

CHAPTER 9: PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Of fundamental importance to this research is the epistemology of practice of the participants – the way they conceptualised and intentionally operationalised their task as religious educators. This chapter, therefore, will be concerned mainly with knowledge which is a primary point of reference for the professional practice of the religious educator. Central to the argument will be how these randomly selected groups of participants perceived the nature, content, process and purpose of the discipline in which they engage. The conceptual framework (Figure 12:272) that will be used to test the empirical evidence from the case study, reflects the recent intellectual literature of religious education that was examined in Chapter 3. Evidence will also be used from the analysis and interpretation made of some of the ACU documents (Chapter 4). The empirical evidence will come mainly from an analysis of the photographs¹ of the observation lesson and the subsequent interviews. A further intention for this chapter is to present a statement about what constitutes the professional practice of a critical religious educator.

For the purpose of this chapter the case study data that will be used will be that of the Group 1 participants and, finally, for a ‘different voice’, the data of Group 3 will be used. The data from the Group 2 interviews will not be used because those participants were just finalising the first semester² of the course and had not completed any of the units that relate specifically to the curriculum and pedagogical aspects of the course (Appendix F: p.339). This was the reason the

¹ The photographs for each participant have been numbered and will be referred to as P1, P2, P3 etc. Samples are included in Appendix N (pp.418-420).

² All the participants were enrolled as part-time students. This means that, at the time of the interviews, they had completed only two units of an eight unit course from the religion studies strand. (Appendix F: p.339).

members of Group 2 were not invited to give an observation lesson by way of independent evidence about their practice as religious educators. The members of Group 1 had completed, or were pursuing their final course unit, and the Group 3 participants were in the final stage of innovating and evaluating the inservice pilot project – thus both these groups were invited to give a lesson for observation, as evidence of their practice, and attend a second interview session. It was at this second interview that the photographs that had been taken during the observation lessons³ were used as a stimulus for discussion.

As has been stated the application of the conceptual framework of Figure 12 will be used to test the data from the critical case study. However the following goal from the intellectual literature is a summary of the general purpose of religious education and will be used as a further point of reference in determining the extent to which the practice of the research participants contributed to the goal of religious education.

The goal of religious education, then, is not to deliver static ‘truths’, nor to determine certain attitudes, but to create critical participants to the ongoing life of the Christian community.
(Lovat, 1988; 33)

2.0 RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF THEIR DISCIPLINE

This section will address the argument that the practice of the participants incorporated the substantive components of the discourses of religion and education as integral to the nature of their task.

The biographical profile of Carmel (Appendix I: pp.347-348) records her disillusionment with the ‘butterflies and bunnies’ curriculum in religious education and her new enthusiasm, for religious education because she now understood it as a

³ During the observation lessons the researcher also used Appendix O: p.421 as prompts for recording factors relating to a participant’s practice.

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NATURE	<p><i>Viewed as:</i></p> <p>A pluralistic discipline incorporating substantive components from the discourses of religion and education.</p>
CONTENT	<p><i>Addressing:</i></p> <p>The traditional and contemporary experiences of Christianity in the cultural and historical context of the learner.</p>
PROCESS	<p><i>Employing:</i></p> <p>Dialogical critical reflection on tradition and the historical forces that influence the learner.</p>
PURPOSE	<p><i>Aimed at:</i></p> <p>The active, liberating growth of the individual directed towards a recreation of personal beliefs, values and actions as well as the transformation of one's world.</p>

Figure 12: A Framework for Critical Practice

discipline in its own right. During the photograph interview⁴ Carmel (1.3;26) referred to her use of praxis, before the course, when she thought it was a 'common sense' method similar to 'the way [she] always taught'. Since the course she had come to realise praxis was a methodology and not a method. Before she studied for her graduate diploma Carmel 'did all the things [she] was supposed to do to teach a praxis way but wasn't doing justice to the critical reflection and response elements.' As a consequence of now understanding the philosophical underpinnings of praxis Carmel's plan for her observation lesson had two main purposes — 'to revise what [she] had been doing in order to provide for the children's critical reflection... and to give the children ways to show their decisions about how they could care for the environment.' An analysis of the second interview transcript, as well as the photographs taken during the lesson presented by Carmel (1.3;26,27,P1-P26), generated textual evidence, as well as a visual explanation, of how she blended a knowledge of scriptural content with an understanding of the praxis methodology. Added to this the photographs also demonstrate an appropriate use of teaching and learning strategies to stimulate dialogue, and individual appropriation by the learners of the content. The focus from the tradition, for this lesson was a topic, from the kindergarten curriculum, based on the message of the Book of Genesis 1-11.⁵ The photographs of Carmel's lessons, especially P9 and P10 showed the children displaying their decisions, in story or craft form, 'to care for our world'. These responses were the outcome of a lesson that had presented the tradition, with the benefits of modern biblical scholarship, in an age-appropriate way to five-year-old children. The photographs (P7, P12, P20, P21, P22) also spoke to the interplay of religion with sound

⁴ The term 'photograph interviews' is used to name the interview when the photographs taken during the lesson were used as stimulus for recall.

⁵ Broadly speaking the theme of Genesis 1-11 is about creation and relationship: the relationship of each person with God, the author of good; the relationship among people; and relationship in the whole of creation. Relationship brings a responsibility not to destroy what is creative of good. The specific focus of this lesson was on the responsibility for the environment.

educational principles such as dialogue, peer interaction, analytical and intuitive processes.

When Anita (1.1: 385) completed her preliminary reflection sheet, before the first interview, she noted that as a consequence of the course she was aware of the need for relevant content and methodology. The substantive knowledge Anita (1.1:409) had gained was ‘pretty important in relation to the change in emphasis in content’. As well as this Anita had become ‘much more aware of methodologies and... tend[ed] towards Groome’s methodology.’ The marriage of religion and education gave Anita a two-pronged conceptual base. This was expressed in the outcomes that she planned for her lesson which ‘provided for lots of educational things as well as religious things’. When the photographs were used to evaluate the planned outcomes, evidence in all the visuals contributed to a positive evaluation of Anita’s aims. Of particular interest are the photographs (P15, P16) that were taken when the children reassembled after the activities at the end of the lesson. At this point the lesson was summarised through recalling the scriptural text, and inviting the students to find ways, in their own lives, to change by being ready to forgive⁶: all this was done through questions and dialogue to provoke critical and rational responses without relying exclusively on faith-oriented terms.

Delma’s (1.4; 20, 23) lesson to Year 4 demonstrated her understanding of the content knowledge of religious education as well as an epistemology of her pedagogical practice. Her lesson could be described as a critical search with the children for an understanding of the concept of God as the giver of gifts, which we are to use and share responsibly in our community: the focus was on the joy of sharing for both the giver and the receiver. The concept of beauty, formed from a diversity of gifts, was made concrete through the story and poster of a harlequin whose attractive patchwork clothing was the result of many different kinds of fabric; this was presented as analogous to the beauty that is the aggregate of

⁶ The text Lk.19:1-10 (The Forgiveness of Zacchaeus) is a powerful comment on the themes of reconciliation, forgiveness, social status, discrimination, injustice, ministry and generosity. Most of those were directly addressed by the lesson and were summarised, by the children, on their charts and by their painting and the modelling activities.

individual gifts in a community. When Delma spoke about the lesson she ‘wasn’t sure if the lesson was different from ones [she] would have given before [she] graduated but [her] understanding that underpinned the lesson was different... previously [she] wouldn’t have thought of one of the ends of RE as emancipation but RE isn’t about constraining; it is about freeing the individual.’ Delma also wondered ‘what anyone would have done’, by way of reproach, if she had given that multi-disciplinary lesson years ago when religious education ‘was compartmentalised’.

In the case of resources and teaching strategies the photographs show Delma’s pupils engaging with the content and learning processes. The photographs reflect some of the important curriculum issues related to gender, class and ethnicity. For instance they also show evidence of educational theories such as an integrated curriculum, group tasks, critical reflection, enquiry, discovery and interactive learning that shape and articulate teaching today.

After reading and processing the scripture (Luke 18:35-43), for context clues and understanding, Bernard (1.2; P4, P9) raised questions with the children that called for inference, synthesis and comprehension. One of the purposes of the questioning was to stimulate the children’s awareness of social class and ethnicity issues raised in the scripture passage.

From an examination of the photographs, taken during Elizabeth’s (1.5; 30,32, P6) lesson, one in particular is significant in relation to reflection and discovery learning. This is particularly evident where the photographs show the children moulding clay as they reflect on their feelings and make decisions. This is in harmony with Elizabeth’s claim that she has moved towards a more reflective approach and ways of ‘letting the children tap into the content and make it their own.’

2.1 Summary: Religious Educators’ Perceptions of the Nature of Their Discipline: Group 1

It is interesting to note how the participants viewed the nature of religious

education *vis-a-vis* the necessity for a relationship of the discourses of religion and education. They are adamant about the way a competent knowledge of scripture and theology influenced the quality of their teaching. They do not, however, see the nature of religious education as merely content-oriented. They value equally their knowledge of the pedagogical dimension of their practice and were selective about their choice of critical praxis as a paradigm for teaching. They saw praxis as a way of proposing knowledge with the aim of informing, forming and transforming the learners. There is evidence that they had developed an adequate understanding of religious and educational philosophy as a basis for a pedagogy that could lead to new insights and actions.

An interesting perspective surfaced on the nature of a religious educator's task. While the research participants recognised their responsibility to be knowledgeable about the scripture and theology of the tradition they also saw very clearly the urgency for dialogue of content with educational theories. From their perspective the possibility of reconstructing religious education, in the light of contemporary problems, would be possible only if educational theory and theology asked questions of each other about what kind of knowing is valuable and what paradigms of learning could be used to promote that knowledge.

If the practice of the participants is described, in Scott's (1984) terms, as a model within the ecclesial, revisionist or reconceptualist traditions then the lessons observed, as well as the evidence from the participants' transcripts, would show that each of the participants in Group 1 operated mainly within the revisionist tradition. The lessons were built on a conceptual framework that was informed by both theology and educational theory: the participants conceptualised their role as an educational activity rather than a confessional ministry.

Broadly speaking, this section has argued that the research participants viewed the nature of their discipline as a confluence of religion and education. This in turn determined the philosophical assumptions that underpinned their choice of the substantive content as well as the processes for teaching. They perceived that the ultimate nature of their activity was 'to create critical participants'.

3.0 RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS' PERCEPTION OF THE CONTENT OF THEIR DISCIPLINE

The analysis of the document, *Catechesis in Our Time*⁷ Figure 4 (p.113) speaks strongly in favour of respecting the integrity of tradition, as well as the experience of the learner, as content. In reference to tradition its stance is that it is

useless to campaign for the abandonment of serious and orderly study of the message of Christ in the name of a method concentrating on life experience –

however, it likewise supports the use of life experience as a partner for content and advises that

[no] opposition [is] to be set up between a catechesis taking life as its point of departure and a traditional, doctrinal and systematic catechesis.

(John Paul II, 1979:#22)

Although *Catechesis in Our Time* fell short of its initial promise to point the way forward for reconceptualising religious education, it recognised the changing situation in which the gospel is encountered today and insisted on renewed, rather than restored, patterns of language. In examining the empirical data of this study it became obvious that the research participants recognised that religious language that had been socially constructed by the past had become irrelevant and nevertheless would be maintained unless renewed language reflected the diversity of new socio-historical situations.

In the choice of content, resources and teaching strategies the participants demonstrated that they viewed religious education as a pluralistic discipline with an

⁷ This document was authored by John Paul II under the title, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979). Although it addressed the activity of catechesis it lacks, in common with all official Roman documents, a conceptual and linguistic clarity and some of its content refers to what, in this work, comes under the name of religious education.

interplay between religion and education. In the case of content from the discourse of religion they had drawn their content broadly from the many languages of faith.⁸ The third and fourth movements of a praxis approach (Appendix B: p.326), used by the participants, provide for a dialogical disclosure of scripture, tradition and teachings of the church to invite the learners to personal reflection and rediscovery of the content for themselves (Groome, 1980:214-215).

The religious language used by the participants proved, in most cases, to be free from incomprehensible formulae. One exception to this was Geraldine (1.7;28) who used the phrase 'God and Jesus' to name Jesus of Nazareth.

There were frequent instances in the lessons when the researcher became aware that the participants, while intentionally addressing the traditional beliefs of Christianity, at the same time tried to ensure the children's own beliefs and values were not imprisoned in irrelevant or abstract terms. In fact, one of the reasons Delma (1.4;13,23) was giving the particular lesson, observed by the researcher, was to clarify a previous confusion, experienced by the children in an earlier grade, about the concept of celebrating the Eucharist. Delma replaced the previous difficult concept that the children had of the Eucharist as a sacrificial meal by the concept of a meal where Jesus shared friendship and love.

In her lesson on Genesis 1-11 Carmel (1.3; 27 P11, P14, P17, P22) made conscious efforts to remove possibilities of abstraction. She claimed that her understanding of scripture guaranteed that she was 'not talking about fundamentalist things'. The photographs of her lesson show the concrete means she provided (e.g. puppets, painting, modelling) for the children to develop their understanding of, and language for, the concept of creation.⁹

In the light of what has emerged in the framework for disclosure and discovery (Figure 12: p.272) for religious education, the practice of the participants

⁸ Languages of faith is the term used in religious education to describe the content such as scripture, tradition, teachings of the church, liturgy, prayer, life experiences (Diocese of Parramatta, 1991:15).

⁹ The photographs show the children displaying their models, paintings and story cards that say: *Our world is big and beautiful. We all have to care for our world.*

acknowledged the importance of the cultural and historical context of the learner in interpreting and refashioning the knowledge, values and beliefs of Christianity. The importance of meeting the historical situation in religion was an anxiety for Elizabeth (1.5;29) because 'our religion has changed and we've grown ourselves' and this made her wonder 'what this generation of Catholics will be like'.

Bernard (1.2;26) had scored the item relating to accountability for the future (Appendix M:B.4.0;p.403), as the most significant outcome of the ACU course for him. Bernard reported that he 'feels frustrated with what is still happening' to keep learners in the past. He expressed anger at the injustice caused by the apathy of teachers who ignore the fact that the language to express the beliefs and values of Christianity has changed. Bernard's plea was for proactive measures to be taken to ensure that religious education takes account of the way cultural-historical circumstances impact on learners and call for change.

3.1 Summary: Religious Educators' Perception of the Content of Their Discipline: Group 1

In Figure 12 (p.272) both contemporary experiences and the traditional substance of Christianity are noted as content. It was important in both the interviews and the observation lessons to determine whether there was any sense in which the participants operated in an anti-intellectual way and therefore ran the risk of self-deception that endangered the integrity of the tradition by focusing exclusively on the learner's experience as content. Most of the members of Group 1 spoke about the need for content in relation to their decision to use either the praxis approach (Groome) or critical model (Lovat) as well as about their wider knowledge of suitable resources. The choice of praxis or critical model by the participants provided for input about the tradition and the appropriate resources 'suggested a variety of ways' (Carmel 1.3;27) to present the information.

A fundamental problem arises from viewing religious education as addressing both the traditional and contemporary experiences of Christianity. The problem is that throughout history, as religious education models gave way to their

successors, theology dominated the discipline of religious education. The struggle, therefore, has been for religious educators to reconceptualise their task by attending to ways of using theology and experiences so that each is shaped by the other. To avoid a possible dichotomy of tradition and contemporary experience Delma (1.4; 22, 25), at a school camp that was structured around the theme of the environment, had made both the children's experiences and relevant scripture integral to the prayer celebration. She chose the scripture so that experience and tradition mutually shaped each other. In this respect it is also interesting to examine Anita's (1.1 P13, P14, P21) photographs for what they said about a synthesis of traditional doctrine and new doctrinal insights. The visuals demonstrate how tradition and experience converge to enrich each other: The tradition's story about the forgiveness given to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) goes hand-in-hand with the emphasis on the personal experience of relationship, expressed by the children in their drawings, as examples of their understanding of forgiveness.

All the lessons that were observed used as content both the experiences of the learner and the tradition of Christianity and, true to Groome's (1991:19) principle of critical reflection, engaged the students in processes of reasoning, memory and imagination to uncover assumptions in the tradition and to appropriate and decide about the tradition's beliefs. Although the content was specifically confessional (Catholic) the process maximised the potential of Christianity for an open and informed form of religious education rather than a closed one (Lovat, 1992a:13).

4.0 RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS' PERCEPTION OF THE PROCESS OF THEIR DISCIPLINE

Support for the participants' preference for a praxis methodology that is in harmony with the purpose of contributing to the liberating growth of the individual, is found in the documents of Vatican II that have already been referred to in Chapter 4. Although the following quotation is not usually used in relation to

religious education it establishes strong support for the data from the case study used in this section.

In spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or a kind of persuasion that would be dishonourable or unworthy.

(Abbott, 1966:682)

There was almost a universally similar response by the participants to the question (Appendix M: Task 9; p.413) about the methodology they had used for the lesson. In general they had rejected a transmission model and the concept it conjured up of coerced assent to static knowledge and to authoritarian doctrines and practices. The process the participants found acceptable was one that employed dialogical critical reflection as in the models designed by Groome (1980) and Lovat (1989). This was particularly evident in Frank's (1;6;16,17) lesson. Using Lovat's critical model (Appendix C: p.327), in the critical reflection of Stages 1 and 2 and in the critique, appraisal and challenge of Stage 6, Frank had maximised the opportunity for 'an open and informed religious education'. The critical model, with its elements of praxis, and the expansion afforded by the final stage to appraise critically what might be needed, was Frank's preferred choice for the very reason that it provided for an open and critically reflective approach to the tradition. As an added ecumenical dimension Frank now invites guest speakers from other religions to give input, beyond the Catholic tradition, on the selected phenomenon (e.g. ritual for the sick). Frank is the coordinator for religious education for the four grade six classes and he regrets that the teachers who have not done graduate studies 'leave out the reflective and doctrinal bits' because they are not aware of the need for 'depth and critique'.

The reality that children of today are called to know and live Christianity that is refashioned by the cultural-historical context of the twentieth century was one of the reasons Geraldine (1.7;27,28) had chosen to use praxis. It was also her reason for the critical choice of resources and strategies she used for the discovery

process of her lesson. Geraldine discussed some of the photographs (P3, P6, P5, P11) which showed the children engaged in discussion in preparation for the personal responses they would make (paint) to the input that had been given at one point in the lesson. These photographs were identified as providing evidence that her lesson was 'in no way transmission' because that was contrary to her intention to 'give relevant information' so that the children 'could get their own knowledge.' While Geraldine was reasonably confident that she could facilitate this kind of learning she was uneasy about how ready the church was for the change this would mean in the orthodoxy and orthopraxis of these children in their own Christian life. She had strong feelings about this and expressed the opinion 'the priests need to see and understand the way children are learning about doctrine because these children are to be the future of the church — for there is no other future.'

Elizabeth's (1.5;37,38) lesson could be identified as within the revisionist model because it was rooted in the tradition with the purpose of encouraging personal response and action. In a sense Elizabeth's practice of religious education was one that showed some characteristics of a reconceptualist tradition, as described by Scott (1984:336), dealing with 'other standpoints, values and truths'. With an outlook similar to Frank's (1.6), Elizabeth presented the intellectual content from the Catholic perspective (Genesis 1:1-31 — The First Story of Creation) and used resources from several traditions as an opportunity for the pupils to explore how other traditions articulated and passed on their understanding of the sacredness of our world. Furthermore, Frank's perception, influenced by his preference for Lovat, showed signs of Scott's reconceptualist tradition that aims to 'bring educational critique to the existing church — its programs, patterns of power, linguistic forms and operating assumptions' (Scott, 1984:338).

Just as it was argued in Chapter 3 that there is a relationship between movements in theology and religious education so, too, it can be argued there is a relationship between movements in education *per se* and religious education *per se*. Contemporary professional educators have become increasingly alert to the need to recognise the movements in educational philosophy and its application to teaching

methods. In turn this has given high profile to the use of appropriate strategies to engage both the analytic and intuitive modes of consciousness. Three of the photographs, taken during Anita's (1.1) lesson which show the children engaged in collaborative tasks to design, paint and sculpture their responses (Appendix N: pp.418-420) are merely a sample of the richness and diversity of strategies and resources that were used to engage analytic and intuitive modes of learning. Further examples are in Delma's (1.4;P15,P17,P21) lesson in which approaches such as group discussion, group work and collages were used. The photographs from Elizabeth's (1.5;P6,P7,P15) lesson also feature group discussion, clay modelling, body sculpture and written language.

One of the main dimensions about revisionist religious education, that came from an analysis of the intellectual literature of religious education (Boys, 1989; Groome, 1980; Lovat, 1989; Scott, 1984) was the relationship of tradition and transformation – making the religious heritage accessible to be mediated and acted upon. The following examples from the data of the critical case study demonstrate that the participants had developed an understanding of this and effected it in the processes of their practice. Evidence of this understanding was provided by answers to the question that asked the participants to comment on what the photographs said about a synthesis of traditional doctrine and new insights for action.

Geraldine (1.7) If you look at that photograph (P4) where I did the time-line with sentence strips you'll see it has the traditional doctrine in it about the life of Jesus but the children also came to realise he had friends and families – his humanity is clearer this way ... and it helps children in their family relations.
(1.7;25)

Frank (1.6) I'd now be pushing for Christianity as a community thing. That's now my model of church – the church as community. I think the church should be an institution that takes a stand in the forefront of society.
(1.7;21)

The photographs identify ways in which the participants provided materials for the learners to comprehend and examine the scripture or doctrine that formed the religious content of the lesson. This suggests a recognition on the part of the research participants of the need to construct an environment where the power relationship between the languages of faith, e.g. scripture, as propounded by the official church, and the learner's experiences could meet in dialogue to generate understanding. The photographs of lessons, where scripture was used, demonstrate how the children engaged with the scripture as a partner in dialogue for understanding. An example of the relationship was the finale of Carmel's (1.3;17, P6) lesson where the scripture text and children's pictures and stories of their experiences were displayed as complementary elements of a bulletin board. One photograph from Anita's (1.1;P6) data shows the children's text cards (their forgiveness stories) pasted on a large illustrated copy of the scripture text to show that the language of experience was in dialogue with the traditional language.

The examples noted above also demonstrated the extent to which the participants maximised the potential of the praxis paradigm to insert the learner and his/her experiences as an 'equal interlocutor' (Groome, 1991:63) with content from the discourse of religion in order to avoid a one-way transmission of dogma.

4.1 Summary: Religious Educators' Perception of the Process of Their Discipline: Group 1

Characteristic of process in Scott's (1984) revisionist tradition is applying modern critical reason to the Christian tradition to emphasise the partnership of tradition and transformation and to wed continuity and change. When the concept of revisionism was discussed in Chapter 3, Groome (1980) and Lovat (1989) were identified as two of the contemporary educators, whose models of religious education were seen to stand within revisionism. Both the data from the observation of lessons and the photograph interviews confirm that the participants had what Elizabeth (1.5;26) described as 'new criteria from Groome and Lovat' for

assessing their practices and constructing lessons that signalled they were operating within a revisionist model.

It has been claimed from the data of this investigation that all the research participants were committed to a praxis approach in their professional practice. Before the course 'both the Groome and Lovat models were new' to Frank (1.6;16,18,19,20) and he had 'taught a *chalk-and-talk RE* behind closed doors... because [he] wasn't sure he was teaching the right thing.' As a 'convert to Groome's praxis' and particularly to its application in the critical model (Lovat, 1989), Frank has written several major programmes using Lovat's model. The new methods 'make [him] operate more professionally and [he] enjoys teaching religious education just as [he] enjoys teaching science and language because [he] understands them and has enough intellectual understanding of the content.' Frank's lesson was on the Anointing of the Sick. Before the course his only knowledge about the topic was that it was a sacrament used when people were in immanent danger of death. In the light of how Frank combined his new knowledge about the sacrament and his new praxis teaching approach it is interesting to note his responses during the photograph interview. The following extract from his transcripts provides evidence that Frank's perception of the nature, content, process and purpose of religious education was within a revisionist model.

What I wanted was an awareness of the sacrament as one that is related to the responsibility of community — where the sick and the old should be looked after. I also wanted the class to realise that it is a celebration and not something to fear and that people who are sick need support. I also wanted them to compare how different cultures show grief and to critique how the church approaches sickness and grief.. As behavioural responses we sent paper cranes, as an action of empathy with Sadako¹⁰, to the Peace Park in Japan and we took part in a parish anointing. After the anointing we served morning tea and talked to the oldies.
(Frank 1.6; 18-19)

¹⁰ *Sadako* is a Japanese story used for curriculum themes on sickness and death.

In Chapter 8 the change in the nature of the research participants' relationship with the church was examined. One expression of this was that because the participants were better educated about development of doctrine and the hierarchy of beliefs they became more aware of their freedom to choose and decide about what was essential and central to their Christianity. It also emerged from the empirical data in that chapter that the transformation, in most cases, had not been without some anxiety and anguish. The implication of this, for their task as religious educators, convinced them that their role was not to reproduce the past (Groome, 1976:194) and so cause their students to face confusion and anxiety in later life. This alerted them to finding ways, e.g. praxis, to teach religious education that generated knowledge that was authentic for the pupils' present needs and would not short-circuit their growth towards fuller understanding of Christianity as adults.

The argument in this section has addressed ultimately the outcomes of religious education in regard to orthodoxy and orthopraxis — the extent to which the purpose of the curriculum generates 'well-thought-out convictions [that] lead to courageous and upright action' (John Paul II, 1979;#22) so that the learner is liberated towards growth of personal beliefs and Christian action. As operators within revisionism the participants demonstrated clearly their practice to recreate, with the learners, personal knowledge and values.

5.0 RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS' PERCEPTION OF THE PURPOSE OF THEIR DISCIPLINE

It can be argued that the following quote from the discourse of religious education describes the purpose of religious education as disclosure and discovery.

To educate in the Christian faith is not easy... [and] poses to Christians the challenge of introducing people into their faith tradition but, rather than allowing that tradition to control and determine people's lives it must be made present as an empowerment toward liberation and freedom.

(Groome, 1978:19)

This, then, is a guide to what will be looked for as evidence in the case study data to determine if, and to what extent, the purpose of the professional practice of the research participants presented the tradition to the learners for critical understanding and action.

In the previous section, the explanation on the process of religious education noted the part played by a praxis epistemology for a critical professional practice. This has implications for the way religious educators plan for the descriptive, interpretive and critical outcomes of their lessons to achieve the purposes of their discipline. It means planning so that the learner can grow towards critical faith and become more inclusive and discriminating in personal values and actions. The descriptive, interpretive and critical outcomes (Lovat, 1989:99) were actualised in the teaching strategies adopted by Geraldine (1.7; P3, P4, P6) and photographed during the lesson. Geraldine presented information about Jesus and his life in Nazareth by using text cards that ultimately became a visual summary of the input. The essence of what Geraldine planned as an interpretive outcome was effected by the children in small groups: the task required them to present their understanding of the insights from the input about cooperation and relationship in the life of Jesus. The children's critical skills were addressed through decision-making. During the role-play of some hypothetical episodes the children were asked to reflect critically on how effectively cooperation and a relationship of trust could be used to help people live happily and freely.

This study has already argued that information gained by the research participants about the substantive knowledge of the discipline of religious education generated competence and an intellectual power that provided the basis for emancipation from dogmatic dependence. This assumes that in their professional practice the research participants would aim to actively involve their students in constructing their own knowledge so that any hegemony of the past is not simply repeated. For this reason Elizabeth (1.5;30) wanted to avoid 'questions and answers' and had used body sculpture 'to tap into the depth of the children... so that they could interact with the content and make it their own.' She is uneasy

about 'the stereotyped traditional messages' and examines textbooks critically to ensure they do not present distorted answers for the children. Similarly Bernard (1.2;21), who 'shivers when [he] thinks of the many, many lessons [he] gave in the past and wasn't conscious enough about what was happening', has changed his educational practices: previously he would have relied 'mainly on *chalk-and-talk* strategies'. The photographs of Bernard's lesson (P9, P13, P19) captured groups of children engaged in discussion, drama and body language tasks as ways of coming to understand and appropriate the content of the lesson. When Bernard reflected on the photographs and his reasons for teaching differently he made a final comment of relief – 'That's a big change for me.' Anita (1.1;22,28,32,P23) had given a high priority, when she ranked important outcomes of the course, to her 'concern that students have the right to know the truth.' The photographs made her realise that because she now has substantive knowledge that is free of distortion she can 'convey the message to the children and make it more meaningful for them'.

The participants chose their own topic for the observation lesson from the units of the religious education curriculum operative at the time of the researcher's visit. For this reason, and also perhaps because only two of the participants taught upper primary grades, the main evidence for the way the lessons raised the revisionist questions about such things as power and liberation is from the transcripts of Elizabeth (1.5) and Frank (1.6) who taught upper primary classes. It is interesting to note that while Elizabeth's lesson followed a praxis methodology Groome (1980), Frank's developed from Lovat's (1989) critical model. Both teachers explained and defended their choice of methodology and educational practices in relation to their view of curriculum as constructivist. This signalled their professional initiative to develop a dynamic curriculum called for by the social and cultural context of their learners.

A review and analysis in a previous chapter of the religious education literature pointed to changes in theology and religious education as moving in tandem. These movements are also coupled with the impact of shifts in policy,

practice and curriculum of education *per se*. All this calls for religious educators to find appropriate ways, in a teaching profession that is becoming increasingly more complex, to address the emancipatory purpose of education. This will mean a professional practice oriented to the active, liberating growth of both the individual and the institution (church). The implication is that religious educators will need to choose strategies that enable students to construct their own beliefs and value positions. This was certainly evident from Frank's (1.6;26,P6) lesson where he used the critical model because 'it broadens the children's experience of beliefs and values and was educationally sound in that it provided for variety in teaching and learning strategies and for a high level of involvement and participation.' Frank used the opportunity, provided by the critical model, for the learners to be involved critically in Stage 6 (Appendix C: p.327) in appraising what changes might be needed. In Delma's (1.4;9,25) case 'a lot of older ideas about educational theory have gone.' She finds it difficult, however, to both nurture and pass on the concept of freedom to children who have 'such black and white ideas', and is convinced that 'widening resources and strategies' is one way of ensuring that children 'think things through for themselves.'

It has been demonstrated from an analysis of the official documents promulgated by the Catholic church since Vatican II (Figure 4: p.113) that some of these had significant potential to reconceptualise the discourse of religious education, especially in relation to its purpose. Amongst the factors that were significant was one relating to the need for an appropriate language 'for religious truths, one in keeping with the modern human condition' (Congregation for the Clergy, 1971:#8). The analysis of some of the documentation of the ACU course (Figure 8:pp.163-166) also shows that a goal targeted by the course was the capacity of graduates to analyse critically language that could perpetuate ideological elements of the tradition. The observations made during the lessons (Appendix O: p.421) showed that the participants carefully avoided using metaphysical terminology, fundamentalism and literalism. Their language also

avoided closure on future alternatives and was used responsibly for the construction of future objective reality (Whalen, 1985:23).

5.1 Summary: Religious Educators' Perception of the Purpose of Their Discipline: Group 1

The data from the case study has shown that the research participants considered that an essential purpose of a revisionist model of Christian religious education is one of integrating the historical tradition with a learner's present experience in specific socio-cultural and political environments. In addition to this their purpose was to enable the learners 'both to know and act upon the truth' (Elias, 1986:156-159) through ideology-critique and ideology-commitment. Elias' insistence on fostering a suspicion of ideologies relates to his perception that a dominant hermeneutical mode of religious education, while it discloses the 'power of stories, myths, symbols, rituals, parables and doctrines', is in danger of maintaining the *status quo* of tradition. For this reason Elias proposes that religious education also needs to deal with a healthy suspicion of ideologies so that issues, arising from the tradition, such as antifeminism, are critiqued.

Comment has already been made (Chapter 3) on the shift in the shape and structure of religious education as it developed during this century. Further data, relating to the consequences of the shift, were examined in the intellectual literature and in the ACU document (Appendix E: p.331). There is essential agreement in the sources mentioned above, and in the empirical data from the case study, about the consequences of the changes for the purpose of religious education: rather than dealing with established answers, professional practice challenges religious educators to deal with new religious and moral questions.

At the beginning of the last decade Boys (1980a:289) argued that Catholicism needed 'an understanding of religious education that facilitates the development of a faith that encourages a critical sense'. One implication of this stance is that teaching and learning strategies that facilitate critical enquiry are needed. This section has shown that the research participants aimed not merely to

affirm a tradition, but to focus on facilitating ways to disclose the power of the tradition so that the learners through critical reflection could fashion their own values and beliefs.

6.0 A DIFFERENT VOICE: Group 3

An analysis of the data in the transcripts of Group 3, although processed in the same way as data for Groups 1 and 2, gives a different message; this will now be discussed for the perspective it offers this study.

Durka (1981:281) makes clear the essential place theoretical clarity plays in the epistemology out of which religious educators should operate. She proposes that to comprehend their work religious educators should be educated as teachers 'who are conceptualisers who understand their task in a broad theoretical framework.' There was a common acceptance of this need for a theoretical framework amongst the research participants of Group 1; however the Group 3 teachers were indifferent about the need to comprehend the conceptual base that undergirds their discipline. It would seem that Group 3 had settled for 'a common sense eclecticism' that might well be a mask for intellectual chaos (Tracy, 1975:2). The evidence from the members of Group 3 showed that, while they had sighted the praxis diagram (Diocese of Parramatta, 1991:19) in the new curriculum, they understood it only as a plan for the steps of a lesson. They were unaware of the philosophy underpinning it and thought that in fact all they needed was to know the sequence of the 'steps' because most of it seemed to be a 'common sense' way of planning a lesson. Their epistemology of practice, therefore, came from 'common sense' rather than from a philosophical understanding of the intellectual literature of religious education.

Evidence about the dominant model, used by Group 3 participants, gives mixed messages. The transcripts show that all the teachers in Group 3 claimed to be using a praxis approach. However responses to some questions in the photograph interviews demonstrate that they did not give a high priority to an

intellectual understanding of the cognitive content and the philosophy underlying the praxis approach.

6.1 Foundational Underpinnings: Group 3

When the data from Group 3 were examined for the scope, methodology and operating principles of religious education, the dominant tradition of religious education that emerged was the ecclesial enculturation tradition represented by socialisation theories. There is also, however, a trace of the revisionist tradition as described by Scott (1984:323-344). This eclecticism is exemplified by the comments made by Patricia (3.2;3,6,10) who, as she said, had gained confidence because the curriculum had given her 'the doctrine that the church is teaching'. However Patricia was also convinced that 'previously we had a black and white faith and we did as we were told but that now people must take the responsibility for themselves'. Further examples of the dominant ecclesial tradition, with a trace of revisionism, are from Trudy (3.5;6,20) and Wendy (3.7;2,20). Trudy would prefer things to be black and white; however she wants to give children something to work on and let them express themselves freely. Wendy had given the Year 2 children detailed information about the Hail Mary and the Rosary in a way that was very true to the ecclesial tradition; however she commented that 'previously we all moved one way and now we're trying to get children to try their own ideas'. Neither Trudy nor Wendy really wanted 'to let go'. There was evidence that the ecclesial tradition dominated the foundational understanding of the participants. The limited extent to which principles of the revisionist tradition surfaced throughout the data suggested the teachers had not examined their own past understandings in a critical way that would move them closer to the conditions of freedom and justice that make truth possible (Habermas, 1970:372).

6.2 Technocratic Rationality: Group 3

According to Giroux (1981:154) technocratic rationality ignores the

relationship between power and school knowledge and often ends up celebrating knowledge that supports existing institutional arrangements. This pertained in the case of Group 3, who were generally uncritical about the curriculum document that had been chosen by the employing authority. This lack of criticism need not, in itself, be a problem. However, the evidence from Group 3 lacks any demonstration that, for the majority of the members, the pilot project has caused a 'massive re-interpretation of professional experience and a complete reorientation' (Tripp, 1988:52) which would mark the movements of the participants towards, and beyond, practical or hermeneutical knowledge. The following are some examples of references of technocratic rationality that abound in the data:

- ... the curriculum helps the teachers to be confident that because it is written down it must be right and they're allowed to believe it.
(Patricia, 3.2;6)
- ... I feel very strongly about handing on the faith ... I am looking at the new curriculum as a different way, and probably a more effective way, of handing on faith and doctrine.
(Sarah, 3.4;4)
- ... I'd prefer things to be black and white.
(Trudy, 3.5;6)
- ... My position is that while the children are so young we need to drill them and as they get older they can be extended to reason it out.
(Victor, 3.6;7)
- ... I don't think I need to know where Mary, the Mother of Jesus, fits in because of my faith.
(Wendy, 3.7;30)

Throughout the interviews most of the Group 3 members emphasised outcomes in terms of the technical aspects and the instrumental solutions and saw the pilot project as a means-end activity for the acquisition of knowledge.

The stark difference in the professional practices of the members of Groups 1 and 3 is substantiated more by the evidence of the interview data and observations made using Appendix O (p.421) than by the difference in the

classroom climate and teaching styles of, and learning strategies used by, the group members. If assessed for effective practice, according to the *Draft Competency Framework for Teachers* (NBEET, 1992b)¹¹, most of the participants in both Groups 1 and 3 would demonstrate an equal competency for many of the elements of the Areas of Competency 2-5. However if assessed by the elements for the Area of Competency I (Using and Development Professional Knowledge and Values) the differences would be most significant. It can be claimed that the inservice project, in which Group 3 participants were involved, had neglected to establish the opportunity for the religious educators to develop a professional knowledge base. It seems that professional knowledge and professional practice were not perceived as twin concepts by either the sponsors of the pilot project or the participants. From the evidence of earlier chapters it can be claimed that by ignoring the distinction between the nature of professional development and the nature of inservice the members of Group 3 had failed to develop in the competency area of professional knowledge.

6.3 A Minority Response: Rebecca (3.3) and Sarah (3.4)

Although the writer did not directly choose the research participants, as much homogeneity as possible was aimed for amongst the members in each group of participants¹². However, although Rebecca met the stated criteria for the group

¹¹ *The National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning* was mounted in Australia by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET, 1992c) for improving the quality of teachers' work and professional standards. NBEET drafted a protocol, in five areas of competence, as one aspect of implementation. The five areas were:

- Area of Competence 1. Using and Developing Professional Knowledge and Values.
- Area of Competence 2. Communicating, Interacting and Working with Students and Others.
- Area of Competence 3. Planning and Managing the Teaching and Learning Process.
- Area of Competence 4. Monitoring and Assessing Student Progress and Learning Outcomes.
- Area of Competence 5. Reflecting, Evaluating and Planning for Continuous Improvement.

¹² Selection of research participants for Group 3 was made by the local Principals where the pilot project was being trialled. Principals had been asked to nominate teachers with a reasonable length of teaching experience who had not engaged in formal graduate studies in religious education.

there were variables in her life history and educational background that made aspects of her data very different from that of the other members of Group 3. In essence the actual outcomes of the pilot project were the same for Rebecca (3.3;5,7,9,26) as for the others – her work in the pilot project had introduced her to resources but had not given her cognitive content and had not given her a theoretical understanding of praxis. In fact she ‘didn’t feel any different about religious education since using the new curriculum’ and had ‘no overall perception of what the curriculum had done’ for her. However, some of Rebecca’s other comments such as ‘I find my own freedom within the post-Vatican church’ and ‘I don’t want the church to be black and white’ differed remarkably from the replies of the other participants in this group. Although Rebecca had not done graduate studies in religious education she had recently completed three units in religious education for the BEd course she had done to upgrade her three year teacher qualification. It is possible, therefore, that Rebecca had developed a professional critical consciousness and faced the issues of power and control when she did the religious education units for her upgrading course. When Rebecca upgraded she was a mature adult (41-50 years), and perhaps her life’s circumstances and the cognitive content of the units in the upgrading course had already contributed to change.

The only other member of Group 3 who had done any study of religious education, as a mature age student, was Sarah. Sarah’s course is not one that is generally accredited by tertiary institutions. It was a sustained part-time inservice course, conducted over two years, to update teachers in religious education.¹³ The inservice had given Sarah (3.4;7,25,27,28) a new understanding of scripture and had, as she said, ‘influenced my thinking... because my childhood beliefs were blind faith’. The impact on Sarah of a new understanding of scripture, from the

¹³ The course completed by Sarah was one called *Religious Education, Certificate A*. This was a joint venture sponsored by some of the dioceses in eastern Australia and was written to update teachers in the new movements in scripture, theology and religious education since Vatican II. While it served a purpose, as is evident from Sarah’s transcripts, it lacked an intellectual rigour and has not been acknowledged by ACU for credit by teachers who subsequently enrol in the Graduate Diploma of Education (Religious).

previous inservice, was evident in the impatience and anxiety she expressed about the parents of her students 'passing on to these children older ideas of scripture'. However there was still a great ambivalence, as well as a lack of independent judgement, in Sarah's position. She still 'takes Christianity for granted' but feels free not to 'bring doctrinal language' into every religion lesson. The previous inservice had, from the evidence in Sarah's data, given her technical knowledge but it had left her conforming to objective, unexamined facts and functioning according to group expectations — the characteristics of a Stage 3 faith (Appendix A: p.325). She remains bound by her 'socialised perspectives' and does not appear to have moved to 'a critical consciousness that expands one's horizons for the truth wherever it can be found' (Groome, 1991:130-131).

The data for Rebecca (3.38) and Sarah (3.4;26) yielded other evidence that was not found in the other transcripts for Group 3. They also demonstrated attitudes of security and a willingness to accept intellectual responsibility for decisions about the content and strategies from the new curriculum.

6.4 Summary: A Different Voice: Group 3

Comment on what emerged from the data generated by Group 3 is not meant to be conclusive. It has been used in relation to the mainline data by way of demonstrating the difference in outcomes experienced by the members of Group 1 and Group 3. A summary of the results of the pilot project, for the participants in Group 3, shows that on the positive side the new curriculum had given most of the participants access to resources and method — technocratic knowledge. On the negative side it had created confusion and frustration for those teachers who experienced a loss of control and sensed that the project sponsors had lost an opportunity to meet the needs they identified, albeit in their state of semi-transitive and naive-consciousness (Freire, 1973:16-22). Broadly speaking the situation can be described as being directed by an unproblematic approach to improve, rather than transform, religious education. The participants in the project lacked

ownership of the activity and because of the uncomplicated view of causality, on the part of the sponsors, the objective of the project had been equated with technical outcomes and had failed to engage participants in acquiring knowledge that was practical and emancipatory.

6.5 Recommendation: Group 3

The comments made so far have highlighted from the Group 3 participants' transcripts their perceptions of the inservice project *per se*. Those perceptions, as well as the dissatisfaction of the participants with the manner in which the project was evaluated by the Catholic Education Office, have influenced the following recommendations. One could argue from the participants' evidence that the inservice project lacked an adequate framework for both its implementation and evaluation to maximise its potential in relation to the personal and professional aspects of the teachers' development.

The kind of framework that suggests itself as possible is one initiated by the *National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning* (NBEET, 1992c) to encourage teacher development. In common with one of the purposes of the *National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning* the pilot project aimed to improve learning outcomes for students and to maintain and increase the quality of the professional work of teachers. Therefore, the pilot project would seem to have much to gain from an assumption that underpinned the national project (NBEET, 1992c) that making teaching explicit enhances teachers' involvement, understanding and knowledge and consequently improves teaching. In essence this required the co-ordinators of the pilot project to establish what counts as competent teaching in religious education by using the national, or amended, set of generic competencies with elements for each competency and a series of performance indicators for each element. This suggestion, by the present writer, presumes that the competencies, elements and performance criteria are flexible and can be tailored to relate to what is personally significant for each teacher. This would

avoid perceiving the competencies in a negative light as an appraisal or assessment strategy.

An advantage of using the principles of the *National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning* network is that the key players, that is the teachers, supported by their professional and industrial bodies, are already familiar with the procedures as a way of professional development. Some areas of education, for example, those in the early childhood section, have written their own case studies to encompass their specific needs (Fleet, *et al.* 1993) and the writer would recommend this in respect of religious educators. The early childhood researchers regretted that the framework of competencies lacked a philosophical framework and, therefore, was 'decontextualised and technocratic'. To address this they recommended that the framework be set in a philosophical context. For similar reasons it is suggested, by this writer, that in relation to the pilot project, it would be necessary to write and to operate from a philosophical framework for the competencies to ensure that they are seen to be explicitly contextualised within the content and values of religious education.

The immediate target of the pilot project was to trial and evaluate a new curriculum resource for religious education as an exercise in professional development. It is suggested that the Catholic Education Office missed a chance of engaging teachers in professional development by not engaging in a more rigorous evaluation of the resource. The manner of evaluation missed an opportunity to involve teachers in greater discussion, debate and analysis that would have encouraged them to investigate critically their personal practices and understanding of the content and methodology of religious education. A comprehensive instrument, such as an appropriate version of Appendix D (p.328), could have been employed as a complement to the use of the national competencies. The evaluation (Appendix D: p.328) would relate explicitly to the teaching of religious education in the light of the new curriculum resource that was being piloted and could, in itself, contribute to professional development through critique and decision-making.

The writer of this study realises that the complexity of school life militates against busy teachers engaging in the totality of what has been recommended above. One would want to suggest, therefore, that a quality experience of professional development for a few teachers, released from all or part of their teaching duties, is another option that could have been considered. As it was, the limited resources of finance and personnel, appeared to be spread too thinly to achieve adequately the goals of the pilot project. With the benefit of hindsight, and the advantage of research, these decisions have become obvious. Unfortunately dilemmas of this nature remain a daily challenge to administrators in Catholic education where there is not sufficient funding to implement enlightened policy about professional development.

Group 3 participants were included in the research by way of comparison. However, as has been noted, their data, when analysed and interpreted, provided evidence that their experience was in contrast to that of Groups 1 and 2. It seemed worthwhile, therefore, to deal with the issue separately and to highlight the important differences in outcomes. The evidence, for what constituted differences in the data for Group 3 points to action that could be taken by the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn in policy making for professional development that aims to upgrade religious education in the schools.

7.0 CONCLUSION: PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR

By drawing on the literature and empirical data for evidence of what constituted a framework of professional practice it can be argued that there are implications from the data for what qualifies religious educators as being professionally prepared. It is evident that the specifically designed graduate course at ACU (Figure 8: pp.163-166) was built on principles that generated concepts such as critical knowledge, critical dialogue, critical consciousness and critical praxis (Figure 2: p.54). Therefore, the Graduate Diploma of Education (Religious) provides a formal qualification for members of Group 1 that reflects the

characteristics of transformative professional development. In contrast the participants in Group 3 who had been engaged in an activity for functional efficiency acquired knowledge uncritically. The resulting knowledge, for Group 3, failed to generate a critical consciousness, and failed to be constituted by 'an affective interest in freedom and autonomy and a cognitive interest in truth' (Habermas, 1972:310).

CHAPTER 10: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This research has examined what form of professional development programme produces knowledge that is constitutive of the professional development of the critical religious educator. It aimed specifically at determining what kind of knowledge is generated by students who pursue a particular graduate course in religious education at the Australian Catholic University, Signadou Campus. It also aimed at establishing to what degree such courses impact positively on the educator's professional practice and personal growth.

Figure 13 (p.302) is a summary, from an epistemological point of view, of what the research revealed about the professional development of a critical religious educator. The figure summarises this research in terms of the type of knowledge that is constitutive of the professional knowledge base of the religious educator: constitutive of transformative experiences of the religious educator and constitutive of the professional practice of the religious educator. It is not the researcher's intention to claim that the evidence from the case study is representative of what ensues for all teachers who undertake graduate studies in religious education. Likewise it is not the researcher's intention to generalise from the experiences of the participants. However, significant conclusions can be drawn from the research and comment will be made about the outcomes and their implications for the professional development of a critical religious educator.

2.0 AN OVERVIEW

In Chapters 7-9 the relevant conceptual literature and the evidence of the empirical data were used reciprocally to test the argument of this thesis: some significant conclusions emerged from the dialogical investigation of theory and

KNOWLEDGE	TECHNICAL	PRACTICAL	EMANCIPATORY
<i>Constitutive of:</i> professional knowledge base of the religious educator – <i>in terms of</i>	Substantive Knowledge and Efficiency	Understanding and Interpretation	Responsibility and Critical Consciousness
<i>Constitutive of:</i> transformative experiences of the religious educator – <i>in terms of</i>	Awareness and Change	Growth and Expansion	Renegotiation and Contractual Relationship
<i>Constitutive of:</i> professional practice of the religious educator – <i>in terms of</i>	Competence and Reconceptualisation	Dialogue and Reinterpretation	Synthesis and Praxis

Figure 13: Professional Development of the Critical Religious Educator

data. In essence the research demonstrated there is a relationship between the technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge that the participants gained from pursuing recognised formal qualifications, and their autonomy and freedom to be effective critical religious educators. The participants had gained, or were in the process of gaining, personal and professional philosophies and resources necessary to question and evaluate the past and to exercise some control over the present. They had acquired knowledge that gave them a capacity to assess and discriminate critically the community's traditional theological symbols and statements.

Furthermore, the study indicated there was a relationship between the knowledge gained by the participants and the integration of their human and faith developmental processes that occurred in response to the experience of graduate study. The study provided evidence that the participants had gained, or were in the process of gaining, knowledge and insights that generated a capacity to challenge and synthesise what they had previously perceived as truth. This was allowing them to operate with integrity, although sometimes painfully, in a church of conflicting perspectives and to reconstruct values and beliefs that they found were personally more authentic than their experience of coercive control from the absolutism of some church laws.

Similarly the data generated by the study have indicated a relationship for the participants between the knowledge produced by the course and their professional practice as religious educators in the classroom. The participants had gained, or were in the process of gaining, knowledge and experience which were enabling them to relate to criteria for refashioning and renewing religious education as a field of study where knowledge is socially and culturally conditioned by changing ecclesial and historical circumstances. As a consequence of their revised conception of religious education the participants provided evidence of being able to apply a praxis methodology which proceeded from first principles rather than being a technocratic process.

2.1 Professional Knowledge Base of the Religious Educator

The analysis of data indicates that the participants recognised that substantive knowledge *per se* was of distinct significance amongst the outcomes of their course. The data established a strong case for the importance of the production, interpretation and integration of content knowledge in a professional development programme. It revealed that with a professional knowledge base of technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge the participants appeared able to develop a critical understanding of the intellectual literature of religious education. This in turn helped equip the learners to question what they perceived as irrelevant and reified knowledge that acts to distort communication.

The development of an expanded theory base of contextually relevant technical knowledge satisfied the participants' cognitive need to defend their discipline with critical integrity on educational grounds. It provided specialised data from critical research related to the contributing disciplines such as theology and scripture that could be used in a technical way to describe reality. The examination of a diversity of intellectual positions equipped the participants to recognise different ways of viewing Christianity brought about by a pluralism of theologies. It is important to note that one of the main consequences of this was that the participants felt that technical knowledge had helped them to contribute to refashioning their profession.

It has also been argued in this research that just as a spiral moves upwards and outwards to gather momentum so, too, did the research participants' knowledge spiral upwards and outwards: from technical knowledge to knowledge born of a practical cognitive interest, to knowledge born of an emancipatory interest. The research evidence pointed to an activity of interpretation by the participants to examine critically their new insights from technical knowledge in order to contest or confirm its meaning and reconstruct a present that is in continuity with, but not controlled by, the past. The twin concepts of understanding and interpretation were used by the participants to critique the *status quo* and to dialogue critically about

the consequences of knowledge in order to gain alternative explanations that relate to socio-historical factors. This indicates that the teachers had a historical consciousness that enabled them to see the necessity for change in the tradition in relation to such things as language, rituals and practices. The participants provided evidence that they recognised that controlled and transmitted knowledge differed from knowledge that was context-embedded and generated from dialogue.

There is strong evidence that the expansion of critical technical knowledge and deepened hermeneutical insights from practical knowledge had created independence and autonomy for the participants in their decision-making. However, this research has already registered that it was more problematic to substantiate whether emancipatory knowledge, produced by the participants, disposed them to operate as unambivalently as was the case with the technical and practical knowledge base of the profession. The ambivalence is seen in the participants' co-existing claims. They claimed that access to the non-alienating technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge of the substantive content of their discipline satisfied their need for knowledge to realise their professional responsibility as critical religious educators. On the other hand, this was balanced by their reluctance to take too much radical action to redefine the public discourse of the church and so effect a change in the system of power relations in the institutional church.

2.2 Transformative Experiences of the Religious Educator

The conceptual literature of this thesis pointed to a link between professional development, through critical learning, and the multidimensional process of contextual adult development towards human growth and responsibility. The case study data supported the link: there was evidence in the data that critical professional education impacts not only on the learner's professional knowledge but also on personal growth.

The literature and the empirical evidence indicated that a shift in what constituted a valid professional knowledge base related to a growing consciousness experienced by the research participants about their personal relationship with the institutional church. New data had given them, as adult learners, different criteria to apply to the institutional norms, values and beliefs they had previously embraced. It had facilitated the unveiling of what had caused constraints on their freedom and it committed them to take initiatives to examine the relationships of power between themselves and the institutional church.

The biographic details of the research participants, together with the literature and the empirical evidence, also suggested that a person's way of being Christian is likely to be challenged at various intervals throughout life as the individual's knowledge and self-understanding, in relation to the cultural situation and church life, evolve. It is important to note that one of the contextual factors bearing on some of the participants of this thesis was the pressure from employing agencies to upgrade their professional qualifications in order to enhance career prospects. However, the case study data showed that the teachers came to value education not merely as a way of gaining career status but also for its distinctive way of contributing to a reconstruction of meaning and coherence in their lives as individuals.

From the theoretical underpinnings of this research, and from the ethnographic data of the interviews, it is possible to advance the argument that for the research participants the graduate course was a source of transformation that integrated the old and the new with a different orientation towards reality. In the case of this research the transformation was not always without tension. A common experience of the participants was a tension that was caused by conflicting perspectives of divergence and multiplicity between self and the institutional church as the learner reclaimed identity by choice and reframed questions about belief in terms of new modes of consciousness.

It was not the intention of this research to determine if the development and transformation of the learners interpenetrated the socio-historical reality of the

church and this may well be the concern of a further study. However, implicit in the contextual nature of development that has been claimed as the theoretical position of this work, is the expectation that some process of transformative movement in the forms and structures of the church may also occur. This is likely because of the context-dependent and interactive nature of change when knowledge is acted upon by church members who are conscious of the laterality of self and the institution. Any claim from the above comment is made with caution by the writer. However, there is strong evidence in the intellectual discourses of adult development and religious education to suggest the possibility of bilateral change. The discourse of human development indicates that development has a bilateral purpose of effecting change in both the individual and the institution. Similarly the discourse of religious education, from its relationship with the social sciences, conceives of the learner as an agent concerned with knowledge that can effect bilateral change.

2.3 Professional Practice of the Religious Educator

For the issue of the professional practice of the religious educators the empirical data were taken from transcripts of the interviews that followed the observation lessons given by the members of Groups 1 – not from the data of members of Group 2 who, because they were in the early stages of the course, had not given observation lessons as independent evidence. The analysis of the data, in relation to the outcome relating to professional practice, could be summarised by saying that the participants' professional practice was underpinned by an intellectual rigour that informed their philosophy, content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. The observed lessons were clearly designed on principles of critical reflection that engaged the students in processes of reasoning, memory and imagination (Groome, 1991:19) to uncover assumptions in the tradition. The content for the lessons had been chosen to take account of both contemporary experiences of the learner and the traditional substance of Christianity.

The level of satisfaction of the participants in Group 1 with their professional practice was high because the teachers felt they had an intellectual grasp and understanding of their discipline. This gave them an experience of exercising control and responsibility to plan and implement a religious education curriculum with personal integrity and professional authenticity. Satisfaction and achievement were also high because the participants had a new relationship with their own context and were energised towards making problematic taken-for-granted practices because they were intent on preventing knowledge from becoming static. The research participants also had a new operative understanding of tradition and perceived their task as discerning what could be retained from tradition, as well as moving beyond, to transform tradition. The perception of tradition accommodated the past, present and future and allowed the religious educators to engage in critical praxis as a paradigm for teaching. Their activity was marked by a dialectic between knowing and doing and focused on equipping their pupils to be active agents in the development of critical faith and Christian action. It aimed to equip pupils to construct their own knowledge and discover their own objective truth.

There was clear evidence that the participants' professional practice was a confluence of the disciplines of religion and education. Therefore their conceptualisation of their role as an educational activity, rather than solely a confessional ministry within the church, was a further significant outcome.

It followed from the analysis of data that the participants in their professional practice were committed to religious education aligned with revisionism. They were committed to its positive elements such as historical consciousness and application of critical reason to the Christian texts, rituals and symbols to allow them to inform, and be informed by, the praxis of a wider community. While this approach is radically different from what was used by religious educators a decade ago, it is important to note that the researcher has already registered (Chapters 3 and 9) that while revisionism that provides for a hermeneutical mode of religious education discloses the 'power of stories, myths,

symbols, rituals, parables and doctrines', (Elias, 1986:156-159) there could also be a danger of it maintaining the *status quo*. For this reason the writer would like to see Lovat's critical model (Appendix C: p.327), which is a version of revisionism, used more comprehensively in the professional practice of religious education. Lovat's (1989:95) critical model is structured to appraise the Christian tradition critically and to empower learners to be agents of change.

3.0 SUMMARY

From the evidence examined in this research it is argued that, for the randomly selected groups of research participants, university study, specifically the Graduate Diploma of Education (Religious), Australian Catholic University, Signadou Campus has generated significant outcomes. The evidence indicates that the Graduate Diploma of Education (Religious):

- 3.1 makes accessible the tradition of Christianity as well as the recent intellectual literature of religious education so that religious educators can critically understand and integrate the present and the past and mediate the future;
- 3.2 constitutes for religious educators new criteria for assessing practices, understandings, values and structures of the institutional church and the capacity to separate what is essential from what is peripheral in Christianity;
- 3.3 generates in religious educators an awareness of their own belief constructs and an openness to an emancipatory concept of truth;
- 3.4 facilitates a different consciousness of religious commitment that widens one's truth, shapes and reshapes one's values and beliefs;
- 3.5 encourages religious educators to participate on their own terms as agents for personal and institutional transformation;
- 3.6 familiarises religious educators with a praxis paradigm for proposing knowledge aimed at informing, forming and transforming learners;

- 3.7 develops an understanding of religious and educational philosophy as a basis for new insights and actions;

The claims on the basis of this study can be extended more generally either to all graduates of the programme which provided the site of investigation and to other university-based religious education courses. However, support for the strength of the argument of the importance of university-based graduate programmes for professional development of religious educators was provided (unexpectedly) from Group 3 participants. As indicated above, these teachers had engaged in an in-house pilot project to trial a new religious education curriculum document. Data from their transcripts provided evidence of few of the transformations discussed above in relation to Groups 1 and 2. So clear was the contrast between these groups that Group 3 participants were described as speaking in *A Different Voice*.

The concept of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978:100), involving a structural change in the way we see ourselves and reality, is one way of summarising generally the process of new understanding that was part of the ultimate experience of the research participants. In Mezirow's (1978:105-106) terms, the process for the religious educators, had been one of movement towards a revitalised perception and a more inclusive and discriminating position that was more integrative of experience. The data revealed that the course had exposed the research participants to knowledge that was a source of growth and understanding of their faith tradition. It had instilled a new vision to be faithful to a past that was adapted and transformed in the light of the present. The course had created a new awareness and understanding of theological viewpoints productive of freedom and autonomy which Brookfield (1986:58) defines as 'the possession of an understanding of awareness of a range of alternative possibilities.' This research has identified, in the participants, a process of new understanding of traditional beliefs and practices which was 'a genuine experience... an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth' (Gadamer, 1979:445).

3.1 Implications

Some very significant implications arise from the above summary. One possible implication relates to the extent to which it will be possible for the official Catholic church to permit and even encourage religious educators to shape Christianity and act as agents of institutional transformation. Admittedly the literature related to this research has shown that transformative outcomes can be bilateral and, therefore, a change in the individual can mean a change in the institution. Given the change in meaning perspectives, and consequently the freedom and emancipation of the participants, and their increased commitment to, rather than rejection of Christianity, the transformation, therefore, of the institution would seem inevitable. Thus some would argue, that it is too late for opposition from the official church to be effective. However, there are already signs, in regressive patterns established in recent papal documents, that efforts are being made to keep conservatism alive.

While the potential of the Second Vatican Council was a quantum leap the church has a history of councils that shows the church has not always been tolerant of heuristic believers. The implication that has been noted is, therefore, of considerable concern because the research has shown that while tradition is important to the participants their idea of living within it has nothing to do with blind adherence to a tradition that has not been reinterpreted, in the light of experience, by successive generations (Gadamer, 1979).

The documents examined in Chapter 3 (Figure 4: p.113) were only a representative sample of a great number of Roman Catholic documents that demonstrate that at the philosophical and theological levels it is possible for the church to act positively. Perhaps a favourable resolution will depend on the degree to which the church authorities and its members enter into genuine dialogue. This is possible on the part of church members educated in the fashion of the research participants. Their way of forming their world coherence is to strive to be comprehensive and to be internally consistent and responsible for their own beliefs

but not in isolation from the world views of others. One could not be as confident that the official church has experienced the same level of consciousness raising and change in meaning perspectives.

As previously stated the potential for the rate and extent of change in Christianity has not been maximised since Vatican II. However, the change that has occurred has either bewildered or caused apathy in religious educators because they could not arrive at a new understanding and no longer had the language to articulate personally the faith in which they believed. However, this study has concluded that as the participants' professional knowledge was developed they were able to engage in critical praxis and construct their own assumptions and basic beliefs. On the other hand the evidence for the members of a pilot project in Group 3 was that, rather than developing a capacity for critical praxis, the inservice project was marked by standardising knowledge and technocratic rationality. Although this study did not pursue the consequences of this for Group 3 it would seem that further research might conclude that for the members of Group 3 the inservice had actually resulted in devaluing professional knowledge.

All the participants in this research had an initial teaching qualification of three years and all were chronologically in the stage of adulthood – a stage that is shown in the faith development literature to have potential for a more independently assimilated faith that is less conventional. The earlier background, if any, in religious education had been gained by these teachers, in their initial degree when they were young adults and probably at a stage of development that accepted or rejected unthinkingly the unexamined traditional beliefs. Thus it had been an advantage for the research participants, for the purpose of upgrading, to engage in further formal study when they were more ready, chronologically and from life's experience, for maturing in faith. During the writing of this thesis changes have occurred that could short-circuit the advantage of further study at a chronologically later stage. For instance the University of Melbourne (*Campus Review*, 1994: 4) has moved to make teaching a two-degree profession. An implication of this is that if universities follow this pattern future teachers will graduate with a five year

qualification. Teachers could still be relatively young and without a depth of life experience that facilitates maturity at the time of graduation. However, given their five year status there would be less need for such teachers to upgrade and engage in graduate studies during the stage of adulthood when individuative-reflective faith development is more likely. Consequently future religious educators may not experience the transformative experiences for which there is evidence in the case of the research participants of this study.

A question that was prompted by observing the professional practice of the participants was the necessity of including a supervised practicum as a core element in the graduate course. The importance of this was highlighted by the deepened critical awareness of the participants, about their practice, as a result of discussing the photographs taken during the lessons. That experience suggests that a practicum, analysed and deconstructed by the teacher, in partnership with a member of the university, would ensure a further measure of self-critique and dialogue: this could save the graduate students from 'the heresy of [their] own orthodoxy' of their practice (Schillebeeckx, 1974).

The educational settings assumed by critical theorists as suitable for engaging learners in rational discussion were not always enjoyed by the research participants. In all cases the classes observed were groups of at least twenty-five students and in most groups there was the predictable percentage of uncooperative pupils. This meant that the lessons were given in a less than ideal environment. This is patently clear in the photographs in Delma's (1.4; P20) data where one child's behaviour is disruptive of the environment. While this kind of behaviour was not observed frequently during the lessons it is an instance of times when rational discussion is not possible. Many present classroom environments are not conducive to praxis, or to serious, purposeful teaching in any discipline. This means that the professional practice of the best prepared religious educators will have to battle the real world of classroom problems: that factor may well diminish their impact on the learners.

The professional practice of the teacher, rather than learning outcomes, has been the concern of this thesis. However, the question of the size and composition of classes raises issues that could be matter for further research. While transformative professional development *per se* is an important factor in improving education for emancipation it may well be an ineffectual exercise unless contextual factors, such as class size, are also addressed. Indeed employing authorities control size and composition of classes. This may, in itself, call for ideology analysis of the injustice of these taken-for-granted situations if religious educators are to be effective.

Malone (1990) argued that teaching approaches to the planning of religious education appeared to have a direct relationship to the specialised qualifications in religious education of secondary teachers: teachers with 'good' qualifications showed a much greater tendency for presenting an academic¹ rather than a catechetical or personal development approach. This research has been concerned with teachers in Catholic primary schools where religious education is in fact structured within a revisionist paradigm. However, one aspect of this thesis argues, as Malone does for teachers in secondary schools, that the qualified religious educator operates differently from those who do not understand the nature, content, process and purpose of their discipline. An examination of the data for the participants in Groups 1 and 2 demonstrated that their specialised study was constitutive for them of a professional knowledge base and professional practice. The teachers in Group 3, who were not formally qualified in religious education, were characterised by technocratic rationalism: they operated not as intellectuals but as practitioners.

The importance of the social context for transformation has already been discussed in this work as a multi-faceted reality that bears on moving religious education, towards and beyond, revisionism. In regard to religious education one important factor, that has gathered momentum with the proportions of geometric

¹ Malone's conception of an academic approach could also be described as religion studies – faith commitment is not assumed.

progression, is biblical research by scholars such as Brown (1981), Crossan (1994) and Fiorenza (1983). The work of these scholars has unleashed enormous energy and possibility for change and a reminder that Christianity must be in dialogue with its scriptural base. Two specific expressions of this scriptural scholarship are the liberation and feminist movements in theology. Biblical researchers are subjecting the Christian texts to critical analysis to explore them for multiple meaning and are reclaiming a model of Christianity that is based on dignity for each person in solidarity with others. Thus critical questions are emerging for religious educators in response to the call from liberation and feminist theology.

The fundamental responsibility of Christianity has always been to continue the redemptive work of peace and justice of Jesus Christ. However, in the course of history the Christian message has been interpreted and has become increasingly complicated and convoluted in ways that distorted its essential meaning. Therefore, the challenge of contemporary biblical scholarship has been to reclaim a view of Christianity that is in harmony with its original vision of justice and peace.

The liberation theologians found reinforcement for their vision of justice and peace in the radically egalitarian message of Jesus and his concern for the destitute and marginalised. On the other hand, feminist theologians have reexamined the sources for omissions and erasures for a new understanding of human dignity by interpreting and expanding the text to discover what lies behind it. Both these movements have already generated substantial scholarly literature and have methodologies and processes that will have implications for reconceptualising religious education. In the future when the liberation and feminist discourses, together with relevant cultural trends, impact more generally upon the religious beliefs and practices of Christians they will impact, too, on religious education. Meanwhile many Christians are becoming better educated and understand themselves in terms of a new historical consciousness. They are now more aware of individual and social questions about the meaning and interpretation of their Christian faith and the religious heritage to which they now have better access.

It is not possible to anticipate the shape and structure of religious education when the full impact of the effects of such movements as liberation and feminist theologies, and other forces, do redefine the operational concept of Christianity. However, one could expect such a religious education will have a praxis way of knowing as its epistemological base. This will mark religious education with characteristics such as reflection and dialogue that examine critically contradictions between the tradition and the concrete reality of the learner. It will also be marked by a concern that addresses a broad range of issues that relate to breaking alienating boundaries, particularly those that abuse human dignity and touch on existence at the personal, interpersonal and sociopolitical levels.

The attempt to revitalise the message of Christianity is not new and repeated attempts have been made to reconceptualise religious education. However, what is envisaged for religious education is different and radical. Its curriculum will come from a context beyond ecclesial boundaries: its task will be to effect religious, moral and intellectual conversion 'without which religious education is stagnant' (Boys, 1982:224). Such a form of religious education will have the potential 'to keep [religious] education open to the undreamt possibilities of a human race' (Moran, 1981:62).

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is likely that the present contextual factors, namely, accelerated demands for professional development both at the national and employer level, and the shift in religious education since Vatican II, will continue to impact on religious educators. Therefore provision for the ongoing professional development of religious educators, as this study has shown, will need to facilitate access to specialised substantive content and pedagogical knowledge. It will be important to determine that religious educators acquire a body of knowledge that empowers them to be critical educators with a professional responsibility to reconceptualise their task.

In this respect the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, albeit on a very small scale, has continued, over the past decade, to give priority in its professional development budget, to scholarships for a limited number of teachers enrolled in graduate courses in religious education. The initiative was a response to felt need, rather than as action backed by empirical data, and this research has pointed to the effectiveness of investment by the Archdiocese in graduate courses as a means of professional development to generate personal and professional transformation for religious educators. On the other hand, the outcomes from the Archdiocese's investment in respect of Group 3 teachers were different. These teachers were participating in a pilot project to trial a new curriculum in religious education: they had not engaged in graduate studies in religious education. An analysis of the data identified that, for these teachers, some of the outcomes that emerged were standardisation of knowledge and technocratic rationality. The failure to gain the specialised substantive knowledge of their discipline could be claimed to be the most significant deficit — and perhaps the basic problematic cause for the lack of professional and personal growth for teachers in this group. This signals that the *status quo* of religious educators will continue unless they engage in a serious study of their discipline.

This research did not intend to investigate the research interests, disciplinary qualifications and teaching quality of the staff who teach the units for the Graduate Diploma of Education (Religious) course at the Australian Catholic University, Signadou Campus. However, the changes in religious education, foreshadowed by this research, have implications for lecturers in religious education. The changes imply that skills will be needed by university staff to facilitate for students, even more comprehensively than at present, processes that are interpretive and reconstructive of the silences and biases in the tradition. Lecturers will also need to pursue research to examine how to incorporate, in graduate courses, the ongoing findings of scholars engaged in decontextualisation of texts and practices of the tradition.

Religious education has experienced difficulty in establishing itself as a discipline. The continuing vitality of its research and the work of its scholars will be essential in further developing an understanding of the nature of knowledge in which it is grounded and practised to defend the status it has gained. Broad-based social change will effect a changing reality and will continue to such an extent that today's ways of knowing and paradigm for learning can be considered as only provisional. The professional practice of today's religious educator will not necessarily serve the future well. Constant critique of the culture and tradition and ongoing engagement with the intellectual literature of religious education, as a basis for intentional teaching, are called for to ensure for the religious educator a viable professional practice.

The participants of this research, through their professional development that has been transformative for them, have been confronted academically and personally: they have invested valuable energies in meeting the challenges. The extent to which these were life-giving emerged throughout the interviews but perhaps no more strongly than in the participants' answers to the final task during the photographic interviews. In the spirit of the ethnographic nature of this research comment on this will be presented in a fairly lengthy quote from Carmel's (1.2;28) transcript:

Could you comment on whether you think the course has, in any way moved you.

<i>FROM</i>						<i>TOWARDS</i>
<i>bondage</i>	1	2	3	4*	5	<i>freedom</i>
<i>delusion</i>	1	2	3	4*	5	<i>knowledge</i>
<i>frustration</i>	1	2*	3	4	5	<i>satisfaction</i> ¹

¹ Geuss (1981:71).

I've already said that I tend to think right is right and wrong is wrong. However, I believe the hierarchy cause some of the *bondage* which really need not be there; I now have the *freedom* of seeing past that, so I would put *No. 4* as the point to which I've moved.

Certainly I've moved from *delusion* towards *knowledge*, because I used to think that the church was doing so much wrong. Now I

know I'm the church and realise the members of the hierarchy are not necessarily better than I am. That has taken away the delusion. So the point would be *No. 4* again.

While I had a lot of enjoyment learning about scriptures and the historical things, *my frustration hasn't moved towards satisfaction* because I'm now so frustrated with the garbage we're hearing. So whereas I was previously quietly satisfied, now I'm likely to be more frustrated!... so I've moved more towards frustration! (*No. 2*). However, the frustration now is not so much for myself as for young people who don't know how to decide what they're hearing could be garbage.
(1.2:28)

5.0 A FINAL STATEMENT: A CRITICAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR

The evidence from testing what the intellectual literature and case study data disclosed as a revisionist approach to religious education points to the following epistemological structure. A competent religious educator who is concerned with a critical approach to the practices and attitudes of Christian faith will demonstrate:

- conceptual clarity about the discipline of religious education and its distinctiveness from other activities such as catechesis and evangelisation;
- possession of relevant technical knowledge of the cognate disciplines that are the substantive content of religious education;
- pedagogical content knowledge and understanding of interactive theories of learning;
- avoidance of a self-serving ideology in respect to tradition so that tradition and transformation are integrated;

- social-historical consciousness of the relevance and appropriateness for the learner of the way the substance of the tradition is expressed today;
- critical dialectical relationship that maintains unity between theory and practice, action and reflection, past and present;
- sensitivity to the hermeneutical dimension of interpreting and communicating the content to 'recreate the past';
- professional self-criticism of one's ability to explore and explain the data;
- a genuine belief in values such as personal responsibility and autonomy in regard to one's beliefs and practices.
- responsibility for accountability of the future by consciously trying to improve the discourse of religious education;

Although the following challenge to religious educators was issued almost two decades ago it is built on principles that make it an equally valid challenge for the professional practice of today's religious educators:

Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it... In view of all this, it seems... that in redefining, reconceptualising, and restructuring the field to effect the kind of religious education we need, our worst error would lie in dreaming too small.

(Durka, 1977:110-111)

EPILOGUE

*History may be servitude,
History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
The faces and the places, with the self which,
as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured,
in another pattern.*

Little Gidding
T.S. Eliot

‘Renewed, transfigured in another pattern’

T.S. Eliot’s *Little Gidding* captures, almost as a sustained metaphor, what emerged as the essence of this thesis. In *Little Gidding* Eliot makes a statement of religious and philosophical ideas that focused on the possibility of regeneration, even in ‘midwinter spring’, when the disillusionment of the past can be liberated and restored by ‘pentecostal fire’. Detached from the past, one sees history as ‘timeless moments’ when experiences are integrated and redeemed and the self emerges ‘to become renewed, transfigured in another pattern’. This thesis has argued, that through the process of graduate studies in religious education individuals experience the disintegration and reintegration processes of a ‘midwinter spring’ that allow them to transcend the limitations of past growth. Graduate studies became for the research participants what *Little Gidding* was for Eliot, — a place of opportunity for questioning and reflection to liberate them to use both their own past and their historical Christian past in such a way as to accord a real place to a new, divergent and authentic reality — without yearning for a pattern that no longer exists.

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