

**SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:
AN EXPLORATION OF PEDAGOGY**

Name of Candidate: Kaye Elizabeth Chalwell

Qualifications:

Diploma of Theology

School of Christian Studies, Robert Menzies College, New South Wales

2007

Graduate Diploma in Education (Primary)

Sydney Institute of Education, New South Wales

1987

Bachelor of Science

University of Western Australia, Western Australia

1985

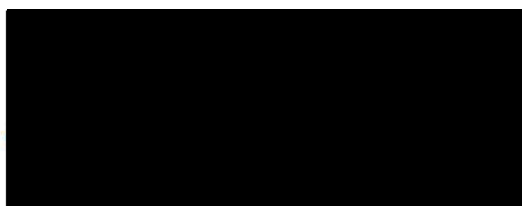
A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of New England

July 2014

CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their contribution to this thesis:

To my supervisors, Dr Mary Macken-Horarik and Dr Genevieve Noone who gave me the confidence to listen and think, and so much more.

To Dr Corinne Buckland who helped me to see that writing a PhD was possible.

To the twenty three SRE teachers who gave their time to share their stories and experiences with me.

To Amy Birungi who convinced me this was a good idea and then kept me going to the end.

To my family: Francis, Dylan, Alex, Evie and Sarah who all made sacrifices so that I could write this.

To all the people who asked me about my thesis and got more than they bargained for when I answered them, and to Annemarie Rivers who created my lotus.

And to my Dad who found the missing full stops, incorrectly numbered paragraphs, and can always find an incorrectly placed apostrophe.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF DIAGRAMS.....	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 The historical context.....	3
1.1.1 Stage 1: Colonial New South Wales - church responsible for education (1780-1830)...	4
1.1.2 Stage 2: National schools - providing religious instruction for Catholic and Protestant students (1830-1850)	5
1.1.3 Stage 3: Differing approaches to SRE in New South Wales and Victoria (1850 – 1890) 7	
1.1.4 Stage 4: Churches take responsibility for SRE (1890 – 1970).....	10
1.1.5 Stage 5: Challenges to SRE (1970 to the present)	16
1.2 Purpose and research question	20
1.3 The importance/significance of the study	21
1.4 The scope of the study	22
1.5 Structure of the thesis.....	23
CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS SRE PEDAGOGY?.....	25
2.1 Epistemological lens	27
2.2 Axiological lens	30
2.3 Methodological lens.....	33
2.4 Religious education pedagogy in faith-based schools	36
2.4.1 Phase one: RE like other learning	39
2.4.2 Phase two: RE unlike other learning.....	40
2.4.3 Phase three: RE like other learning.....	43
2.4.4 Phase four: All learning can be religious	44
2.5 Religious education in the church based setting	45
2.6 Conclusion	48

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	50
3.1 Research design assumptions.....	51
3.2 The development of grounded theory	53
3.3 Constructivist grounded theory	57
3.4 Reflexivity and the researcher.....	60
3.4.1 My reflexive statement.....	61
3.5 Research Methods	64
3.5.1 Selection of participants, research scope and data collection	65
3.5.2 Data collection	71
Jane	76
Prayer for engaging with class teacher - prickly yet can be supportive.....	76
3.6 Research quality - trustworthiness	78
3.6.1 Credibility	79
3.6.2 Transferability.....	81
3.6.3 Dependability	82
3.6.4 Confirmability.....	82
3.7 Ethical considerations	83
3.8 Conclusion	84
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND CODING.....	86
4.1 Data collection and transcribing	87
4.2 Initial Coding	88
4.3 Focused coding	90
4.4 Memo writing.....	92
4.4.1 Constructing conversations	93
4.5 Directed sampling	96
4.5.1 Document analysis	98
4.6 Conceptual categories	99
4.7 Integrating conversations, memos, extant literature	104
4.8 The Conversation begins.....	107
CHAPTER FIVE: GUEST AND HOST	113

5.1	Derrida's law and laws of hospitality	120
5.2	Being a guest of the school	123
5.3	Being a guest of the classroom teacher	129
5.4	Being a host to the students.....	134
5.5	Conclusion	138
CHAPTER SIX: VULNERABILITY AND AUTHORITY		141
6.1	Relationship with the classroom teacher.....	146
6.1.1	High significance of the subject.....	147
6.1.2	Historical and legislative context.....	148
6.1.3	The presence of the classroom teacher.....	149
6.2	Relationship with students	153
6.2.1	Experiencing vulnerability	155
6.2.2	Making themselves vulnerable.....	156
6.2.3	Gaining authority	158
6.3	Relationship with God	160
6.3.1	Removing their sense of ultimate vulnerability	160
6.3.2	Calling them to teach	161
6.3.3	Helping them to teach	165
6.4	Conclusion	167
CHAPTER SEVEN: TRUTH AND HOPE		171
7.1	Truth.....	173
7.1.1	Absolute Truth	173
7.1.2	Contingent Truth.....	177
7.2	Hope.....	183
7.2.1	Eschatological Hope	184
7.2.2	Immediate Hope.....	186
7.3	Truth and hope enacted.....	187
7.3.1	Stories	188
7.3.2	Questioning.....	189
7.3.3	Not proselytising.....	196
7.4	Conclusion	198
CHAPTER EIGHT: RELATIONAL TEACHING		200

8.1	Intentionality	203
8.2	Caring.....	211
8.3	Love	214
8.4	The I-Thou	216
8.5	Belief in a relational God	218
8.6	Conclusion	221
CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION		225
9.1	Guest and Host.....	228
9.2	Vulnerability and Authority	229
9.3	Truth and Hope	232
9.4	Relational Teaching	235
9.5	Conclusion	236
APPENDICES		239
•	What is the SRE teacher's role in the classroom?	244

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Details of participants.....	66
Table 3.2 Timing of data collection	71
Table 3.3 SRE lesson journal: What preparations did you do for the lesson?.....	76
Table 4.1 Example of line-by-line coding in Alicia's data.....	90
Table 4.2 Analysis of SRE teachers' data.....	105

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 3.1 Grounded theory continuum	58
Diagram 3.2 Exploring SRE pedagogy: the journey begins	70
Diagram 4.1 Process of data analysis	88
Diagram 4.2 The SRE Pedagogy Lotus	106

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1.1 Religious organisations authorized to teach SRE in New South Wales public schools.....	240
Appendix 1.2 State variations in the provision of SRE in Australia	241
Appendix 1.3 Teaching resources provided by SRE Providers that support SRE teachers in this study	243
Appendix 3.1 Interview 1 possible questions	244
Appendix 3.2 Possible questions for Eleanor’s second interview	245
Appendix 3.3 Participant information letter	246
Appendix 3.4 Participant consent form	248
Appendix 5.1 <i>Guest and Host</i> conversation.....	249
Appendix 5.2 The construction of <i>Guest and Host</i> as a conceptual category	255
Appendix 6.1 <i>Vulnerability and Authority</i> conversation	256
Appendix 5.2 The construction of <i>Vulnerability and Authority</i> as a conceptual category ...	264
Appendix 5.1 <i>Truth and Hope</i> conversation.....	265
Appendix 5.2 The construction of <i>Truth and Hope</i> as a conceptual category.....	273
Appendix 5.1 <i>Relational Teaching</i> conversation.....	274
Appendix 5.2 The construction of <i>Relational Teaching</i> as a conceptual category.....	278

ABSTRACT

In several states of Australia, parents who send their children to public schools can also elect that they participate in special religious education (SRE). SRE is taught in public schools during school hours by visiting teachers who provide education in the beliefs and practices of their religion. The religious organisations that these SRE teachers represent are responsible for both the selection and training of SRE teachers, and the provision of curriculum. Although SRE is common in many public schools, little is known about the distinctive nature of its pedagogy.

Although there are many similarities between SRE pedagogy and other pedagogy (including religious education), its particular features are of interest in this thesis. SRE teaches about belief from a faith perspective which is a source of motivation for all teachers who volunteer to teach children in public schools in NSW and Victoria. SRE is timetabled in school hours and yet is not part of the school curriculum; and it is taught by visiting teachers who may be passionate about their beliefs and the need to share these with young people but are also subject to the contingencies of classrooms arrangements which are often inhospitable. These factors influence the knowledge, values and practices of SRE teachers which can be seen through three broad, interrelated lenses - epistemological, axiological and methodological. It is therefore important to understand how SRE teachers' experiences and beliefs influence these three aspects of the pedagogy they embody in the classrooms they visit and the ways in which they struggle to reach the children in these irregular classroom encounters.

In order to discover how SRE pedagogy looks to its teachers and to do justice to the ways they construed their calling and pedagogic response to this I needed to attend closely to the words they used to describe their work and to tease out those categories that were common across the cohort of 23 teachers in all their differences. Constructivist grounded theory was chosen as the basis of the methodology both because it provided an opportunity for the voices of the SRE teachers to be heard and because it is well suited to research that explores issues where there has been limited academic consideration. Using the categories generated from the analysis, and examining them in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives from other social and educational researchers, a theoretical framework for understanding SRE pedagogy was then constructed. Data for this study was collected from twenty three SRE teachers between 2010 and 2012. SRE teacher interviews were chosen as

the initial source of data. In addition, reflective journals and follow-up interviews further enhanced the depth of the analysis. Constructivist grounded theory enabled me to attend closely to the words the SRE teachers used to describe their teaching and the conditions shaping their classroom actions.

The data analysis was extensive; data from the teachers' interviews and journals was initially coded through line-by-line coding and then through focused coding where salient codes were brought to the forefront. As analysis continued conceptual categories were constructed through an iterative process involving a continuous returning to the data, the focused codes, and the construction of conversations derived from the teachers' words. The analysis underscored how the historical and institutional context of SRE, and the place of religious belief in SRE teaching, both influence SRE pedagogy. At the heart of SRE pedagogy is an emphasis on the relational aspect of teaching. This relational teaching is embedded in the way that the SRE teachers bring their belief to their students and the vulnerability they experience as they do this. Each of these aspects are subject to the realities of teaching in schools and classrooms that are not their own.

The analysis led to the construction of four conceptual categories that capture the distinctive nature of SRE pedagogy for the SRE teachers. These are the SRE teachers' (i) experiences of guest/host relationships; (ii) experiences of vulnerability and authority; (iii) beliefs around truth and hope; and (iv) belief in the importance of relational teaching. These four categories come together to form the SRE Pedagogy Lotus where subsequent layers are embedded within the previous layer. The SRE Pedagogy Lotus is a useful heuristic for representing and understanding the distinctive nature of SRE pedagogy. It represents how the interconnectedness of the four categories with relational teaching at the heart of SRE teaching were constructed in the analysis. Experiences of being a guest and host form the outer layer of the lotus because these experiences impact all aspects of SRE. As SRE teachers cross the threshold of public schools they become the guests of both the school and the classroom where they teach. Regardless of whether these experiences are positive or negative, the awareness of being a guest influences the SRE teachers' pedagogy.

In the second layer of the SRE Pedagogy Lotus, SRE teachers experience both vulnerability and authority. SRE teachers experience vulnerability because they teach about something that is deeply important to them within the context of the guest/host relationships that they encounter. Experiences of vulnerability are also related to the SRE teachers'

perceived lack of authority they contend with in the classroom. Paradoxically, the SRE teachers' experience of vulnerability and lack of authority is counterbalanced by their expressed belief that they teach under the authority of God who has called them to teach SRE and they believe joins them in the classroom.

Truth and Hope is the third layer of the SRE Pedagogy Lotus. While the SRE teachers express belief in the absolute truth of God's word, as they teach they selectively work with this truth to make it accessible for their students. Similarly, the SRE teachers express both an eschatological and an immediate hope in their teaching. They have an eschatological hope that their teaching will have deep, spiritual impact on their students in the future. But they also have an immediate hope that each lesson will unfold in positive ways, engaging their students with ideas about faith that are shared in a class.

Relational teaching lies at the centre, or heart, of SRE pedagogy. The SRE teachers emphasise how developing a good relationship with their students helps them to establish a positive learning environment. However, the SRE teachers also bring a spiritual dimension to the importance they place on developing good relationships with their students. Their expressed belief that God is relational, their sense of calling to SRE and their desire to share the possibility of having a relationship with God drives them to work on positive relationships with their students.

This thesis underscores the distinctive nature of SRE pedagogy that is reflected in the SRE teachers' epistemology, axiology and methodology. The SRE Pedagogy Lotus provides a helpful heuristic for understanding SRE pedagogy and highlights the need for teaching resources that support this pedagogy and for training and support of SRE teachers in the four layers of SRE pedagogy.