a mosque, a rainforest, a restaurant, a living room and a meeting room. The felt space, as distinct from the place, seemed to play a role in how the participants experienced the interreligious learning and teaching and may provide clues about the depths of encounters. One of the themes that recurred in several of the lived experiences was the sense of experiencing space beyond that which was there. Merleau-Ponty (1996) suggests that one can be drawn into a space that is beyond the physical realm and this seems possible through one's lived experience of interreligious learning and teaching.

In her experience of encounter with a young Aboriginal man, Jill (age 43) recounts his call to his ancestors asking for permission to move through country. After a moment of silence, she noted:

I felt a deep connection between the living, the dead and the forest that encircled me.
It made me feel very close to my father whom I had lost some months earlier. (Jill, age 43)

The call to the ancestors appeared to open the space and enable Jill to feel a 'bigger space' of ultimate connection to all. It brought the living, the dead and the natural surroundings into one 'space'. This was a spiritual engagement beyond words, Jill was beckoned outside the physical space and experienced a deep spiritual connection, with her dead father, the young Aboriginal man and the forest they were traversing. While the experience was not one of 'religion' per se, it was of transcendence, of 'God' or had resonances of a spiritual meaning (Cornille, 2008). Cornille (2008) proposes that this type of encounter may be 'associated with great openness and creativity, but also with vulnerability and danger' (p. 73). One's deepest beliefs are exploring the teaching/practices/beliefs of another religious or spiritual conviction in 'a space' beyond the physical surrounds. The place of the rainforest, the setting for this encounter, was a huge physical space and yet it was able to 'open up' to a boundless space in Jill's experience of learning and teaching about worldviews/convictions. Through her openness and vulnerability, her knowing was expanded in the encounter.

The lived space of the interreligious learning and teaching experience can also be one of drawing the individual into the encounter or potentially one in which the individual is detached or indifferent. An experience of a Seder meal shared at a restaurant in Los Angeles with her sister, a newly converted Jew, was one that Vanessa (age 53) describes as a compelling space:

Intrigued by a religious service set around a dinner table... Families and others, curious and eager to be part of the encounter, joined the celebration. (Vanessa, age 53)

There was a sense of being drawn into the celebration space, it was captivating, and everyone wanted to be part of it. The experience was inviting and joyful and gave all the feeling of welcome and inclusion in the proceedings. The interreligious experience can draw the individual into a comfortable inviting space, one in which one wants to be included. The stories, song and ritual meal drew the participants into a compelling ‘timeless’ space that they all wanted to encounter. Yet, Allan’s (age 19) experience of visiting a Mosque in his final year of schooling, describes a different experience of lived space. He describes entering the Mosque:

(We) quietly entered the large carpeted room and sat on the floor facing what seemed to be the front. Five clocks hung on the wall in our line of sight, all with different times – seemed a bit strange. (Allan, age 19)

Allan’s lived space in this experience of interreligious learning and teaching appears to be a disorientated or ‘strange’ space. He couldn’t recognise the front orientation of the room and found the number of clocks something unusual. It was a foreign space and rather than intriguing him, it appeared to render him indifferent. It may be that Allan can see the place but not the space. The subsequent interreligious learning and teaching experience could potentially have been shaped by this initial disconnection with the space. The interreligious experience could potentially be impacted negatively by a lack of preparation or orientation toward the space in which the encounter is to take place.

Lived Time

Temporality or *lived time* offers yet another theme for guiding reflection on interreligious learning and teaching with time being experienced as clock time, life-time, time standing still and longed-for or wished-for time. The lived time of the participants in this study give rise to a variety of time manifestations. Allan tells:

I was surprised to hear this, [information about Sharia Law] though I know there’s more to it than that. I thought to myself, “that gives a side that maybe not everyone knows about.” I felt glad I wasn’t born into a Muslim family. (Allan, age 19)

Here Allan (age 19), who seemed to remain indifferent to the learning and teaching comes to a realisation that his current ‘life-time’ was perhaps a coincidence of time and place. If he had been born in another time/place, being a Muslim may have been his life trajectory. He was grateful this was not his ‘lot in life’. His sense of who he was, his identity was confirmed, and he learnt something of what he wanted for the future though this was expressed in the negative.

When one is totally engaged in an encounter, one’s sense of time can almost seem to stand still, and one can be lost in the mingling of time and space. The American psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1975) proposed the notion of ‘flow’ where one feels a sense of timelessness, focus and inner clarity,

whilst not being conscious of the world around you, similar to a state of ecstasy. For participants in this study, the time and space blending occurred, though not all may have experienced flow:

My orientation to Judaism had been unforgettable. (Vanessa, age 53)

...there was a respectful silence, a moment before we seemed able to move on... (Jill age 43)

I chanted the mantra many times during the 39 days, and the waves of grief eventually crashed over me less and less. (Monika, 46)

I felt that what he was saying was taking me far too close to the edge – the edge of a precipice that was completely unknown. The edge was drawing me, but I couldn't go any further at that time. (Steve age, 57)

All the participants were immersed in the temporality of their interreligious or in Steve's case, an intrareligious experience. At some point, vulnerability brought to the surface the mystery, the depth, the strangeness or the beyond-ness of the encounter with otherness, be that another religion, spirituality or variation within one's tradition. It was brought to a moment of clarity.

Lived Things

Materiality as an existential theme can guide reflection upon how things are experienced in relation to interreligious or intrareligious learning and teaching. How do the experiences of things contribute to such encounters? Some of the participants in this study interacted with material things that were elements of a religious practice finding them impactful or helpful:

We supped from the Seder plates with the eggs, the lamb shank, the arugula and the haroseth, each symbolic of the Passover story. (Vanessa, age 53)

I moved towards the fire and stopped for a moment to allow time for the smoke to envelope me. I willingly partook in the ritual with a respectful reverence and while it was a different experience, there were resonances of knowing. (Jill, age 43)

...he gives me a string of 108 beads called a mala. Then Peter teaches me a Buddhist mantra 'OM MANI PEME HUNG'. ...having a melodic saying to focus on was helpful. (Monika age 46)

The 'things' enabled the participants to engage in learning and teaching and it seems the things were in some way familiar and yet strange or new at the same time. Sharing a ritual meal, sacred stories, cleansing with fire/smoke and prayer beads are experiences of *things* that most Catholics would be familiar. When they're part of the learning and teaching around a new or different religion or spiritual

experience, the participant is able to draw on their prior knowledge to make sense of the learning and potentially offer something back in the learning/teaching process. Marzano (2004) reporting on research into the use of background or prior knowledge indicates that what is “already known about the content is one of the strongest indicators of how well they [students] will learn new information relative to the content” (p.1). The capacity of an individual to draw upon prior knowledge and utilise it in interreligious learning and teaching may be influenced by “what” and “how” the individual deals with the contents of belief. Belief may be what enables the learning and teaching to be transformative.

Lived Relationships

Relationality is fundamental to human existence and can be difficult to separate from the other existentials. But the question is how do people connect within the interreligious learning and teaching experience? Is the connection between self and other within these experiences a moment or gift or can it be the *modus operandi*? In Jill’s (age 43) experience of encountering Aboriginal spirituality, the connection with the other was ritualised when the young Aboriginal man proclaimed:

“Welcome to the land of my ancestors, whose spirits live here. Come and cover yourself with the smoke of the fire so you smell like me. Then you can walk with me on country.” (Jill age 43)

Jill engaged in the bodily practice or ritual and this resulted in a “resonance of knowing” as noted in the lived things reflection. This was an invitation to connect, to be ‘of one smell’ before traversing the young man’s country. The relationship was invitational, spiritual and based on a mutual respect. Establishing connection as a basis of the encounter, innately initiated by the Aboriginal man, aligns with the process of relationally responsive pedagogy for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities Regional Aboriginal Education Team, Western area, 2012, p.62) and was welcomed by Jill. It was a different, possibly new experience, yet the ‘resonances of knowing’ indicate that Jill drew on prior knowledge to make sense of the ritual and feel connected. This set the tenor for the entire encounter.

Rod spoke confidently, respectfully and with a comfortableness that was warm and genuine. I listened quietly and attentively to the stories of his land and his people and felt a sense of awe and connection as we tread lightly on the sacred ground. (Jill, age 43)

The lived relationships in this encounter are more than human, it was a felt sense of relationship to the living (human and non-human, inner and outer worlds) and also the dead (ancestors). The learning and teaching occurred through the relationship, the connection between all parties enabled a new knowing for Jill and possibly for Rod. This reveals the interreligious learning and teaching potentially

offering a moment of communion. This *lived* relationship, a deep sense of community, was also at the forefront of Vanessa's experience of the Seder meal:

The magical effect of these encounters was immediate. I'd been immersed in the religious ritual and experiences of traditional Jewish Passover and the non-orthodox Jewish community in Hollywood. (Vanessa, age 53)

Within this community experience, Vanessa did however also feel a sense of an 'absent relationship'.

The rabbi and the cantor drew us into the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, and there between story and song were the Old Testament women like Ruth, Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Hannah, Rebekah and the infant Moses in the basket in the rushes. The characters enchanted the gathered crowd of Jews and non-Jews. New to this observance, as a Catholic of the New Testament teachings, I was sensed with a regret and nostalgia for the feminine, the significance of the women. (Vanessa, age 53)

The learning and teaching experience led Vanessa into the scriptures. The Old Testament scripture stories used in the Jewish Passover celebration are also part of the Catholic canon, yet Vanessa had felt a lack of relationship with, and knowledge of the women of the Old Testament. The encounter drew her into a world of experience that she had not explored before and awakened her to *pangs of regret* for the lack of fruitful relationships with the stories of these biblical women.

The lived relationships within an interreligious or intrareligious experience can be challenging and produce an uncomfortableness that may or may not be productive and may take further reflection or scaffolding. Steve (age 57) in an intrareligious experience at the age of 23, indicates his uneasiness:

I confidently stated, "With your line of thinking then, there would be no point in praying for a safe flight home on Friday?" (It was well known that I'd had a terrifying flight down.) ...

There was silence – a gentle, yet protracted silence. Then, with a kind half-smile on his face, Hans simply nodded gently. I was stunned and unsettled, maybe even defensive. I had to step back and consider where I was in all of this. ...

(There was) a definite mix of unease and excitement.
(Steve age 57)

For Steve, the encounter with Hans, a Dutch theologian, was challenging and uncomfortable, yet he was drawn into relationship with him and felt he had something to offer him in his growing religious identity. Lived relationship may assist in offering a depth of learning, and yet it may remain

elusive if the sense of personal connection and investment is not present. Allan, age 19, in recounting his experience of interreligious learning and teaching, did not speak of a relational connection with the Imam and remained somewhat detached or indifferent to the experience. He recounts;

As we moved through the threshold of the Mosque, we removed our shoes as instructed. Some students smirked and giggled a little as they did so, but quietly entered the large carpeted room...

...and [we] waited quietly for the Imam to begin. (Allan, age 19)

The students' giggling reveals an uncomfortableness and an absence of felt relationship until the teaching from the Imam began. The process for connecting in the interreligious learning and teaching experience may influence the potential for fruitful outcomes. The commitment to connecting with the other, might reflect the individual's capacity to engage in deep or transformational learning and teaching.

The reflective inquiry guided by the lifeworld existentials has revealed much about the potential of interreligious and/or intrareligious learning and teaching opportunities for individuals and their communities. With an eye for what has potential, these experiences could offer insight into potential interreligious or interconvictional learning and teaching opportunities that are meaningful and engaging for students in Catholic Primary and Secondary schools. Further analysis considering the Post Critical Belief (PCB) typologies and the pedagogical typologies of the Victoria Scale could reveal further understandings through considering what and how individuals believe and the pedagogical focus of interreligious, intrareligious or interconvictional learning and teaching.

Insights from the PCB Typologies and the Victoria Scale (Pedagogical) Typologies

The interreligious or intrareligious experiences of the individuals in this study have all been approached with a respectful disposition, indicating that the participants would be likely to be operating from a Literal, a Relativist or a PCB cognitive belief style. An external critique position would undoubtedly endeavour to find cause to ridicule the religious experiences as all religion is seen as meaningless and needs to be criticised. Steve's intrareligious learning and teaching experience was the trigger for him to be able to engage differently in the interreligious learning and teaching that he shared with an ecumenical Young Adult Parishioners' (YAP) group.

Steve (age 57) recalls:

Returning to the group after my encounter with Hans, my pre-retreat self no longer existed, I couldn't go back. My grappling came with me to YAP and I discovered in many of the members (Baptists, Anglicans, Uniting Church members and

Catholics) a curiosity to explore our differences as an avenue for appreciating and learning from each other. (Steve, age 57)

The prior intrareligious experience that had metaphorically “pushed him to the edge” indicated he may have been in a literal believing position with a fixed mindset about who and what God was and how he could communicate with God. Steve was challenged in a retreat experience to let go of his right/wrong God, the “God that directly intervened in his life” to consider a relationship with God that was mediated through symbols and that wasn’t directly accessible to him. This was extremely confronting for Steve and he felt like he was “on the edge of a precipice” (Steve, age 57). However, after grappling with this experience, he was able to attempt a whole-hearted engagement in an on-going interreligious learning and teaching experience with an ecumenical group that “fostered the owning and honing of our personal faith” (Steve, age 57). Steve was challenged to move from literal belief to PCB and subsequently was able to engage more deeply and critically (exploring difference as well as similarities) in an interreligious learning and teaching experience. This enabled him to appreciate the other, whilst coming to a more nuanced understanding of his own tradition and beliefs.

Vanessa (age 53) and Jill (age 43) describe experiences of interreligious learning and teaching that also appear to utilise PCB to engage in the process. Both participants self-identified as women of faith and to varying degrees both are practicing Catholics. Both experiences as reflected upon above, were experiences that were felt in their relationships, their bodies, in space, in time and in the things or practices of the experience. They were able to draw on their prior knowledge of religious/spiritual experience and engaged whole-heartedly in the learning and teaching. They embodied the experience and allowed it to expand their understandings of how one lives religiously. Both participants appeared to become drawn into the encounter and experienced a sense of flow where time/space merged and there was a clarity that revealed a new or expanded knowing.

Allan (age 19) and Monika (age 46) both described themselves as not knowing if there is a transcendent reality and this became evident as the layers of meaning were revealed in their engagement with the interreligious learning and teaching, that may be better described as multireligious learning and teaching. In Allan’s description of his experience, he seemed almost indifferent to the experience and his ‘lived’ engagement was minimal. His final reflection, confirming that he was pleased not to be born a Muslim, indicating that he deemed it luck that had placed him in a different time and place. It was fate rather than belief that put individuals in a religious context. This suggests his position is one of a Relativist, not personally engaged in faith but not critical of those who choose to engage in faith as one of the options for life. He learnt things about the Muslim faith but as he didn’t identify as a believer, he did not draw on his prior knowledge about religion to utilise the experience to expand his understanding of his own faith. His experience was perhaps more indicative of multireligious learning.

Monika may also be describing an experience of dealing with the contents of belief from a relativist cognitive belief style. Her “not knowing” in relation to the transcendent didn’t prevent her from utilising a practice that she says, “made me feel a bit silly” (Monika, age 46). The practice did give her something to focus on and took her out of herself and therefore she found it helpful, however the experience could have been any practice, it didn’t have a religious or spiritual significance to her. This experience indicates a relativistic way of dealing with the contents of belief which can enable the individual to learn about a practice or element of a religion but that it may fall short of becoming learning that can transform the person’s religious knowing. The lived experience of the (mostly) adult participants in this study, explored through the lifeworld existentials, could shed light on how school-aged students’ cognitive belief style might be considered in engaging them in interreligious, intrareligious or interconvictional learning and teaching. The pedagogical choices for such learning and teaching experiences in the Catholic school classroom also require consideration.

The Victoria Scale (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; 2014) inspired by the work of Dutch researchers ter Horst (1995), and Hermans and van Vuygt (1997) offers a typology for considering the pedagogical options of a Catholic school when dealing with a Catholic worldview and solidarity with ‘the other’. The optimal pedagogical option, according to Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010; 2014) is that of the Dialogue school in which the learning and teaching of religion or the contents of belief would include dialogue or learning and teaching inclusive of all convictions; the various Catholic/Christian worldviews and other worldviews. This pedagogical style proposes that within a Catholic school, a Catholic worldview is always a partner in the dialogue with others. This dialogue aims to enhance the religious understanding or self-understanding of the participant regardless of one’s religious denomination or non-religious worldview.

In the Catholic School context in Australian schools, the current climate is such that the clientele of the Catholic school reflects the religious profile of the general population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Foley & Dinan-Thompson, 2019b; McCrindle, 2017). Consequently, Catholic schools can find their community comprising approximately 30% of ‘no religion adherents’, 25% Catholics and the remaining population either other Christians or other religions. Religious plurality is a reality acknowledged by Catholic Religious educators across the globe (Roebben, 2019, Rossiter, 2020, van Dijk-Groeneboer, 2019, Jackson, 2019) and presents a challenge or opportunity for many in the field. It reinforces the need for Catholic schools, in honouring the pluralist context, to consider the potential for a Dialogue school pedagogy which includes the voices of other convictions; religious and non-religious (interreligious or interconvictional learning and teaching) and a move away from monoreligious or multireligious learning.

The participants in this study were all originally baptised Catholics. In adult life, two of the five identified as ‘not knowing’ in regard to a transcendent reality and their stories highlighted their

indifference to the potential religious or spiritual meaning of their experiences. Wiliam (2014) advocates that the only way one can know if learning has taken place is if the learner is able to reproduce the knowledge. All participants in this study were able to report on what they had learned in regard to an experience they considered to be interreligious learning and teaching. However, the participants who presented as Post Critical Believers recounted embodied engagement in the experience and articulated a knowing that was more than 'head' knowledge. The participants described an expanding of their personal religious worldview and some experienced 'flow' with their level of challenge just at the level of competence (Wiliam, 2006). Maraldo (2010) suggests that:

understanding the religion of others by engaging in their practices does not eliminate the differences between them. It may call for a temporary disengagement with one's religious beliefs, but it does not require that one abandon them. (p. 115)

Maraldo (2010) advocates that accessing the religious practices or rituals of 'the other' as they are lived can assist an individual to increased levels of content knowledge and enables a change in the way one is able to understand.

Australian Catholic school classrooms, and many religion classrooms of the world are likely to encompass a plurality of convictions (multiple religious/non-religious worldviews) and considering students' cognitive belief styles and the pedagogical options for engaging students in learning about religion, there may be potential for improved engagement and outcomes. A class of students (Primary or Secondary) will undoubtedly present with a variety of developing or emerging cognitive belief styles and this will influence the students' desire and capacity to engage in learning and teaching about religious/ non-religious worldviews. Participants in this study who were able to become absorbed in a pedagogical enterprise that involved them in an embodied experience, one that was felt in the body, in relationships, in the physical space and possibly even with things, lead to an experience of 'flow' or time standing still. Wiliam (2011) suggests this is an optimal disposition for learning and teaching, and for participants in this study it appeared to offer the opportunity for transformation that expanded their sense of their own religious identity.

The challenge/opportunity for teachers of Religion in Primary and Secondary schools might be to allow the experiences of interreligious/interconvictional learning and teaching to be truly educative. That is, to engage the students in age-appropriate and contextually appropriate pedagogy that offers the possibility of embodied learning and teaching and is not bound by a pre-determined outcome. While it is acknowledged that students, particularly in the upper secondary years, are participating in interreligious learning and teaching, this research suggests further potential for rigorous, purposeful engagement that could allow a variety of positive outcomes to ensue. These experiences could be accompanied by age-appropriate opportunities for students to explore initial 'theologising' and the

'recontextualising' of Catholic doctrines (Rossiter, 2019) to support and enhance their cognitive belief capabilities. This work, in an educational context, may provide fodder for personal identity development. Such development (including religious identity) can be a complex task in the modern world where individuals are no longer formed in homogeneous religious communities. This offers the Catholic Religious Education classroom a significant opportunity to purposefully enhance the religious identity formation of young individuals.

Identity Development and the Catholic School

The goal of education in Australia is for all students to flourish as holistic, connected, contributing human beings. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) reaffirmed the Melbourne declaration's emphasis on the development of "confident and creative individuals...(who) have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing (Education Council, 2019, p. 6). Identity development is part of the educative agenda of Australian schools and the Catholic school can foster an environment that intentionally contributes to the development of individuals' religious identity. Hutsebaut (2007) advocates:

Teachers can play an important role here by presenting information, or by teaching students to think about these things and by confronting them with different religious persuasions. This happens almost as a matter of course through the presence of other persuasions, religious and non-religious, in the class. (p.289)

While many Catholic schools have populations that are socially, culturally and religiously diverse, it can also be opportune to seek out the voice of diversity from the wider community. Becoming knowledgeable about your own religious tradition, and other traditions could afford all individuals (including those with a non-religious worldview) greater access and openness to understanding the religious perspective of others. The development of religious (or spiritual) identity can assist the individual to grapple with and find meaning in life, as evidenced in the participants' stories. Fostering opportunities for such development sits comfortably within the *Alice Springs Declaration's* vision for supporting the flourishing of *all* Australian students. The importance of the spiritual dimension for young people was highlighted by Huuskes, Heaven Ciarrochi, Parker and Caltabiano (2016) in their empirical study exploring differences in psychological functioning of youth, which indicated "that youth who believe in God may be more likely to cope, while those who were unsure or did not believe may struggle" (p. 50). This suggests that to have a belief in a transcendent reality, may be a protective factor for youth and increase their resilience in more challenging times. Seizing opportunities to develop the individual's religious (spiritual) identity within an educative frame, might advance this positive outcome. While developing resilience is not the aim of fostering students' belief in a transcendent reality, it is a bonus outcome that is welcome in the current Australian and global context.

Conclusion

Insights from the lived experiences shared in this study suggest an opportunity or challenge for the Catholic school to be a seedbed in which students can develop a plausible, contemporary and dynamic religious identity. The Catholic school has potential to be a place where students learn, re-learn, challenge and question how they might deal with religious content. Globally, many students' lived experiences engage them with diversity, including religious, spiritual, cultural and non-religious worldviews. When religious content and lived experiences are scrutinised utilizing an educative lens, students engage in effective contemporary pedagogies, such as inquiry-based learning, design thinking, relationally responsive pedagogy, critical thinking and explicit instruction, that are effectively employed in other subject areas. The religion classroom could bring this relevance to students' lives through grappling with diversity, including religious diversity, in age-appropriate ways. To embrace the opportunity authentically, engagement in interreligious/interconvictional learning and teaching that offers opportunity to embody the experience, and question and critique perspectives would be the challenge. To be educative, students could question and make meaning through such experiences, with a Catholic perspective partner in the dialogue (and not the dominant authority).

Students will continue to develop their identity, including their religious identity as they move beyond the school setting. The Catholic school has the opportunity to successfully ground students in religious knowledge, engaging in appropriate and effective pedagogies and in experiences of interreligious learning and teaching. Williams (2011) advocates that diversity is the best tool in a teacher's kit as it allows for good learning and teaching. It invites dialogue and the opportunity to consider the thinking of others. The Catholic school may invite opportunities to develop faith and to be skilled in thinking critically and imaginatively about the contents of belief, while at the same time considering the religious or non-religious worldview of another. As evidenced in the stories of the participants in this study, engagement in interreligious learning and teaching can potentially cultivate acceptance, foster respectful relationships with individuals or groups of diverse religious/non-religious worldviews, expand one's religious knowing and possibly build resilience. This may offer the contemporary world a rich and essential resource through developing religiously literate global citizens. However, this research is situated with adults and further research exploring the opportunities and challenges with students, particularly in the seedbed of a Primary school context, is warranted.

This chapter explored the 'lived experiences' (van Manen, 2014) of interreligious learning and teaching of five adults in various contexts. The following chapter explores the experiences and insights of interreligious learning and teaching from the perspectives of Leadership team members, teachers and school officer/administration assistants in one single bounded case; a Catholic primary school.

Chapter 6 - A Case Study of Interreligious Learning and Teaching in a Catholic Primary School – a Nexus of Leadership, Pedagogy, Identity, and Relationships

This chapter explores the perceptions of leadership team members, teachers and school office/administration officer perspectives of interreligious learning and teaching in one school context. This paper was published in the *International Studies in Catholic Education*.

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Abstract

Australia is a religiously diverse nation with a growing trend in ‘no religious affiliation’ and irrelevance of religion in the lives of young learners and their families¹. The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of School leaders, teachers, and support officers in describing their role in interreligious learning and teaching in the context of one school. Whilst this is a study of one context, the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) data and Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) school review data indicate it is a high functioning school². Fourteen one-to-one interviews were transcribed, analysed, and coded revealing themes that clarify key features of the data guided by

¹ This trend is reported via the Australian Federal Census and is reflected in the populations of many Australian Catholic schools as reported by the Independent Schools Council of Australia. Anecdotally adults and students report the lack of connection between the ‘Church’ and their own lives and choose not to be affiliated with institutional Church which appears to be out-of-step with societal norms.

² Many Australian Schools are reviewed, and improvement agendas set with external consultants using the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) National School Improvement Tool (https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=tll_misc). This tool consists of nine domains in which schools are rated from low to outstanding according to the evidence collected by consultants (documents and interviews with personnel and stakeholders). A school that is rated as ‘outstanding’ in all the nine domains would be considered high functioning. Many Australian Catholic Schools utilise the KU Leuven ‘Enhancing Catholic Identity’ survey instruments to assess student, staff, and families’ attitudes towards the Catholic Identity of a school that align with theoretical schemas. According to the ECSI researchers, in Good Shepherd Primary school, “the greatest strength uncovered through the subpopulation instrument is the vast majority of students, staff and parents in the Recontextualising subpopulation. ... This bodes well for promoting the Recontextualising Catholic Dialogue School – which, based on the ECSI research, has the highest potential for enhancing the identity of your Catholic School.” (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019 p. 27) This school is considered ‘high functioning’ in regard to its capacity to enhance its Catholic Identity.

the research question. Leadership, diversity, relationships, pedagogy, learners, and religious identity emerged as key themes. Delving deeply into the perceptions of the school staff in relation to their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching may offer some insight for other contexts endeavouring to increase the relevance and plausibility of religion in the lives of learners.

Key words: *interreligious learning and teaching, recontextualisation, Religious Education*

Introduction

Religion and its relevance to the lives of individuals is challenging in our contemporary context. For Catholic schools across the globe, this is a concerning reality. In Australian Catholic schools there is a growing number of learners that identify as having ‘no religion’, ‘other religions’ and ‘other Christian religions’ (Independent Schools Council, 2018). This adds to the milieu when considering how a school deals with the content of the religion curriculum. Utilising this reality to develop a more robust engagement in the subject and co-creating a more complex understanding and respect for the diversity of religious and non-religious experiences, is a step in reclaiming relevance and engagement. Hence potentially offering future citizens an opportunity to live their lives with new perspectives.

This study is a deep dive into one school context with outstanding levels of functioning in its school improvement journey (National School Improvement Tool School Review, 2018) and outstanding data in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity assessment tool (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019). This research probes the staff and leadership team’s descriptions of the success of their school in endeavours to engage learners from a variety of religious/nonreligious perspectives in the learning and teaching of religion, while allowing each learner to bring their perspective to the learning. To allow all voices to be authentically heard, the work of learning and teaching the content of religion requires pedagogical strategies similar to other subject areas, removing the presumptive language of faith (Brennan & Ryan, 2011) and allowing learners to learn in ways with which they are familiar. This facilitates good learning and teaching about the tradition whilst not precluding the nurturing of the faith of a believer (Catholic or other) and supporting a more plausible and nuanced faith development for all learners.

Religious Education in a Catholic School

In the teaching of Religion in a Catholic school, there are several approaches that could be taken when framing the curriculum for the subject. While approaches to Religious Education have long been debated (Hyde, 2017, Rossiter, 2020, Ryan, 2007, Scott, 1984, 2015, 2019) and are not consistent nationally or internationally, the approach taken by the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Queensland, and that

of the other four dioceses in Queensland is a Reconceptualist approach³. The reconceptualist approach is a paradigm that has been contested in the United States as well as other countries including Australia (Scott, 2015, Hyde, 2017). Religious Education as conceptualised in this approach is best articulated by Gabriel Moran (1991). The approach allows for ‘exploring the meaning of one’s own religious life in relation to both those who share that life and those who do not’ (Scott, 1984, p.334). At the same time, Groome’s (1980) *Shared Christian Praxis* (the Emmaus paradigm) has been an influential model for Religious Education globally (Lydon 2018, Hyde 2017, Scott 2015, Buchanan 2005). The Shared Christian Praxis approach to Religious Education is one that Scott (2015) contends blends the two distinct processes of Religious Education (catechesis and religious instruction) rather than distinguishing the two processes and then bringing them together in a “careful and intelligent way” (p. 56).

The Church document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* states:

There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the Gospel message. (61)
The close connection makes it possible for a school to remain a school and still integrate culture with the message of Christianity. The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para 68).

The teaching of Religion in a Catholic school (religious instruction) is primarily focussed on knowledge and teaching people to *understand* religion, while at the same time the Catholic school teaches people to practice a religious way of life through prayer and liturgy, social justice and action, the school culture and religious formation experiences. The reconceptualist approach given expression in the schools of the Brisbane Diocese, attempts to hold these two dimensions in creative tension. This, according to Scott (2015 p. 59) “offers the possibility of directing students, in an integrated manner, to learn to live religiously in the modern world”.

³ A Reconceptualist approach “operates from an educational framework rather than from a catechetical or ‘shared Christian praxis’ framework. The most prominent proponent of the reconceptualist approach has been Gabriel Moran upon whose work the Brisbane Catholic Education Model for Religious Education is based” (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2020). (see <https://catholicidentity.bne.catholic.edu.au/religious-education/SitePages/A-reconceptualist-approach-to-the-Religion-curriculum-P12.aspx>)

Moran (1991) identifies the two distinct yet complementary dimensions or processes of *Religious Education*, suggesting:

What deserves that title is teaching people religion with all the breadth and depth of intellectual excitement one is capable of - and teaching people to be religious with all the particularity of the verbal and nonverbal symbols that place us on the way. (p.256)

Having clarity about what one is engaged in gives focus and purpose to the endeavour, be that the teaching of the subject religion or teaching people how to be religious in a particular way.

When teaching the subject of religion, Scott (2019) proposes that teachers “look to parts of education for professional models, guidance, support, knowledge and domain of authority” (p.9). Hence an appropriate model of pedagogy for the teaching of religion enables teachers to bring together principles and practices of effective learning and teaching that support the learning of all learners. As Brennan and Ryan (2011) remind us, the Catholic tradition is accessible through good teaching. The pedagogical practices of the religion classroom will therefore align with those of other subject areas reflecting best practice in learning and teaching⁴. In the Australian context, classroom religion learning and teaching would include the ‘14% ‘no religion’ and 12% other religions’ learners (Independent Schools Council, 2018, p11) contributing to the dialogue and learning about religious and non-religious life perspectives. The voices of students within the Catholic School sector are not homogenous and allowing the diversity to speak and contribute to the learning offers vibrant, real and valuable learning for all.

Understanding one’s purpose allows the learning and teaching of religion to occur in an educative context without a prerequisite requirement that students come to the learning with a Catholic

⁴ The pedagogical practices or educational processes in any one subject area will vary according to the educational purpose, for example to retrieve information, to make meaning, to question assumptions, to achieve automation (e.g Math multiplication tables). The subject of Religion aligns well with subjects that often utilise an inquiry-based pedagogy, such as History, Civics and Citizenship and other Humanities and Social Science learning areas. Utilising inquiry-based pedagogy, students are primarily aiming to make meaning. Critical inquiry, which is utilised in Health and Physical Education, English and other Humanities and Social Science subjects can assist learners to question and to delve deeper into assumptions and perspectives which is also useful for facilitating the educative purpose of Religion. Automation and the use of Explicit instruction are processes that would be less often utilised in Religion because a key purpose in the teaching of religion is for the learners to make meaning through their own inquiry. This stands in contrast to the ‘catechism or doctrinal era in the early 1960s’ (Rossiter, 2020, p. 194).

worldview. It allows the individual learner to approach the learning from their own context, and through the inclusion of diverse perspectives, it opens the possibility for authentic learning which engages learners in religious content and skills affording them the opportunity to expand their knowing. According to Rossiter (2018), this is an open and inquiring process, ‘concerned with exploring the content and issues – and not with the ‘getting of Catholicism’ (p.99); it is a process that ‘would be of value for ... all students no matter what their religious affiliation’ (p. 103). For learning and teaching of religion to engage contemporary learners, the challenge will be to present the content in an open and inquiry way, to allow learners to question, critique and make meaning for their lives. For the Australian Catholic school, the learning and teaching of religion is a core learning area⁵ but also seen as an additional learning area being a point of difference from public schools. To give the learning and teaching of Religion its due status, it needs to be considered along with the learning and teaching of all curriculum areas in the improvement agenda of the school.

Improvement Agendas in Contemporary Educational Contexts

School improvement is a key consideration for many schools and school jurisdictions in countries around the world. In the Australian context the *National School Improvement Tool* (2016) developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been utilised by many schools to identify where they are in their learning and teaching improvement journey, where they want to go, and to monitor their progress over time. Taylor-Guy et al. (2020) through the work of ACER have identified commonalities across diverse countries and contexts which indicate conditions for effective decision making around improvement initiatives and the measuring of impact. This research highlights that ‘data are crucial to school improvement and school leaders play a critical role in identifying reliable and meaningful data’ (Taylor-Guy et al., 2020, p. 1). The school leaders play an important role in developing within the school a culture of continuous improvement, which will inevitably require a process of change to actualise such a goal. The leaders of a school community, including teachers as leaders, need to become savvy interpreters of the evidence of their impact and be cognisant that teaching requires adaption to maximise student learning (Hattie, 2015). Hence an improvement agenda requires teachers/leaders to be on a continuous journey working towards improvement for each learner in a particular context at any point in time.

⁵ In the Australian Curriculum for Primary schools there are eight learning areas that must be taught (core): English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies and Languages. For Australian Catholic schools there is an additional core learning area that must be taught: Religion.

The use of meaningful data is a key component acknowledged as imperative to school success (Hattie & Smith, 2021, Sharratt, 2019) and coupled with this, clarity of purpose or knowing the why behind the use of data sets is noted as crucial. Improving student outcomes is high stakes for Australian schools with highest and lowest performing schools as public data. School enrolments can be dependent upon performance and have an impact on the viability of a school in both the Catholic and Independent sectors. For many schools this has been an additional factor that has honed their focus onto continuous improvement. Effective pedagogical practices identified by high impact strategies is practical, but without school leaders having a clear and articulated vision of the desired impact, such innovations become aimless (Hattie & Smith, 2021 p. 2). Aligning with Sinek (2009), *The Visible Learning* researchers advocate that the ‘mindframes for leaders and teachers’ (Hattie & Smith, 2021; Hattie & Zierer, 2018) are the why or the set of beliefs that support successful outcomes for learners. These being:

a belief that our primary role is to be an evaluator of our impact on student learning, use assessment as a way to inform our impact and next steps, collaborate with our peers and students about that impact, be an agent of change, challenge other to not simply ‘do your best,’ give and help students and teachers understand feedback and interpret and act on the feedback given to us, engage in dialogue, inform others what successful impact looks like from the outset, build relationships and trust and focus on learning and the language of learning. (Hattie & Smith, 2021 p. 4)

Such ‘mindsets’ potentially give leaders/teachers the focus or hooks needed to anchor their continuous improvement agenda and to make decisions about what will enable all students to be able to learn and all teachers to be able to teach well (Sharratt, 2019). The recognition that school leaders and teachers have a significant role to play in the improvement of the learning and teaching for all students is becoming more apparent and acknowledged in all educational sectors. In attempting to engage in learning and teaching of Religion, many Australian Catholic school contexts have begun to consider how they can ‘recontextualise’ the content of religion and support its accessibility and relevance to the citizens of the contemporary pluralistic milieu.

Recontextualising Religious Education

Many Catholic schools and school authorities worldwide have engaged in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) project which was initiated in 2006 under the auspice of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The project took as its focus ‘the religious identity of Catholic schools and other institutions involved in Catholic education facing the challenge today of recontextualising their Catholic identity in a detraditionalising, secularising and pluralising culture’ (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 10). The ECSI project acknowledges that the

contemporary context for many individuals is vastly different to that of the past. In Australia, individuals are no longer able, or for some willing, to rely upon inheriting a religious tradition from family and community. Globalisation has assisted in advancing a pluralised world and secularisation appears to have an ever-strengthening influence with the support of media, western and popular culture, individualism, and urban life to name a few.

The disparity between a Catholic Worldview and contemporary culture has continued to grow and as a means of finding a way to grapple with this, Boeve (2006) identified a typology of identity options for Catholic schools and other institutions. This schema could be used to understand where an institution is at, and then where to focus attention towards improving the divide between Christianity and culture. The ESCI project operationalised this typology into an empirical instrument called the Melbourne Scale using a multivariate questionnaire (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010 p. 203) offering Catholic schools a way of measuring their starting point before embarking upon or continuing their improvement journey. The typology identifies how a school or institution deals with theology and the widening gap of a Christian worldview and the dominant worldview of Western culture (Sharkey, 2019). The schema recognises Confessional school Identity as the ‘extent to which a traditional Catholic School identity is continued today, despite the tension between culture and Catholicism’ (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014 p. 53). The options for dealing with the widening gap between the Catholic Tradition and culture are *Christian Values Education*, *Institutional Reconfessionalisation*, *Institutional Secularisation* or the ECSI preferred option *Recontextualisation* (see <https://ecsi.site/au/foundations/>, Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014 for detailed explanation of options).

Recontextualisation, which is the ECSI normative position, is one which is:

deliberately in search of a renewed Catholic profile in and through conversations with plurality. It tries to understand the Catholic faith re-interpreted in a contemporary cultural context. On the one hand plurality is recognised and valued as such; on the other hand, the focus on the Catholic identity is maintained. (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 56)

This option proposes that when Catholic schools deal with theology, it is done so within the context of diversity and that diverse religious and non-religious perspectives are brought into dialogue with a Catholic perspective. This process allows for learners to be engaged in learning and teaching that permits re-interpretation of what the Catholic Tradition offers in a renewed and perhaps more plausible, yet respectful way. Sharkey (2019) suggests the ‘challenge will be to provide forms of Religious Education that respond effectively to this religious diversity without compromising Catholic beliefs or alienating students by seeking to impose a version of the Catholic faith on them that they are unable to receive’ (p. 473). Hence the options for the learning and teaching of Religion can potentially influence its capacity to be received. Rossiter (2020) advocates ‘excessive use of {ecclesiastical} language, at the

expense of the word education, turns the focus inwards towards Catholicism – at the very time when more of an outwards focus on the shaping influence of culture is needed’ (2020, p. 193). The emphasis on education allows for the robust and respectful receiving and processing of a variety of perspectives.

The approach to Religious Education comes into play in a focus on Recontextualisation if the voice of diversity is to be taken seriously and honoured respectfully. Within an educational context in which not all learners are Catholic (insiders), those with diverse perspectives (outsiders) can potentially offer, and have their viewpoints received. The Reconceptualist approach to Religious Education as discussed earlier would appear to have the pedagogical capacity to allow for the religious diversity to dialogue with a Catholic perspective and come to new or nuanced understandings. An approach to Religious Education based on catechesis, on the other hand, aims to nurture and develop the faith of believers (insiders), to hand on the tradition and therefore is necessarily confessional in nature. This approach would be challenged by the voices of outsiders (diversity) as the focus of the endeavour is on the formation of believers (insiders). Scott (2019), advocates:

The classroom teacher’s task is to explore the meaning of what is written in the past and to help students articulate their own convictions. The role of classroom teaching-learning is mainly to be critical, to probe, to raise questions about whether what is assumed to be true really is the case. (p. 9)

Such an approach to the learning and teaching of religion presents challenges for a school/institution if the desired outcome is that the learner receives and embraces a predetermined Catholic worldview or unquestioned aspects of Catholic tradition, preserved through elements such as Scripture, doctrinal statements and creeds. To raise questions and enter into dialogue with those that hold a Catholic worldview and those that don’t, is potentially confronting and as participants begin to articulate their own convictions, it could bring into question how revelation or ‘knowings’ about God are established and understood.

Whilst this study does not permit a comprehensive exploration of the meaning of revelation⁶ (Vatican II, 1965), to engage in dialogue with God and with others within the contemporary, pluralistic context and hold a finite understanding of revelation, would restrict the possibilities for the encounter (see Scott, 2020; Moran 2009). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993) reminds us that ‘The Father's self-communication made through his Word in the Holy Spirit, remains present and active in the Church’ (1993, para79). Genuine dialogue would be impeded if the outcome is already determined in a fixed understanding of what God is or can be. Revelation understood as only present in the past or in Scripture, creeds or doctrines is to deny the on-going interaction of the divine in the world. Revelation as an on-going process gives rise to new knowledge about God through encounters with God, others, and all creation. Religious Education, if plausible, would allow these experiences and personal meaning makings to be part of the dialogue related to religious content and provide an opportunity for authentically grappling with content that is relevant to the lives of all contemporary citizens.

In the Australian context, schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane purposefully espouse a reconceptualist approach to Religious Education and are engaged in continuous school improvement utilising the ACER National School Improvement and the ECSI Multi-variant scales as data sets for measures of impact. Some have utilised the 10 Mindframes for Visible Learning; Teaching for success (Hattie & Zierer, 2018) and the 10 Mindframes for Leaders: The Visible Learning Approach to School Success (Hattie & Smith, 2021) to anchor their staff in the ‘why’ of the improvement journey and focus on maximising impact. This research has focused on one school in the Brisbane Archdiocese, Good Shepherd Primary school, that has utilised the ‘Mindframes’ to assist the school in maximising impact in all learning areas, including the learning and teaching of Religion. The aim of the study is to explore leaders’, teachers’, and school support officers’ understandings of their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching⁷.

⁶ The Church document, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, (Vatican II, 1965) reflects significant shifts in the Catholic Church’s understanding of revelation. In *Dei Verbum*, “revelation is no longer simply a body of truths contained in Scripture and taught by the Church. ... There is a movement away from revelation as *revelata* (truths disclosed) to revelation (personal disclosure)” (Scott, 2020, February p. 5/6). However, *Dei Verbum* does not define revelation and at times refers to “religious truths” (Vatican II, 1965. Par 5,6). Scott proposes “Revelation happens, as a living interpersonal event, in the depth of human experience. The church can transmit documents, written records, doctrines, art, and practices of the tradition but not divine revelation. (2020 February, p. 6)

⁷ The understandings of parents and students are to be explored in subsequent research

Design and Case Description

The study utilised a qualitative single-case study approach. The case being the bounded system - Good Shepherd Catholic Primary School. Located in the Brisbane Archdiocese, it has a current school population of 359 students (188 boys and 171 girls) with a projected enrolment of 700 in the coming years. It has a teaching staff of 20 females and 2 males and non-teaching staff of 13 females and 2 males. Only 5% identify as First Nations and 28% state their language background as other than English⁸. The school is located in southeast Queensland with a School Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) percentile of 67. The school is more educationally advantaged than 67% of schools in Australia.

Patton (2002) stated ‘a single case is likely to be made up of many smaller cases – the stories of individuals, families, organisational units, and other groups’ (p. 297). This is reflected in the study design with interviews conducted with teachers, leadership team members, and a variety of auxiliary staff members. These ‘thick descriptions’ (Ponterotto, 2006) of practice are scrutinised in light of the ACER School Improvement Report and the ECSI Catholic School Identity Report to probe answers to the research questions. The key research question being: How do leaders/teachers/support staff describe their role in interreligious learning and teaching? With sub-questions posed including: What things do you do in your classroom to support student’s learning in this area? How do or why don’t you think pedagogical practices play a role in your capacity to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

Participants

After having received ethical clearance, teaching staff were invited to volunteer to participate in the study following a researcher-led presentation to staff outlining the research questions. Seven teachers and three leadership team members volunteered, and subsequently four self-interested school officer/administration staff members were recruited through snowball sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.116). Leadership Team members were interviewed individually for 1 hour and staff

⁸ The students come from backgrounds including, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Philippines, India, Sudan, China, South Africa, Chile, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Taiwan, Samoa, South Korea, Germany, United States of America and New Zealand. The school does not have a designated language teacher, however there is a support teacher who works with learners who have English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D).

participants were interviewed individually for up to 20 minutes⁹ The interviews were transcribed, and participants had the opportunity to review and make amendments as required. (See Table 6.1 for participant characteristics and nature of the sample.)

Table 6.1: *Participant Background Information*

| Participants | Gender | Age | | | Religion | | Person with a Disability | ECSI Report working party |
|--|------------------------|-----|-------|-------|----------|----------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | ≤30 | 31-40 | 41-55 | 56≥ | Catholic | | |
| Leadership | 2 x female 1 x male | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 1 | |
| Teaching Staff MacKillop Discovery Place = Year 1/2 Learning Pod | 1 x female | | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | |
| Teaching Staff Nagle Creating Place = Years 3/4 Learning Pod | 2 x female | 1 | 1 | | 2 | | | |
| Teaching Staff Ignatius Designing Place = Year 5/6 Learning Pod | 3 x female | | 2 | 1 | 3 | | 2 | |
| Numeracy Support Teacher | 1 x male | | 1 | | | 1 | | |

⁹ This research was conducted after an initial shut down of schools due to a COVID-19 outbreak. While participation in the research was voluntary, the time to interview the staff was restricted to 20 minutes to minimise the impact on the teacher as teachers were operating in uncertain times.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|
| Non-teaching Staff | 4 x female | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 2 | 2 | 1 | |
| Total | 12 x female 2 x male | 2 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 11 | 3 | 1 | 4 |

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were read as a whole, and first impressions noted. The text of each interview was then read line-by-line and relevant words, phrases, lines, or sentences were labelled. The transcripts were subsequently coded capturing data potentially relevant to the research question. These codes became ‘building blocks for themes, (larger) patterns of meaning, underpinned by a central organising concept – shared core idea’ (Clarke & Braun, 2016 p. 297). The themes have been utilised to find and clarify key features of the data guided by the research question.

Findings and Discussion

All participants spoke of the use of data to inform their next steps in practice with the school’s ACER review report and ECSI report having been shared and scrutinised with all staff members. Six main themes emerged from the interview transcripts of the teachers, leadership team members and school/administration officers. These themes are: leadership, diversity, relationships, pedagogy, learners and religious identity. They uncovered thick, rich descriptions and insight into how interreligious learning and teaching is perceived and engaged within this school context. Descriptions of these themes with support from the relevant interview excerpts are discussed subsequently.

Leadership

The Australian Council for Educational Research (2016) reports that ‘research is revealing the powerful impact that school leadership can have in improving the quality of teaching and learning’ (p.1). Effective leadership is a key component in setting the culture of a school and leading it on its journey of continuous improvement. Branson et al. (2019) advocate:

Contemporary leadership theory has moved beyond a focus on knowledge, skills and practices that try to manage, control or influence others to where it is viewed as made manifest in the quality of the relationship that forms between the leader and each of the persons they are leading. Through this relationship, the inclusion,

dignity, integrity and growth of each person is maintained, thereby increasing engagement, work quality and outcomes'. (p. 228)

Leaders in effective schools in contemporary educational settings are challenged to take an active role in developing quality relationships with all community members and being an inspiration for community members to want to improve their learning and practice. Leaders are also called to be lead learners in their community (Sharratt, 2019) and in a Catholic school context, a leader of faith-based learning. The participants at Good Shepherd identified:

We really need to understand our own interactions, understand who we are, and to know that there will be people who will be standing on our shoulders. We need to keep passing on our policies, our procedures, our practices so that everyone understands, and they can articulate our vision and mission. ... I want teachers who are dedicated to their spirituality, their faith, but also committed to their professionalism in teaching and learning. (Leadership 1)

In the induction day, it's like an invitation into the community. We got to be let into the conversation of, 'This is where we came from, this is our mission, this is our vision and welcome. The induction process was very personalised. It was 'you've been chosen to be part of this school.' ... It's been so inclusive. ... Even though I wasn't here from the beginning, I have the background knowledge – it's not hidden – which has really shaped the way I carry myself as a teacher at this school. (Teacher 2)

Leadership is so knowledgeable, very compassionate and caring and I think that flows down. They are careful in how they choose staff. I think most people who are here are like-minded. ... It stems from good leadership coming down and what's expected of you and how you should act. (School Officer 4)

The Principal and leadership team in this context were visible to their staff, they invested time in developing respectful relationships and the staff and the leadership saw themselves as learners. The Leadership team members were considered knowledgeable others (Sharratt, 2019) and they were embedded in the context working with the staff and students to improve the learning and teaching in response to the needs of the learners. This was a systematic approach, so all learning areas of the

curriculum were approached in a similar way and the spiritual life of the community¹⁰ was an important consideration trickling down and up all the levels of leadership in the school.

Diversity

Wiliam (2011) promotes diversity as the best tool in a teacher's kit as it allows for good learning and teaching. It encourages dialogue and offers the opportunity to consider the thinking of others while providing clarifying or possibly extending one's own thinking (Fisher et al., 2021). The participants interviewed in this study, placed a strong emphasis on the importance and value of diverse perspectives and the opportunity to have a voice in the learning and teaching of religion and across the whole of the school context. Some of the participants articulated:

I think at this school what we do well is that we have that diversity of voices, views, and perspectives, and that we recognise them within the school community and then that helps to contribute to the dialogue of learning and teaching within that space. I think overall, we keep asking ourselves, 'What are those similarities/differences between the Catholic faith, and then the other faiths within our school community?' And that just helps to shape our lessons and our personal understanding as well. (Teacher 6)

I think this community is probably a bit more knowledgeable about what a dialogue school actually might mean. And that's because we have so many different people of different faiths who come here, but they honour the Christian story because we do. (Leadership 3)

... it's belonging to a way of thinking. We're always challenging ourselves. ... Your contribution is a worthwhile contribution and is valued. (School Officer 2)

Good Shepherd is rich in diverse cultural and religious/non-religious worldviews and actively seeks out opportunities to engage with its plurality to enhance the learning and teaching. Saxton et al. (2018) advocate 'Diversity can (and should) enrich our teaching, challenging each of us to find new ways of exploring content' (p. 15). The Good Shepherd teachers valued the context of each learner and

¹⁰ The spiritual life of the community involves the Prayer and Worship, Religious Identity and Culture, Social Justice and Action and Evangelisation and faith formation. (see <https://catholicidentity.bne.catholic.edu.au/religious-education/SitePages/Religious-life-of-the-school.aspx>)

viewed it as an opening to new learning or extended understanding. The teachers acknowledged that sometimes it can be challenging to engage the voices of some, however, they also believe that:

in the contemporary learning space, the student voice is essential. We (the teachers) cannot move forward without their input, that's what leads us all the time towards where we're going. (Teacher 4)

In the teaching of Religion, the teachers posited that the diverse voices added richness to the learning and teaching and honoured the experiences and prior knowledge of learners that could be brought to the new learning about the Catholic Tradition or perspective. According to Ausubel (1968, p. vi cited in Hattie & Smith, 2021 p. 24) 'the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows'. For teachers in this context, this pedagogical practice was familiar to them and was utilised in all subject areas. The community embraced the *Mindframe* of 'Engaging as much in dialogue as monologue' (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Hattie & Smith, 2021) in which having a voice was a dialogue that:

involved the teacher's use of authentic questions (where what counts as an acceptable answer is not prespecified), uptake conversations (where the teacher incorporates students' responses into subsequent questions), and the extent to which the teacher allows a student response to modify the topic of discourse. (Hattie & Zeirer, 2018 p. 102)

The pedagogical practice supported the engagement and voice of all learners and enabled deeper understandings that connected to what the learners already knew or had learnt and indicated the next step in the learning. Saxton et al. (2018) suggest that in accepting that all ideas have value and purpose, 'rather than assuming consensus we can use difference to explore even more deeply' (p. 22). In the learning and teaching of religion this can be challenging, as some research participants articulated. Some learners while born into a particular religion, are not able to articulate religious understandings from that perspective. Hence the need to develop relationships with parents, outside religious agencies, and the development of a teacher's own knowledge base. The ECSI preferred option of Recontextualisation through dialogue and engaging the voice of 'other' perspectives, a key strategy for finding renewed meanings for the Catholic Tradition in the contemporary world can be enhanced through relationships and pedagogy.

Relationships

School climate, according to Hattie (2019) has a positive impact on student learning with a 0.43 effect size¹¹. The school climate in a Catholic school is referred to as the ethos and charism and is reflected through its 'religious values, culture, rituals and practices' (Archdiocese of Brisbane, p. 217). The ethos and charism are demonstrated or lived through quality relationships, authentic values, learning and teaching practices, and school policies and structures. Participants in this study proposed:

... it's the values, it's the vision; it's the mission; it's the people who – we'll sit around the staff room table and have a joke. ... you walk in and no-one is ever left by themselves. No-one is on their own. We're a community. And it's something that it's been hard work in the making – and I've been here now for five years and I've seen the growth in the school. But underpinning all of that has always been this constant connection to the charism and to what we want to achieve here at Good Shepherd – the vision. (Teacher 4)

We're a community. We look out for each other and there is very much a bond. We are willing to listen to students...all students are welcomed in Good Shepherd. Every face has a place – our motto is called 'Called by name'. (School Officer 3)

The first three weeks of school, the whole of the time is around teaching the students how we do school at Good Shepherd. We will pull apart the mission statement – Good Shepherd's Way of Being Community – the dispositions of a learner and the CARE rules, and then we also focus on their learning pod. So, the Assisi children

¹¹ Hattie's meta-analysis of 1,400 studies of influences related to student achievement found an average effect size of 0.40 of all the interventions studied. He subsequently judges success relative to this 'hinge' point' to indicate what works best in education. The effect size is calculated as the standardized mean difference between the two groups: Effect size = (Mean of experimental group) – (Mean of control group) Standard Deviation

(Hattie and Zierer, 2018, xviii)

will learn about Saint Francis, Mary MacKillop¹² and so on. In that time the teachers gather data on the learners. (Leadership 2)

The school climate or ethos and charism matters. Fisher et al. (2021) suggests ‘our actions and words send powerful messages to our colleagues that can either build their individual and collective efficacy or harm it’ (p. 74). The staff of Good Shepherd believe that the community, both within the school and beyond, matters and they have worked hard to build positive relationships with each other, the students, the parents, the wider community and in their Catholic context with God. The staff could see the alignment of their documented vision, mission, values, policies and procedures, and could articulate these along with the belief that the actions of the school community were congruent with these. This sense of the importance of relationships evidenced a commitment to the *Mindframe* of ‘Building relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others’ (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p. 89). The participants in this study felt a deep sense of integrity and working together with common understandings enabled them to support the learning of all learners. Hattie and Zierer (2018) propose that ‘positive relationships are the precursors to learning – they form a resource to be spent when in challenging situations – as then students need to feel much trust to ask for help, to try again, and explore openly with their peers’ (p. 129). All participants appeared to have a sense of their personal and collective responsibility for improving the learning and wellbeing of students and of each other. The participants spoke of their willingness to learn from their colleagues, including the leadership team, and to have support from them in their learning. The teaching of religion and the spiritual dimension of life was at the forefront of the positive quality relationships and was articulated by the participants as linking to the vision and mission of the school.

Pedagogy

Pedagogical practices within the Religion curriculum and how these enable educators to facilitate the learning and teaching of theological understandings, continues to be contested in many faith-based schools. The ECSI researchers have weighed into this debate with preferred positions for dealing with pedagogy and theology being, a Dialogue School utilising Recontextualisation and

¹² St Mary MacKillop (1842 – 1909) is Australia’s first and only saint to be recognised by the Catholic Church. Mary was the co-founder of Australia’s first order of Religious Sisters, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. She was known for her work in educating the poor and social reform.

proposing that a Post Critical Belief style¹³ is the optimal style of believing for engagement with religious content. The leadership and other staff in this context noted:

... interreligious dialogue has grown from not just being about talking to the local synagogue and going back and forth but it goes a little bit deeper than that and becomes about an understanding – breaking open, ... it's about this compassion and mercy and understanding in faith. I think it's complex, but also simple in its outcome that starts with dialogue and having a discussion without any preconceived idea on what we think they're going to say. ... this is our chance in the learning sphere to do just that – to learn, to grow and to impart that knowledge and that understanding. (Teacher 4)

Parents understand we will be teaching the Catholic curriculum, but that doesn't mean that we don't respect other religions. We ask students to show us or lead us in ways that they might pray or things that they might do in their own faith tradition. (Leadership 2)

The participants articulated high levels of pedagogical knowledge and practices and utilised this for the teaching of Religion along with other subject areas. Scott (2019) proposes:

The classroom offers space for public discourse on the key issues of our time. It enables us to examine things from the outside. The classroom teacher in school, in sum, is part of the great, secular, public work of education. Its supposition is that we can re-see things and the world anew with new eyes. The teacher of religion in the school classroom is invited to join in this modern professional endeavour. (p. 9)

Scott (2019) emphasises the openness and plausibility that can be achieved through the classroom teaching of Religion when utilising the pedagogical practices that are transferable from other subject areas. Engaging in thinking strategies and processes for respectfully critiquing knowledge and practice considered routine in other subject areas, strengthens engagement and allows learners to see religious content and practices with 'new eyes'. The teachers, leadership team and school /administration officers in this context reported the explicit intention to recontextualise the Catholic

¹³ Post Critical Belief Style is one in which an individual has “a personal belief in a transcendent God while being aware that only through symbolic mediation and on-going interpretation people can enter into a relationship with the Divine” (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019 p. 3).

Tradition in dialogue with the contemporary context as has been identified in their ESCI data (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019, p. 27).

Rossiter (2020) contends that the recontextualising agenda is ‘complex and difficult to achieve because (it) depends ultimately on changing people’s attitudes and spirituality significantly in the direction of a post-critical belief that ‘interrupts and reconfigures the context’ opening it ‘anew towards the reality of God’ (Boeve 2007, p. 198). This is an ambitious task that may or may not come to fruition and it is *not* the aim of the classroom teaching of religion, though it is potentially a welcomed by-product of good learning and teaching and emersion in an authentic Catholic community. Being a change agent and believing all teachers/students can improve, is a *Mindframe* supported by the research of Hattie and Smith (2020) that ‘has implications for deep, lasting and large-scale system reform’ (p. 47). The collective efficacy of the staff in this context was reflected in the students’ option for Recontextualisation that is identified in the school ECSI research report (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019). The on-going challenge, acknowledged by the research participants, is the sustainability of practice. How to continue to enable new practitioners to the context to facilitate these enlarged religious conversations resulting in lasting change is critical. What to do when a new teacher/leader/school officer is not open to this pedagogical choice will have implications for future viability. Learners engaging rigorously with religious content and having the opportunity to see the world anew is the result of good learning and teaching which can only occur when teachers themselves are willing to engage in the continuous journey of learning¹⁴.

Learners

Teachers engaging in a continuous process of learning and developing their practice is an expectation of the profession, and is guided by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (see <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/national-policy-framework/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers.pdf>). The Principal and Leadership team of a School are also held to high standards of continuous reflection, learning and development of practice (see https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/national-policy-framework/australian-professional-standard-for-principals.pdf?sfvrsn=c07eff3c_6). Hammond (2021) attests that ‘improvement requires challenge – challenging our mental models about what students can do, challenging our teacher beliefs about pedagogy, and challenging deficit thinking that holds us back from becoming warm demanders

¹⁴ This learning can be supported through institutions such as the Australian Catholic University that offers undergraduate and post Graduate courses that assist teachers to understand and engage in learning and teaching practices that support the learning and teaching of Religion.

of students' cognitive development' (p. 54). Teachers and School Leadership team members in contemporary educational contexts are being called to participate in the challenge of continuous learning to support improved outcomes for all learners. They engage in the same processes of learning and teaching as their students. The leadership and staff of Good Shepherd articulated:

Professional learning is really important to grow our capacity as teachers, and not only the teachers but the school officers...they look at their own professional goals that they set at the beginning of the year. They're aligned to the annual school strategic goals which stem from Brisbane Catholic Education's annual strategic goals as well. It's all aligned to the Australian Professional standards for teachers. They also have to look at Hattie's Mindframes and reflect on certain areas of that... The only thing the school officers don't do is the professional teacher standards. (Leadership 1)

Everyone is encouraged to go further and to extend their learning. As a teacher or school officer, Leadership is always encouraging us to be studying or doing more professional reading... learning more. (School Officer 3)

Everything is professional, nothing is personal. It's the sense that you are allowed to fall and falter, and that's part of learning. Everything we say to the learners is exactly what happens with our colleagues and with leadership and within our teams. ...There's a challenge to be opened up to a way of working (collaboratively) and to share ideas. We have our problems, but I think ultimately, we're good at sorting them out. (Teacher 6)

The teachers, leadership team members and school/administration officers in this context had a deep sense of themselves as leaders and learners. The culture of the school intentionally promoted continual learning and improvement and a sense that the whole community was in the learning and teaching project together. This aligns with Hattie and Zierer (2018) and Hattie and Smith (2021) who attest that the research supports a *Mindframe* that advocates collaboration with one's peers and students about one's conceptions of progress and impact, to promote successful learning and teaching. Hattie and Zierer (2019) highlight that the 'focus of collaboration needs to be about the impact and effects on students' (p. 26). The collaborative culture of Good Shepherd permeated all aspects of school life and manifests as a lived sense of collective efficacy. Berg and Seeber (2016) propose 'thinking and talking as members of a community rather than as individuals has the potential for the development of group emotion, and we likely know the shared joy that results from feeling we are all connected' (cited in Saxton et al., 2018, p. 23). The Good Shepherd teachers/school officers and Leadership Team appeared to listen deeply to each other and worked collaboratively to improve learning and teaching. Some research participants acknowledged that if a person 'liked to stick to themselves', the Good Shepherd

focus on collaboration and working as a team was challenging for them. In the learning and teaching of religion, the inclusion of the perspectives of others evidenced a way of working and leading. Staff identified that how one leads can reflect the values and beliefs one holds and can be aligned to one's religious identity.

Religious Identity – Institutional and Individual

The ECSI project focuses on the religious identity of Catholic schools as they face the challenge of remaining relevant in a world that is pluralising and becoming increasingly secularised (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). Through engagement in this project, many Catholic schools in the Australian context have focused on their institutional 'Catholic identity'. They have focussed on how institutional identity might be enhanced through the development of personal religious identity and engagement in dialogue that honours the voice of 'others' and promotes 'recontextualising' of the Catholic Tradition in the midst of the pluralising culture. The perspectives of the participants in this school context revealed thinking about their personal and institutional religious identity:

I think everything we do has a purpose and really sets everyone up on their own journey, their own spiritual journey going forward. It (religion) doesn't feel like an isolated subject. It's very much all together, we bring who we are to the learning... (There are) so many messages that come out of religion, like stewardship and sustainability, that are so powerful. I believe them so wholeheartedly that it's hard not to bring that into the classroom because it's who I am. It's like that for the students too. (Teacher 2)

...it's treating everyone with respect and care, feeling like you're being cared for, you're welcomed. It's not necessarily Catholic, it's the root of what Catholicism is about, you don't have to be Catholic to be welcoming and caring. ...Everyone is 'called by name'. Everyone is equal in the eyes of God. (School Officer 2)

When asked, 'Why do you send your kids to a Catholic school?' (Parents) say, 'It's because you have strong beliefs in who you are.' And some respond, 'Even though I'm not part of that faith, I really respect the fact that you do. And you're not moving in and out, you're holding true to who you are.' (Leadership 3)

The staff had a strong sense that their charism as part of their culture and ethos, was important to the way the school functioned. The learning and teaching of religion was well supported by good practitioners and embedded knowledgeable professionals (Sharrett, 2019). This was effective because it was aligned with the culture of the school. The embodiment of the teachers', school officers' and Leadership team members' values and beliefs, enacted through their communications and actions evidenced a congruency between their personal religious identity (not necessarily Catholic) and the

institutional religious identity. The rhetoric of the school's Catholic story was lived, modelled by the Leadership team, the staff, and students. There was a deep sense of integrity – alignment between rhetoric and conduct. According to the ECSI assessment measure, the school has wide support for Post Critical Belief and a Recontextualising Dialogue school approach which is a 'multi-correlational didactical approach (that) does most justice to the dynamics of revelation and the Christian faith tradition itself' (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019, p. 81). With a staff supportive of the Recontextualising Dialogue school approach, there is opportunity to develop both the personal religious identity and the institutional religious identity of the school through critical, empathetic and reflective dialogue with 'others'. As Scott (2015) proposes, 'the modern concept of religion implies understanding one (or one's own) religious position in relation to other possibilities' (p 54). The degree of comparison can be as simple as one other perspective and yet allows for deeper knowledge. This offers individuals a sense of agency as they begin to find the value of their own experience in understanding the on-going revelation of God and respecting the importance of religious affiliation for believers.

Conclusion

This study has been an opportunity to explore one context which through the evaluation mechanism of school improvement (NSIT) was identified as operating at an outstanding level in all domains (ACER, 2019). In the ESCI assessment tool, the school was also identified as having most students, staff, and parents in the recontextualising group, the desired position as articulated by the researchers (ECSI Research Report for GOOD SHEPHERD Primary School, 2019). The policies and procedures of the school support the ongoing improvement of learning and teaching. The attention given to the religious identity of the school, appears to position staff well, in bringing a Catholic perspective into a recontextualising dialogue with other worldviews. The research participants articulated an open disposition honouring difference, and welcoming all in an inclusive culture, whilst explicitly articulating a Catholic perspective in dialogue.

The building of a culture of connectedness, learning and openness to diversity, whilst drawing from the wisdom and imagination of the Catholic tradition, has enabled community members in this context, to make personal meaning. This requires vulnerability as participants share aspects of their personal religious/non-religious identity and potentially grow in understandings together. This could call into question the Church's understanding of 'revelation'. One cannot authentically dialogue with 'the other', unless we are prepared to acknowledge that the other may reveal an understanding of God that was not previously known. Authentic interreligious dialogue offers the possibility that such understandings may come from persons holding perspectives other than a Catholic worldview. This

may be a challenge for the Catholic Church's understanding of 'revealed truths'¹⁵. However, some educators in Catholic schools, may have chosen (consciously or unconsciously) a paradigm shift that enables them to bring the contemporary human experience into dialogue with the wisdom of the tradition and allows it to reveal new knowing that is relevant and plausible for contemporary humans.

The study is limited to one context which was deliberately chosen because it is high functioning according to the NSIT measure and the ECSI surveys. The results of the investigation may be indicative of what is *possible* if a Catholic school community is; confident in its why, has effective leadership that purposefully facilitates engagement in evidence-based learning and teaching practices, and is supported by authentic Christian living. This Catholic school context was purposefully established and continues to evolve its shared vision with sharp clarity. The study offers a glimpse into how the approach to the learning and teaching of Religion and the inclusion of diverse religious and non/religious perspectives could enhance engagement in Religious Education. There may be some learnings for consideration in other school contexts explicated by participants but linked to school leadership and improvement frameworks such as the ability to 'fall and falter', to 're-see', 'thinking and talking as members of a community' and being 'warm demanders' of students, whilst providing space for individual identity development. For the plurality of worldviews to be authentically appreciated, the understanding of 'revelation' warrants further exploration. Research and investigation into Catholic classroom teachers' and students' understandings of the 'revelation' of God and how they imagine continued engagement with religious content and the relevance of God in the lives of individuals, would be enlightening.

This chapter has explored the perceptions of leadership team members, teachers and school officer/administration officer about interreligious learning and teaching in one school context. The next chapter will explore the perceptions of the students about interreligious learning and teaching in the same school

¹⁵ For believers who hold the understanding of "revealed truths" that are transmitted via documents or doctrines, they may be challenged by individuals who come to their own personal revelation through dialogue and encounter with a personal Divine. Such individuals could challenge each other over issues such as euthanasia, abortion, eucharistic participation of divorcees or other marginalised groups e.g. LGBTQI+ community or the poor and homeless.

Chapter 7 - A Case Study of Students' Perspectives of Engagement in Interreligious Learning and Teaching: A Community of Learners

This chapter explores the perceptions of students of their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching in the single bounded case of one Catholic primary school. This paper is currently under review with the *British Journal of Religious Education*.

Foley, T., Dinan-Thompson, M., & Caltabiano, N. (2023) A case study of students' perspectives of engagement in interreligious learning and teaching: a community of learners [Manuscript submitted for publication]. *British Journal of Religious Education*

Abstract

This case study explores the perceptions of students regarding their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching in one Australian Catholic Primary School. The study probes the learners' understandings of what interreligious learning and teaching looks like in their context and how it might relate to their understandings of their evolving religious identity. The students were interviewed in focus groups and qualitative content analysis was used to uncover themes that emerged from the data. The key themes, Religious Education learning, diversity, voice and agency, and identity were brought to the fore. These themes are discussed in light of the school's Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) data and the school's approach to Religious Education. Utilising the multicultural/ multifaith reality in this school context enabled the learners to engage with a plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews. Employing a pedagogical model operationalised in other learning areas, learners in Religion can engage respectfully in dialogue, critique perspectives and come to new or nuanced understandings. The study revealed learners were empowered to bridge the gaps between them through a felt sense of belonging to their school community and the enhancement of their understandings of the Catholic tradition through knowledge of, and dialogue with, other traditions.

Key words: *Interreligious learning and teaching, Religious Education, diversity, religious identity,*

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, the Australian population has become progressively less affiliated with Christianity and concurrently, increasingly more affiliated with ‘no religion’ (secular beliefs, other spiritual beliefs, and no religious affiliation) (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2022). According to the latest ABS data, the most common religions in Australia are Christianity (43.9%), No religion (38.9%), Islam (3.2%), Hinduism (2.7%) and Buddhism (2.4%) with Catholic affiliation at 20% (ABS 2022). The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) (2018), in an analysis of the ABS 2016 Census of Populations and Housing, drew attention to the notable trend of students’ continued growth in ‘no religion’ affiliation (p. 12) and that Catholic and Independent schools were continuing to become more demographically similar to the communities they serve. The students in Australian Catholic schools are therefore likely to continue to be religiously diverse. This reality may present an opportunity for Religious Education in Catholic schools as the population is not a kindred group and may not be invested in religious affiliation.

The religious/non-religious identity of individuals in most Australian classrooms is a variety of religious affiliations or no affiliation and this diversity offers potential for interreligious learning and teaching. Approaches to Religious Education in Australia, and in particular the learning and teaching of Religion, continue to be debated (Hyde, 2017; Rossiter, 2020; Rymarz & Cleary, 2018). How religious identity is impacted through Religious Education is also contestable (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014; Pollefeyt & Richards, 2020; Rossiter, 2020). Learners’ understandings of their engagement in Religious Education, and more specifically the plurality of the religious/non-religious contexts they bring to the learning, becomes a pertinent inquiry. For the purposes of this study, the authors propose interreligious learning and teaching the ‘appropriate term to include the potential reciprocity between individuals and various convictions (religious/non-religious/spiritual/cultural)’ (Foley et al., 2020, p. 145 see also for further explication). This small study explores the understandings of some Primary school aged learners (8 – 12 years) in one school context. Particularly, how they understand and engage in interreligious learning and teaching and how this may or may not relate to their religious identity is probed.

Typologies for Framing Religious Identity

The Enhancing Catholic school identity (ECSI) project initiated through a partnership between the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven (KUL) and the Catholic Education Commission, Victoria, Australia has developed typologies for conceptualising religious identity and have operationalised these into multivariant questionnaires for measuring personal, professional and institutional religious identity (see Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014; Sharkey, 2017, 2019, <https://ecsi.site/au/foundations/> for more detailed explanation of typologies). Dioceses across Australia, including the Brisbane Archdiocese, have engaged with this project conducted by the KUL research team. The report generated identifies where

the students and adults are situated on the three scales, the Post Critical Belief scale, the Melbourne scale, and the Victoria scale as well as the general Religious Profile and attitudes of the group.

The Post Critical Belief scale is a typology that identifies the cognitive belief styles that are present in the surveyed group and the level of support for each style within the group. The typology identifies how an individual deals with the contents of faith with the four styles being: Literal Belief (literal affirmation), External Critique (literal disaffirmation), Relativism/Awareness of Contingency (symbolic disaffirmation) and Post Critical belief (symbolic affirmation) (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). According to the researchers, the belief style that is most supportive of personal religious identity development is the Post Critical belief style. A population with a high number of individuals identifying with this belief style will in turn likely be supportive of enhancing the religious identity of the school.

The ECSI research (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, 2014) proposes the school that is open to holding in dialogical tension the diversity of perspectives present in the modern school together with the richness of the Catholic tradition, and grapples with these in a multi-correlative way, is one which is engaging in Recontextualisation. Recontextualisation, the ECSI preferred option, is one of four strategies for participants to engage with Christianity and culture in the contemporary school. This option, the researchers propose, promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of where similarities and differences occur between Christianity and the plurality of religious/cultural worldviews. This can afford individuals opportunities to form new credible perspectives that are faithful to the Catholic tradition and also plausible and meaningful in a modern context.

The Dialogue school is the preferred option identified by the ECSI research for the professional and pedagogical engagement with religious content in the school. This option, one of four for the Victoria scale, supports maximal solidarity or openness to other worldviews and maximal openness to Christian beliefs, symbols, and practices (Sharkey, 2017). This option stands in contrast to the Monologue, Colourful, and Colourless Schools which offer differing combinations of maximal/minimal openness to a Christian worldview and solidarity with the other (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The Dialogue school is one which pays attention to how the content of the Religion curriculum is presented (Catholic worldview) and focuses on a learner-centred pedagogy employing learning strategies that engage a plethora of worldviews and encourages all to participate in meaningful, respectful dialogue.

Pedagogy

The quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching is the focus of much research in Australian schools with the intention of improving learning outcomes for students (Dinham 2016; Hattie, 2011; Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Hattie & Zierer, 2018). In searching for the core ideas about what makes a difference between teachers with high impact and those with low, 10 Mindframes for Visible Learning have been identified by Hattie and Zierer (2018). One of the ten identified by the researchers being, 'I engage as much in dialogue as monologue' (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p. 102). Dialogic

teaching is an opportunity for students to be authentically engaged in their learning and to consider their own perspective and the perspective of others as their learning progresses. Empirical educational research findings suggest ‘dialogically organised instruction was superior to monologically organised instruction in promoting student learning’ (Hattie & Zierer 2018, p. 102). Hattie and Zierer (2018, pp. 103 - 106) report the major factors in dialogic teaching include ‘class discussions’ ($d=0.82$), ‘peer tutoring’ ($d=0.55$), and ‘small group’ learning ($d=0.49$). All these factors with an effect size greater than $d=0.40$, indicating more than a year’s growth in learning (Hattie 2009), can be a means of maximising the impact on student learning when the strategies are engaged at an appropriate time (Hattie & Donoghue 2016) in the learning process.

In the Archdiocese of Brisbane, the classroom learning and teaching of Religion, utilises an educational approach and the Brisbane Catholic Education Model of pedagogy. The learning and teaching of religion in this context ‘promotes inquiry learning, a learner centred pedagogical approach to learning and teaching, that aligns closely with the directions taken in the Australian Curriculum’ (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020 p. 35). Whilst Hattie’s (2009) synthesis of over 800 meta- analyses reported an effect size of $d=0.31$ (less than a year’s growth) for inquiry-based teaching, Hattie and Zierer (2018) propose this maybe because it is not implemented at the right time. Inquiry-based teaching, according to Hattie (2012) may well be more effective if it is implemented once the learners have acquired the content knowledge or surface learning and are moving into the deep learning of establishing the relationships between the content.

In examining the efficacy of inquiry-based approaches to learning, Scott et al. (2018) advocate that guided forms of inquiry including problem-based learning produce significant affordances. The authors propose when employing a guided inquiry approach, ‘the teacher is able to maintain enabling parameters in ways that increase student voice and agency within an environment marked by dialogue and the co-construction of knowledge’ (Scott et al. 2018, p. 44). The learning strategies of guided inquiry can utilise factors such as classroom discussion, peer tutoring, small group learning, questioning, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, self-questioning, self-verbalising, self-explanation, and cooperative learning (Hattie & Donoghue 2016) to enhance student engagement and learning. Scott (2021) suggests the work of school-based learning and teaching of Religion is to encourage critical questioning and the co-construction of knowledge that can come from dialogue with the Catholic tradition and other religious traditions. This educational approach can challenge and support meaning-making for the lives of learners.

Context of the Study

Good Shepherd Primary school, a Brisbane Archdiocesan school, engaged in the ECSI surveys and qualitative analysis in 2019. The largest sub-population identified by the researchers in the Good Shepherd Primary data, in all three groups; students, staff and parents, is the one that opts for Recontextualising the religious identity of the school. The sub-population of each Good Shepherd group (students, parents, and staff) is larger than the aggregated Queensland-wide results. There were 92.2% of the student population opting for Recontextualising compared to 33% state-wide; 43.5% of the parent population opting for Recontextualising compared to 37.7% state-wide and 81% of staff compared to 49.1% state-wide (KUL, 2019, pp. 26-27). According to the ECSI research, this ‘theologically preferred’ subpopulation ‘bodes well for promoting the Recontextualising Catholic Dialogue School’ (KUL, 2019, p. 27). The ECSI report has been shared with the staff and parent community. In addition, the school has been reviewed using the ACER School Improvement Tool (see <https://www.acer.org/au/research/school-and-system-improvement>) and obtained an outstanding rating in all domains (see Foley et al., 2022 for further information) indicating that the school has processes in place to continually sustain and improve high standards of learning and teaching.

Single Case Design and Description

This study employed a qualitative single-case design with Good Shepherd Catholic Primary school being the single bounded case. The case was purposefully selected as an information-rich case (Patton, 2015) with potential to yield in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The school has a student population of 398 (194 boys and 204 girls) with a projected enrolment of 700+ students, due to the school being located in a growth corridor. The teaching staff are comprised of 23 teachers (22 females and 1 male) and 16 non-teaching staff (14 female and 2 males). The school Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) percentile is 68 indicating that it is more educationally advantaged than 68% of schools in Australia. Almost a third (31%) of students identify as having a language background other than English and 4% of students identify as Indigenous (First Nations) (see My school website <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/50581>).

Data were collected via interviews conducted with students who attend the school. The stories used to illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 2015) are of students’ perspectives of classroom experiences of interreligious learning and teaching. These are analysed in light of the school’s ECSI Report, and contemporary educational research identifying the factors that impact student classroom learning. The key research questions investigated being: How do students describe their role in interreligious learning and teaching? With sub-questions posed including: What things do you do in your classroom when learning in this area? How do or why don’t you think the ways in which the learning is presented plays a role in your ability to participate in interreligious learning and teaching? How might this learning assist learners in developing their religious/non-religious identity?

Study Participants

Ethical clearance was granted via the University and Brisbane Catholic Education and with the Principal's permission, students were given an information sheet about the research project asking for volunteer participants. Interested students were invited to a researcher-led discussion outlining what engagement in the project would entail and to provide them with the research questions. Subsequently, in alignment with the ethical clearance, 12 students from years three, four, five and six, the upper primary year levels (ages 8 – 12), were randomly selected from the volunteers, to be interviewed. The students were invited to choose if they would like to be interviewed individually or in a group setting. All students chose the group setting and interviews were conducted in two groups of 6 students; one with Year 3 & 4 students and one with Year 5 & 6 students aligning with their learning context groupings (Ignatius and Hildegard Learning pods). The focus group interviews were for approximately 20 minutes in accordance with the ethics conditions. The interviews were transcribed, and participants were given the opportunity to examine and adjust the transcripts as necessary. (See Tables 7.1 & 7.2 for participants' details.)

Table 7.1: *Focus Group 1 Ignatius Designing Place learning community participants' background information*

| Student | Gender | Age | Year Level | Cultural Background | Religion |
|---------|--------|-----|------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Male | 9 | 3 | Sudanese | Muslim |
| 2 | Female | 9 | 3 | Australian | Catholic |
| 3 | Female | 8 | 3 | Australian | No Religion |
| 4 | Female | 10 | 4 | Italian | No Religion |
| 5 | Male | 9 | 4 | Afghan | Muslim |
| 6 | Male | 10 | 4 | Australian | Catholic |

Table 7.2: *Focus Group 2 Hildegard Leading Place learning community participants' background information*

| Student | Gender | Age | Year Level | Cultural Background | Religion |
|---------|--------|-----|------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 7 | Male | 11 | 5 | Spanish | Catholic |
| 8 | Male | 11 | 5 | Aboriginal Australian | Aboriginal Spiritualities |
| 9 | Female | 10 | 5 | Vietnamese | Buddhist |
| 10 | Female | 12 | 6 | Italian | Catholic |
| 11 | Female | 11 | 6 | Sri Lankan | Catholic |
| 12 | Male | 12 | 6 | Australian | Anglican |

Data Analysis

Content analysis was undertaken to draw meaning from the data guided by the research questions (Patton, 2015). Initial impressions were gleaned from reading the interview transcripts as a whole. Subsequent readings revealed relevant words, lines, phrases, or sentences. These were coded and through ensuing readings and analysis, key themes emerged. The themes were then examined and interpreted with reference to the literature and theory reviewed.

Findings

The interview conversations revealed the stories of the participants' perceptions of the learning in which they were engaged. These stories being thick descriptions of human experience that the researcher is seeking to understand (Stake, 1995). Relevant interview excerpts evidencing the themes are presented and will be later discussed. Four main themes emerged from the data, these being: Religious Education learning, diversity, voice and agency, and identity.

Religious Education Learning

The data revealed that the students interviewed appeared curious about religion, regardless of whether or not they were religiously affiliated. They had a genuine interest in learning about religion. The learners expressed that their learning about Religion was in relation to the Catholic tradition as they

were at a Catholic school, and this appeared to be ‘a given’ that was acceptable to them. Students articulated:

Good Shepherd, being a Catholic school, we learn a lot about the Catholic religion and Godto be a better person and build up our kindness and calmness and caring. (Focus Group 1)

I like knowing more about Jesus and how he came to be and all the different religions and his way of living... it teaches us how to become a community, and we learn about different religions. We know how to pray in different ways. (Focus Group 2).

The students engaged in discussions and activities that helped them to understand more about the Catholic tradition and also to learn from the experiences of others. They were able to verbalise their thinking and learning about Religion and expressed an enjoyment of it. They were learning things that they didn’t know about before.

Additionally, students spoke of their involvement in the Religious life of the school and their opportunities to engage in Catholic liturgies, prayers and rituals and learning about the lives of the Saints linked to their learning communities. They volunteered;

Every morning and afternoon we’d pray either the school prayer, Hail Mary or Our Father. We pray all different types of prayers... When we have liturgies, we also include different Aboriginal prayers. They have a special Aboriginal Our Father prayer that we say when we do liturgies. (Focus Group 2).

We celebrate all the saints that our different buildings are named after. We celebrated St Ignatius in Term 3. (Focus Group 1).

The learners seemed to appreciate that they could expand their knowing about religion through these practices. They were learning more about the Catholic tradition and other perspectives (religious or non- religious) through engagement in a Catholic way of being religious.

Diversity

The diversity of the school context was acknowledged by the students. They appeared proud of the fact there was such a variety of cultures and religions within the school. The plurality was spoken of as an asset, something that made their school a better place.

Students highlighted:

We have people that come from the Christian religion, and we have people that come from many different religions all over the world. (Focus Group 2)

We learn a lot from our students... they share a lot of what they do with their culture and background information. (Focus Group 1)

The learning from the religious and cultural diversity was acknowledged and appreciated. The participants expressed a belief that the diversity enabled them to learn more and didn't seem to think it detracted from learning about the Catholic tradition.

Voice and Agency

The participants voiced that their learning about religion in the classroom had many similarities to the learning in other subjects, employing a familiar way of working. They highlighted they had opportunity to express their understandings and ideas in a variety of ways. The students explained:

If we have a task and we have the option to draw or write about it, we can do it from our own perspective, and it gives us the opportunity to share with other people who are new to this religion. They get a new perspective from what we see, and they'll now know what it feels like to be part of that religion. (Focus Group 2)

We do religion in lots of different ways. We do it in art and writing. And we do 'How this makes us feel', or 'How we feel about this'. (Focus Group 1)

Some students have their own (cultural/religious) thing that they have to do and sometimes they invite us to do it with them ... we can help them with our religion, and they can help bring us closer to theirs. (Focus Group 2)

Good Shepherd gives us the freedom to express how we want to learn about our religion and how we want to show our understanding (Focus Group 2)

The students articulated they were often given information in Religion via their teacher or another 'expert', and then had the opportunity to explore that information with their peers and show their learnings in a mode of their choosing. They conveyed how this empowered them and gave them ownership of their learning. They appeared to appreciate that they were not simply told 'this is how it is'. Through their exploration of topics, they could find meaning for themselves in light of their own experience, the experience of others and the biblical texts or Catholic Tradition. They did this through research inquiry, asking questions and hearing what others had to say about the learning. The students were engaged as they had choices, within parameters, about where to take the learning. They expressed they could put forward ideas or perspectives and they were respected and valued by others, giving them a sense of their own worth.

Identity

The study participants recognised that they were able to learn more about the Catholic or other traditions when they went to places of worship on the weekend and also from their parents. Learning from other religious traditions was adding to what they knew and helped them to clarify their ideas about their own traditions.

The students voiced:

On the weekends some of us go to church and have extra information given to us about the Bible and Jesus' story. (Focus Group 2)

Good Shepherd accepts everyone for who they are despite their religion. We get to learn more about our friend's religion, and they get to learn about ours. And we all become a kind community and learn off each other. It's very nice. (Focus Group 2)

The students had a felt sense of appreciation for themselves and for others and this allowed them to feel like they belonged and were part of a community. The themes revealed through the student interviews will now be discussed in light of the literature.

Discussion

Inquiry-based learning, when used at the right time in the learning has the potential to allow students to have a voice and take ownership of their learning journey (Scott et al., 2018). It allows the student to critique what is being presented and to link this to the learners' own experiences, hence making it more meaningful. Sawyer (2014) proposes that inquiry is most effective when students 'repeatedly generate and articulate their knowledge, ask deep questions, self-explain, and justify their reasoning' (p. 35). The learners in this study appeared quite comfortable with this way of working. It was a familiar routine and one that operated across the school, as the younger students also reported being well acquainted with the learning process. Goldberg (2010) suggests that inquiry learning fosters students' ability to '[m]ove beyond the acquisition of facts to metacognition, development of investigative and thinking skills, formulation of ideas, judgements, conclusions and taking responsibility for their own learning' (p. 351). The student participants reported their motivation to learn and a felt sense of agency over their learning. The learning was not restricted to religious knowledge and theology but also extended to practice.

The learners participated in Catholic prayer, rituals and celebrations expressing that these too, were a source of learning for them. At the same time they knew that they were not all Catholics and were exposed, through their classmates and parent community, to other ways of expressing a religious life. Moran (1997) advocates that 'unless we compare, we cannot understand any one religion, including

our own' (p.162). These learners expressed a deep appreciation of and respect for a 'Catholic' way of living religiously and were mindful that this was not the only way to be religious. They proposed it helped them to know more about their own way of being religious by knowing what others did. Rossiter (2010) advocates that 'good access to one's historical religious tradition is not only a birthright, but a spiritual resource that serves as a starting point in a lifelong search for meaning, purpose and value in life' (p. 6). The Catholic students in this context were able to meaningfully access their religious tradition whilst detecting similarities and differences with other traditions or non-religious worldviews. Being able to identify similarities and differences between contexts is 'one of the most powerful learning skills to enable students to transfer their learning' (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016, p. 9) potentially enabling it to contribute to lifelong learning. Whilst the students did not express a personal non-believing stance in the interviews, they expressed an openness to people having their own stance on faith (belief or non-belief) and that this was a positive aspect of the school.

The study participants were acutely aware of the diversity within the school community and were appreciative of the opportunity it offered to learn from each other about culture and religion. Saxton et al. (2018) advocate '[d]iversity can (and should) enrich our teaching, challenging each of us to find new ways of exploring content' (p. 15). The learners in this context, were open to the opportunity the diversity of the community offered and were open to the learning that flowed from it. The Dialogue School (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014), the optimal typology of the Victoria Scale, proposes that a school with maximal openness to both diversity and a Catholic perspective, supported by a strong option for Post Critical Belief (PCB) is in the best position to be able to lead the school to the Recontextualisation of religious content. Furthermore, it offers learners the opportunity to receive the content as plausible and personally meaningful in a contemporary context. This opportunity is potentially both educational and invitational for young learners in their personal faith journey. The Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) (2013) urges Catholic Schools to allow multicultural expressions to exist in schools and to promote dialogue to 'foster a peaceful society' (para 2). It is proposed that this is done by 'discovering the multicultural nature of one's situation...overcoming prejudices and ... educating oneself 'by means of the other' to a global vision and sense of citizenship (CCE, 2013, para 2). This urges all to engage in dialogue to uncover different perspectives and to move to a new vision that is beyond, but not dismissive of differences and similarities, and credible for the future.

The learners at Good Shepherd spoke of diversity positively, offering them 'a bigger picture' of the world and appreciating it as a way to build connection and community. The school openly engaged the learners in interreligious learning and teaching through the inclusion of the multiple religious and non-religious worldviews present within the community, sharing basic knowledge, symbols, and practices. The learners used familiar learning routines to assist them to inquire and to learn with, and from, each other. The learners' capacity to engage critically with the contents of belief, utilising learning

strategies that support deep learning, including questioning and creative thinking, may play a part in how they process the potential learnings.

The PCB scale (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) indicates the participants' preferences in the way they engage cognitively with religious belief. The researchers acknowledge that individuals possess elements of each of the belief/non-belief styles but often have a clear preference for a position. When profiling a group, a population preference is established. For the students at Good Shepherd, the leading cognitive style is Relativism (6.36/7), closely followed by Post-Critical Belief (6.21/7), which the researcher propose should be taken as 'an asset for enhancing Catholic school identity' (KUL, 2019, p. 6). The students surveyed in the ECSI report are not the participants interviewed for this study; however, a similar tendency could be gleaned from this study's participants. The learners in the current study articulated clear support for a symbolic cognitive belief style, evident in their approach to religious texts and practices and their genuine openness to the diversity of belief or non-belief. The present study participants were confident they had some agency in their learning and were not passive consumers of religion or culture. The openness to symbolic belief and to the diversity of the community potentially fostered a disposition for Recontextualisation.

The ECSI Melbourne scale, which identifies how participants experience the way the school facilitates connections between Christianity and culture has a preferred position of Recontextualisation. This position attempts to hold Christianity and culture in a healthy tension as one engages in a search for renewed Catholic understandings through dialogue with plurality. According to the ESCI data, the students at Good Shepherd school clearly support the ECSI preferred position of Recontextualisation. The operative subpopulations at the time of the ECSI surveys identified the students as having a 92.25% preference for Recontextualisation. The students interviewed in this study were supportive of dialogue and critique around religion and culture to assist in developing their own nuanced understandings. They were especially supportive of the Catholic religion being a consistent dialogue partner, with its inclusion embraced by the learners. The participants didn't see this Catholic perspective as intrusive, but rather it allowed for the students' own thinking and questions to be clarified and/or challenged. This potentially gives them more clarity about their own Catholic or religious/non-religious identity.

The Good Shepherd learners were cognisant of the learning that took place in Religion, acknowledging they learnt much from dialogue with their fellow students and the inquiry approach to learning. Their learning enabled them to be active constructors of school culture as they recognised the inclusion of other perspectives assisted them to better understand themselves and others, and to develop a more cohesive community. Religious Education appeared to be relevant to the learners and utilised the best of educational practice while also offering an opportunity to see and/or engage in what 'religion' is like in practice. This active engagement gave the learners a voice and agency. It encouraged an appreciation of the valuable contribution the diversity within the community offered the dialogue with

the richness of the Catholic Tradition. Religious Education in this context is drawing upon evidence-based educational practices which enables learners to access religious understandings by building surface learning, deepening the learning and then transferring and applying understanding (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016) as the students learn to go beyond the context to engage in the contemporary world. The process also potentially offers individuals the opportunity to make personal meaning and resource their own spiritual or religious life, though such impact is not quantifiable.

Conclusion

This small study is limited to learners in one context. The 9-year-old school has deliberately focused on being a Catholic school. Its population is multicultural with almost one third of the students identifying as coming from mixed religious and/or cultural backgrounds. The Leadership team and staff have paid particular attention to Religious Education as the school did not have a confessional culture to draw upon. The environment is welcoming, hospitable and inclusive with learners accustomed to adults regularly visiting classrooms asking questions as on-going assessment 'for' and 'as' learning (Sharratt, 2019). Potentially the volunteers may be learners who enjoy learning about Religion and their responses influenced by a positive disposition towards the subject, despite being randomly selected from a larger volunteer group. In addition, the school's educational advantage (ICSEA 68th percentile) may suggest the socio-educational status and/or influence of parents could bias the participant's experiences towards more positive perceptions. Further research is warranted to explore these possibilities.

The study participants articulated their engagement with the religious content and their religious context, using learning strategies that facilitated dialogue and critical thinking, empowered them to expand their knowing. Being engaged in good learning and teaching and having the invitation to experience how Catholics live religiously opens the door to personal faith experiences. In this way Rossiter (2018) proposes 'Religious Education can resource the spirituality of young people, no matter what their level of religiosity' (p. 2). In responding to the growing increase in 'no religion' affiliation in Australia, Brisbane Archbishop, Mark Coleridge cautions, 'It doesn't necessarily mean that people, young or old, are less religious than they were; but it does mean that they're religious in very different ways than in the past. And the Church needs to look carefully at that, lest the communication gap between believers and non-believers grow even wider' (Brolly, 2017). This study has dived deeply into one context and explored how good learning and teaching in Religion can be interreligious and offers learners at the very least, the opportunity to learn about oneself and the other, increase religious/cultural understandings, fund spirituality and promote social cohesion. The continued decline of affiliation with Christian religions and the increase in non-religious or other religious affiliations, suggests an urgent need for Catholic schools, as an integral part of the Church, to attend to Religious Education and how learners of a variety of religions can be engaged meaningfully in it. This may be a call to attend to Religious Education in 'different ways than in the past', to purposefully engage learners in genuine

dialogue with their real-life pluralist context and the richness of the Catholic Tradition. This could be a means through which individuals can develop or enhance their religious or non-religious identity and find meaningful ways to communicate with each other.

This study points to the need for further research exploring engagement in interreligious learning and teaching in Catholic schools. Such engagement, which honours the Catholic tradition, takes seriously the reality of our multicultural and multifaith society, utilises good educational practices and exposes learners to ways to authentically live a religious life, could potentially offer contemporary learners a plausible and meaningful way to explore their own spirituality and/or religious affiliation. This could be particularly pertinent as students move into the secondary school in providing a platform for coming to understand how people 'young and old might be religious in very different ways than in the past' and how this could spiritually/religiously fund our future society.

This chapter explored students' perceptions of interreligious learning and teaching in the school context. The following chapter explores yet another facet, the perceptions of parents about their children's engagement in interreligious learning and teaching.

Chapter 8 - A Case Study of Parent Perspectives on Interreligious Learning and Teaching in a Diverse Catholic School Context; ‘Building a Civilisation of Love’.

This chapter explores the voice of parents with their perceptions of their child’s engagement in interreligious learning and teaching in the context of the single bounded case of a Catholic primary school. The publication is currently under review with the *Journal of Values and Beliefs*

Foley, T., & Caltabiano, N., & Dinan-Thompson, M. (2023) A case study of parents’ perspectives on interreligious learning and teaching: in a diverse Catholic school context: ‘Building a Civilisation of love’ [Manuscript submitted for publication]. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*

Abstract

In the pluralised contexts of many contemporary Australian Catholic schools, cultural and religious diversity is a reality that could be ignored or potentially utilised to enhance learning. This case study probes the perceptions of parents regarding their children’s engagement in Religious Education in a Catholic school and in particular, engagement in interreligious learning and teaching. The small qualitative study utilised interviews with parents that were analysed and coded to reveal themes that are then discussed in light of the literature reviewed. Four key themes emerged: engagement, diversity, voice and agency, and identity revealing potential for enhancing partnerships with parents and families in the educative project of growing young Australians into their humanity and working towards the creation of a civilisation of love. The study points to a potential for the ‘wider Church’ to engage families in dialogue through articulating the why and how of Religious Education in Catholic schools (including interreligious learning and teaching) and enhancing parental engagement in such learning and teaching to resource the spiritual/religious identity of all as they grow into the fulness of life.

Key words: *parent perceptions, interreligious learning and teaching, spiritual/ religious identity, Religious Education, diversity*

Introduction

The perspectives of parents regarding their children's engagement in interreligious learning and teaching may not have been a consideration for many Australian Catholic schools until more recent times. Yet, with diversifying school contexts, multi-faith and multi-cultural learning and teaching opportunities are a real-life context with rich content that can be utilised for the benefit of all. Parent perceptions of their role in the education of their children may impact how engaged they become in their children's schooling and in particular their Religious Education. The importance of the development of identity (including spiritual/religious identity) is embedded in the Australian Government's goals for all Australians and developing partnerships with parents in realising this may produce favourable outcomes. This small study explores the understandings of some parents of Primary aged children (4 ½ - 12yrs) in a school with a diverse population, regarding their children's engagement in interreligious learning and teaching. In particular, how this may or may not influence their developing spiritual/ religious identity.

Parent Populations in Australian Catholic Schools

The students and families of Australian schools, including Catholic and Independent schools are progressively becoming more diverse. McCrindle et al. (2021) propose '[a]s a result of shifting migration patterns from Europe to Asia and Africa, there has been an increase in Australia's religious diversity despite the overall decline in religious affiliation' (p.11). The diversity of worldviews in Australia is realised via the increase in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, a decreasing affiliation with denominational Christian religions, including Catholicism, and the increasing affiliation with 'no religion' (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021). The Independent Schools Council of Australia (2018) reported from the 2016 ABS Census results 'when it comes to religious affiliation of students the most notable trend is the continued growth of the no religion category across all three sectors [Independent, Catholic and Government schools]' (p. 3). Philip Hughes, a researcher for the Christian Research Association, proposes:

'No religion means many different things to Australians. However, most fundamentally, it means that they do not want to identify with any particular religious institution. For many Australians, religion is simply off their radar and not something they think about. Other surveys indicate that many Australians are not at all sure about the existence of God, although many still describe themselves as 'spiritual'. What the Census does not tell us is how these Australians find a sense of meaning. (Hughes, 2022)

The populations of Australian Catholic schools are reflective of this wider societal reality and students and their families potentially navigate their meaning-making in very different ways than in the past. The family inheritance of religious traditions and the sense of identity that can accompany this is less prevalent and perhaps less overt than in the past. How contemporary parents understand their role in

their children's education within the Catholic school may shed some light on how they view and value Religious Education, and particularly of interest is interreligious learning and teaching.

Parents as Partners in the School Community

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) sets out the educational goals for all Australians, articulating the Australian Government's vision and responsibility to improve educational outcomes (Education Council, 2019). The declaration highlights:

Parents, carers and families are the first and most important educational influence in a child's life. They have a critical role in early development, including social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical wellbeing. They instil attitudes and values that support young people to access and participate in education and training and contribute to local and global communities. It is critical for the education community to work in partnership with parents, carers and families to support a child's progress through early learning and school. (p. 10)

The importance of families and their vital role in partnership with educational communities are acknowledged and the primal role of parents in the education of their children is articulated. The Declaration advised educational institutions to 'ensure that education promotes and contributes to a socially cohesive society that values, respects and appreciates different points of view and cultural, social, linguistic and religious diversity' (Education Council, 2019, p.5). This aspiration is for all Australian learners across the Catholic, Independent and Government school sectors.

In addition, the Declaration advocates that the education community be committed to developing in every young Australian 'a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing' (Education Council, 2019, p. 6). The development of personal identity is an on-going process, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper, however Crawford and Rossiter (2006) propose for educational purposes, 'personal identity can be conceptualised as a process in which individuals draw on both internal and cultural resources for their self-understanding and self-expression' (p. 126). The cultural resources might include factors such as family, religion, school, television, the internet, ethnicity and more, while internal resources might include emotions, beliefs, attitudes and values to name a few (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). The spiritual aspect of one's identity is core (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Stoppa, 2017) and a religious culture can inform an individual's identity. Stoppa (2017) proposes "a spiritual sense of self may be part of religious identity for some young people, but for others, may be created and expressed outside the context of formal religiousness" (p. 154). Hence, resourcing the spiritual and religious dimensions for young people could potentially prove fruitful for their developing identities. This is an opportunity for the school community to invest in contributing to the identity development of our future citizens by supporting or building on the family's impact.

Parents' role in connecting the learning at school with learning at home and in the wider community is recognised as critical (Emerson et al., 2012) for student outcomes. One of the factors that impact the degree to which parents engage with this role and sustain the engagement is *parental role construction* (Emerson et al., 2012). Emerson et al. (2012) propose that research indicates:

The way parents perceive their role in education is generally determined by the following factors:

Beliefs about appropriate and desirable child outcomes,

Beliefs about who is responsible for these outcomes,

Perceptions of what important group members (e.g family, teacher, other parents) expect from them as parents, and

Parental behaviours related to those beliefs and expectations.

(Emerson et al., 2012, p.11)

Parental role construction can support or undermine parents' decision to engage with or be involved in their child's education. Beliefs about what desirable outcomes might look like and who is responsible for these outcomes may influence how parents engage in their children's learning and their aspirations for their children's schooling. Goodall (2013) in reviewing the literature on the interaction between parental engagement and parental belief, proposed 'engagement in children's learning has beneficial effects on children's achievement' (p. 95). However, in relation to parental beliefs, the literature (almost entirely from the United States) suggests 'belief has an effect on outcomes which is most positive for children from Jewish backgrounds and least positive for those from Conservative Protestant homes' (p.95). Goodall (2013) advocates future research is needed in this area, to look beyond religious affiliation to what goes on in the homes of different groups to produce differences in educational outcomes so that all children have the opportunity to achieve well.

Sharratt (2019) proposes 'schools build strong relationships with parents by keeping them informed about their children's progress and by involving them in the why and how the school is teaching' (p.22). Informing parents of the 'why' and 'how' gives them clarity about what is important to the school learning community and the ways in which this is achieved. The Australian Catholic Primary school has Religion as a compulsory addition to the eight key learning areas of the Australian curriculum and hence the clarity on why and how of Religious Education, offering the Catholic school a point of difference.

The Catholic School

The church document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, acknowledges ‘parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children’s education belongs’ (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1998, para 20). The document goes on to propose that in the contemporary world, there is a pervasive tendency of parents to delegate this role to the school and hence dialogue with, and support of families, needs to aim to foster their involvement in the school’s educational project (CCE, 1998, para 20). This may involve supporting parents to understand the Catholic school as an educating community and Religious Education as important for learners regardless of their religious/non-religious affiliation. The CCE (2022) instruction, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, advocates the Catholic school become:

an educating community in which the human person can express themselves and grow in his or her humanity, in a process of relational dialogue, interacting in a constructive way, exercising tolerance, understanding different points of view and creating trust in an atmosphere of authentic harmony. Such a school is truly an educating community, a place of differences living together in harmony. (CCE, 2022, para 30)

This CCE instruction places emphasis on the role of education and the process of dialogue and critical thinking for enabling differing perspectives to be considered and respected in the individual’s growth in humanity.

In an earlier document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*, the CCE (2013) proposed:

Education contains a central challenge for the future: to allow various cultural expressions to co-exist and to promote dialogue so as to foster a peaceful society. These aims are achieved in various stages: (1) discovering the multicultural nature of one’s own situation; (2) overcoming prejudices by living and working in harmony; and (3) educating oneself “by means of the other” to a global vision and sense of citizenship. Fostering encounter between different people helps to create mutual understanding, although it ought not to mean a loss of one’s own identity. (CCE, 2013, intro para 2)

This document proposes it is the school’s responsibility to have intercultural dialogue in its pedagogical vision (CCE, 2013, intro para 3) and acknowledges that ‘awareness is lacking of how precious the religious dimension is for fruitful proficient intercultural dialogue’ (CCE, 2013, para 9). The CCE expresses that such dialogue starting ‘from an awareness of one’s own faith identity, can help people to

enter into contact with other religions. Dialogue means not just talking, but includes all beneficial and constructive interreligious relationships, with both individuals and communities of other beliefs, thus arriving at mutual understanding' (CCE, 2013, para 13). In the current social context, a challenge for some parents may be that they don't have a clear understanding of their own faith or non-religious worldview (Rymarz, 2017) and so passing religious understandings on to their children could be problematic. The tradition-ing process of faith in the home (Scott, 2015) may be somewhat abdicated and the responsibility placed on the school. Scott (2015) suggests one's 'religious identity is created by turning to face the other. Religious Education now is inter-religious' (p. 267). Thereby greater clarity of the individual's religious identity can potentially be brought to the fore when one is faced with who one is not.

Framing Religious Identity

Many schools across Australia and the world have begun to engage with the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) project (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) as a way to measure and develop strategies to improve the Catholic identity of their school and promote the religious identity of individuals. This research includes questionnaires that operationalise three multivariant scales, the Post Critical Belief (PCB), the Melbourne, and the Victoria, along with surveying the general religious profile and attitude of the participants. The scales propose to measure the individual religious identity options (PCB), the school identity options (Melbourne) and the Professional/pedagogical options (Victoria) of the school community (see Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014; Sharkey, 2017, 2019, <https://ecsi.site/au/foundations/> for detailed explanation). These are ways in which a school can measure current levels of identification with a Catholic worldview and look to the options for the future for personal, professional, and institutional religious identity.

According to the researchers (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) the optimal options for enhancing Catholic religious identity are Post Critical Belief (symbolic affirmation), Recontextualisation and the Dialogue School. While respondents may possess elements of all the options for each scale, they are likely to have a predominant individual stance and in profiling a group, a preferred group option is identified. For Post Critical Believers, the content of faith is engaged with in a symbolic way through mediations such as scripture, prayer and the natural environment. For such individuals God is not encountered 'literally' but through 'symbolic' intercessions which draws one into a loving relationship with God. The option for Recontextualisation identifies how schools engage with the complexities of culture and Christianity, engaging in multi-correlative ways to genuinely grapple with the plurality of the contemporary contexts and the integrity of Catholic Christian faith. This option is realised through the use of a Dialogue school pedagogical perspective which actively connects a Catholic Christian worldview with the multiple religious and non-religious voices within the community to assist the community to come to new or nuanced understandings that give meaning to life.

The ECSI researchers acknowledge that their research has revealed that Christian Values Education (CVE), one of the strategy options for establishing and enhancing the Catholic Identity of a school, is one that is a popular preference for both students and adults (staff and parents) in primary schools across Australia (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The researchers suggest this strategy can be popular when a school is still diversifying and tries to link the Catholic faith to values that are generally accepted in the broader society. This has the effect of reducing the Christian message to values that are easily compatible with everyone. This according to the ECSI researchers, ultimately leads to secularisation because the particularity of the Christian message is reduced to basic ethical values and loses the richness of its contribution. Anecdotally, values continue to be a popular drawcard for parents choosing Catholic Education in Australia (Rymarz, 2017), though this may not necessarily equate to the Christian Values Education strategy articulated by the ECSI researchers.

Context of Study

The parents in this study are part of the Good Shepherd Primary school community, a Brisbane Archdiocesan school. The school engaged in the Enhancing Catholic School identity surveys and qualitative data analysis conducted by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in 2019, with parent participants invited to be part of the research. There was a 10.4% parent participation rate which the researchers acknowledge makes it difficult to generalise results, however they propose that if these parents are a random representation, then ‘some insights can be potentially gained’ (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019, p. 2). Additionally, the researchers acknowledge that parents have been difficult to engage in surveys and that the participation rate at Good Shepherd is quite good relative to other schools that have engaged in the project (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019, p. 2). The results of the research report have been shared with the staff and parents of the school community.

Through analysis of a wide variety of questions across the three multivariate scales (PCB, Victoria, and Melbourne) and the attitudinal and profile questionnaires, sub-populations which indicate the main trends within the surveyed population, are identified. The leading sub-population, identified for students, staff (leadership and teachers) and parents at Good Shepherd, is one that chooses Recontextualisation (see Foley et al., 2022, Foley et al., 2023 manuscript submitted for publication, for further exploration of staff and student data). The dominant Recontextualisation sub-population of Good Shepherd parents hailed the support of 43.5% of surveyed parents, which compares to 37.7% of the Queensland-wide surveyed parents choosing Recontextualisation. The dominant Queensland-wide parent sub-population (44.9% of surveyed parents) was Christian Values Education (CVE). At Good Shephard, 21.7%. of the surveyed parents opted for CVE. The CVE sub-populations of staff and students at Good Shepherd were also significantly lower than the dominant Recontextualisation sub-populations.

Study Design

A single case study design was employed in this study, with Good Shepherd Catholic Primary school being the single bounded case, selected because its ECSI data highlights the surveyed population's support for enhancing Catholic School, and individual religious identity. The population of the school is 398 students (194 boys and 204 girls) with a projection to double in size due to its location in a population growth corridor. The staff include 23 teachers (22 female and 1 male) and 16 non-teaching staff (14 females and 2 males). The school is more educationally advantaged than 68% of Australian schools with an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) percentile of 68. Students identifying as having a language background other than English make up almost a third (31%) of the student population and 4% of students identify as First Nations (Indigenous) (see My school website <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/50581>).

After University and Brisbane Catholic Education ethical clearance was granted, information sheets regarding the research project were circulated to parents with the Principal's permission, and via the school processes. Because of COVID restrictions, access to parents was restricted and a researcher-led discussion outlining the project could not be conducted. Consequently, 8 parents volunteered to be interviewed individually. The parent group were all female and a relatively homogenous sample (Patton, 2015). Nuzzo (2021) proposes 'females are more likely to participate in many kinds of social science research,' (p.85) with this notion supported in this project. Congruent with the ethics conditions, the interviews were conducted for approximately 20 minutes and then transcribed. Participants were offered the opportunity to adjust the transcripts as necessary or clarification sought from the researcher. (See Table 8.1 for participants' details.)

Table 8.1: *Adult Participants' Background Information*

| Parent | Gender | Age Bracket | Year levels of Children | Cultural Background | Religion |
|--------|--------|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Female | 30 – 40 years | Prep & 2 | Australian | Catholic |
| 2 | Female | 30 – 40 years | Prep | Australian | Catholic |
| 3 | Female | 30 – 40 years | 2 & 6 | Aboriginal Australian | No Religion |
| 4 | Female | 30 – 40 years | 6 | Australian | Catholic |
| 5 | Female | 40 – 50 years | 4 | Australian | Anglican |
| 6 | Female | 30 – 40 years | 2 (Identified ASD) | English | Anglican |
| 7 | Female | 40 – 50 years | 1, 3 & 5 | Australian | Catholic |
| 8 | Female | 40 – 50 years | 2 & 4 | European | Not stated |

Analysis

The researcher utilised content analysis to make sense of the transcribed texts guided by the research questions (Patton, 2015). The key questions probed were: How do parents describe their children's role in interreligious learning and teaching? With sub-questions investigated including: What things do your children do in the classroom when learning in this area? How do or why don't you think the ways in which the learning and teaching is presented plays a role in your children's ability to participate in interreligious learning and teaching? How might this learning assist your child/ren in developing their spiritual/religious identity? The interview transcripts were considered as a whole to ascertain initial impressions and the subsequent readings uncovered relevant words, lines, phrases, or sentences. These were coded and further readings, reflection, and analysis, revealed key themes. These themes were then considered with reference to the literature reviewed.

Findings

Descriptions of human experience are rich texts and fodder for the investigator's search for understanding (Stake, 1995). These captivating conversations revealed the stories of parents' perceptions of the Religious Education learning, including interreligious learning, in which their children engaged. Appropriate interview excerpts indicating the themes are offered and will be discussed. Four main themes arose from the data, these being: engagement, diversity, voice and agency, and identity.

Engagement

The parents in this small study shared that they believed their children were engaged in Religion because there was good learning and teaching happening and their children enjoyed it. The students were interested and had a variety of ways of working and were not just required to 'sit and listen'. Parent participants offered:

I think the teachers know the students well. It's not just filling in colouring-in sheets and answering questions in a book. They engage through song and through stories, but they're also then encouraged to create their own songs and stories, and situations where this could be the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do. They're quite engaging tasks for little people as opposed to just being told this is what you do, and this is what you don't do. (Parent 2)

I just think she really takes it in. She just talks, she loves the prayer...she draws, not just a simple drawing – it's very detailed about what she has done for the day. (Parent 6)

They don't always learn from the Bible and then do an activity. It's interconnected and interconnected throughout their other learnings as well. (Parent 7)

They do prayer and meditation. They have access to that each day. (Parent 1)

Both my children love religion...there's a lot of stories. They really engage and love the religion side of schooling. (Parent 8)

The parent participants felt that the learning was active, engaging, and enjoyable for the learners and not just information being deposited.

Diversity

The parents were keenly aware of the diversity that was the reality of the school context, and this seemed to be perceived as a positive aspect of the school community. Parents proposed:

It [the school] is so multicultural... we do have several religions across the school...there is opportunity for these children to be included and they all learn a little more. (Parent 8)

They're learning different customs with different religions because in religion, they look at different things. With the Indigenous one you have different customs and laws... (Parent 3)

... (my daughter) learns a lot about the faith of her friends because they're from different cultures.... She has the privilege to be able to have that communication... (Parent 4)

The participant parents, though mostly Catholic or Christian in religious affiliation, expressed an appreciation of what could be learnt from the multicultural/multifaith context in which their children were learning.

Voice and Agency

Learners being able to have their say, use their voice and make some choices about how they demonstrate their learnings and understandings was appreciated by the parents interviewed. They shared:

Because it (Religion) looks at values and it acknowledges that even if you're not all Catholic, our values are very similar – you have a faith. So I think that it helps her speak openly about what she values and her faith, although it's still developing. Because she feels that what she says is valued, she can talk about it openly, she can share it and discuss it and won't be judged and she can practice it as well. It's practiced in meditation or in values of sustainability. (Parent 5)

[my daughter] really likes Venerable Catherine McAuley. She said if she was around now, she thinks that she could be a friend with her. That generosity of spirit and heart is something I think my daughter connects to. We had a little conversation about that this morning. (Parent 4)

The parent participants expressed that they valued that their children could learn and make meaning for themselves with the support of information shared by the teacher. They were appreciative that the learners could share their ideas, enjoyed the subject, and could make choices about their learning.

Identity

The parents articulated a synergy between what they valued and the young people their children were becoming through the learning and experiences that they have at Good Shepherd. Parent voice:

My daughter didn't have a great background of knowledge of religion before she came here. I think she's come away with not just knowing prayers and curriculum-based knowledge but with a really good understanding of creation and caring for others and showing kindness. She talks about it and she enjoys it. There's a genuine love of it. (Parent 2)

... because (at this school) they've got to own it, show it, live it every day, pretty much in everything, not just in that religion space, but throughout the day. (Parent 3)

...that communication [with others] enhances her own understanding of her own faith, as being Catholic. (Parent 4)

... it aligns really well with our values as a family – that's why we chose a Catholic school. For example, at the moment they're looking at moral choices, and my daughter discusses all aspects of the learning with us. So then it sort of plays out in the choices we make as a family, too, or we discuss making moral choices as they relate to our values as a family. (Parent 5)

Identity is hooked into being able to mirror ourselves on other people that speak the same language... my big boy hasn't come to me yet to ask about any sacraments, and if that comes, so be it, and if doesn't, so be it, especially because my husband's not Catholic. That's diversity happening... and tolerance. (Parent 7)

The alignment of the school and home was appreciated by the parents interviewed and they could see how the religious identity of their children was being shaped and formed through opportunity to learn through diversity and engaging in enjoyable learning and teaching that privileged the Christian story and Catholic tradition.

Discussion

The data gathered from this small group of volunteer participants voiced ideas and opinions that appear to align with the Recontextualising subpopulation identified in the parent population surveyed in the ECSI research (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019). The current study participants expressed their openness to the religious and cultural diversity of the community, they appreciated the focus on a Catholic perspective and the exploration of texts and practices that afforded their children a voice in investigating and seeking new religious meanings and potentially personal and/or social transformation. This study's parents were mostly Catholic or Christian and articulated an appreciation that the school leads the Religious Education of their children and that they could take a more supportive role. While they did not express that they were relinquishing their responsibility to religiously educate their children, they indicated that it was helpful that the school could take the lead and parents could 'learn' with their

children. This may be a consequence of a detraditionalising society and many of the current parents of Primary school-aged children, potentially not having the benefit of home tradition-ing (Scott, 2015) or an engaging Religious Education in their own schooling.

There appeared to be genuine support from these parents for Religious Education that engaged their children and offered them learning that was interreligious and intercultural to broaden their understandings of religion and faith. Parents did not speak of their personal engagement in their children's interreligious learning, though the school does invite parents to share their cultural/religious knowledge and practices with the community (see Foley et al., 2022b manuscript submitted for publication). The interviewed parents appeared open to the learning themselves and were keen to support their children's learning in Religion and possibly with support and encouragement, open to further developing their partnership role.

The diversity of the community was widely acknowledged, and the parents conveyed the positive affect they believed this had on the community. They felt that the additional perspectives their children could gain from the diversity of the student clientele, gave them a richness that supported the social capital of the school and the wider community. The students were able to broaden their understandings about each other and this, the parents could see, supported them getting along with one another better and also helped them to know themselves and their own beliefs through comparison to others.

Whilst the parents agreed that diversity was a positive for the school context, one parent wondered if the appreciation of it would be 'outgrown'. The parent proposed:

I feel like the kids seem to be more tolerant and open to diversity and other religions at this stage, and I think when they get older, maybe it becomes a little bit more sheltered (closed), because they care what people think and the peer pressure as they grow up. (Parent 7)

This pondering may allude to the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) (2019) indication that 'racism is an ongoing problem in Australia' and 'is damaging to Australia's social cohesion' (p. 5). The AHRC (2019) suggests that a 2018 survey revealed "one in five surveyed Australians reported experiencing discrimination on the basis of their race or religion during the past 12 months" (p. 27). This may signal that on-going appreciation of cultural/religious diversity may need to be attended to explicitly in Australian schools and possibly beyond into higher education. McCowan's (2017) research into the Building Bridges Programme in Melbourne, Australia, an interfaith dialogue in secondary schools' programme, proposed that there may be value in experiential interfaith education, 'that is critically needed to address widespread ignorance, (and) religious prejudice' (p. 276). McCowan (2017) proposed, in schools where there was no 'non-partisan general study of religion' (p. 276) such a program would be of value in addressing ignorance and prejudice. A similar effect could potentially be achieved

through continued effective interreligious learning and teaching in Catholic schools, supporting the positive opportunities that diversity may offer.

Parents in this small study articulated awareness that their children's engagement in Religious Education allowed them a voice and some agency over their learning. The parents appreciated that the learning was not all teacher directed and that their children had the opportunity to use their creativity and imagination and could verbalise their own thinking on topics or issues being explored. The latest ABS data (2021) indicates that Christian affiliation has declined through all age groups, hence there are less parents and children identifying as Christian than there were in the past. How such individuals find meaning becomes an interesting question and while most parents in this research identified with a religion, their commitment to religious practice is not known. Many of the parents identified as Catholic or Christian, though not all, yet there seemed quite unified support for allowing their children the opportunity to question and critique in Religion and to consider the Christian perspective in light of other perspectives. The parents appreciated that their children could contribute their own ideas and experiences to the building of their knowledge about religions and religious practice. This may be indicative of one of the ways contemporary individuals attempt to find meaning in their lives regardless of their religious affiliation (Hughes, 2022). Perhaps the openness of the parents speaks of a willingness to allow their children to explore and find out for themselves rather than enculturating them in their own religious/non-religious perspective. The study parents appreciated that their children explored ideas for themselves and that what they were discovering/learning aligned with their parents' perspectives.

The resourcing of one's developing religious identity through the inclusion of exploration of who one is not, is supported by contemporary scholars (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Jackson, 2018; Moran, 1989; Rossiter, 2020; Scott, 1984, 2015, 2020) and encouraged by the CCC (2013) as a first step in developing 'a civilisation of love'. Coming to a developing understanding of personal identity, including spiritual / religious identity is central to young Australians becoming confident and creative individuals (Alice Springs Declaration, 2019, p. 6) and the parents in this study acknowledged the contribution of religion to this development. Parents suggested that the school was able to assist them in helping them to grow in religious understandings along with their children. This may be a result of parents not having accessed the religious tradition/s of their parents and now choosing to explore meaning with their own children. The parents supported a Religious Education that offered knowledge and experience and was open to the re-interpretation of faith traditions in the lives of contemporary individuals and families.

The parents in this study conceded they lead busy lives and finding time to invest in the spiritual or religious aspects was sometimes challenging, thus they appreciated that the school offered this, and their children could subsequently share their learnings at home. This is quite a different way of being religious or coming to religious understandings than may have occurred in the past when Catholic and

other religious cultures would likely have been an intergenerational legacy and relatively homogenous. The school Religious Education learning and teaching could thus be an opportunity to extend the education to the family via the students' engagement and voice on religious content and issues. This may be an untapped opportunity to engage parents in the learning and teaching of Religion and while it may not necessarily re-engage parents as 'church goers' it may (re)-ignite a religious curiosity leading to conversations and potentially increased knowledge, faith and religious tolerance.

Conclusion

This is a small, limited study with a relatively homogenous sample of parents offering perceptions of interreligious learning and teaching in one context. The context being one that the ECSI Research (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019) proposes has student, staff and parent populations that are open to Recontextualisation. This offers individuals new and plausible ways of reinterpreting understanding of the Catholic faith within the pluralistic culture. Whilst the volunteers in this study are potentially parents who are invested in, or curious about, their children's Religious Education, their insights may offer possibilities for a coalition of the willing.

The recent draft document of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia (2022) has called 'the Church in Australia to [be] centred on Christ, with a baptismal identity and on a path of missionary discipleship' (Plenary Council, 2022, Sept 2022 decree 3). An aspect of this commitment is the 'development of resources, formation and education programs in the promotion of hospitality, encounter, dialogue and merciful responses to the needs of our society' (Plenary Council, 2022, Sept 2022). One of the foundations of the decree being 'seeking communion'; a call for the Church to engage in interreligious dialogue as a way of building harmonious relationships with those of other religions and no religion. This could work towards 'creating mutual understanding' and building a 'global sense of citizenship' advancing a 'civilisation of love' (CCE, 2013). This work, the Council acknowledges, will include 'educational programs' thus the Catholic school, along with other church entities, can potentially play a vital educative role. This role, drawing on the pluralised context of the contemporary world, will need to find new ways of communicating with, and understanding the other, enabling all to grow in their humanity.

This investigation probed how parents described their child's role in interreligious learning and teaching at Good Shepherd Primary and how this may or may not assist their child's religious identity development. The study, though limited, points to the potential for open and willing parents of students in Catholic Schools to support their children's engagement in interreligious learning and teaching with positive outcomes for all. This could be an opportunity for Catholic Schools to contribute to supporting parents in their role as religious educators in a contemporary society that is decreasing in affiliation with organised religion. Assisting parents to understand the 'why' and 'how' (Sharratt, 2019) of Religious Education, inclusive of interreligious learning and teaching, could promote the engagement of parents

in this project and may reap benefits for both students and their parents. The Catholic school's commitment to engaging parents in the Religious Education of their children, inclusive of interreligious learning and teaching, may potentially assist the social mission of the church through supporting families in building knowledge and respect for, and dialogue with, the religious/cultural other. This offers opportunity to overcome prejudices and to actualise harmonious relationships potentially awakening a religious curiosity which may resource the meaning-making efforts of our future generations. This potential warrants further research.

This chapter explored the perceptions of the parents regarding their children's' engagement in interreligious learning and teaching in the single bounded case of one Catholic primary school. The following chapter will review the findings of the studies and triangulate the perspectives in an integrated discussion and conclusion.

Chapter 9 - Integrated Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of individuals who have engaged in interreligious learning and teaching to gain insight into what might be possible for students in contemporary Catholic schools. The research question guiding the investigations being: How do individuals perceive engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how might this interplay with religious identity? This final chapter contains five sections. Firstly, a summary of findings from each of the articles either published or under review is revisited. The themes drawn from the complete study are then presented in an integrated discussion which is followed by future considerations for Religious Education and leadership for Catholic schools and potentially for State schools. The strengths and limitations of the study are highlighted before the overall conclusions from the dissertation are offered.

Summary of the Findings of the Five Studies

The study has taken a journey through multiple perspectives to explore and attempt to understand the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching (a metaphoric gemstone) from different facets and how it might interplay with religious identity. The investigation began with an autoethnographic study which aimed to investigate the researcher's own experience of interreligious learning and teaching in dialogue with the theoretical perspective of the PCB and Victoria scales (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). This study revealed that the researcher was able to utilise her prior knowledge of her religious experience to navigate this new religious experience which was an encounter of 'togetherness as people' (Haers, 2004). The experience offered opportunity for new learning and a nuanced understanding of how the researcher could engage more meaningfully in her own religious worship. The study presented insight into how dispositions to the learning could play a role in how and what one could learn. This posed a question as to whether students in a Catholic school might benefit from 'educating for identity'. This could enhance capability through developing knowledge and perspectives facilitated through support in learning skills and dispositions for engagement in dialogue, as a strategy for interreligious learning and teaching, and build personal capacity. This study led to a broadening of the investigation to consider the perspectives of other adults engaged in interreligious learning and teaching.

The second study employed van Manen's (2014) hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenology using the life world existentials (lived relations, lived body, lived space, lived time, lived materiality) to investigate 'What is the individual's experience of interreligious learning and teaching?' for five adult participants engaged through snowball sampling. This research aimed to uncover layers of meaning in

lived experience in an attempt to expose possibilities for students in Catholic schools in light of the ESCI attitude typologies of the PCB scale and the Victoria scale. The study revealed that a move from literal belief to PCB can be a challenging experience for an adult so potentially this could be similar for students. Many of the religious experiences were felt in the body and those participants who appeared to operate from a PCB cognitive belief style were in an optimal position to expand their knowing by experiencing a ‘transformation’ through what was more than ‘head’ knowledge. Those who appeared to be operating from a Relativist position could take learning from the experience, though it did not have the transformative impact. The study revealed religious belief attitudes and pedagogical options for engaging with interreligious content may increase engagement and learning outcomes when framed in an educative paradigm. The participants’ increased knowledge of other traditions afforded them greater access to understanding the religious perspectives of others. Participants’ lived experiences of interreligious learning and teaching revealed it could assist them in developing their religious identity through grappling with and finding meaning in life. These findings moved the researcher to be curious about how this might be experienced by staff, students, and parents in a Catholic school, hence a case study in one Catholic school followed.

The case study, situated in a Catholic school in the Brisbane Archdiocese, was purposely selected as an ‘intrinsic’ case (Stake, 1995). The researcher was investigating how interreligious learning and teaching is experienced and perceived by staff, students, and parents and how this might interplay (or not) with the individual’s religious identity. The initial phase of this study probed the understandings of the teachers, leadership team members and school classroom or administration officers. Using basic qualitative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014), the researcher uncovered the themes of leadership, diversity, relationships, pedagogy, learners, and religious identity. The findings revealed leadership had a powerful impact on the community’s potential to build relationships and engage in the continuous improvement of learning and teaching and nourishment of the spiritual life. Diversity was considered an asset that the teachers could utilise for improving the learning and teaching through drawing on the prior knowledge of learners and appreciating diverse voices and perspectives to add richness and complexity to the learning.

The school climate was lived through establishing good relationships within and beyond the school community. Relationships were deemed authentic as people’s words and actions were congruent with the school’s vision, mission, policies, and processes. There was a collective responsibility for the wellbeing and learning of all community members. The staff expressed high levels of pedagogical knowledge that they utilised across all learning areas with the intent to ‘recontextualise’ the Catholic Tradition with the learners. The staff considered themselves to be learners and engaged with the Australian Professional standards (see <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards>), the Mindframes for visible learning (Hattie & Zierer, 2018), the Coherence framework (Fullan & Quinn, 2015) and the 14 Parameters of System and school improvement (Sharratt, 2019) to develop collective teacher efficacy

and improve student learning outcomes. The staff identified a congruency between their personal religious identity and the institutional religious identity. The second phase of the case study explored the perceptions of students in their engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how it might interplay with their religious or non-religious character.

The students ranged in age from 8 – 12 years (primary year levels 3 – 6) and were randomly selected from a group of volunteers. The student interviews were analysed using basic qualitative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014) and the themes of Religious Education learning, diversity, voice and agency, and identity emerged from the data. The findings revealed diversity was perceived as an asset and the students acknowledged they learnt a lot from each other and this helped them to feel connected and part of the community. The learners enjoyed Religious Education and the inclusion of learning about other cultures, religions and their practices gave them a sense of voice and agency in being guided to construct their own knowledge. The learning with and from a variety of religious traditions offered them a better sense of who they were at that point in time, as they understood themselves in relation to who they were not. The familiarity of the pedagogy employed in the teaching of Religion and interreligious learning and teaching enabled the learners' agency over their learning. They could readily draw upon strategies that were part of their learning repertoire. The final phase of the case study and the project was then to investigate the parent perceptions of their children's engagement in interreligious learning and teaching and how it might interplay with their religious identity.

The parent participants in the study were limited in numbers in part due to the COVID -19 restrictions on parent access to schools, and also comprised a relatively homogeneous group of women participants. The interviews with the parents were analysed via basic qualitative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014) and the themes revealed from this group of participants were engagement, diversity, voice and agency, and religious identity. The findings present an optimistic appreciation of the diversity of the school community and the parents viewed it as a positive attribute that added richness and supported the social capital of the school and wider community. The question of whether the student appreciation of the diversity would continue beyond the primary years, as young people became more influenced by peer pressure, was highlighted. The parents supported the acquiring of knowledge and experience and the opportunity to recontextualise the Catholic tradition which was facilitated through engagement in the learning and teaching of Religion. The parent group acknowledged that their learning about religion was enhanced through engaging with their child's learning. The parents felt their child's religious identity was enhanced through the learning and teaching of religion including the opportunity to learn about the religious practices of others. Having explored these perspectives, what will be considered next is how these findings come together through triangulation of the data sets, to potentially offer themes across the complete study.

Themes Evidenced Throughout the Studies

Relationships

The importance of relationships in interreligious learning and teaching was identified as a key component in successful outcomes across all of the small studies. The autoethnographic study revealed that relationship could allow a ‘togetherness of people’ (Haers, 2004) through which there was mutual exchange (learning and teaching) facilitated through the relational dialogue. This ‘fundamental togetherness’ (Haers, 2004) is what held the conversations in an open, respectful exchange of similarities and differences. An attitude of PCB (symbolic belief) and an openness to diversity and a Catholic worldview (Dialogue school typology) were enablers for the researcher to engage in the experience consciously and willingly, with a desire to learn.

In a similar way in the phenomenological study of five adult experiences of interreligious learning and teaching, a PCB and Dialogue school attitude, enabled an openness in which some participants, experienced a sense of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) revealing clarity. The relationship was again a key element for the participants. They were able to draw from their prior knowledge, learn from the shared experience, come to new understandings of each other, and offering something for each other’s learning. Haers (2005, p. 318) refers to this encounter-space as a ‘frontier territory’ where one comes face-to-face with ‘otherness’, the borderlines are not firm and there is a ‘thick space’ of togetherness where new learning can occur.

In the case study, the perceptions of staff, students, and parents in one Catholic school were investigated to uncover what they understood to be interreligious learning and teaching and how this was experienced in the case school. The case (Good Shephard Primary) was identified by the ECSI research as having a large percentage (92%) of proponents open to *Recontextualisation* which requires openness to the multiplicity of perspectives in the modern world and hence potential engagement in interreligious learning and teaching (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The staff perceptions revealed the importance of relationships between each other, with students and the parent community. The leadership team worked continuously with the community to build their culture of connectedness through the lens of the mercy charism upon which their school was founded. All the staff members felt part of the community and recognised their role in continuing to build their community relationships. The school employed the Coherence framework (Fullan & Quinn, 2016), the 10 Mindframes for visible learning (Hattie & Zierer, 2018), the 14 parameters for school improvement (Sharratt, 2019), and the Australian Standards for teachers to work with their community on school improvement utilising the National School Improvement tool to monitor the school’s on-going learning journey. All these resources encourage the building and maintaining of a connected culture to support and enhance student learning. The staff, led by the leadership team, recognised the alignment between what they espoused about

relationships and how this was appreciated and lived out authentically in their school Christian community.

From the student and parent perspectives, relationship was also considered a key factor in being able to listen to each other and interact respectfully in the exploring of the diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds present in the community. The students felt they were valued because their various experiences were deemed important and worth listening to in the classroom. The students recognised this as assisting them in building a community and the parent participants also appreciated this as a way of building social capital within and beyond the school. Building good relationships was embedded in the culture of the school and engagement in interreligious learning and teaching assisted in the strengthening of these relationships through the learners being able to find out more about each other in a safe learning context. This supports both goals of the Declaration (Education Council, 2019) through the promotion of equity and in developing active and informed members of the community. The school, viewed as an education community with a connected culture, is one 'where all are assured of being able to increase their capacities to the full, with the constant aim of pursuing the good of all' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014, para. 59). The dialogue school pedagogical perspective with maximal openness to diversity and maximal openness to a Catholic worldview (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) was apparent in the school context and the learner and parent participants appeared to deal with the contents of belief in a symbolic way regardless of belief or non-belief. A sense of belonging or connectedness is a factor that supported successful learning outcomes for the learners in interreligious learning and teaching and other learning areas in this school context. The openness to diversity and to the interreligious learning and teaching experience was as another consistent theme across the studies.

Openness to Engaging with Diversity

The researcher's personal experience in the autoethnographic study highlighted how an openness to the 'other' and the encounter between them, allowed for genuine engagement and a depth of experience that brought new learnings. The phenomenological investigation of adult participants' lived experiences of interreligious learning and teaching uncovered those who engaged with a PCB attitude (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) to belief and its content appeared to have a depth of experience that expanded their knowing about their own faith. Those that engaged with a Relativist attitude (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) seemed to gain learning from the experience, but it did not appear to be learning that was transformative in their own life experience.

In the case study context, the staff, students, and parents all described a genuine openness to diversity and the opportunity that it brought for interreligious and intercultural learning and teaching. The staff acknowledged it as the 'best tool in their kit' (Williams, 2011) as it allowed a genuine opportunity to 'find new ways to explore content' (Saxton et al., 2018) and to consider the thinking of

others. The students themselves were open to the learning that flowed from the diversity in their community and could see how the various perspectives on religious content or issues enabled them to compare and contrast it with their own religious/non-religious experience to make meaning for themselves. This strategy being a powerful one that Hattie and Donoghue (2016) identify as enabling the transfer of deep learning into other contexts.

Parent participants in the case study also appreciated that the diversity offered their children a bigger sense of the 'real' world and community. Openness to engaging with diversity in relation to intercultural understandings, ethical understandings and personal and social capabilities is identified in the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum encompassing skills and dispositions which ensure learners are 'equipped for living and working in an interconnected world' (Australian Curriculum, 2022). Utilising these General Capabilities in interreligious learning and teaching facilitated the transfer of skills and dispositions across learning contexts supporting the transfer of deep learning. The dignity of the human person, central to a Catholic worldview, is the focus of the openness to diversity as it recognises the perspectives of all are valued. The contribution of an educational framework for interreligious learning and teaching across the various studies is now considered.

An Educational Framework for Interreligious Learning and Teaching

The personal experience of the researcher revealed through the autoethnographic study that engaging with the religious other in dialogue and practice offered the opportunity to build knowledge and understanding about another religious tradition. The 'lived experiences' of the adults in the phenomenological study confirmed this. Regardless of belief, those with a symbolic interpretation of religious content were able to learn from the encounter with the experience offering the participants a greater understanding of another tradition and another perspective or way of thinking. The participants in this study who did not identify as believers were able to engage in the encounter and appreciate the new learnings but did not express impact on faith or spiritual growth. These studies indicated that individuals with a PCB (symbolic belief) or Relativist (symbolic non-belief) attitude (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) and a Dialogue or Colourful school pedagogical perspective (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) are potentially open to learning through the diversity of religious perspectives and practice regardless of the individual's faith commitment.

Investigating interreligious learning and teaching in the context of a Catholic school which espouses a Reconceptualist approach (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020) to Religious Education revealed a 'community of learners'. The school employed an educational paradigm allowing for 'border crossing' (Scott, 1984) in Religious Education and utilised many pedagogical strategies that were transferable across learning areas. The staff, students and parents valued learning, including that which came from other religious perspectives. The staff and students saw themselves as learners engaged in a learning journey. The teachers viewed the teaching of Religion and opportunities for interreligious

learning and teaching as part of their professional role. The staff were highly skilled in pedagogical knowledge and felt confident that if they didn't have the content knowledge required for the teaching of Religion or interreligious learning and teaching, they had 'knowledgeable others' (Sharratt, 2019) within the school community from whom they could seek assistance.

The culture of learning was such that the teachers did not feel daunted by not possessing all the religious knowledge or theological background that they may need for teaching Religion as they had strategies for their own learning. The staff enacted the learning culture they espoused and were comfortable that they were professionals and could advance their professional development (see <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards>). This, Scott (2019) proposes, is the teacher choosing 'the profession of school teaching' and engaging in learning and teaching which is 'free from many of the limitations of ecclesiastical structures' (p.12). Learning and teaching in an educational framework does not have to 'be heard as a salvific reality' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para 68) by all who engage in it. In this context, the professional approach across all subject areas enabled the teachers to use the embedded school improvement processes to ensure the learning and teaching in Religion was contemporary and rigorous, keeping pace with other curriculum areas. It also allowed opportunity for renewed understandings of the Catholic faith in and through engagement with the multiplicity of voices/perspectives in contemporary culture, revealing re-interpretations that may be genuine, plausible and resonate with present-day learners.

The students in this school context recognised that the learning strategies utilised in Religion and interreligious learning and teaching were familiar to them. They were adept at drawing upon their prior knowledge to assist in new learning and knew how to employ strategies for deep learning (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016) while expressing their learning in a variety of ways, including the arts. The pedagogies employed in all learning and teaching were 'a way of working' for the learners and familiar thinking routines enabled the learners to articulate their learning and make their thinking visible (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). The parent participants in the study appreciated that the learning and teaching in Religion and the inclusion of interreligious learning and teaching was interesting to their children. According to the parents, their children enjoyed it, and it employed a variety of ways that they could evidence their learning, so it was engaging for them. The learning and teaching, according to the parent participants, allowed for the students to be challenged and enriched by the Catholic tradition without it being a taken-for-granted given that it is neither questioned nor critiqued.

Transformation /Transfer and Religious Identity

The initial autoethnographic study brought to the fore the possibility of the interreligious encounter's potential to be transformational for the individual. Specifically, the reflected challenge from the dialogue/ learning and teaching experience may bring forth a new or nuanced knowing that can become integrated into the individual's thinking. In the initial study the researcher's reflected

experience was a challenge to her way of dealing with distractions or intrusions into liturgical participation. Experiencing how others deal with interruption in a more welcoming, family-focused way gave the researcher opportunity to ponder the possibilities for herself and choose to integrate some of these ideas into her practice and expand her consciousness. The opportunity was one in which the researcher's religious identity was further developed and her faith favourably disposed through the encounter.

The phenomenological study also revealed individuals who engaged openly and respectfully in interreligious learning and teaching, could experience 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and discover new learning that built on what they already knew, and offered them new possibilities. This study revealed the challenge or struggle of the transformational experience for an adult moving from a literal to a symbolic attitude towards religious content. It appeared that the more deeply the encounter was felt through the lifeworld existentials, the more personally transformative it seemed to be for the participant with their religious identity and faith enhanced.

Personal faith transformation within the school context, while a desirable and *hoped for* outcome, is not measurable and a matter for the individual. Within an educational framework, the ability to transfer and apply understanding in a new context is an important skill for learners. Hattie and Donoghue (2016) propose that 'learning is the outcome of the processes of moving from surface to deep to transfer. Only then will students be able to go beyond the information given to "figure things out" which is one of the few untarnishable joys of life' (p. 11). The authors propose 'it is learning to detect differences and similarities that is the key to transfer of learning' (p.8). In the case of Good Shepherd primary school, the staff emphasised developing the learners' capability to learn about other cultures and religions enabling them to see what was similar and different. The learners could then use this information when approaching other learning, with transfer skills offering greater ability to utilise learning into the future when they are confronted with new or different experiences of plurality. The work of 'Recontextualisation' (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) which 'tries to understand the Catholic faith re-interpreted in a contemporary cultural context' (p. 56) requires the *transfer* of learnings from one context to another. In this way the learning and teaching in Religion, including interreligious learning and teaching offers knowledge, skills and dispositions that may be transferred into the individual's future life.

The student participants in the case study were interested in finding out about other religions and appreciated that others may hold different perspectives to their own. The learners' familiarity with learning strategies and thinking routines appeared to manifest in a curiosity and eagerness to make connections and enrich their own understandings. The learners were confident and agile in their ability to articulate their learning, to ask questions and to utilise their learning capability across curriculum areas. In interreligious learning and teaching, this offered them scope to critique, and to come to

understandings that were potentially transferable to the community beyond the school. The parent participants considered the learning and teaching about the diversity of religions and cultures something that their children would benefit from when they participated in wider society, with skills for potentially enhancing social transformation. The transfer of the knowledge to a new context is in itself a valuable contribution to the lives of young people and is possible with good learning and teaching. For those for whom there is also a personal faith transformation through this learning and teaching, they are potentially double beneficiaries.

Educating for Identity Development

The autoethnographic study revealed that encountering another religious tradition has the potential to shape new attitudes and understandings about one's religious identity (Boys & Lee, 2006, Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). This study explored the interreligious encounter (learning and teaching experience) of an adult with a PCB attitude and an openness to a Dialogue school pedagogical perspective. It revealed the experience was one in which the personal religious identity of the researcher was enhanced or reshaped by the encounter. The second study investigated the 'lived experience' (van Manen, 2014) of interreligious learning and teaching of five adults, three of whom were Post-critical believers and two with a Relativist attitude. All the participants were open to diversity hence a Dialogue school or Colourful school pedagogical perspective. All the study participants appeared to enter wholeheartedly into the experience of learning and teaching and the experience was felt in the body and in the relationships regardless of their belief/non-belief attitude. The confrontation with otherness stirred them through the lifeworld existentials and it appeared that the Post Critical believers reflected and critiqued the experiences and recognised what it might offer them for the expansion or reshaping of their religious identity.

The Australian Government's Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Declaration, 2019, p. 6) for all Australians, includes 'a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity' as key factors for becoming confident and creative individuals. All Australian schools will therefore attend to this agenda with the Australian Curriculum General capabilities a resource that can assist. All schools are called to attend to personal identity development and in a Catholic school the *religious* component of identity is inherently considered. In the case study Catholic school context, the staff recognised the importance of presenting a Catholic worldview to the learners as well as other religious perspectives, especially for those present within the school community. This gave the learners opportunity to learn about the Catholic tradition and other religious perspectives and to give clearer shape to their own developing perspectives. It challenged the learners to come to a clearer understanding of their own perspective, though still evolving, and this potentially resources their identity development. While personal religious identity is not a measurable outcome of education, the school is able to offer learners experiences that provide opportunity for learning and teaching that can inform and challenge

this development and potentially constructively position them for positive personal identity formation. This can prove useful regardless of the students' religious/ non-religious worldview (Rossiter, 2018) however personal growth and change has to be freely chosen by the individual (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). The staff also identified the Religious life of the school as offering opportunities for learning and teaching in and through religious practices that expose the learners to religious culture and present them with experiences of a religious identity lived in a particular way.

The student participants from Good Shepherd school could recognise that learning about the religious perspectives and practices of 'others' within their community, helped them to know more about, or consolidate, their own religious or non-religious perspective. The extent of the impact on an individual's religious identity is not quantifiable, however fostering an openness to diversity and offering opportunity to learn from it is at the very least 'helping people to reflect on themselves within a perspective of "openness to humanity"' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, para 63). This attitude, at Good Shepherd, was fostered with a culture of respect, listening and hospitality towards all, creating a community that embraced and celebrated its diversity, viewing it as potential building material for identity development.

The parent participants were appreciative of the school's contribution to educating their child's religious identity through interreligious learning and teaching as they felt they were not necessarily well equipped to do this alone. Parents viewed the openness to diversity as a future orientated perspective as this was the social reality their children would continue to experience. One parent participant did question whether the acceptance or tolerance of the diversity the students exhibited would continue into adolescence with the influence of peer pressure in this life stage. This is potentially an opportunity to capitalise on continuing the work of interreligious and/or intercultural learning and teaching into the secondary sector where identity formation, both personally, and group affiliations, becomes a pertinent life stage task (Erikson, 1985).

Considerations for Religious Education and Leadership

This study has potential considerations for Religious Education and Leadership in Catholic schools within the current pluralist contexts of Australian Catholic schools (McCrindle, 2017; Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018) and the on-going dynamic of school improvement (Sharratt, 2019; Taylor-Guy et al., 2020; ACER, 2016) and self-improvement of Catholic institutional identity (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). It may also have something to offer to a dialogue about the potential benefits for interreligious learning and teaching in State Government schools. The project has revealed the overarching ideas of relationships, openness to diversity, learning within an educational framework, transformation/transfer and religious identity, and educating for identity development evolving out of the three studies. The initial two studies conducted with adults sought to understand the phenomenon of interreligious learning and teaching and how, from reflected adult experiences, one

might identify potential ways that these learning and teaching encounters might interplay with religious identity. These learnings were then able to add another perspective to the investigations in the Catholic school context.

The case study was bounded in a Catholic school that had engaged in the ECSI questionnaires to determine its 'Catholic Identity' profile according to the ECSI researchers' scales and profiles. The school's staff, students, and parent populations at the time of the data collection revealed sub-populations (81%, 92.2% and 43.5% % respectively) that were very supportive of 'Recontextualising' the Catholic profile of the school, indicating an openness of the population to a PCB attitude and Dialogue school pedagogical perspective. The process of 'Recontextualisation' is operative at the school level and also potentially within the individual. The school through 'conversations with plurality' attempts to search for a 'renewed Catholic profile' in an attempt to become 're-interpreted in the cultural context' (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p.56) and thus a plausible Catholic profile for contemporary learners. At the same time, individuals bring their understandings to the conversations and their personal religious profile or understandings may potentially be renewed through the process. The ECSI researchers advocate the *Hermeneutic Communicative Model* (Pollefeyt, 2007; 2008) as an approach that will support the recontextualising of the Catholic tradition and potentially renewed understandings for individuals. While this model is potentially a productive model for supporting such work, the school in this context utilised a Reconceptualist approach and the ECSI data revealed a large 'Recontextualising' subpopulation active within the context. This indicates that the 'Recontextualising' subpopulation has developed utilising the current operative model of Religious Education.

The research revealed the school utilised the Reconceptualist approach in alignment with its Religion Curriculum document (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020). The classroom teaching of Religion was included in the school's improvement agenda and many of the pedagogical practices and learning strategies employed in the eight learning areas of the Australian Curriculum were also utilised in the learning and teaching of Religion which included interreligious content. The Reconceptualist approach allows for interreligious learning and teaching (border crossing) through its educative context providing a platform for 'a starting point to begin conversations across religious and non-religious lines and a foundation for authentic dialogue' (Scott, 1984, p. 336). The dialogue being that of 'life, action or religious experience' (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991, para 42). The 'border crossing' facilitated through the processes of education employed educational strategies and language, as opposed to a theological language, which could potentially be exclusive. This did not mean that theology was ignored, but rather it was examined using the skills and rigor of educational inquiry.

The Reconceptualist approach allowed the teachers to embrace their professionalism utilising their pedagogical skills to engage their learners in a space of educational inquiry. Scott (2019) suggests 'this form of education involves having people look at church matters from perspectives within and

without the Church' (p. 9). Catholic perspectives, in such an approach, are always present and have voice in the dialogue, but are not the imposing voice or voices. All perspectives have a place and can contribute to the dialogic learning and teaching process with the teacher, a professional educator, skilled in orchestrating this within the parameters of education. The teacher's role in the classroom teaching of Religion including interreligious learning and teaching as explicated by Scott (2019), is to 'engage in the difficult but important work of understanding religion' (p. 12). This takes the pressure off the teacher needing to be a theological expert and places the emphasis on utilising professional judgement in accessing 'knowledgeable others' (Sharratt, 2019) if or when the need arises. The educative process is working towards mutual understanding and respect for the perspectives of others.

The theology of religions, originating around the time of Vatican II (Moyaert, 2011), was born out of a time in which the church wanted to open its windows to the world and was an attempt to 'promote friendly interreligious relationships' (p. 13). Of the traditional paradigms, *Pluralism* appears to offer the most authentic openness to the reality of religious plurality as it 'separates the possibility for salvation from mediation through Christ and holds that religions form different and equal ways of salvation' (Moyaert, 2011, p. 15). Within the school context, the forms of dialogue in which learners might engage would potentially be 'the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action or the dialogue of religious experience' (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991, para 42) and so the salvific question can be bracketed, and the experience is one of education and relationship and not limited to a theological exchange. Within an educative framework, the consideration of similarities and differences between perspectives would be an accepted and expected learning strategy.

Potentially what is more pertinent to the experiences of interreligious learning and teaching in a school context is the conviction that true '[d]ialogue is born when I am capable of recognizing (sic) others as a gift of God and accept they have something to tell me' (Tweet of Pope Francis, 2016). This brings the question of 'revelation' to the fore.

Whose revelation? - Who counts?

Within the Catholic Church, there exists an understanding by some (or many) that 'revelation' is held in scripture and tradition as a body of 'revealed truths', and Christian belief as upholding these 'truth claims' (Moran, 2009; Maraldo, 2010; Scott, 2020). Based on the studies in this research, this is problematic if engaging in learning and teaching in dialogue with another tradition. Moran (2009) proposed:

Faith-revelation needs a new or improved pattern of authority. In the world of Vatican I, revelation was a deposit of "eternal decrees." The faith that corresponded to that revelation was belief in the truth of the teachings of the church's bishops. In the world after Vatican II, revelation is better understood as the present activity of God, and faith is the obedience of the whole person in a relationship of trust and overflowing love. (p. 69)

This understanding postulates the person who is ‘believing in’, can experience the revealing God in all of creation and this resonates with Pope Francis’ notion that dialogue with ‘the other’ is born when one believes the other has something worthwhile to say. In this way an individual’s faith or ‘belief in’ is dynamic and directed towards revelation that is happening in the present and not in a fixed or static interpretation of the past. If interreligious learning and teaching is situated within such a mindset, the ‘why’ of this engagement allows for those of a symbolic non-believing stance to engage as the focus is on the present interaction and what that may reveal. A literal attitude (belief or non-belief) is going to be challenged by interreligious learning and teaching as proponents will have a predominantly fixed understanding of God (or no God) and be intolerant of alternate religious/non-religious positions (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). The post-critical believing attitude may be a key enabler in allowing individuals to submit wholeheartedly to a relationship of ‘trust and overflowing love’ that is dynamic and personally accountable and does not hold the certainty of ‘eternal decrees’.

The recognition that all creation holds an image and likeness of a relational God and the gift of an inherent human dignity, is an anthropological foundation of Christianity. Hence for Christians, ‘the path of dialogue becomes possible and fruitful when based on the awareness of each individual’s dignity and of the unity of all people in a common humanity, with the aim of sharing and building up together a common destiny’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, para 21). Interreligious learning and teaching is a step towards building a shared humanity with all individuals able to maintain their own religious/non-religious understandings and at the same time, with the possibility of expanding such understandings. Moran (2009) suggested that no religion can claim to hold God’s revelation, rather, ‘each religion is understood to have an interpretation of divine revelation, that language allows different religions to live together peacefully and makes it possible for one religion to learn from another without abandoning the truth it knows (p. 4). In the context of a Catholic school, interreligious learning and teaching within the framework of education, allows for a variety of perspectives or ‘multiple angles of vision’ (Scott, 1984) which is necessary for the examination of Catholic perspectives from inside and out (Scott, 2019). This will give opportunity for critique and appreciation and potentially give rise to new understandings of the Catholic tradition in this contemporary world, which are accessible and plausible for young individuals (a Recontextualised Catholic identity).

Within an educational framework, salvation need not be a dominant issue as inherent human dignity and belief in on-going revelation affords the validity of many paths to God that may potentially pollinate each other. The consideration of one ultimate reality, a revealing God, supports the cross fertilization of paths and potential enrichment for the individual’s journey with moments of togetherness, which may *build* bridges or *be* bridges (allowing traffic in both directions) moving towards our common destiny. The inclusion of the voices of other religious traditions could potentially enhance each other’s knowledge and religious journeys allowing the individual to engage more plausibly and authentically in their tradition and personal religious life. For those with no religious affiliation, there

is potential to appreciate the religious perspectives of others and engage respectfully and genuinely in life.

Interreligious learning and teaching utilising the Reconceptualist approach (Scott, 1984; Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020) and the conviction that each religion has ‘an interpretation of divine revelation’ (Moran, 2009), may potentially offer a paradigm that is beneficial for re-igniting the debate about the place of education about religions and worldviews in the curriculum of all Australian schools. It may also support the Declaration (Education Council, 2019, p. 6), which emphasises ‘a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity’ as important for developing confident and creative Australians. Interreligious learning and teaching for students in all schools, including State Schools, could support personal identity development by exploring religious and non-religious perspectives and understandings in an educational context. It could serve as a platform for enhancing social cohesion and countering racism and violent extremism (Halafoff, 2015; Halafoff & Lam, 2015; Lovat, 2018; Maddox, 2014) through offering religious and non-religious perspectives a voice within an educational arena. Jackson (2014) outlines knowledge and skills that could be utilised in such an educational project with the learning and teaching offering the potential for building cultures of connectedness as students learn of their similarities and potentially become more tolerant of their differences. Giving voice to religious and non-religious perspectives within an educational context acknowledges the reality of the context in which learners live and can assist them to begin to respectfully navigate a world of multiple worldviews which will continue throughout their lives. It also acknowledges that everybody’s voice counts and offers potential for transfer/transformation for individuals as they learn more about others. Possibly for the Post-critical believer, when ‘truth’ comes with ‘trust and overflowing love’ (Moran, 2009, p. 69), the individual can find the courage to let it transform them. Within a school context, an understanding of the why of interreligious learning and teaching will be largely dependent upon the school leadership.

Leadership

Many contemporary Australian schools have been engaged in an improvement agenda utilising the *National School Improvement Tool* (2016). For Catholic schools in Queensland employing a Reconceptualist approach to Religious Education, this improvement agenda is inclusive of the classroom teaching of Religion. Thus, resulting in the learning and teaching of Religion being monitored and scrutinised for improvement, along with other Australian curriculum learning areas. The learning strategies, general capabilities and dispositions deemed appropriate for the enhancement of learning and teaching are transferred across learning areas where appropriate. This process is led by the Principal and school leadership team requiring them to be ‘lead learners’ (Sharratt, 2019) and in the Catholic school context requires them to be lead learners of Religious Education. Religious Education, inclusive of the two complementary dimensions; the Religious life of the school and the classroom teaching of Religion (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2020) necessitates the Principal and leadership team to be

knowledgeable and also authentic models of a Catholic Christian way of living within the school community. The leadership of a purposeful and intentional improvement agenda can set the learning and religious culture of the school on a positive trajectory.

The building of the religious culture of the school through good leadership sets the tone of the school with a connected culture improving learning for all (Hattie & Smith, 2021, Sharratt, 2019) and working towards building a 'civilisation of love' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017). The leadership of the school, in their responsibility for leading the Religious life of the community will attend to the spiritual formation of the staff and students and potentially families, through opportunities for activities such as prayer, retreats and community service. These are invitational experiences and ones in which individuals may engage and enhance their own spiritual or religious journey. Within the classroom, good practitioners are motivated by improvement, and teachers as professionals are adept at utilising their learnings across the spectrum of learning areas. It is the school leadership who can model and develop 'the coherence between what they say and what they do' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, para 89) communicating the integrity of the educational community. Thus, with good leadership to support them, practitioners of Religious Education can be courageous enough to seize opportunities for interreligious learning and teaching without the fear or need to hold tight to 'Church' foundations that may impede good education. This leads to the question; where to from here?

Yet Another Journey Begins...

This long journey of small studies has focussed attention on exploring perceptions of interreligious learning and teaching and how this may interplay with religious identity. It has been a journey of revealing a plethora of opportunities for 'human togetherness' that are ripe with potential for deepening relationships, embracing diversity, learning from one another, and building material for personal identity development and possible transformation. The autoethnographic and phenomenological studies conducted with adults, identified the potential for individuals with a PCB attitude to religious content and a Dialogue school pedagogical perspective (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) to engage in interreligious learning and teaching experiences that were personally transformational and enabled them to recontextualise the Catholic narrative for their lives. In the context of a Catholic school, with a strong percentage of the population choosing to engage with plurality and the Christian story through Religious Education inclusive of interreligious learning and teaching, the Reconceptualist approach and a strong improvement agenda were apparent. While the reconceptualist approach to Religious Education remains a contentious paradigm both nationally and internationally, the seeming gains in this school context suggest its potential warrants further investigation. It would be of particular interest to consider if the improvement agenda and the strong collegial culture were also factors that contributed to allowing the possibilities for interreligious learning and teaching in a primary school, to be unleashed.

The potential for interreligious learning and teaching to resource identity development is yet another question that could merit further research. Would the continuity of this type of learning through all the educational sectors assist in positively supporting interreligious and intercultural relationships through adolescence and beyond? Would this assist with Australia's on-going problem with racism (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019)? The General Capabilities in the Australian curriculum offer a map for progressing many of the skills and dispositions that may be useful in fostering identity development and may also be cultivated through social emotional learning or wellbeing programs. The content of interreligious learning and teaching can be facilitated effectively utilising these capabilities.

The findings of this body of work also point to 'Leadership' in a Catholic school as having a key role in the school's willingness and potential capacity to engage in respectful and effective interreligious learning and teaching. It would be of benefit to investigate further into the role of the Principal/Leadership team as 'lead learners' (Sharratt, 2019) in all domains including the Religious life of a school. The culture of connectedness and learning, and the leaders being confident in *why* they were doing things were potentially what enabled the success of interreligious learning and teaching in the current case study context. Exploring this in a range of school contexts, such as a variety of school sizes, different approaches to Religious Education and schools with a variety of ECSI results, could offer further insight. This research has opened a door to what is possible for schools wishing to engage with the plurality of contemporary social and religious contexts. Exploring this in wider and deeper ways will add to the knowledge we are constructing about how we might build a civilisation for the common good.

Strengths and Limitations

The exploration of interreligious learning and teaching and its potential interplay with religious identity through the three investigations in this study has both strengths and limitations. The focused nature of the research is potentially both a strength and a limitation. The ability to look closely and deeply into people's realities has enabled the researcher to uncover more than what lies on the surface. It offers the opportunity for deep learning and the potential for transfer of learnings to another context. At the same time, the small number of participants and contexts limits the research as there is not the potential for generalisability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014; Patton, 2015).

The case study was limited in that it offers the perspective of one approach to Religious Education in which interreligious learning and teaching was an element. While the approach appears to support the learning in this context, there may be other approaches that could just as successfully enable interreligious learning and teaching, but the focus on this school limited the study to this approach. The researcher has put upfront her bias towards this approach, and this also potentially impacts the findings. To mitigate this bias the researcher did not propose or allude to the approach as a factor in interreligious learning and teaching in the interviews or interactions during the school visits.

The sample sizes in all of the studies were small and potentially a larger and more diverse group could have produced different results. As the data sources were human experiences, potentially the point in time may also produce varying findings. Further research could substantiate and/or extend the findings of this overall project. The parent sample in the final study was small with all female respondents. Research suggests that females are more likely to participate in research in the social sciences (Nuzzo, 2021) and due to the COVID-19 restrictions at the data collection time, the researcher was not able to canvas additional participants. However, it was felt the voice of parents was important for the study.

Social desirability bias which ‘can lead to overestimation of the positive and diminished heterogeneity in responses, resulting in a questionable appearance of consensus’ (Bergen & Labonté, 2020, p. 784) may have been a factor in the case study interviews, particularly in the student focus groups. Triangulation with other data forms and across the participant groups was used to minimize this bias. The different participant groups of staff, students and parents were compared, and the school’s ECSI quantitative data, along with the school policies and documents, and researcher observations during immersion periods were triangulated to uncover potential discrepancies or consistencies.

Insights into what might be possible for individuals and schools willing to engage in interreligious learning and teaching in a primary school context are important for our contemporary world. The study is limited by the capacity of the researcher to provide sufficiently thick descriptions throughout the individual studies. Should these descriptions not be thick enough for readers to find resonances, the potentiality for transferability declines. Yet the researcher aspires that at the very least, questions will be raised that readers will deem important enough to explore.

Conclusion

‘Insiders and outsiders,
belonging and feeling left out.

Where do we feel at home?

Where do we feel lost?’

(Simmonds, 2001)

This excerpt from Simmonds’ (2001) meditation on a Sieger Köder painting ‘Home’ juxtaposes times in life when one can feel challenged/distressed with the joy of being ‘at home’. This brings to the fore the ebb and flow within the individual which may occur in an interreligious encounter when one moves from known to unknown, native to stranger. How one deals with this internal turmoil can

potentially be supported by a symbolic belief /disbelief attitude and a pedagogical perspective of openness to the voice of diversity. Within a Catholic school context, the fostering of symbolic belief and the inclusion of the Catholic perspective in pedagogical endeavours supports the work of recontextualising or re-interpreting the Catholic narrative in the contemporary cultural context (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). Haers (2004) advocates;

Our schools are open laboratories for common life in our societies not only in the sense that knowledge, skills and attitudes are transmitted to facilitate the building up and sustaining of our societies, but also in the sense that the open exploration of community life in schools provides a playground to enact and design how future society will look. (p. 315)

The author, referring to Catholic schools (though equally applicable to State schools), indicates the potential for the school to be a playground for designing our future society with the young learners. Designing requires imagination, experimentation, and a vision for what the project wants to achieve. The Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) advocates an education:

That is sound and open, that pulls down the walls of exclusivity, promoting the richness and diversity of individual talents and extending the classroom to embrace every corner of the social experience in which education can generate solidarity, sharing and communion. (para.10)

This offers a vision for the educational community of the Catholic school, and potentially a State school, which can accommodate the inclusion of interreligious learning and teaching, and places an emphasis on relationships and community, and points to our common destiny.

The researcher has had personal experiences of the 'gem' that interreligious learning and teaching is, and can be, for one's personal faith journey and developing one's knowledge of 'other ways of being religious'. Knowing who one is, can be given greater clarity in knowing who one is not, regardless of religious/non-religious affiliation. Fostering respectful relationships and building connectedness is conducive to improved learning outcomes and enhances one's wellbeing. The gains from interreligious learning and teaching when facilitated appropriately, are many. This research has suggested that the Reconceptualist approach to Religious Education in a Catholic school could be one possible way to successfully enable this necessary component in our modern world. It has also highlighted the dynamic and static nature of identity, which includes religious identity. Regarding the Reconceptualist approach, Scott (1984) advocated almost 40 years ago 'we can hardly yet imagine the richness and complexity of this emerging paradigm' (p.333). Perhaps it is time for the approach to be embraced as a real possibility for the future of Religious Education in Australian Catholic schools, especially with its potential to facilitate the much-needed dialogue in interreligious learning and teaching. It may also provide a paradigm for exploring the possibilities of interreligious learning and

teaching in Australian State Schools. Taking this approach seriously has potential to engage all learners (religious and non-religious) in rigorous learning and teaching that could resource their future and the future of our world in 'building a civilisation of love' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013).

Epilogue

The reflection of a middle-aged researcher...

Stories and encounters with 'otherness' continue to pique my curiosity, challenge my thinking, expand the knowings I think I have about God, and remind me that I am on a continuous journey of learning and growing as a human person in a loving, trusting relationship with God. Utilising skills and dispositions for respectful interactions and learning to attentively listen to others seems simple, yet not always easy when others' perspectives are very different to mine. In these times, I've looked for 'that which holds us together' by listening to and learning a little more about what 'may appear to tear us apart' and trying to hear the 'human' in the stories and experiences we share.

I will always metaphorically choose to 'cross the road' and 'take the little girl safely home' in any encounter with otherness, despite the uncomfortable feelings of vulnerability. I've learned on this journey that this 'frontier space' requires openness and 'holds' uncertainty and yet with courage and reflective practice, the learnings can transform me. Through the many personal experiences, the sharing of stories and the sharing of faith, I've continued to expand my 'humanness' and inch closer to living my life to its full potential while endeavouring to allow others to do the same.

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Appendix A

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MOVING FROM

Theory to Practice

Religious Educators in the Classroom



Edited by
RICHARD RYMARZ & PAUL SHARKEY





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This book could not be more timely. For too long, and in too many places, academic reflection on RE, ecclesial frameworks for the subject and advanced practice in the classroom have functioned in a tri-partite rather than tri-une manner. In gathering the insights of impressive contributors, the editors not only demonstrate the creative vitality of RE in their national context, they model an inter-dependent vision of RE which has relevance for dioceses, theologians and practitioners across the globe.

Prof. Anthony Towey
Aquinas Centre for Theological Literacy
St Mary's University

This work admirably succeeds in its stated aim to throwing light onto Religious Education theory as it finds expression in living, breathing, professional practice in the classroom. Its eighteen chapters by RE practitioners, many of whom are classroom teachers, makes a significant contribution to the practical grounding of RE discourse in Australia. Many contributors provide pedagogical responses within the Enhancing Catholic School Identity space and many directly draw on the national RE framing paper. This volume enlarges the canvas of RE, addressing for example, spirituality, meditation, youth ministry and liberal arts among others. Most chapters helpfully conclude with issues and challenges for the way forward. This is a highly relevant work that celebrates the critical role of the classroom teacher.

John McGrath – Senior Education Officer
Faith Formation & Religious Education

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INTRODUCTION

The motivation for putting together this volume comes from much experience of Religious Education in Catholic schools. It is hard to come up with a single and dominant factor that provided the inspiration needed to take on the considerable task of editing a book that brings together such a range of leading practitioners. One experience, however, may give some insight into why this project came to be undertaken. Some time ago one of the editors was asked to reflect on what people in the future would say about the efforts that we made, as a Church, to respond to the profound cultural changes that have emerged in recent times. It was a good question!

After some consideration, two points came to mind, one general and the other much more specific. Firstly, future generations may be curious as to why we spent what seemed to be a lot of time and effort on internecine disputes. There is really no justification for this. In times of profound cultural change any community that cannot move beyond a fixation on its internal divisions and disputes will have limited appeal. Secondly, and thinking here in particular of the Catholic educational community, why did there appear to be such an emphasis on general responses such as developing framing documents or broad statements of principle, and not on how this translated into what teachers did in the classroom? There is certainly a place for planning and proper conceptualization, but in the final analysis this

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work is preparatory to what will take place in the classroom where the human interaction between teachers and students takes place.

This point is made more strongly if we think of the work that RE teachers do. It is they and not clergy or professional theologians who are generally most engaged with young people. Imagine what will be happening tomorrow morning and the morning after and the morning after that in a multitude of Catholic schools all over the country. Teachers will be engaging with students on moral issues, presenting the Church's understanding of sacraments, reading the scriptures, inviting questions, pondering the idea of a loving God acting in the world. This is not an exhaustive list. The substantial point though is that it is in a classroom setting that the human encounter that is at the heart of the gospels takes place. To neglect or under emphasise the importance of this encounter could be something that future generations will look back on and critically ponder.

A preeminent emphasis on what happens in the classroom should be central to planning and resourcing in Religious Education in Catholic schools. This emphasis recognises that the delivery of Religious Education must be an area of serious enquiry and evaluation. It should be a key consideration of, amongst other things, how we develop and refine curriculum documents. The risk is that if this emphasis on classroom practice is not in place then a fissure could develop between what is expected to happen in Religious Education and what actually takes place. An example may be helpful to further illustrate this point.

Some time ago, one of the authors was giving a presentation to a number of experienced RE teachers on a pedagogical methodology that had been adapted by schools in a particular diocese. As such, the presentation assumed a good understanding of the approach and many of the points made sought to extend and consolidate existing practices. During the presentation it became more and more obvious that there was some confusion amongst the participants about what was being offered. The cause of this became much clearer during the first morning break when some of the teachers taking part were asked about their impression of the material that was being discussed. A general consensus point was that the ideas were new and quite

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challenging. This came as a surprise as the pedagogical approach had been well described in the official curriculum documents and had been in place for some time. To reiterate, the seminar was not intended for teachers who had no prior experience with the methodology. It was certainly not an introductory course. One teacher's comment clarified the issue. When asked about the approach she noted, 'Well none of us actually use this'. The reasons for why teachers were not following what was set out in the curriculum are worthy of further consideration but this is a topic for another day and perhaps another edited volume! The key point is that what was happening 'in the classroom' was not what was expected and planned for and this had a number of obvious and important implications. Three will be highlighted.

Firstly, proper professional development and formation is compromised when assumptions made about current practices are not well-founded. Secondly, development of resource material and other support material should be based on an accurate understanding of what teachers are actually doing. Thirdly, proper sequencing and spiralling of learning for students cannot take place effectively if present and projected learnings do not conform to stated objectives. These and other implications all undermine the experience of Religious Education for students if there is not a shared and equal emphasis on planning and delivery.

What this volume seeks to emphasise and celebrate is what takes place in classroom RE in Catholic schools. It seeks to provide a stronger connection between planning and delivery by recognising the critical contribution of the classroom teacher. A very worthwhile goal to work toward is a more unified approach in Religious Education. To this end, the contributions in this volume seek to give some insight into what happens in the classroom, and thus further the considerable efforts made in Religious Education in Catholic schools in this country.

Brendan Hyde's chapter on Godly Play explores how Jerome Berryman's approach to theological play has been translated into classroom practice. He argues that Catholic schools do not 'do' Godly Play but rather their Religious Education curricula are

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influenced by the key principles and practices of the Godly Play process. Anne-Marie Irwin's chapter on Sofia Cavalletti in the classroom complements Brendan Hyde's chapter by contrasting Cavalletti's Montessori method with Berryman's Godly Play. Anne-Marie presents the Montessori method through the Scripture and Liturgy Teaching (SALT) approach, developed initially through her doctoral research. Marty Ogle's chapter focuses on the Making Jesus Real (MJR) approach developed by Peter 'Mitch' Mitchell. MJR focuses on bringing Jesus' message, teachings and actions into the lived experience of students, using slogans such as 'fly like an eagle – don't hang with the turkeys' and the positive psychology of building on one's strengths, rather than focusing on pathology.

Alison Gore makes the case for a dialogical approach to teaching Scripture in the classroom in her chapter and uses the story of the Ethiopian in Acts who asked how it would be possible to understand the text 'unless someone guides me'. Alison draws from sources as diverse as the NCEC Framing Paper for Religious Education; Rebecca Nye's work on spirituality; and Pollefeyt's reflections on the teacher as witness, specialist and moderator in her reflections on how such guidance might be offered. Peter Mudge offers practical approaches for teaching spirituality in the classroom through strategies such as the Rule of St Benedict, the foundational Christian practice of breathing and the Examen. Laura Avery and Michelle Dermody continue the spirituality theme with their exploration on the ways in which mindfulness, meditation, prayer and the Examen can be incorporated into the life of the school. Laura and Michelle also refer to the Making Jesus Real approach presented in Marty Ogle's chapter.

Catherine Brown considers the Religious Education classroom through a 'Francis lens' because she believes his vision enhances and revitalises the curriculum, grounded as it is in love and mercy. Paul Sharkey regards the Religious Education classroom through the bifocal lenses of a Vatican II theology of Revelation and the findings of the Enhancing Catholic School Identity research. He reflects on the current cultural context and offers a Pedagogy of Encounter as a way to engage students in a form of Religious Education that is meaningful and formative for them.

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Kevin Lenehan reflects on the revisions of the Religious Education frameworks currently underway in the four Victorian dioceses. He also describes the pedagogies of encounter and empathetic dialogue that become necessary when one appreciates the pluralising, detraditionalising and individualising cultural currents which shape the context for Religious Education today. The dialogical approach demands that teachers avoid being content heavy in their teaching to develop differentiated programs of learning where students can make meaning of the content from within their own horizons of understanding. Rina Madden, Ann France, Julie O'Donnell and Leeanne Butler offer a very concrete rendering of the Pedagogy of Encounter in their chapter which invites us into the life of St Joseph's Catholic primary school in Hawthorn. Here strategies of dialogue, provocations and deep thinking are explored in a narrative which stays close to the living action of a school.

A Catholic liberal arts approach to teaching Religious Education is advocated in the chapter by Renée Köhler-Ryan and Janina Starkey. This approach offers students a space of freedom, in which they can ask fundamental questions about what it means to be human and to lead a good life. Angelo Belmonte and Amber Calleja present the Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia Religious Education pathway in their chapter, arguing that it provides students with a program of learning and formation that is focused on the student's faith journey and their participation in the wider life of the Church. The Normativity of the Future approach developed by Reimund Bieringer and further enhanced with Mary Elsbernd along with Peter Pitzele's Bibliodrama approach to Scripture provides the foundation for the chapter offered by Karen Bergin and Ide Garvey, Principal and Religious Education Leader in St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Sunshine, Melbourne. Here themes of hope and God's dream for creation predominate as the authors share how they combated the secularisation of their school by asking their students to share their experience of Religious Education. On the basis of this student experience the teachers embarked upon a journey of charism renewal, facilitated planning sessions and an appreciative inquiry approach to improving Religious Education in the school.

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Michael Vial focuses on the skills and dispositions that are important for a student to gain in Religious Education. He reflects on the capabilities and dispositions literature from a Catholic perspective by presenting the recent redesign of the Religious Education curriculum in South Australia. David Ivers begins his chapter on the experience of Sydney Catholic schools with the Emmaus story and the three phases that can be discerned in it: Bewilderment, Inquiry and Questioning, and the Moment of Awakening and Action. These phases provide an organising structure for the chapter which covers topics as diverse as Backward Design theory, a process approach to pedagogy, Godly Play, e-learning, and authentic learning and assessment.

Christine Robinson and Chris Hackett explore the spiritual and religious capabilities associated with deeper learning in their chapter which focuses on the experience of Religious Education in Western Australia. Richard Rymarz presents the findings from a study he undertook of the ways in which textbook resources are used in the Religious Education classroom. The study began with qualitative research interviews of ten RECs and these interviews provided a basis for the development of a survey which was then completed by 867 teachers and RECs. He explores the links between content and pedagogy in this study which also considers the impact of online resources as well as the relationship between curriculum frameworks and the resources used in the learning and teaching process. Last, but by no means least, Toni Foley and Maree Dinan-Thompson reflect on the impact for religious educators of the increasing numbers of students who come from other religions or from non-religious backgrounds. Interreligious dialogue is presented as a way forward and the research of Belgian scholars such as Pollefeyt, Bouwens, Roebben and Haers was brought into a dialogue with Brennan, Ryan and Moran and others who support pedagogies aligned with the interreligious dialogue seen as essential in our context, shaped as it is by pluralism.

Those who are familiar with the discipline of Religious Education will recognise that as editors we have not scoured the nation to select contributors to this book who share our views and philosophy.

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Rather, we have asked practitioners who come from very different places to share their diverse approaches. Our hope in so doing was that we would throw light onto Religious Education theory as it finds expression in living, breathing, professional practice in the classroom. We did not seek to harmonise the different approaches that have been articulated in these chapters into a single homogenised method. For example, the Godly Play approach presented in Brendan Hyde's chapter is seen by some as complementing the Montessori method presented in Anne-Marie Irwin's chapter, whereas others see these two methods as being like oil and water. Similarly, the Making Jesus Real approach advanced by Mary Ogle is seen as reducing Christian faith to humanised values by some, whereas others argue the approach leads students to the person of Christ, truly present in the midst of their experience. We have not sought to reconcile these differences because we believe that it is in the very differences that the kind of professional reflection and critique that leads to richer and better practice becomes possible, always for the sake of improved outcomes for the students in our schools.

CHAPTER 18

OTHER RELIGIONS & NO RELIGION *A classroom approach to interreligious dialogue in religious education*

by Toni Foley & Maree Dinan-Thompson

Introduction

The advancing tide of ‘no religious’ affiliation and the increased diversity of institutional religious identity in Australia continues to highlight the pervasive reality of a pluralistic society (Bouma & Halafoff, 2017; ABS, 2016; McCrindle, 2017; Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018). Globalisation through immigration, along with cultural changes, has brought diversity within religions and a plethora of options for religious and non-religious worldviews. Catholic schools are no longer primarily populated by Catholics nor necessarily staffed by practicing Catholics with strong personal faith. Many students in contemporary Catholic schools are products of a de-traditionalising society and often not beneficiaries of religious or other traditions handed down through generations (Boeve, 2012). Modern Catholic schools, however, have evolved with and through the influence of many factors including globalisation, changes in education, a decreased engagement with institutional Church, digital technology advancements and economic and environmental developments, to name a few.

The 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population census revealed that in the category of religious affiliation, adherents to ‘no religion’ (30%) now make up the largest group (ABS, 2016). According to the ABS, ‘no religion’ in this census included secular

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and other spiritual beliefs with most adherents in the group in the younger age brackets. McCrindle (2017, p. 7) in investigating faith and belief in Australia, drilled deeper into the 'total Christianity' numbers to identify that approximately 14% of those who may have identified with Christianity in the past, when given the option, chose to identify as 'spiritual not religious'. This perhaps indicates an openness to the spiritual rather than the simplistic assumption of hostility or indifference towards formal religions. Nonetheless, the plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews in the general Australian population is evident and many Catholic and Independent schools are finding their school populations aligning with this trend (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2018). Such changes in religious, social and cultural factors have impacted reality in Catholic schools with students and teachers potentially from other religions or no religion. This chapter offers some perspectives on how teachers might address this in the classroom utilising effective pedagogies to engage in interreligious dialogue.

The Contemporary Catholic School

The educational landscape of the 21st century is one of rapid change with students being prepared for future occupations that may not yet exist (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Wiliam, 2011). Fullan and Langworthy (2014) propose that the new aim of education needs to be deep learning that prepares students for a future that requires agile thinking and continuous problem-solving. The authors propose:

The goals of deep learning are that students will gain the competencies and dispositions that will prepare them to be creative, connected, and collaborative lifelong problem solvers and to be healthy, holistic human beings who not only contribute to but also create the common good in today's knowledge-based, creative, interdependent world.
(Fullan and Langworthy, 2014, p. 2)

The intention is for all students to flourish as holistic, connected, contributing human beings. This is consistent with the *Melbourne Declaration's* (MCEETYA, 2008) emphasis on a desire for the wellbeing of all students. This wellbeing is inclusive of the spiritual

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and supports 'an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). The Declaration and leading scholars in education, recognise the importance of a holistic education which embraces diversity in preparing students to be future citizens creating a world for the common good of all.

In further extending the vision for education in Catholic institutions, The Congregation for Catholic Education challenges educational institutions to create valid educational projects, that is, education that is:

sound and open, that pulls down the walls of exclusivity, promoting the richness and diversity of individual talents and extending the classroom to embrace every corner of social experience in which education can generate solidarity, sharing and communion. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017, para. 20)

This guides Catholic educational leaders to draw deeply from the particularity of their social context to ensure education is real and relevant to the lives of their students. It urges educators to use these contexts as a basis to share their humanity through which Jesus Christ may be encountered in the witness of the Christian. The document proposes a way forward for Catholic education amidst the difficulties of the ever-increasing plurality of contexts, advocating that a culture of true dialogue is required and that this dialogue:

takes place within an ethical framework of requirements and attitudes for formation, as well as social objectives. The ethical requirements for dialogue are freedom and equality; the participants in the dialogue must be free from their contingent interests and must be prepared to recognise the dignity of all parties ... It is a 'grammar of dialogue,' as pointed out by Pope Francis, able to 'build bridges and ... to find answers to the challenges of our time. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017, para. 22)

The call to dialogue has resounded in numerous Church documents from Vatican II to the present day (Second Vatican Council, 1965; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991; Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013) and is a challenge that the Church

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addresses to all Christians. Thus Catholic schools, as part of the Church, are called to mission, therefore to engage respectfully and authentically in dialogue to support and educate new generations into a way of being in communion with all of humanity.

Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious and/or intercultural learning which is facilitated through dialogue, has become an issue for consideration and debate for all Australian schools that reflect the diversity of contemporary society. This was highlighted in the development and review of the Australian Curriculum. Many Australian scholars (Halafoff, 2015; Halafoff & Lam, 2015; Lovat, 2018; Maddox, 2014) called for a place for *education about religions and worldviews* in the curriculum of Australian schools as a strategy for social cohesion and countering violent extremism. Though the topic of religion in schools remains hotly contested, Halafoff (2015) acknowledges it has been largely ignored in the Executive Summary and Recommendations of the *Review of the Australian Curriculum* (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). This further emphasises that in the Catholic school, the reality of 'other religions' and 'no religion' needs to be addressed. Key to considerations for interreligious dialogue within the learning and teaching of religion, complemented by the religious life of a school as proposed in this chapter, are the Enhancing Catholic School identity (ECSI) typologies (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014), with a focus on the Post Critical Belief (PCB) and Victoria scales.

In considering interreligious dialogue within the context of the Australian classroom, Erebus International proposed that, 'maximum benefit will be gained from dialogue when we have some knowledge of the culture or faith we are encountering' (2006, p. 102). Students need to have some general knowledge about religions and non-religious worldviews, including one's own tradition or perspective, to be able to enter meaningfully into a dialogical encounter. Pollefeyt (2007) advocates that the starting point for interreligious dialogue in the school setting is 'radical openness to diversity within the classroom' (2007, p. XII). In promoting and developing the ECSI preferred typologies, the Catholic Dialogue school nurtures Post-

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critical belief and authentic dialogue to support students in their exploration of contemporary, pluralistic culture. This is done in the hope that these students come to renewed understandings of their own religious identity.

The Dialogue school (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014) endeavours to offer opportunities that can guide students to access their own religious experience and search for, be open to, and be discerning of, the many religious and non-religious interpretations offered to them through the dialogical encounter. The encounter invites the individual to take responsibility for his/her own religious or non-religious viewpoint and to embrace new or renewed understandings and meanings. The Catholic Dialogue school unashamedly invites students into belief through experiences in the learning and teaching process, and through the witness of individuals living their faith and taking responsibility for their religious viewpoint, though this is not a measurable outcome. Interreligious dialogue in the modern classroom is tasked with engaging students from a variety of cognitive belief styles, as indicated by the ECSI research. All cognitive belief styles could be well placed to begin with discovering the diversity (religious and non-religious) within the classroom and building general knowledge of the various religious and non-religious perspectives within the school. Thus the way will be paved for interreligious dialogue.

Roebben (2009) in reviewing *Interreligious Learning* edited by Pollefeyt (2007) summarises interreligious learning as:

Young people are involved in learning to recognize, know, and appreciate differences. At a more profound level, this implies an encounter not only with differences, but also with the otherness of the other. (Roebben, 2009, p. 103)

The task of interreligious learning, whilst developing knowledge and understanding that explores differences as well as similarities, is to connect students at the more personal level in which they are called to dig deep and encounter each other in dialogue within a respectful reciprocity. The encounter demands an openness to the inclusion of the social and cultural dimensions of the religious/non-

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religious experience as this is part of the lived human experience, and is intimately linked to the individual's search for meaning through interpretation of the world. As interreligious dialogue requires vulnerability; this necessitates the establishment of respectful relationships and protocols for engagement which creates a space of openness, sensitivity and safety.

Pedagogies for Interreligious Dialogue

A space of openness which engenders a willingness to allow oneself to be vulnerable in sharing is an important design. A starting point for achieving it can be embarking on interreligious learning by probing the classroom and community context, and by building basic general knowledge around religions and philosophies. Yet developing general religious knowledge including religious language, symbols, images, practices and traditions could be described as akin to learning a second language (Brennan and Ryan, 1996; Moran, 1989). Employing pedagogies like *Morning Routines* (Dooner, n.d) devised originally to support the building of the general knowledge of second language learners in their literacy and numeracy, could facilitate effective and timely up-skilling for many contemporary students of religion. The pedagogy, operative in the primary years, includes the four elements of Day, Date & Weather; Talk for learning; Sentence of the day and 100 Days of learning. These elements have been found to improve student vocabulary and background subject knowledge. The pedagogy has been successfully utilised by several teachers of religion to facilitate the growth of religious knowledge and vocabulary.

Using the *Day, Date & Weather* in the Morning Routine, teachers have developed students' knowledge of important holy days, holy months, festivals, seasons, holy places and symbols for a variety of religions and spiritualities including Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Hindu, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Sikh. The exploration of religions and spiritualities started with those represented in the classroom and then moved beyond. The knowledge is utilised in the *Talk for Learning* which encourages students to speak to each other about what they have learnt. Students are encouraged to use

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correct vocabulary, to speak in complete sentences, to be interesting and where appropriate to include their own perspective. *Sentence of the Day* encourages writing good sentences that include important information about the holy days, festivals, symbols and/or seasons. The *100 Days of Learning* component could include counting down to religious festivals, the month of Ramadan, the days of Lent or other numerical aspects or religions. The increase in general religious knowledge has developed students' appreciation of the religious diversity of the classroom and the world. However, interreligious dialogue calls for deeper engagement.

Increased levels of religious knowledge support students' capacities to engage in interreligious dialogue, while concurrent development of skills is necessary for facilitating the process of dialogue. Such skill development is well supported through the Australian Curriculum (P-10) General Capabilities (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d) that are refined and identified as 21st Century skills in the senior curriculum syllabuses. These skills which include creative and critical thinking, personal and social skills, communication, collaboration and teamwork and ICT skills, could be effectively utilised in interreligious dialogue where students are called to engage in religious learning that also encompasses the 'real world' responsibility of one's own religious perspective. Thus, learners are challenged to be critical, manage themselves in social interactions and to move beyond detachment or indifference to *own* their worldview.

Managing open discussions about religion and religious issues in a classroom is challenging for both teachers and students. It necessitates holding multiple perspectives in creative tension with students requiring skills and dispositions to manage themselves respectfully within this diversity of viewpoints. In supporting interreligious dialogue, the ASPIRE principles and pedagogy (Roffey, 2017) could offer protocols for respectful ways of working and the safe participation of all. The pedagogy referred to as Circles or Circle Solutions (Roffey 2014) has a structure with flexible content and agreed practices for engagement, whilst also utilising thinking routines and games. Proficiency in such a pedagogy could assist classroom

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teachers in developing and rehearsing effective ways of working for interreligious dialogue and assist in developing connectedness and a positive ethos which provides the optimal platform for reciprocal encounters.

The Circles pedagogy articulated by Roffey (2013, 2017) is founded on the ASPIRE principles that frame both the content and the context within which they are embedded. The principles are encapsulated in the acronym ASPIRE: Agency, Safety, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect, Equity (see *Growing Great Schools Worldwide*, 2017). They are enacted in the facilitation of the Circle which adheres to a simple pedagogical structure with three basic guidelines; listen when someone is speaking, everyone has the right to pass, and all interactions are positive. The pedagogy has been utilised in schools in Australia and internationally and has a growing body of research to support the engagement of students and its effectiveness (Roffey, 2017; Roffey & McCarthy, 2013). Circles has also been found to be successfully implemented in working with Aboriginal high school girls (Dobia et al., 2014) and it is suggested it may help address diversity of cultures and religions.

When students are well-versed in the flow of the pedagogy they are actively engaged in their learning and develop skills of active listening, thinking routines for critical reflection and evaluation, perspective taking, being impartial or suspending judgement when required, and (at times) tolerating ambiguity. The students and teacher build relationships with one another and become adept at the protocols, whilst enjoying their learning. The Catholic Dialogue school could utilise this pedagogy to successfully engage students in interreligious dialogue. Employing appropriate skills and dispositions, the dialogue can assist students to engage deeply with the other and the multiple perspectives presented. This offers students the opportunity to grapple with their own religious understandings while considering others' understandings and/or input from religious leaders or community members. The skills and attitudes developed in Circles are reflective of those posited by Jackson (2014) as required for the development of an understanding about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education. While this pedagogy could be a useful tool

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for the development of such skills and dispositions, it is likely there are other suitable models.

Potential Content for Interreligious Dialogue

Scott (1984) in explicating a reconceptualist paradigm for religious education, of which Moran (1989) is a leading proponent, suggests that in this most mature form of religious education:

Genuine intra- and inter-religious dialogue is sought through a process of self-reflection, sympathetic understanding, open encounter and mutual exchange. An analogical and educational imagination plays a central role in a re-claiming and transcending of one's own religious standpoint. (Scott, 1984, p. 334)

Scott highlights the need for intra- and inter-religious dialogue and mutual exchange, identifying that not all perspectives are the same even within a religion and that mutual exchange can enhance one's religious, (or non-religious) standpoint. In proposing suitable content for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews, Jackson (2014) outlines that the knowledge and understanding could include:

- The key concepts associated with a particular religion/religious tradition.
 - The perspectives, practices and beliefs of groups within a particular religion.
 - Examples of key texts and relevant history.
 - Knowledge of examples of showing diversity of belief and practice within religions.
 - Awareness of one's own views and assumptions.
 - Sharing knowledge and experience of others in the class.
- (Jackson, 2014, pp. 39-40)

Such content could successfully be explored through the classroom teaching of Religion in a Catholic school employing a reconceptualist paradigm for Religious Education.

The Archdiocese of Brisbane's Religious Education (2013) document, an example of a curriculum that embodies the reconceptualist approach, 'seeks to develop students' religious

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literacy in light of the Catholic Christian tradition, so that they might participate critically and authentically in contemporary culture' (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2013, p. 11). The document, which includes the Religion curriculum and the Religious Life of the School (how people live religiously in a particular way), has scope for interreligious dialogue through the development of religious literacy and religious knowledge and understanding beyond that of the Catholic Tradition. Exploring interreligious dialogue through the already existing developmental curriculum assists in ensuring that content is age appropriate and teachers are sequentially building and enhancing the two-way interaction between the Church and the modern world.

Contained within the Brisbane Archdiocese's Religion curriculum (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2003) is the sub-strand 'World Religions', which begins in the preparatory year. Judaism, because of its natural link to Christianity, is the prime focus of this strand in the primary school. Nonetheless, in the secondary years, the content expands to include the five major world religions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and spiritualities included as one of the cross-curriculum priorities from Preparatory to Year 12. There is additional scope for interreligious dialogue in the complementary dimension, the Religious Life of the School. Many of the components within the Religious Life of the School (Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2013) – Religious Identity and Culture, Social Action for Justice, Prayer and Worship and Evangelisation and Faith Formation, contain elements that provide opportunity to engage in intra- and inter-religious dialogue. These elements encourage the development and flourishing of relationships and embrace the diversity within the classroom, the school and the wider community. The Religious Life of the School thereby provides a seedbed for exploring religious, non-religious and cultural diversity in the public discourse, whilst also highlighting the uniqueness of the Catholic tradition.

For interreligious dialogue to be transformative, students are best positioned if they have a sound knowledge of their own religious or non-religious perspective and a capacity to think symbolically (allowing openness to other perspectives). This could be promoted

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through building general religious knowledge, nurturing relationships with holders of a variety of religious/non-religious perspectives, and via mediations such as artworks, music, prayer or scripture to engage students in inquiry that utilises creative and critical thinking and provides valuable content for dialogical encounters. This dialogue, employing appropriate protocols for respectful engagement, can promote deep learning. Such deep learning being the aim of future orientation education that contributes to creating the common good of all.

**Some Challenges (or gains)
for Interreligious Dialogue**

While teachers of Religion in Catholic schools have curriculum documents that allow for interreligious dialogue, many may require support in developing the use of effective pedagogical practices. Additionally, ongoing professional learning exploring subject-specific knowledge could enhance teachers' capacity to engage students in effective learning and teaching in Religion. The reality of contemporary Catholic schools is such that many teachers who are required to teach Religion, are themselves likely to have nominal formal religious affiliation (ABS, 2016; Rossiter, 2018). This poses a challenge and an opportunity for schools, requiring careful consideration in the on-going professional learning and the professional and personal development of teachers. Teachers of Religion may not be steeped in the richness of the Catholic Tradition, and might lack confidence in their ability to engage in rigorous learning and teaching of Religion. This, in part, may be a consequence of confusion about whether teachers of Religion are engaged in an educational or a faith endeavour. Whilst the learning and teaching of Religion can, and hopefully will, positively impact the students' faith, its primary purpose is education, and thus can reasonably be expected to 'resource the spirituality of young people no matter their level of religiosity' (Rossiter, 2018, p. 2). A lack of affiliation with institutional religion could be embraced as an opportunity to engage teachers, who are often open to the spiritual, in high quality qualification programs that support the realisation of

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Catholic Dialogue schools and encourage the development of Post Critical Belief.

It is apparent that, in similar ways to other learning areas, teacher professional learning in religion could be enhanced with the upskilling and utilisation of appropriate pedagogies that promote the use of 21st century skills and subject-specific knowledge. This is an ongoing process promoting deep learning and requiring teachers to be agile thinkers who are open and adaptive, whilst encouraging student-centred, research-based, inquiry learning processes that tap into 'real-life' contexts and issues. Some contemporary Catholic schools have purposefully included Religion in their Professional Learning Communities (Stoll, Bolan, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006) so that the teaching practices are critically investigated, and teachers are focused on learning and growth for themselves and their students. This is reflective of schools' overall improvement agenda and places the Religion curriculum in its appropriate educational context. This context involves an emphasis on *educating* as a resource for life.

Modern Catholic schools also have the benefit of being able to invite teachers and students into opportunities to enhance, or to initially experience, their personal faith journey through various means including retreats, prayer and social justice activities. These opportunities, whilst always invitational, offer a lived experience of a religious life and complement the knowledge and understanding of the classroom teaching of Religion. Teachers and students who are open to engagement in such experiences will potentially develop their capacity for PCB (Post Critical Belief) and enhance their capability to be open to the experience of interreligious dialogue and potential transformation. There may also be an invitation for respectful reciprocity in engaging in conversation with those of 'other' or 'no religion' experiences. Current data (ABS 2016; McCrindle 2017) suggests that, particularly the younger generations are open to the spiritual, and thus encouraging individuals to participate in meaningful spiritual practices and activities will be likely to engage them.

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Conclusion

Undoubtedly the world in which contemporary students are immersed is pluralistic and educational institutions are steeped within this reality while attempting to prepare students for jobs and a future yet to be imagined. Haers (2004) proposes that 'the open exploration of community life in schools provides a playground to enact and design how future society will look' (p. 313) and insightfully foregrounds interreligious dialogue as a touchstone element for the formation of students as future citizens, and perhaps global citizens. Education about religions and worldviews as part of the curriculum for all Australians has been called for by several scholars because of the multi-religious or 'no religion' nature of our context and the need to learn to live harmoniously.

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2014) propose that individuals with a PCB cognitive belief style are in the optimal position to engage in interreligious dialogue as the individual is open to the complexity of interpretations of symbolic mediations as pointers to the divine reality. The Dialogue school's pedagogical option of maximal solidarity and maximal Catholic identity, grounds schools in the desire to strive for authentic dialogue as a vehicle for interreligious learning. PCB and the Dialogue school pedagogy are the preferred positions for ECSI to enable optimal engagement in interreligious dialogue. This can provide an openness to diversity while keeping a keen eye on the particularity of the Catholic Tradition and offering opportunities for renewed meanings for all. Interreligious dialogue requires skills and dispositions that need to be developed and practiced. These skills and dispositions may be advanced using effective pedagogies, such as Circles and Morning Routines, and it may be timely for further research investigation into their efficacy.

The challenge/opportunity for schools is multifaceted. Not only do students require good learning and teaching about the Catholic Tradition and other religious traditions along with the invitation to engage in a religious faith journey, but teachers, many of whom are also heirs of a detraditionalising society, may benefit from similar learning and formation opportunities. Opening the dialogue requires a level of subject knowledge and underpinning theologies,

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engagement in effective pedagogy, and learning dispositions and skills, that support respectful and sensitive engagement with this rich task. Through interreligious dialogue, students and teachers are exposed to the reality of our times, the plurality of religions and cultures, and encouraged to discern and take responsibility for their own religious or 'no religion' position. The development of new or renewed understandings and meanings through interreligious dialogue can support individuals to recontextualise their faith and create plausible meanings for their religious identity within this rapidly changing world. And for no religion adherents? At the very least they gain a comprehensive educational grounding in the religious and spiritual dimensions of life.

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MEET THE AUTHORS
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Research Interests: Inter-religious Learning, Wellbeing, Religious Education. Toni is an Education Officer supporting Catholic Schools with Identity, Mission and Religious Education. She is diocesan co-ordinator for the Graduate Certificate in Catholic Education and an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at James Cook University.

Associate Professor Maree Dinan-Thompson, James Cook University, Cairns

Research Interests: Health & Physical Education, Physical Education, Curriculum, Assessment, Wellbeing. Maree is a registered teacher with all of her school employment located in Catholic Schools. She has served in advisory and governance roles with the Cairns Catholic

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Diocese and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, and participates in local Catholic schooling as a consultant and parent. In her role at the university she has maintained a strong relationship with Catholic schooling and coordinates the Graduate Certificate of Catholic Education.

Appendix B



INFORMATION FOR WRITING A LIVED EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTION:

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring perceptions of interreligious learning and religious identity: interplay of learning and teaching.

Information about the Lived Experience Description

If you would like to write your own lived experience description the following may be of assistance.

- Keep your story short and simple
- Describe a single experience (Your first experience of 'interreligious learning and teaching' would be ideal).
- Begin close to the central moment of the experience.
- Include important specific concrete details.
- Include dialogue as appropriate (What was said by whom).
- Describe the experience as much as possible as you lived through it. Avoid explanations, generalisation or abstract interpretations.
- Describe the experience from the inside – your feelings, emotions, state of mind etc.

(Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and writing*. New York: Routledge.)

If you have any questions, please contact Ms Toni Foley at the Catholic Education Services, Cairns.

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If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact:
Human Ethics, Research Office
James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811
Phone: (07) 4781 5011 (ethics@jcu.edu.au)

Appendix C



Sample interview questions for each group

School Leadership open-ended interview questions

Tell me about interreligious learning and teaching at (Name of School).

What things do you do in this school (class) to support student's learning in this area?

What do you see as your role in interreligious learning and teaching in your school?

Why do or why don't you think it's important to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

How does personal belief (or not) influence your capacity to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

How do or why don't you think pedagogical practices play a role in a teacher's capacity to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

How do you as a school leader establish a shared vision and common beliefs about interreligious learning and teaching?

What role do you believe leaders play in enabling positive outcomes from interreligious teaching and learning?

How does religious identity interplay with interreligious teaching and learning?

How do you as leader play a role in staff and student engagement in interreligious learning and teaching?



Classroom teacher open-ended interview questions

Tell me about interreligious learning and teaching at (Name of School).

What things do you do in your classroom to support student's learning in this area?

What do you see as your role in interreligious learning and teaching in your school/classroom?

Why or why don't you think it's important to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

How does personal belief (or not) influence your capacity to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

How do or why don't you think pedagogical practices play a role in your capacity to engage students in interreligious learning and teaching?

How do you as a classroom teacher establish a shared vision and common beliefs about interreligious learning and teaching with your students?

What role do you believe you play in enabling positive outcomes from interreligious teaching and learning?



Student- Individual or Focus Group open-ended interview questions

Tell me about what you have learnt in school about other religions, faiths or worldviews? What have you learnt about different cultural/religious or non-religious groups in your community?

What things do you do in class (school) to learn about these things (name some activities/programs/days that they have participated in the past if necessary)?

How do you feel about all of this? What do you think this learning has done/not done for you?

What does religious identity or religious character mean to you? Do you think it's important to know about your religious/non-religious character? Why/Why not?

How do you feel about learning about the religious character/s of others? Is it helpful/not helpful? Why/why not?



Parent – Individual or Focus Group open-ended interview questions

Tell me about what your child/ren has/have learnt in school about other religions, faiths or worldviews? What has/have your child/ren learnt about different cultural/religious or non-religious groups in your community?

Name some activities/programs/days in which the child/ren has/have participated in the past. What things do you know your child/ren has/have learnt about these things

How do you feel about all of this? What do you think this learning has done/not done for him/her/them?

What does religious identity or religious character mean to you? Do you think it's important for your child to know about his/her religious/non-religious identity? Why/Why not?

How do you feel about your child learning about the religious identities of others? Is it helpful/not helpful? Why/why not?

Appendix D

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Appendix G

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Appendix H

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Appendix I

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