STUDY OF SRE AND ITS VALUE TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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In a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulation power. Life, to be sure, is even in such a world a genuinely ethical symphony; but it is played in the compass of a couple of poor octaves, and the infinite scale of values fails to open up...The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals.

(James, 1897/1956, pp. 210–211)

Consistent with prior literature, our results suggest associations of frequent religious participation in adolescence with greater subsequent psychological well-being, character strengths, and lower risks of mental illness and several health behaviors.

(Chan and VanderWeele, American Journal of Epidemiology, September 2018, p. 7)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART I: Introduction and Background

- The world is going through a period of rapid change which impacts significantly on Australian society.
- Many people thought that with secularisation, religion would die, but this is not the case, and religion is still a very important actor in contemporary society.
- SRE, that is confessional religious education, began in New South Wales in 1880, as one lesson a week, known as 'Right of Entry Classes'. Today it operates as Special Religious Education (SRE) with parents in the state being given the option of opting out of these classes and choosing either Special Ethics Education (SEE) or No Religion instead.
- In 2015, a major review was commissioned by the Department of Education of both SRE and SEE. This was the most recent study to provide a comprehensive picture of the operation of both SRE and SEE, with the previous report being produced in 1980, 35 years ago.

PART II: The Advantages of Maintaining SRE

- There a number of key contributions that SRE can make to ensure the holistic education of a child. These are:
    - values education
    - facilitating children's health and wellbeing
    - enriching religious diversity leading to a thick multiculturalism
    - strengthening students' culture and identity
    - creating a 'safe place' in the face of racism, prejudice and antisemitism.

PART III: Bringing The System Into The Twenty-First Century

- 2015 Review and its central recommendations
- Responses by the NSW Government and the SRE community, with the creation of a consultative committee representing all the different faith communities and the appointment of a consultant, Rachele Schonberg, to assist in the implementation of the 16 key recommendations accepted by the committee as being of central importance for the SRE providers.
- Theory and expert recommendations in terms of key pedagogic strategies include the need to combine both socialisation and education in the SRE classroom; to foster a constructivist approach to teaching about the religion rather than an essentialist approach; to draw on the techniques of experiential and information education; and to ensure reflective rather than an instrumental teaching and the interpretative approach as delineated by Jackson.
- SRE teachers see their role as a vocation but if they can be assisted to incorporate these key elements into their teaching and learning, SRE will be much more successful.

PART IV: Recommendations And Conclusions

This study demonstrates that religion still has an key role in our contemporary society and that it is important to retain SRE in government schools. SRE provides a number of key benefits. These include firstly values education within the framework of belief in God or a higher spiritual being, which has been shown to be a powerful factor in empowering student decisions, fostering their ability to act and assigning student responsibility. Secondly, religious belief has been shown to have important psychological benefits for students' mental health and wellbeing. Thirdly, retaining the rich mix of the different faith communities in New South Wales strengthens Australia's multicultural fabric. Finally, SRE classes provide safe places for students explore the deeper questions of their religion and identity.

At the same time, this study argues that SRE pedagogy needs to be brought into the twenty-first century, ensuring best practice in teaching and learning. This is needed to meaningfully engage the next generation. To achieve this goal, SRE providers, with government support and assistance, need to:

- Introduce a basic training course through the Department of Education for all SRE beginning teachers that includes the various pedagogic approaches discussed above
- Provide opportunities for ongoing professional development, both within and across the faith groups
- Introduce more effective supervision and monitoring to the teaching body
- Establish a mixed-faith evaluation committee of curricula and lesson plans to ensure that the materials taught offer a broad and inclusive perspective that encourages the students' autonomy in their religious beliefs
  Foster greater transparency in all aspects of SRE teaching.

This report argues that adopting these best practice approaches to religious education will ensure a robust SRE curriculum which is suitably equipped to develop students in contemporary Australian society. A strengthened SRE program will enrich New South Wales society and improve students' mental health and wellbeing, assisting to equip them to be confident, functioning adults. In the rapidly changing contemporary world this is extremely important.

PART I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

The aim of this report is to illustrate the importance and the value to society of maintaining Special Religious Education (SRE) in government schools in NSW. It also aims to discuss ways that the present system can be improved through greater transparency and accountability, and by understanding current thinking and pedagogy in relation to religious education.

This section, Part 1, presents the introduction and background. In Part II, the report will discuss the major reasons as to why SRE is still of value to contemporary society and will include a case study of Jewish SRE providing a 'safe place', which is so important for students' wellbeing. Part III will then discuss ways of improving the provision of SRE, so that its overall framework and pedagogy is relevant and appropriate for the twenty-first century. This part will include a case study with an analysis of the teaching and learning by the different faiths in SRE on the theme of 'care and compassion', one of the key elements of the Australian Government's values framework document. The final part, Part IV, will summarise the main conclusions and recommendations of this report.

The starting point for this report is that Australian schools are entering a new era: one of continuous change and renewal, restructure and reconstruction, reform and transformation. The current era brings with it a breaking and blurring of all kinds of boundaries—national, social, political, technological, and in communication. The validity of religion is being questioned and the percentage of the population which is affiliated with a specific faith group is declining. This creates significant challenges for religious education in government schools. As such, we seek to explore generational differences to help to illuminate the broader generational shifts and to highlight how, within the challenges of the post-modern world, current research highlights that it is still meaningful to teach values education within the framework of religious education.

It is important to differentiate between beliefs and values, as they are not synonymous terms. Values are based on a rational premise, so it is important to be able to justify the reasons behind a value. On the other hand, beliefs are not rational, but emotional – something one feels intrinsically within oneself, which can be influenced by cultural transmission, the nature and temperament of a person or impulse (Hill, 2010).

At present, there is polarisation towards SRE and its value in our contemporary society, both at the global level and in Australia. The aim of this report is to argue that there is a confluence between ethics/moral education and religious education, and that it is still very important to enable parents within the government school sector to have the choice of SRE for the education of their children, relating to these key issues for society and ensuring that those who want a religious approach for their children to still have that opportunity.

At the same time, this report will argue that there is significant value in religious education for society, provided that it is offered within a reflective rather than a

dogmatic framework. Currently, the debate is polarised. Those opposed to SRE give examples of problematic elements in Christian SRE that are due to the failure to ensure professional development for all providers, while those who support SRE are worried about the closure of these classes, which they passionately believe should be maintained. Objective research has demonstrated the importance of religious belief to health and wellbeing, a key aim within the NSW Department of School Education program.

Our aim in this report is to advocate for a system of SRE for those families who choose SRE classes where students will be immersed in their own religious and cultural heritage and values, while at the same time having respect for all other faiths and cultures.

The Challenges: A rapidly changing world and decline in religious practice

We live in time of rapid change. The way we make sense of our context and what we value is increasingly being shaped by a more global perspective. This section will first discuss the major societal changes that are taking place, then the emergence of multiple religious discourses and finally, the decline in specific institutional affiliations to a faith community.

Major Societal Changes

In the postmodern world, there have been radical changes in human society. This is an era of globalisation. The traditional boundaries that separated ideologies and communities are being broken, creating a change in the 'sense of place.' The digital innovations—Facebook, Twitter, the internet, smart boards—are transforming the education scene. With the internet and Kindle, the whole notion of literacy has changed. The values that may have been context-specific and unique in particular social milieus are being challenged in the light of a global perspective. In addition, a key characteristic of fluid modernity is individuation, where each individual constructs, confirms, and maintains her/his identity according to her/his choice, desires, and tendencies.

We live in a highly materialistic society. With the effects of globalisation and transnationalism, there has been 'the commodification of educational programmes whose purposes are underwritten by economic forces' (Swanson, 2010, p. 137). Resulting from this neoliberal agenda, vital considerations embedded in human nature relating to spirituality and wellbeing have been neglected.

Pluralism is another key concept in modern society, but it is a complex one with a multiplicity of meanings. It incorporates three major elements: methodological, political, and cultural, which are separate but overlapping. The methodological or philosophical element refers to different points of view in contrast to monism or absolutist approaches; political refers to the individual's right to choose between different strands of thought or
identification; and cultural relates to the development of multicultural theory and cultural pluralism (Conyer, 2011).

Another key process that has intensified is secularisation. The theory assumed that religion and traditional values would vanish with the progress of time and the advance of modernity, and this would pave the way to a stronger emphasis on, and prioritisation of, humanistic values.

Well-known veteran Australian journalist, Greg Sheridan, has just published an important eBook, *God is Good: A defence of Christianity in Trouble Times* (2018). In his introduction, he argues that this prioritisation of humanistic values is problematic because:

> *The loss of Christianity, and not only of Christianity but of much other religious belief and practice, will change us in ways we cannot possibly imagine. There will be no purpose beyond ourselves and ultimately Western humanity will look in the mirror and say: I'm bored with myself. And then, out of that boredom, who can imagine? Human boredom and confusion have often had deadly consequences. In itself, this is not the reason for holding on to Christianity. You cannot believe something transcendent because it might be socially useful. You believe it if you think it's true and it attracts some part of your soul; you want to believe it. Yet our identity as human beings has been so intimately woven by our relationship with God. (p. N/A)*

He notes the ongoing removal of religion from the public space, with the state also starting to restrict religion.

> *These are small steps so far, but they will become bigger steps in time. It is very difficult now to teach scripture in a Victorian state school. Queensland education bureaucrats moved to discourage children from mentioning Jesus in the playground. (p. N/A)*

He sees these small steps with the growing secularisation and the potential 'death of God' as having negative repercussions on the fabric of Australian society and aims in his book to demonstrate the importance and value of religious belief. Given that Australia is largely a Christian society, his book focuses on Christianity, but his message relates to all religious beliefs.

Sheridan also points out that the loss of belief in God does not stop people from believing, but that their belief can include 'a wold miscellany of ideologies and esoteric cults', and can also lead to polarisation within society with 'sudden outburst of hysterical sentiments' *(p. N/A)* .

We have seen this in the increasing fundamentalism within religious belief, so that in fact, the opposite to secularisation has happened for some sectors of society. Events such as the fall of the Soviet Union, the strengthening of fundamentalist regimes in Iran, and 9/11 all show that religion is still a major actor in the twenty-first century. We have seen a growing trend of terrorism in the name of God, which utilises modern technology to promote anti-modern agendas (Huntington, 1996) and Australia has not been immune to these developments. This has blurred the dichotomous categories of traditionalism

and modernity, and shows that multiple religious discourses have emerged with both negative and positive facets.

Multiple Religious Discourses

Australia's development as a multi-faith society is a recent phenomenon. In the 2016 census figures, around 60% of the population identified as Christian. The newer faith traditions and faiths, such as the Hindus, Buddhists and Bahá'í, are growing in size as is the Muslim population in Australia.

As mentioned above, we live in a social context in which there are multiple agendas, discourses and interests continuously interacting with each other, with existing social patterns. Multiple voices of many groups are being heard in the current era. As a result, approaches to social processes in education, which may have been appropriate in past eras, are no longer relevant and new ways are being explored to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century. When considering the concept of SRE, educators are faced with multiple agendas and a plethora of interests, motivations, tensions and conflicts: what does being religious mean and how important is it to maintain religious beliefs, of whichever form, within our current society? This is the crucial question in terms of SRE (Gross and Rutland, 2015).

Traditional religious approaches, for example within Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have rejected pluralism and have tended to be absolutist. Modernity has challenged this approach. S.N. Eisenstadt (2000) was the first sociologist to argue that modernity is not a simple, coherent unity, but contains many facets and interpretations.

> *Modernity liberates individuals from the constraining bonds of tradition generating a multiplicity of options that give rise to choice and pluralism. Yet at the same time modernity imposes certain forms of discipline, uniformity, rationalization and social control that counters individual liberation. (p. 5)*

This multiplicity is intertwined with Bauman's (2000) notion of fluid modernity, which implies that our life is characterised by constant change and endemic uncertainty in which we have to be flexible. Modern life is fluid as opposed to the firm and solid life of the past.

A key characteristic of fluid modernity is individuation, where each individual constructs, confirms, and maintains her identity according to her choice, desires, and tendencies. Twenge (2009) has demonstrated that the major generational and psychological shift is to a focus on the individual (the 'me generation'), rather than on broader social needs (p. 399). In relation to Australia and the rest of the Western world, Sheridan (2018) describes this process:

> *The loss of its connection to religious belief has led liberalism into a sustained nervous breakdown. It is driven insane by contradictory impulses it can no longer control or balance. One is an anti-social self-absorption. The development of the metaphysical understanding of human identity has ended in a dry gulch. Under Christianity, for the first time slaves were seen as commanding an immortal destiny*

> *and having a unique, personal relationship with God, as possessing immortal souls. Slaves and women and foreigners—the excluded and marginalised of the ancient world—they all had souls. But the soul—the embodiment of our deepest integrity and destiny—gave way to the self, as the therapeutic age replaced the age of belief. Now, in our postmodern times, in the world of social media and the universal quest for celebrity, even the self has been supplanted by the brand, the quintessential expression of which is the 'selfie'. The price of my soul became the sense of myself and now it's the appeal of my brand. From soul to self to brand is a steep decline in what it means to be human. (p. N/A)*

Clearly these developments are very relevant for contemporary Australian society and are particularly problematic for religious education in general and SRE in particular.

Religion in general is traditionally community-based; a key value is that community needs should take precedence over individual needs. This focus on community is seen in the charitable works conducted by Australian churches, with the Catholic Church in Australia being the second biggest deliverer of social services after the government (Sheridan, 2018). This is one of the major challenges of contemporary society, because of the destructive element of focusing on the individual, rather than the community.

The school is a major social actor that facilitates the journey into modernity through its crucial role in the formation of the moral development of its students. Therefore, given these negative trends with the declining influence of religion and its focus on community, the NSW government needs to recognise the importance of maintaining religion in the public space in general, and in our school system through SRE in particular.

<u>Secularisation and The Decline in Affiliation to a Specific Faith Community</u>
As part of these radical changes there has been a significant decline in organised religion. Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of Australians nominating 'no religion' on the census, with almost one in three Australians (32%) not identifying with any religion (McCrindle, 2017, p. 9). The percentage of non-believers increased with the younger generations, who are also more likely to change their religious beliefs from those of their family.

The decline of belief in Christianity is very clear, with almost two thirds of the generation born between the interwar period and World War II (1925–1945) believing in Christianity, compared with current generation where less than a half of the population are believing Christians.

In 2017, the research firm, McCrindle, undertook a study of faith and belief in Australia. They used a mixed method approach, with a quantitative national survey of 1,024 Australians, and three focus groups encompassing a total of 26 interviewees who did not identify as Christians. In their survey, the question on religion was tightened to 'What religion do you **currently** practise or identify with?' They also provided an option for participants to indicate if they were 'spiritual but not religious'. They found that 45% identified with Christianity with a further 14% identifying as spiritual but not religious,

making a total of 59% (p. 7). This compared with the 2011 census findings of 61% identifying as Christians.

Sheridan highlights that there has been a further and steep decline in religious affiliation as seen with the results of the 2016 census with what Sheridan describes as 'a startling abrupt change in patters of belief in Australia.

> *Just five years before, in 2011, 61 per cent of Australians identified themselves in the census as Christians. In 2016 this number had dropped dramatically to 52 per cent. In 2006 the figure had been 64 per cent, so in the half decade after 2006 there was a gentle decline. In the half decade after 2011 there was a radical decline. Nearly one in ten fewer Australians identified as Christian than five years earlier. One in ten! The rate of decline accelerated sharply and there is, sadly, little reason to think that trend won't continue.*
> *Equally stark was the rise in the number of people who identified as having no religious belief. Its rise almost mirrored Christianity's decline. In 2011 the 'no belief' group was 22.5 per cent; in 2016 it was 30 per cent. Again, nearly one in ten Australians more with no belief than five years earlier. In 2006 the no belief figure had been only 19 per cent so its small rise in the next half decade mirrored Christianity's small decline. Its leap after 2011 mirrored Christianity's fall off a cliff in that same five years.*
> *These are big numbers and they represent big social dynamics (Sheridan, 2018, p. N/A).*

He does note that there can be factors of under-numeration. Some small Christian groups instruct their members not to answer the question on religion, so that the true figure for Christians may be 55% not 52%. Demographers of the Jewish community also argue that there is significant under-numeration.

However, when analysing the figures according to age, the decline is even more obvious. Thus, he argues, Australia in moving to become a majority atheist nation.

It is important to note that whilst the number of believers is declining, there is still a substantial number of Australians who have some form of religious belief, even if they are not active participants in that faith's religious practices, such as attending church. Thus, as the McCrindle Report argues, 'religion in Australia is not dead' (p. 11), but as Sheridan demonstrates it certainly is being challenged in Australia.

Reassessing the role, importance and value of SRE against this background of rapid societal change and the emergence of diverse populations is of central importance. As Sheridan argues, 'God is good' (p. N/A) and it is important to maintain some confessional teaching within the public space of our schools in NSW for those parents and children who wish to maintain their religious beliefs and practices.

At the same time, Sheridan points out:

> *The lack of purpose and meaning, the lack of any ultimate standards that come with the exile of God from our culture lead to savage polarisations and sudden outbursts of hysterical sentiments. There is a disorientation which is alternately enervated and frenzied. (p. N/A)*

In this polarisation, there is, on the one hand, radical atheism, and on the other hand, emerging fundamentalism, and this is across the religious faiths as will be discussed in the next section.

Background and Structure of SRE

There are different forms of religious education in the state context, depending on the country's beliefs as to whether religion and education should be completely separated or not. The history of religion and religious education in Australia is reflective of our country's broader social and cultural changes. Special Religious Education (SRE) began in New South Wales in 1880 with weekly classes known as 'Right of Entry' or 'scripture' classes. Today, parents choose whether their child attends SRE classes, and there are alternative options of Special Ethics Education (SEE) or No Religion. In 2015, the NSW Department of Education commissioned a major review of both SRE and SEE. The aim of this 2015 study was to understand how SRE and SEE are currently operating in schools. This section will discuss these developments.

Religious Education in the State Context

A focal point in the literature on religious education is the role that the state plays vis-à-vis religious education (Gross, 2003; Ziebertz & Riegel, 2009). Specifically, scholars are concerned with the different ways in which countries accommodate religion within their educational systems. Three types of states have been identified (Arthur, Gearon, & Sears, 2010; Cush, 2007; Feinberg, 2006; Grimmitt, 1994; Jackson, 2004, 2007; Knauth, 2008; Thobani, 2010; Leirvik, 2010).

The first type refers to countries, such as the United States, in which neither confessional nor non-confessional religious education is provided in state schools.

The second type refers to countries with a pluralist approach, where teaching of religion is included in the state curriculum, taught from a non-confessional and multi-faith perspective (that is General RE). In this type of country, private religious confessional schooling is an option and may even receive state funding, such as in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

The third type refers to countries where confessional teaching of religion is authorised by the state, and state schools utilise confessional modes of religious instruction. This instruction may be aligned with the dominant faith in the country, such as Iran, or may be split along denominational lines according to the prominence of different faiths, as in the case of Israel, where the Jewish and the Islamic religious traditions each belong to a separate state-funded school system.

Interestingly, in Australia, the SRE element of state education has an element related to this third type of religious schooling, since it offers confessional religious education within the government schools along denominational lines, albeit only for one short period a week, with this teaching not being funded by the state.

Within these three different state models of religious education one can have education about religion; education for religion and/or education through religion. General RE is education about religion, whilst SRE is education both *for* and *through* religion. However, education *for* religion has a fundamentalist focus, whilst education *through* religion means understanding morals and values within a religious framework.

SRE: History and Development

SRE classes began at the end of the nineteenth century, when the colonial governments introduced free, compulsory, secular education for all children to replace the denominational school system that had been in place (Byrne, 2013). In order to meet the needs of the different denominations, the colonial governments introduced a period for 'separate, denominational, confessional teaching' with specific in-faith teaching by each religious denomination (Byrne, 2009). This change was made in New South Wales in 1880 with the Public Instruction Act (Gross and Rutland, 2015). Terence Lovat (2010, p. 4) notes that 'the rubric of "religious", stressed the need for students to be inculcated into the values of their society, including understanding the role that religious values had played informing that society's legal codes and social ethics' (c.f. NSW, 1912).

Initially called 'Right of Entry' classes (known colloquially as 'scripture'), the reasoning behind the introduction of these classes was, at the time, pragmatic, since the public had been accustomed with church-based education, and the reformers wanted to demonstrate that 'state-based education was capable of meeting the same ends' (Lovat, 2010, p. 4). While the initial plan was for the compulsory scripture classes to be offered daily, once instituted, they were only offered on a weekly basis for half an hour. With the increasing secularisation of society in the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, government education came to be seen as 'values-neutral'.

In 1980, a century after its first Public Instructions Act, the New South Wales Government decided that there was a need to evaluate the whole Right of Entry system and they commissioned a report, entitled the Rawlinson Report. Its brief was broad ranging, including the place of religious education, both SRE and GRE (General Religious Education), as well as requesting recommendations for future action. The committee made the following recommendations:

- **General Religious Education (GRE)**, 'that is learning about religions' should form an integral part of the educational opportunities for children in N.S.W. government schools;
- **Special Religious Education (SRE)**, that is the teaching of a particular religious faith, should be available for the children of parents requesting such teaching, depending upon the availability of suitable qualified personnel at the local level;

- **Parents** should retain the right, without having to state their reasons, to determine whether or not their children participate in General Religious Education and/or Special Religious Education, at any stage of schooling. (https://ccd.sydneycatholic.org/about-ccd/history-of-sre-in-nsw-government-schools/ accessed 25 October 2018).

In response to these recommendations, the government decided that attendance at SRE should be voluntary, based on parental choice and that those children whose parents opposed SRE should attend the 'no religion' classes. As well, a new Board of Studies GRE course, entitled 'Studies of Religion', was introduced with a NSW government syllabus for Years 7-12, so that GRE was officially recognised as an HSC (Higher School Certificate) subject. However, although student numbers for Studies of Religion for the HSC have grown rapidly, almost no government schools offer GRE as a subject option. Thus, GRE has only been taken up by the non-government religious school sector as a way of enabling the students to continue their religious studies into their senior years, but through the GRE perspective.

Recently, there has been debate in Australia, reflecting the global debate, regarding religious education in government schools, with researchers arguing that multi-faith education should replace SRE classes. Researchers have recommended a re-evaluation of the way religious instruction and education classes are currently being taught in Australian schools (Bouma and Halafoff, 2009; Byrne, 2009). In 2010, the Religion, Ethics and Education Network of Australia (REENA) was formed as a conduit for this debate. Through the REENA (2011), these critics produced an official document 'Statement and Principles', which highlighted these problems relating to religious education.

In response to these various concerns, the NSW Department of Education recently introduced an ethics course, 'Special Ethics Education (SEE)' which can replace SRE and seeks to reintroduce the social ethics and behaviour previously part of religious education. Students, together with their parents, decide whether they wish to attend their particular faith classes or the ethics/non-religion classes

Organisation and Scope of SRE

Within the SRE system, each religion is responsible for organising the teachers, in most cases, on a voluntary basis, and developing its own, specific curriculum and teaching methods outside of the formal government curriculum. The SEE classes are also run on a voluntary basis, with a new organisation formed to form teacher professional development and the administration of these classes.

Since 1980 there has been no formal study or evaluation of SRE in NSW. To meet this gap, in 2014 the NSW Department of Education commissioned an independent review of both SRE and SEE in government schools. They set out nine basic Terms of Reference (ToR), which encompassed nine categories for this review. This first of these dealt with the nature and scope of SRE and SEE.

This review was undertaken by the outside group, the ARTD Consultants which examined each term of reference and then made recommendations, dealing with SRE and SEE separately. In terms of this report, it is the findings relating to SRE which are relevant.

This review was conducted using a comprehensive mixed methodology approach, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling triangulation. The main methods used were:

> • *Document scan, with a review of departmental and provider websites;*
> • *Curriculum review, assessing materials from current SRE providers;*
> • *Consultations with all stakeholders (principals, teachers, students, SRE providers and parents) including the broader community through online portals, as well as interviews with peak providers, education and other relevant groups, as well as in-depth case studies of 14 schools with 12 SRE providers from 11 faith groups using face-to-face interviews. (Review, p. xiii)*

The researchers expressed confidence in their findings based on this comprehensive methodology, which was certainly very thorough, justifying their confidence.

The study found that there were 101 approved SRE providers, of whom 87 were Christian and 14 from another seven faith groups including (in terms of size) Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish Baha'i, Vedic and Sikh. The largest faith groups were Catholic, Anglican and Baptist. The classes were serviced by 11,400 authorised SRE teachers, almost all of whom worked in a voluntary capacity, with only 3% being paid.

The extent of SRE at primary school level is very high with an average of 87% offering SRE (91% at primary level in weekly 30-40 minute classes and 81% at secondary level, but with variable times for offering the classes, either fortnightly, monthly or once a term and within class time or at lunchtime), with 71% of students participating in primary schools, dropping to 30% in secondary schools. Almost half of the principals surveyed commented on a decline in SRE enrolments over the past four years, with a higher percentage (53%) at primary compared with secondary level (38%) (Hodge et al., 2015).

When students enrol in a government school at primary level, the parents or care givers can decide whether to opt out of SRE. In most schools, once this decision is made it continues for each year grade, unless the family specifies that they wish to opt out. Some principals request parents and caregivers to confirm participation on an annual basis in primary school. At high school level, there is normally the opportunity to opt in to the program, rather than opting out, requiring a more positive commitment to SRE. This may be one contributing factor in lower participation rates in high school.

On the whole, there is a good relationship between SRE principals and SRE providers, although there can be problems with differing worldviews and also issues relating to scheduling of classes.

Setting out the educational goals for young Australians, the Melbourne Declaration (Barr et al., 2008) stipulated that learners should be 'confident and creative individuals' and

'have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical well-being', as well as being as to 'act with moral and ethical integrity' (p. 9).

Based on the current literature in terms of the importance and values of religious education and the quantitative and qualitative research discussed below, this report aims to expand and analyse the value of SRE in achieving the educational goals set out in the Melbourne Declaration. It argues that SRE will assist young Australians to enhance their sense of self-worth, inner peace and spirituality, leading to greater wellbeing and good health, as well as reinforcing their values, and helping them to deal with issues of religious discrimination and prejudice within their own faith and ethnic community. As such, SRE contributes to the Australian education system offering 'thick multiculturalism' as discussed below.

Importance of Choice

Offering SRE for parents and students who want the opportunity of a confessional religious education recognises the diversity of Australian society. At the same time, parents can choose to send their children to the ethics classes. Such choice is important today because within our contemporary, pluralistic and largely secular society, some groups are strongly opposed to religious education (Haydon, 2010, p.200). Indeed, Geoffrey Short points out that within democratic and liberal societies, the importance of autonomy in a liberal society and the right of parents to choose their form of their children's schooling needs to be recognised (Short, 2002). By offering parents the choice between SRE, SEE and No Religion, this autonomy is currently recognised with the NSW government schools. Yet, the fact that the majority of parents opt for SRE indicates that they see value in the system. The next part will discuss why SRE still is important for our contemporary society.

PART II: THE ADVANTAGES OF MAINTAINING SRE

The global debate regarding religious education in government schools has stimulated discussion in Australia around the merit of SRE and its place in contemporary Australian society. Providing SRE classes for NSW students and their diverse religious backgrounds allows for a more intentional teaching and learning approach to fostering spirituality, religious belief and religious values. Part II will discuss the importance of values education and what religious education brings to the table in this domain. In addition to providing important psychological benefits to students' health and wellbeing, SRE classes can strengthen the multicultural fabric of Australia and foster social cohesion by providing a sense of belonging and safe places for students to explore deeper questions of cultural and religious identity in an environment of trust and respect.

Values Education and Its Importance

The changing attitudes to SRE represent the ongoing swinging of the pendulum in terms of educational policies, whether the focus should be religious versus scientific, liberal versus vocational, etc. By retaining SRE but encouraging a values education approach, students will be able to investigate what it means to be human and how to put this into action within their own individual belief system.

Professor Terence Lovat argues that 'the notion, therefore, that public education is part of a deep and ancient heritage around values-neutrality is mistaken and in need of serious revision. The evidence suggests that public education's initial conception was of being the complete educator, not only of young people's minds, but of their inner character as well' (Lovat, 2010, p.4). This section will discuss the meaning of values education, its intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, and the Australian National Framework for Education which has recently been introduced and enumerates the nine key characteristics relating to values. The discussion in this section will end with a specific study of the value of 'care and compassion', demonstrating how this is embedded in all the major religions and also how it is integrated and taught in each of the SRE faith curriculum.

Values Education

Values education is among the central issues in pedagogic discourse and endeavours in many countries. It is perceived as a pivotal means of ensuring the continuity of a society's values (Dror, 2007). From the perspective of many educators, values education is at the heart of educational effort, going beyond technically transferring skills. Yet, on the other hand, some argue that values education is liable to result in political, religious or ideological indoctrination. This is the antithesis of the idea of education, which should deal principally with the development of autonomous individuals, who can choose the values by which they wish to live (Oser, 1999).

A value is the 'enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-

state of existence' (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). Klages (1988) suggests that due to rapid changes in the world as a result of modernisation and secularisation processes, there has been a transformation from what he calls nomo-centric understanding to auto-centric understanding.

Nomo-centric understanding means that the individual is captured, dependent and subdued by his environment, namely that one's existentiality is constructed through belonging, membership, duty and through external values. Auto-centric understanding implies a self-reliant approach, where the individual strives for self-realisation based on his personal judgement and rationality. Thus, auto-centric values characterise a modern approach, whereas nomo-centric values characterise a more traditional approach.

Rokeach (1973) views values as hierarchic and distinguishes between two types of values: (1) terminal values (personal or social values) that individuals aspire to achieve throughout their lives; and (2) instrumental values (capacity values and moral values) that are expressions of forms of behaviour. He maintains that instrumental values may sometimes be a means for achieving terminal ones. Levy (1999) explains the possible ambiguity of Rokeach's definition by relying on facet theory: 'a terminal value relates to a goal that is a destination in itself, while an instrumental value addresses a goal both as a destination in itself and as a more primary destination' (p. 81). Zvi Lamm (2001) maintains that a value is a criterion for preference (for example beauty, love of one's country, the sanctity of life) in a reality of conflict (that is, where there is no a priori consensus) between motivations of equivalent power (between two entities perceived as good or bad). If one is considered good and the second bad, there can be no consensus.

What transpires then, is that values are not neutral but are influenced by various social interests (Apple, 2004), expressed in different conflictive situations. The school is perceived as an arena where different social groups struggle to implement their own criteria, priorities and values through diverse discourses. According to Lamm (2001), the school's role is not to transmit values but rather to use values as vehicles for transformation. Hence, the role of school is not to impart a binding set of values, but to nurture the individual's sensitivity to values (p. 653).

The literature dealing with values emphasises commitment, sensitivity and openness to a life with a value-based nature. This creates a need to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of a value, with educational implications for the individual's world and as a mirror for reflecting different processes that society undergoes.

<u>The Intrinsic or Extrinsic Dimension of a Value</u>

In *Protagoras*, Plato distinguished between intrinsic values, those that the individual is interested in because of their own value, and extrinsic values, in which the individual is interested in order to achieve another goal (Taylor, 1990).

In their research on the extrinsic and intrinsic dimension in a religious context, Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle (1997) found that people who held traditional values have a more extrinsic inclination, whereas those who considered themselves more modern had a stronger tendency to endorse intrinsic orientations. Religious people were more extrinsic

than secular people, women were more extrinsic than men, and people from a lower socio-economic background with lower education levels were typically more extrinsic than those with more education and from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Sansone and Harackiewicz (2000) found that the context in which a person lives has a decisive influence on shaping his or her extrinsic or intrinsic motivation:

> *The social context can influence the goals adopted in a given situation, and can also create a more enduring climate that results in internalization of values… which includes values as to what is interesting and worth pursuing. (p. 451)*

The extrinsic–intrinsic dimension creates a polarised binary arena where discourses of a traditional or modern character about values are constructed and deconstructed. According to Taylor (2004), these binaries should be revisited in the light of new theoretical hypotheses available in contemporary literature.

National Framework for Values Education

As Australia entered the twenty-first century, the Commonwealth Government became concerned at the increasing challenges within society with problems of broken marriages, dysfunctional families, drug problems, crime and inter-ethnic tensions and religious fundamentalism (Hill, 2010, p. 646). Hill quotes from the 2001 Prime Minister's Science Council report that:

> *In spite of Australia's increasing wealth and generally high level of education many indicators of developmental health and well-being are showing adverse trends amongst children and adolescents. Changes which have occurred include [a marked increase in] family breakdown and blended families, [and the] undervaluing and neglect of children . . . Some of these problems (such as . . . suicide) have trebled over the last 30 years and are higher than at any [previous] time in Australia's history. (p. 2)*

The government undertook a study of these issues and, in 2004, decided to introduce the 'National Framework for Values Education', making Australia a world leader in providing government funding for this important pedagogic approach. The National Framework sets out nine key values defined as follows:

Nine Values for Australian Schooling

1. Care and Compassion - Care for self and others
2. Doing Your Best - Seek to accomplish something worthy and admirable, try hard, pursue excellence
3. Fair Go - Pursue and protect the common good where all people are treated fairly for a just society
4. Freedom - Enjoy all the rights and privileges of Australian citizenship free from unnecessary interference or control, and stand up for the rights of others
5. Honesty and Trustworthiness - Be honest, sincere and seek the truth
6. Integrity - Act in accordance with principles of moral and ethical conduct, ensure consistency between words and deeds

> *7. Respect - Treat others with consideration and regard, respect another person's point of view*
> *8. Responsibility - Be accountable for one's own actions, resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways, contribute to society and to civic life, take care of the environment*
> *9. Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion - Be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others. (National Framework, 2005, p. 4)*

The Framework also sets out the key elements and approaches to inform good practice in values education. These include school planning, partnerships within the school community, whole school approach, safe and supportive learning environment, support for students, and quality teaching.

In 2004, the government invested significant funding to enable the implementation of this framework (Toomey, 2010, pp. 20–21), as well as facilitating research to evaluate the impact of the new approach to values education. The Stage 2 Australian Final Report (DEEWR, 2008) stated:

> *Starting from the premise that schooling educates for the whole child and must necessarily engage a student's heart, mind and actions, effective values education empowers student decision making, fosters student action and assigns real student responsibility. Effective values education is not an academic exercise; it needs to be deeply personal, deeply real and deeply engaging. (p. 11)*

A specific case study of a Catholic primary school which introduced the National Framework's program for values education found that it produced significant positive results in the teaching and learning of the students as well as in the overall school climate and student wellbeing (Toomey, 2010). This study attested to the effectiveness of values education, which in this case was also offered within the religious context of a Catholic school.

Secularists within the academic and broader community believe that non-confessional religious education in government schools can achieve the positive results of religious education and values through the development of a broad, liberal, spiritual understanding. In her controversial book, *Unsafe Gods* (2014), Lynn Davies argues that religion is irrelevant because it is the source of violence and fundamentalism and that schools should foster values education systematically to substitute values and religious education over time.

In a 2018 lecture at the International Seminar of Religious Education and Values, Judy Miller argues that non-confessional RE does not specifically aim 'to nurture belief, promote community cohesion, find truth, develop character, increase a sense of identity, gain knowledge or deepen spirituality even if, during the process, it contributes to some or all of those.'

Yet, these are the very elements fostered directly by SRE, which of course includes values education. This will be illustrated through a specific examination of 'care and compassion', one of the key characteristics listed in the National Framework for Values Education, later in this report.

Wellbeing and Health

The NSW Department website stresses that public schools 'provide safe learning and teaching environments to encourage healthy, happy, successful and productive students' and recommend that parents visit Wellbeing and learning to learn more (https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/going-to-a-public-school/quick-guide-for-parents, accessed 6 September 2018).

This emphasis on wellbeing by the NSW Department of Education is a new development, drawing on the problems discussed above of the fact that despite Australia's wealth, recent studies have shown that health and wellbeing in Australian society have declined. Educationalists have become aware of the importance of positive psychology, developing on the earlier theories of Maria Montessori. They have also developed a better understanding of the concept of the 'greater good' and the psychological problems created by the contemporary focus on individual needs rather than community needs. The study of Chen and Vanderweele (2018) demonstrates the centrality of belief in a higher spiritual being, of prayer, both public and private, as well as meditation, as directly producing positive health outcomes and protecting against negative behaviours. As well, Nielsen has demonstrated the importance of gratitude as a factor in giving and this is a key component of all religious prayer. These important findings will be discussed in this section, ending with an explanation of the clear connections between values education, wellbeing and religious belief. We argue that confessional religious education can develop these important attributes so that SRE can foster better health and community cohesion.

Wellbeing and Positive Psychology

There is extensive literature on wellbeing, which begins with ancient Greek philosophy with Aristotles' notion of *eudaimonia,* which means 'happiness' involving living the best possible life (Clement, 2010). The concept of wellbeing refers to 'the condition or state of being well, contented and satisfied with life' (Webb, 2010, p. 959). On the basis of Irwin (1988) and Carr's (2008) research, Clement notes that it must be 'multi-faceted and holistic and include personal, cognitive, affective, social, physical psychological, moral and spiritual dimensions' (Clement, 2010, p. 38). Whilst it is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, it can assist in indicating the strength and values of modern societies (Webb, 2010, p. 959).

Positive psychologists define mental wellbeing as being related to happiness. This perspective has been recently developed further by Martin Seligman, who has related this to the concepts of positive psychology. He stressed that people need to focus on change to building the best qualities in life through well-being, joy, and constructive cognitions about the future: optimism, faith and hope (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Research over the past decade or so has shown that 'when we feel good we are

more capable, productive and creative' (Nielsen, 2010, p. 617) but the concept of wellbeing has only recently come to the top of the educational agenda, even though earlier educationalists have stressed this point.

Well-known educator, Maria Montessori, whose philosophy has led to the development of a whole school system across the globe from early childhood to matriculation, recognised the importance of faith to a person's wellbeing (Carnes, 2015). She wrote: 'religious persons know well that . . . myth must cease to be real as soon as the child's mind matures, whereas faith must accompany a human being until the end of his life' (Montessori, 1997, p. 46). Fostering the spiritual element also relates to affective elements of learning and positive psychology. This is central to the Montessori philosophy (Colgan, 2016), which seeks to develop a positive approach to student learning and to foster within them intrinsic motivation, which includes enjoyment, interest and engagement, which are all elements of positive psychology (Rakhunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005).

Robert Biswas-Diener (2011) argues that the Montessori system is a 'happiness enabler' (p. 214) and thus facilitates wellness. Drawing on the study of Lillard and Else-Quest (2006), he stresses that whilst they did not find significant differences between the Montessori system and other types of schooling in terms of cognitive ability, they outperformed their peers in terms of their social ability and behaviour. He analysed the elements which foster happiness, including active learning, the role of choice, which leads to self-motivation, and creating 'structures that support growth, mastery, independence and other psychological needs that are strongly associated with happiness' (p.216), fitting in well with the positivist theory of psychology.

Montessori was one of the leading scholars who advocated for an optimistic educational approach aiming at building an environment, which develops self-esteem and enhances the positive elements within children and youth (Larson and Paulino, 2014, p. 19) thereby creating transformational change. They define transformation as 'the renewal of one's mind, a new way of being, a solution giving meaning to life' (p. 23).

Seligman (2002a) identified three types of happiness: the 'pleasurable life', involving self-gratification of our senses; 'engaged life', where we are completely immersed in our activity; and 'meaningful life' where we focus on a higher purpose. This issue of giving meaning to life is central to the SRE debate. Nielsen argues that 'while sensory pleasure and engaging activities are not to be dismissed, we enjoy higher and more steady levels of happiness and recuperate more easily from trauma when our lives also contain meaning and we are doing something for the greater good' (pp. 622–623).

Wellbeing, The Focus on The 'Greater Good' and Giving to Others

All religions focus on the concepts of the 'greater good' and also on the importance of 'giving', where ten characteristics have been defined. These include: religious celebrations and gratefulness to a higher being; helping others to help themselves, seen as the highest form of charity; forgiveness; courage; respect (a key element of the ten commandments); compassion; loyalty; and listening (Nielsen, 2010, p. 623). Medical

research has demonstrated that expressing gratitude each day, which is a central part of religious prayer, has the same health benefits as direct giving (Nielsen, 2010).

Professor Nielsen, of the University of Canberra, asked his students to test this assertion of the value to mental health of expressing gratitude. At the start of his course they took the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index survey. Then he asked them to keep a diary for six weeks and at the end of each day to list three things for which they were grateful. At the end of the six weeks, all of the participants had increased their satisfaction noticeably in all eight areas listed by the Wellbeing Index. Whilst Professor Nielsen commented on the limitations of this project, because there was no control group and it was difficult to assess the impact of the material they were studying in class, it was clear that positive psychology/giving, whether through the education process, the experiment or both, led to improved wellbeing (Nielsen, 2010, p.624).

Professor Nielsen asks: 'Giving to others would seem to be a powerful medicine – perhaps an antidote to our own inertia, apathy and fear. Could it be that we can create a strong ballast, a conscience in students by simply enabling them to do good on a daily basis?' (p. 624)

Yet, the importance of giving in terms of students' wellbeing and happiness is a relatively new concept in education. In our secular society, the focus has been to put one's own needs ahead of the needs of others, which is the diametrically opposite approach that has fostered the 'me generation'. The VEGPSP Stage 2 Final Report (DEEWR, 2008) stressed that 'effective values education is not an academic exercise; it needs to be deeply personal, deeply real and deeply engaging' (p. 11).

Another element of giving is what has been described in the literature as 'service learning', that is when students are engaged in action-based activities applying to their curriculum learning in direct service to others or their community (Nielsen, 2010). When we undertook our research for the Montessori International School, Ganenu, in Beijing, run by the Jewish Chabad movement, we found that the school encouraged concern for others, with the Jewish value of *tzeddakah* (charity) being stressed for both Jews and the non-Jewish community. Every Friday morning, the primary aged students volunteered for a Chinese charity, sorting clothes and assisting in other ways. Through this activity, their Chinese language skills improved, but more importantly, they built a sense of social justice together with an empathy of mainstream Chinese society and become part of giving to that society (Gross and Rutland, 2018). Hence, religious practice encourages giving from an early age, so that as students mature, it becomes second nature to their behaviour.

However, service learning does not have to be a part of the formal school curriculum. Developing social competencies is central to any modern school curriculum, and service learning is part of the competency. However, it is important to recognise that if we are to understand the meaning of giving, it should not be considered as a means to an end, but rather an end in and of itself. According to this reasoning, 'giving emerges as a living principle that could underpin our educational practices, not just because we want

children to do better at school, but also because we want them to *live* better' (Nielsen, 2010, p. 626).

Encouraging giving amongst students, something which over centuries was inbuilt into religious practice, can be transformational. To give of oneself, one needs to understand the importance of giving, something which is fostered with religion.

Professor Nielsen stresses:

> *That giving is one of the most profound things we can do is not only a scientific claim made by positive psychology, but also a key tenet of most religions and spiritual traditions. Whichever of these beliefs we subscribe to, there seems to be common ground on which to proceed. (p. 626)*

He notes the paradox that:

> *This still does not completely explain why improving others' lives has such a powerful effect on our own. Ultimately, our hearts, rather than our powers of reason, will have to recognize the truth of that. The heart has reasons that reason does not know… I have cited empirical research to show that 'giving' and 'love' work – even though we might not fully know why. Knowing this does not matter to some extent. Knowing that it works does. (p. 626)*

It is within this paradox between emotion and reason that religious belief is so important. Religious belief is, in the final analysis, an emotional and spiritual response that requires love and transcendence which cannot be explained rationally.

Victor Frankl (1985), in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, wrote:

> *...being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself, be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself, by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love, the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence. (https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/spiritual-life/man-s-search-for-meaning.html)*

As we have demonstrated, in our rapidly changing post-modern world, it has become more important than ever to provide young students with a basis to manage their fears and anxieties. The focus on giving at both the practical and spiritual levels fostered by religious belief can only be introduced into SRE classes. For those who feel the need for religious education, SRE can significantly add to the students' sense of wellbeing.

Research has also shown that with people suffering from alcoholism, drug abuse and eating disorders have lost their sense of meaning in life and their belief in a higher being.

Thus, in groups such as alcoholic anonymous, the first thing that participants are told is that they need to have a belief in God – it does not matter which religious belief they follow, but if they can gain a belief in a higher being and a sense of spirituality, they will understand better not to destroy their God-given bodies.

The Concept of 'Wholeness'

Michael Ben-Avie (2008) defines the concepts of 'wholeness' when children's development combines the six main pathways (physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social and ethical) which are 'critical to academic learning' and that of the 'who-ness', when children not only have a cognitive knowledge of who they are, but also an emotional attachment to their group (pp. 99–100).

For SRE, this means an attachment to their religious community, filling the need for belonging to a group, enabling self-regulated behaviour and ensuring that commitment overrides indulgent behaviour. Ben-Avie argues that if children develop well, they learn well, so the focus for all education should be on child development and not just on child learning. Including SRE, even for one period a week, contributes to whole child development, because it is part of Ben-Avie's six main pathways, which ensures balanced child development.

Health and Religious Practice

Currently, there is a growing awareness of the importance of promoting protective factors for good health, rather than just reducing risk factors, and that there is a need to start this process from an early age. Empirical evidence from recent studies has shown that religious practices are associated with better health and wellbeing in adults, with earlier research demonstrating a strong connection between attendance at religious services and lower mortality risks. Other studies have shown that religious involvements and other religious practices are linked to other positive outcomes including greater psychological wellbeing, character strengths, reduced mental illness and healthier behaviours. Most of these studies have only involved adults, with fewer studies including the connections between adolescence, religious involvement, protection against certain negative behaviours and the promotion of positive health practices. However, most of these studies have been fairly limited in scope.

To validate the hypothesis that religious practices lead to better physical, psychological, and mental health, as well as strengthening character traits, Chen and Vanderweele (2018) sought to further investigate this link. They conducted a major longitudinal study from 1999 to 2013, using the frequency of attendance at public services and of private meditation and prayer to examine this hypothesis. Their sample was predominantly white, with more female participants. They found that 60% attended religious services weekly and 36% undertook meditation and private prayer daily.

The results from this study 'suggest that religious involvement in adolescence may be one… protective factor for a range of health and wellbeing outcomes' (p. 6–7) with the active religious participants demonstrating greater psychological wellbeing, character strengths and lower risks of mental illness. Religious behaviour reduced the probability of smoking and drug abuse, both major health risks, deviant sexual behaviours, depression

and anxiety, and fostered forgiveness (Chen and Vanderweele, 2018, pp. 6–7). They found that adolescence with physical disabilities tended to practice a higher level of prayer, both public and private.

Thus, religious practices foster protective factors for good health. They help to maintain self-control, develop negative attitudes to harmful behaviours, and foster positive coping practices including meditation and forgiveness. Religious involvements also provide peer support mechanisms and networks, a sense of community and positive adult role models.

Continuing SRE in NSW schools ensures the continuation of these positive, protective factors for good health in the broader community.

Wellbeing and Values Education: Australian research

In 2010, a major study illustrated the vital importance of values education for students' wellbeing. Reinforcing Ben-Avie's message, this text 'comes as "values education" widens in scope from being concerned with morality, ethics, civics and citizenship to a broader definition synonymous with a holistic approach to education in education in general' (Lovat, Toomey and Clement, 2010, back cover). Resulting from this study, an *International Handbook* was edited by three key Australian scholars, Terence Lovat, Ron Toomey and Neville Clement, and included sections stressing the role of wellbeing for the curriculum and pedagogy, personal integrity and social engagement.

Recent research in both neuroscience and epidemiology has demonstrated the close connection between wellbeing pedagogy and values education. This research has shown how closely intertwined the holistic growth of each student – involving their social, emotional, moral, spiritual development as well as their intellectual and cognitive growth – are important for the processes of teaching and learning in government schools. These concepts have become embedded in the most recent policies of the NSW Department of School Education, but they have not included the spiritual and religious dimension.

In his introductory chapter, Lovat highlighted the key elements in values education as set out in a 2003 Australian government study, entitled 'Values Education Study '(DEST, 2003) as follows:

> • *that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills;*
> • *that values based education can strengthen students' self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment and help students exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility; and*
> • *that parents expect schools to help students understand and develop personal and social responsibilities (DEST, 2003, p. 10)*

Cultural and Religious Identity and Multiculturalism

The Concept of 'Identity Capital'

The notion of capital, as conceptualised by social scientists, refers to 'net assets and resources', and has been divided into the categories of human, cultural and social. Côté (2005) proposes a fourth category, which he calls 'identity capital', that is the importance of each individual developing his/her own optimal identity. Côté (2005) claims that:

> *Identity negotiation and maintenance are paramount … For example, in undertaking the individualization process, people are confronted with the task of planning their own life courses, which includes determining their own values and beliefs (religious, political, secular, and the like), group affiliations, leisure time pursuits, as well as intellectual and aesthetic preferences. (p. 255)*

Côté notes that this represents 'attributes associated with sets of psychosocial skills, largely cognitive in nature, that appear to be necessary for people to intelligently strategize and make decisions affecting their life courses' (Côté, 2005, p. 225).

According to Côté, group affiliation is considered one of the foundations of identity capital. Anderson, Hamilton, and Hattie (2004) have shown that a classroom climate that fosters a sense of affiliation can increase students' motivation. A meaningful classroom environment
includes both cognitive and affective outcomes, as well as a sense of achievement. Their conclusion is that 'practitioners should be seeking to foster the development of high affiliation classrooms' (p. 220).

The Role of the School in Fostering Cultural Identity

In 1897, John Dewey argued that the main aim of the school is to socialise the child to participate in the wider culture and community to which s/he belongs, explaining that this process begins 'unconsciously', almost from birth (Dewey, [1897] 1959). He argued that through this unconscious education, the individual absorbs the cultural, moral and intellectual foundations of his society.

Dewey's legacy focuses on the interrelationships between child and society, and it is still relevant to today's modern pedagogy, which emphasises the religious, ethnic and civic identity of the child within diverse societies in the liberal state. Hence, the school is considered a major agent in facilitating acknowledgement of the different societies by which individuals are connected and their moral obligation to each of them.

In his field theory, Lewin (1952) highlighted the mutual relationships between the individual and society. He noted that 'individuals participate in a series of life spaces (such as family, work, school and church) and these were constructed under the influence of various force vectors' (Smith, 2001).

In fact, SRE helps students cope with different 'forces' within the 'field'. The aim of SRE is to teach students how to work through these forces by first developing 'identity capital' (Côté, 2005) that will assist them in constructing their own identity through their

religious and cultural heritage, and enable them to better navigate the contesting forces and tensions that exist in the 'field'.

Religion as an Element of Identity Capital

SRE combines the elements of culture, religious education and spirituality (Gross and Rutland, 2015). de Souza (2009) argues that 'the concept of spirituality … pertains to the relational dimension of being' (p. 697). Developing the spiritual side of the child through schooling can address the child's holistic needs. This can be liberating, producing 'experiences of transcendence, intense joy, freedom and/or peace'. Such experiences can contribute to developing a sense of belonging (de Souza, 2009). Cahill (2009, p. 7) argues that the 'sense of the spiritual, the transcendent and the moral remains necessary in all societies to counter the corrupting and debilitating influences of materialism, hedonism and selfishness'.

In the 1980s and 1990s, education focused on individualism and was driven by market-based factors. However, more recently, scholars and administrators have come to the realisation that society and social factors are important for the effective functioning of a democratic society (Crawford, 2010, p. 811). A sense of the loss of core values and a cohesive social fabric has emerged in the face of the many societal ills that have emerged recently, as discussed above.

Thus, religious education, for all its limitations, remains important in developing social capital, and can have a transformative effect, provided that it is taught in a reflective manner.

Can Liberal States be Culturally Neutral: Multiculturalism and SRE

Safeguarding the freedom and autonomy of individuals to determine their own fate is considered one of liberalism's fundamental principles. According to this view, all individuals have the right to develop themselves according to their own wishes and aspirations, and are thus entitled to an education, which expresses their uniqueness and distinctiveness from others.

The state's role is to allow the realisation of its citizens' life-plans, as long as they do not use state resources to promote their own ends to the disadvantage of others. Contrary to the classical liberal outlook, modern liberal theory acknowledges that the individual is a product of specific historical and cultural circumstances, which produce a multicultural and pluralistic environment.

There is considerable debate in the literature as to whether a liberal state should be neutral in terms of culture, or if the state is obliged to protect the cultural rights of all groups within the society. Kymlicka (1989) was the first philosopher to place the rights of minority groups in a liberal society on the agenda. He argued that the classic liberal perception, which engages with equal citizenship, perpetuates inequality between groups and contended that multicultural states have a duty to maintain the diverse cultural structures that exist in most liberal democracies. Thus, these states need to enable minority cultures to foster their individual heritage, to ensure that they are not subsumed by the majority culture and provide the possibility of 'autonomous choice'. To

achieve this aim, he noted that this 'may require special linguistic, educational and even political rights for minority cultures' (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 903).

A number of theorists have criticised Kymlicka's approach. They argue that not every right to culture is appropriate. Kukathas (1997), for example, proposes basing the liberal state's approach to minorities on tolerance and rejects the concept of autonomy. He believes that the values of liberal autonomy cannot be planted in non-liberal societies that object to them. Kolakowski (1990) holds that if an individual is unwilling to tolerate opinions that seem wrong to him, he is entitled to leave the community/country of his own free will. Taking that step, in accordance with his own free will, attests to his freedom.

Tamir (1995) argues that the situation is more complicated. She distinguishes between two kinds of multiculturalism: 'thin' multiculturalism, which only preserves the rights of liberal societies within the framework of the liberal state, such as Quebec; and 'thick' multiculturalism, which supports the rights of both liberal states and the liberal state's need to preserve the culture of non-liberal societies. This differentiation between 'thin' and 'thick' multiculturalism is relevant to the debate relating to SRE in NSW.

Religion is a key component of cultural heritage. Hence, the preservation of particular religious faiths through state schooling is integral to liberal states' protection of diverse, particularistic cultures and religions. SRE, therefore, contributes to the maintenance of 'thick' multiculturalism in Australia.

Educating for Multiculturalism

Educating for multiculturalism is a major challenge for migrant societies across the world. Some politicians, such as the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, have claimed that efforts to create a multicultural society have failed.[1] The former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard also shared these views, (Levy and Mendes, 2004). In his chapter on Jews and Australian multiculturalism, Geoffrey Braham Levey wrote that John Howard had 'come to office with a reputation of being uncomfortable about the word and concept of multiculturalism and in the first twenty months in office, including his equivocation over the rise of Pauline Hanson's xenophobic politics, only confirmed that impression' (p. 179).

Yet, multiculturalism continues to be important for Australia, and the NSW and Australian governments have continued to invest resources in multicultural education (Gross and Rutland, 2014b). In 2013, the website of NSW Public Schools contains general comments about multicultural education, and programs and services, including its anti-racism program. These are still stressed under the headings 'General Multicultural Education', https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/multicultural-education and 'Multicultural Education Policy', https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/multicultural-education-

[1] See David Cameron 'State Multiculturalism has Failed', 5 February 2011, *BBC News, UK Politics*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994, accessed 17 July 2012, and 'Merkel says 'German Multiculturalism has Failed', *BBC News, Europe*, October 2010, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451, accessed 17 July 2012.

policy?refid=285776 (both accessed 17 September 2018). However, the current general website no longer includes specifics about these areas, rather just a reference to interpreters: 'Interpreting and/or translation services are available for parents who do not speak or understand English well, the deaf or hearing impaired and those with a speech impairment' (https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/going-to-a-public-school/quick-guide-for-parents, accessed 6 September 2018). The links to the two sections dealing with general multicultural education and multicultural education policy need to be made much clearer on the general website.

The website dealing with 'General Multicultural Education' states that 'NSW Public Schools reflect Australian communities. Students and staff come from a diverse range of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.' This is the only reference to religious beliefs, but the 'Multicultural Education Policy' includes more references to the issue of respecting religious diversity and spirituality. Importantly, point 1.6 under the heading 'Objectives – Policy Statement' states:

> *Schools promote positive community relations through effective communication with parents and community members from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds and by providing opportunities for their active engagement in the life of the school.*

We would argue that including SRE within the formal school curriculum would meet this objective in terms of giving parents the choice of confessional religious education and involving them more in this aspect of multicultural education.

As well, when focusing on issues of multicultural and anti-racist education, more focus is needed in respect of religious diversity in order to counter religious and racial bullying in the playground (Gross and Rutland, 2015 and 2014b). SRE can contribute to this by encouraging students to be secure in their own faith knowledge, which is a key element of multiculturalism.

Racism, Prejudice and Antisemitism

SRE can assist in countering racism and prejudice by creating a safe place for school children of different religions.

Background to Australian Racism and Antisemitism

Racial prejudice has a long history in Australia (Moss and Castan, 1991). In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, this expressed itself against three main target groups: indigenous Australians, Asian migrants and Jews. More recently, Muslims have become a major focus of attack, with the issue here being one of religion as well as race (Gross and Rutland, 2014b).

One of the main factors in Australia's federation was the fear of the 'yellow hordes', which led to the introduction of restrictive immigration laws, known as 'the White Australia policy' and the belief in Anglo-Saxon conformity (Tavan, 2005). In the 1970s, under Gough Whitlam's Labor government immigration restrictions against coloured

migrants were abolished and multiculturalism introduced (Wilton and Bosworth, 1984). Liberal Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, further reinforced multiculturalism, so that by the 1980s support for the benefits of ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism was endorsed by government policy and embedded in educational philosophy.

However, despite ongoing efforts on the part of both government and non-government bodies, racism continues to be a concern, particularly with the emergence of a 'new racism'. Kevin Dunn (2004) defined this as 'cultural racism', based on the 'insurmountability of cultural differences' (p. 410). Under this construct, ethnic groups are discriminated against and attacked on the basis of perceived 'threats to "social cohesion" and national unity', that is threats to the Anglo-Celtic majority (Dunn, 2004, p. 411). A further study by Dunn (2008) indicated that racism was still very prevalent in Australia: 27% of respondents had been called names or similarly insulted; 23.4% felt that they were treated less respectfully because of their ethnic origins. In a study of social cohesion in Australia, Andrew Markus (2012) also found that there was an ongoing problem of racism, but that the migrant groups who had settled in Australia for a longer period experienced lower levels of racism than the more recent arrivals, many of whom come from Muslim majority countries.

One exception to Markus's findings are Jews, the oldest non-indigenous ethnic group in Australia, with over a dozen Jews arriving on the First Fleet in 1788 and Jewish institutions being well established by the mid-nineteenth century (Rutland, 2001). Today's Jewish community numbers around 115,000 – 120,000, accounting for 0.4 percent of the total population. Yet, the number of incidents of reported antisemitism has been on the rise since tallies began to be published in 1989, as compiled by Jeremy Jones, although that number tends to fluctuate from year to year, depending on external circumstances.

There is some debate as to whether there has been an increase of antisemitism in the last five years. Whilst Jones's data indicates a rise in the number of reported antisemitic incidents, Jessica Taft and Andrew Markus dispute this (2011) arguing that this is due to the proliferation of hate mail, which is often sent out by one or two sources. Through their survey data they argue that the majority of Australian Jews do not consider antisemitism a serious issue, with only 5% reporting being seriously affected by antisemitism and a further 22% occasional antisemitism. However, 58% of respondents had experienced some form of antisemitism, whilst the figure for the age group 18-24 was much higher at 71%. It is this last statistic that is relevant for our present report, although the Taft and Markus study did not include school aged children.

<u>Racial and Religious Bullying in the Schoolyard</u>

In the United Kingdom the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has defined racist bullying (which includes antisemitic-bullying) as:

> *…a range of hurtful behaviour, both physical and psychological, that makes a person feel unwelcome, marginalized, excluded, powerless or worthless because of their colour, ethnicity, culture, faith, community, national origin or national status' (Richardson, 2006, p. 186).*

The NSW Government stresses its commitment to anti-racist education. It explains racism and its impact as follows:

> *Racism can take many forms, such as jokes or comments that cause offence or hurt, sometimes unintentionally; name-calling or verbal abuse; harassment or intimidation; or commentary in the media or online that inflames hostility towards certain groups.*
>
> *At its most serious, racism can result in acts of physical abuse and violence.*
>
> *Racism can directly or indirectly exclude people from accessing services or participating in employment, education, sport and social activities.*
>
> *It can also occur at a systemic or institutional level through policies, conditions or practices that disadvantage certain groups.*
>
> *It often manifests through unconscious bias or prejudice.*
>
> *On a structural level, racism serves to perpetuate inequalities in access to power, resources and opportunities across racial and ethnic groups* (https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/multicultural-education, accessed 14 October 2018).

The belief that a particular race or ethnicity is inferior or superior to others is sometimes used to justify such inequalities (https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/multicultural-education, accessed 14 October 2018).

Yet, it is important to note that nothing is said about the role of religion in these racist attacks, even though the groups most like to experience harassment and discrimination in NSW, come from the smaller religious groups such as Muslims, Jews and Australia's First People, with religious differences often being a major feature in the type of attacks described above. The failure to acknowledge the role of religion in these attacks needs to be acknowledged and responded to.

Extensive research has been carried out in relation to efforts to combat racism, including anti-discrimination legislation, educational approaches and other forms of Australian government intervention (Markus, 2011 and Taft and Markus, 2011). As well, there has been a lot of research and focus on the negative impact of bullying as seen in the website of Relationships Australia (https://www.relationships.org.au/what-we-do/research/online-survey/march-2018-bullying-in-schools, accessed 11 October 2018). However, there has been relatively little academic research on religious and racist bullying in the school playground in Australia or elsewhere (Myer-Adams and Connor, 2008, p.220).

Yet, many newspaper articles and other reports have been published about the problem of religious bullying in the playground, as well as cyber bullying, including attacks on indigenous, Muslim and Jewish children, as well as on religious Christians. Indeed, indigenous children are the most bullied in Australia.

For example:

- Akinyi Ochieng, 'Muslim Schoolchildren Bullied By Fellow Students And Teachers', 29 March 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/03/29/515451746/muslim-schoolchildren-bullied-by-fellow-students-and-teachers

- 'CHRISTIAN families say their children are being bullied for religious ... Choosing a religious school is not an option for many because of additional costs. ... Muslim students in Australia have also felt persecuted for holding ...' https://www.dailymercury.com.au/news/homeschooling-rise-of-50-per.../3509225/

- Matthew Benns, 'Northern Territory kids are fighting back against cyber bullying with the help of sporting heroes', in Alice Springs, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 2014, https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/northern-territory-kids-are-fighting-back-against-cyber-bullying-with-the-help-of-sporting-heroes/news-story/851abab38aafa5ff4129802d4f827f64, accessed 11 October 2018.

- Beatrice Dupuy, 'Muslim children twice as likely to be bullied, new report finds', United States, 31 October 2017, https://www.newsweek.com/more-half-muslim-students-are-bullied-new-report-finds-698023, accessed 11 October 2018.

- Jordan Baker, 'High school students suspended after Nazi salute, bullying', 4 July 2018, https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/high-school-students-suspended-after-nazi-salute-bullying-20180704-p4zpgi.html

These are a few examples of articles highlighting bullying at schools based on religious beliefs, yet the formal documentation fails to focus on this issue sufficiently. As will be demonstrated in the next section, based on a specific study of Jewish students, SRE can provide a 'safe place' for children from different religious backgrounds and also enables them to secure and strengthen their own religious identity in the face of such attacks.

Case Study 1: Playground Antisemitism and Jewish SRE

The problems of bullying in the school playground based on religious affiliation was highlighted by a qualitative study undertaken by the authors of this report of Jewish SRE between 2009 and 2015 (Gross and Rutland, 2015). Similar issues were highlighted in a separate ACT study undertaken by Professor Danny Ben-Moshe. These issues will be discussed in this section, highlighting the value of SRE from a number of different perspectives.

Background

When the 'Right of Entry' system was introduced in 1880, the Jewish community in each state established Boards of Jewish Education (BJEs) in order to employ teachers and organise curricula and resources. In Sydney, the New South Wales BJE was created in 1909 and today is called Academy BJE. In Melbourne, the United Jewish Education Board (UJEB) was formed in 1895 (Rutland 2001, pp. 99–101). The NSW BJE is well organized with funding from the Jewish Communal Appeal, enabling it to pay all its teachers within the SRE classes. It seeks to reach out to all government schools where there are some Jewish students, particularly at the primary level.

In Victoria, Special Religious Instruction (SRI) functioned in government schools until two years ago, when it was decided to discontinue special religious education in the state. This study was concluded before this decision was made, and so we included schools in both Sydney and Melbourne. Given the similarities at the time between the two states, our discussion here will include all our findings.

Methodology

This research is an ethnographic study using grounded theory methodology, a qualitative research method that aims to investigate systematic social processes existing within human relations and actions (Strauss and Corbin, 1997). This enables us to follow patterns of interaction and behaviours that are grounded in real-life events. The interviews and observations also provide a detailed description of the problems investigated. While more time-consuming, the use of direct observation can provide a more accurate and thick description (Geertz, 1973), and is more objective because the information is 'less subject to critiques of respondent bias' (Vannest and Hagan-Burke, 2010, p.127). This qualitative methodology, with its detailed description, enabled us to elicit the relevant information and reach a better understanding of the current Australian SRE government system, with all its tensions, dualities and complexities.

Population

In both Sydney and Melbourne, Jews are concentrated in specific suburbs, where 20–50% of the school population in the government schools offering SRE is Jewish. In Sydney, these are in the eastern part of the city, and in Melbourne, in the south-eastern part. Whilst these tend to be the wealthier suburbs, the children who attend government schools tend to come from the less wealthy Jewish families who cannot afford high private schools fees (either Jewish or non-Jewish). In recent years, the number of children attending SRE/SRI has been increasing—in Sydney by an average of 4.8%

annually for the last five years, and in Melbourne by an average of 5% annually, with five main schools particularly experiencing this increase.

SRE/SRI educators in the government schools consist of three main groups: retired teachers,
who retain an interest in teaching; university students, who are also Jewish youth leaders; and young mothers, who do not wish to take on full-time work. They are paid low salaries as casual teachers. The students come from varied backgrounds, both in terms of religious observance and their wider ethnic backgrounds. Most of the students come from secular homes, in some cases from intermarriages with one non-Jewish parent. The two most recent Jewish migrant groups to Australia are Russian and Israeli; both tend to have a high proportion of children in government schools.

Tools

Classroom observations were carried out in Sydney in two schools (one primary school with 20 children and one secondary school with 8 students) and in Melbourne in three schools (two primary schools with 9 students in School 1, 15 students in School 2, and 1 after school group in School 3 with 3 students). The students in the primary schools were from Grades 5 and 6, and in the high schools, from Grades 9 and 10. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Sydney with two teachers, the CEO of the BJE and a former principal, and the principal of a government high school, as well as ten parents. In Melbourne, the interviews were conducted with six teachers, the Jewish Student Network coordinator, the CEO of the UJEB, the UJEB president and vice-president, as well as three parents. In addition, the CEO of the Australian Coordinating Committee for Jewish day schools was interviewed and eight interviews were held relating to informal education. Together with these interviews, we also interviewed 55 students. In total, 90 interviews were conducted in Sydney and Melbourne.

Procedure

We first received ethics approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney, including stressing the voluntary nature of the participation and promising full confidentiality. According to the ethical requirements of the University of Sydney, the principal researchers cannot approach participants directly, in case they feel that they are being pressured to participate. We requested the director of the BJE in each city to determine which schools should be included, how many, and to approach the principals, teachers and students at those schools for their consent to participate. The Directors also organised our schedule according to the required ethics procedures.

Analysis

Using a grounded theory approach according to the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1987), data from the three sources (interviews, observations, and documents [official literature from UJEB and BJE]) were analysed, thus enabling triangulation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1997). The analysis consisted of five stages: (1) open coding, in which recurring topics were identified and defined (e.g. relevance, choice); (2) axial coding, involving the formulation of categories defining criteria and continuing theoretical sampling (informal education, interactive learning, relevance, stimulating, quality, fun); (3) selective coding, which consists of refining and finalising

criteria to include a series of categories (such as core curriculum, extracts of the essence of Judaism, grains of Jewish culture); (4) formulating the hierarchy and identifying core categories (analysing the most meaningful Jewish experiences in schools); and (5) creating a category-based theoretical structure linked to the literature and proposing a theoretical model.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it only investigated Jewish SRE/SRI classes. It did not investigate other religious groups that also offer SRE/SRI classes, which operate under different conditions and have different frameworks.

Findings

The study found a number of factors which made the SRE experience very positive and important for the Jewish children who chose to attend.

Preserving the particularistic cultural and religious heritage

The classes that we observed sought to foster the different elements of Jewish culture and religion for both the Jewish and non-Jewish students who wanted to attend. In this way, they reflected the spectrum of current Jewish beliefs and practices. Lessons were held shortly before the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashana) and focused not only on the religious elements and diverse interpretations of the festival, but also on the food, customs, stories and songs associated with it. Children were encouraged to take home recipes for apple cake, a traditional food, to bake with their parents. Both the children and the teachers commented on the impactful nature of this experiential activity. In addition, the children's knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet and language was developed through exercises, games and puzzles. The ability to read Hebrew is central to prayer in synagogues and temples. Through these activities, the religious narrative was reinforced and at the same time, children were encouraged to ask questions and be open to the different denominational practices (orthodox, conservative, reform).

In their interviews, the teachers stressed that they needed to take into account the wide range of different Jewish identities in the class, as well as children from interfaith marriages. They encouraged an inclusive and pluralistic approach to their teaching of Judaism, while using critical and reflective resources.

Creating a safe place

A major finding that emerged from the interviews was the need to find a secure zone. The students emphasised that SRE/SRI classes provided them with a safe place and friendship and enhanced their sense of belonging.

> *INTERVIEWER: Would you like to say anything else?*
> *UJEB Class female student: I like Jewish RE because it is a place where I can fit in.*
> *UJEB Class female student: To learn in here with UJEB, it is a safe environment.*
> *INTERVIEWER: Safe environment, what do you mean?*
> *UJEB Class female student: Like they take care of you, they feed you.*

In analysing the reasons for this sense of safety, the teachers stressed the fact that all the children came from the same religious and cultural background, even if they came from different ethnic backgrounds, such as European, Israeli or Russian:

> *INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that students feel safe in this framework?*
> *TEACHER (JC): Perhaps they feel that they are amongst their own; they can relax amongst their own. They are not on their guard.*

The students studied the particularistic items of their culture (festivals, customs, stories of the bible and modern ethnic history) and this strengthened their sense of a psychological safe place. According to student testimonies, these components had a major impact on their motivation to attend the classes on a voluntary basis, as well as on the quality of their learning.

The students raised the issue of racial prejudice on the playground. We found the same stories, with the same stereotypes, in both Sydney and Melbourne. From the data we collected, the problems seemed to increase on the junior high school level. Thus, in one high school in Sydney, one of the boys said, without any prompting:

> *… if you are Jewish you are teased. They call you stingy. They throw you five cents … Or they throw money on the ground and call out 'who is the Jew?' Or they will say: 'That's a Jew nose'. They say something about payot (ear locks). Then they have a brit (circumcision) set. Or they take scissors and go like this [boy demonstrates scissors cutting with his hands]: 'do you want another brit?'*

The students had two different reactions to this playground antisemitism. In some cases, they denied their Jewish background and attended either Christian SRI/SRE or SEE/non-religion classes. For others, it acted as a 'push' factor, where the racial prejudice they experienced made them want to attend SRE/SRI and learn more about their Jewish background.

There are clearly formulated official government policies to counter racism in Australian schools. For example, in Melbourne, which has the highest proportion of people of Greek origin of any city outside of Athens, teachers are expected not to say anything that might reflect badly on students of Greek ethnic origin. With regard to the Jewish festival of Chanukah, which celebrates the victory of a small group of Jewish resistance against the oppression of the Assyrian–Greek Empire, one of the teachers commented:

> *TEACHER (I): Um, it is a safe place … where they can actually say whatever they want to say about Judaism, but the teachers are not allowed to … When we talk about Alexander the Great, we can't even say the word Greek, because somebody will say 'But my friend is Greek and you said he was the enemy …'*

Thus, the teachers are aware of the need to be critical but not to offend other minorities within the school population. Yet, despite the official government policies and the care

taken by the teachers in the classroom, the situation on the playground and in the wider school environment is very different (Gross and Rutland, 2014).

Affiliation and Sense of Belonging

There was a high level of friendship in the classes we observed. The students could choose not to come and would not face any sanctions, and yet they participated of their own volition. The teachers confirmed that the children were eager to learn and told us that they have full, regular attendance.

> *CHILD: I like it because it is really fun. Even though I sometimes don't like doing really hard work in my usual class, our Jewish teacher gives us work like crosswords and they are easy but they give you a lot of information … Sometimes she gives extra fun ones…*

We saw children coming into the classroom, hugging each other or patting their friends on the back like long-lost friends coming to a club:

> *UJEB Class female student: I think it was important but also fun at the same time; you are learning stuff but you are also having fun with your friends, so it is a bit of both and I learned a lot.*

Thus, the classes also created a sense of belonging. The parents informed us that their children were very disappointed if classes were cancelled because of other demands in the school curriculum.

Social networking

Social relationships are also important:

> *TEACHER: I am very passionate about [the SRI class] because my own sons started in the state school system … [The lessons are] just twenty minutes long … [but] it is a time for them to realise that there are other Jews in the school and to connect with each other, which can be very important.*

This teacher stressed that 'you can always do the learning but just the feeling of Jewishness and being connected to a group' is important. These factors helped to create a socially inclusive environment.

Role of the teachers as caregivers

The teachers demonstrated a very high level of dedication and commitment. According to the students, one of the reasons they chose to attend these classes was the teachers' support. The CEO of UJEB commented on the teachers' strong motivation:

> *I think for a lot of them it is a labour of love and not a labour of money… We find that the students love them… We have our retired teachers… their hearts have been in Jewish education for so long that the thought of giving up is not something that they want.*

One teacher emphasised that learning should be fun so that 'in twenty years they remember that Jewish RE was something they enjoyed'. In their dealings with the children, the teachers take a symmetrical, rather than a hierarchical approach. They aim to develop a sense of attachment to create a family atmosphere in the classroom. This combination of a strong sense of warmth and caring together with affiliation enabled the students to reinforce their Jewish identity.

The Canberra Study

The findings from our study of the problems of schoolyard antisemitism and the need for a 'safe place' for Jewish children were reinforced by a separate study undertaken by Professor Danny Ben-Moshe of the same problem of playground bullying in Canberra schools. In response to anecdotal evidence of anti-Jewish incidents in schools, the ACT (Australian Capital Territory) Jewish Community received a grant from the ACT Government's Multicultural Programme and commissioned A/Prof Danny Ben-Moshe (2011) to conduct a study of antisemitism in Canberra schools. This was a qualitative research project where Ben-Moshe interviewed four key Jewish representatives, two focus groups from children enrolled in the Sunday morning Hebrew School in Canberra and a focus group of parents of children enrolled in the Hebrew School. The seven questions in the questionnaire specifically probed issues relating to antisemitism.

The key actors described antisemitic incidents that had occurred both in schools and in the general community. They analysed four main causal factors: the influence of media reporting of the Israel-Palestine conflict; the role of the churches and the accusation of deicide; the problem of ignorance; and Canberra's more limited ethnic diversity compared with Sydney and Melbourne so that 'multiculturalism is not deeply rooted in day to day life, and public culture is more characteristic of a regional centre than a major city' (p.11). Studies have shown that, when criticism of Israel is made in light of events in the Middle East, the number of antisemitic incidents temporarily increases.

Whilst not all of the children interviewed had personally experienced antisemitism in the playground, they were still aware of it and feared it. Ben-Moshe (2011) stressed that the antisemitism was largely verbal, confined to the school playground and reflected 'deep-seated stereotypes of Jews', with comments relating to Jews being greedy or stingy (p. 12). One child was told that 'the Nazis are going to come and finish the job' (p. 12) whilst the presence of swastikas was commented on. There was also a religious element to the anti-Jewish feelings, which the children experienced, particularly at Christmas time. Whilst some of the children in the ACT focus group attended state schools, others attended private Christian schools, where they experienced problems of being forced to attend chapel services. Overall, there was a lack of sensitivity to Jewish religious practices, particularly in relation to dietary laws.

The failure to recognise the issue of religious and racial prejudice is related to the underreporting of these incidences. Ben-Moshe found that the children unanimously opposed reporting these incidences to school authorities and also did not speak to their parents about them. They feared that either no action would be taken or that their reporting would make the situation worse. One upper primary school child stated:

> *I didn't tell mum as she'll want to be make a big deal of it and I don't want to be embarrassed. I'm already not popular (at school) and I don't want to get others in trouble. I feel it will get worse if I say something (Ben-Moshe, unpublished report, p. 14).*

Some children initiated positive steps. One child shared information about Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights, which takes place at the same time as the Christmas period. One of the Jewish traditions for this festival is to eat 'chocolate money'. The student brought some for all her classmates and 'everyone liked it' (Ben-Moshe, unpublished report, p. 14).

The parent focus group expressed great concern, fearing that their children were 'being isolated and excluded', and that this was creating a 'situation [that] was unsafe and, unless something was done about it, it could get worse' (Ben-Moshe, unpublished report, p.15). They also commented that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had a negative impact on their children. In one case, a child was confronted about 'Israeli oppression of the Palestinians' and, in another case, a child was physically assaulted by a Muslim student (Ben-Moshe, unpublished report, p.15). In response to these findings the Canberra study came up with a large number of research observations and recommendations, focusing on the problems of stereotypes and bullying and ways in which these can be countered (Ben-Moshe, unpublished report, pp.16-18).

Clearly, there is a lot to learn from these two case studies in terms of the value of SRE.

Key Messages from These Experiences of Jewish School Children

Our findings showed the importance of SRE in terms of maintaining identity capital (Côté, 2005) by providing basic knowledge in order to foster a unique religious tradition and spirituality. This knowledge contributes to the richness and diversity of a multifaith and multicultural ecological environment (Anderson, Hamilton, and Hattie, 2004). These SRE classes are a safe place where children can learn about their background. The playground antisemitism operates as a strong 'push' factor for those children who choose to identify openly as Jews. In addition, the fact that the children meet their friends and see their teachers as providing a warm and caring environment act as 'pull' factors. This also results in students' strong sense of affiliation, which increases their motivation to participate actively in these classes.

Research has demonstrated that four core values are important in the classroom: trust, respect, care and safety (Adalbjarnardottir, 2010). These are key values for reflective teaching and religious education (Gross, 2010). Gross and Rutland (2015) found all these four values were fostered in the Jewish SRE classrooms. The teachers built an atmosphere of trust with the children who felt free to express their feelings and dilemmas. They also demonstrated respect for the differing levels of the students' beliefs and home practices in a non-judgmental fashion and created an atmosphere of care and safety in the SRE classrooms. As well, we found an additional fifth core value, which is developing a sense of belonging. These five core values need to be incorporated into the SRE professional development program.

As discussed above, the focus on care and compassion is one of the nine key values set out in the NSW Government's framework for values education. Religious teachings tend to focus on the principles of self-care and also care of others. Fostering a caring environment in SRE classes helps to build a safe school culture (Noddings, 1992 and Tirri, 2010). By modelling caring behaviour in SRE classes, as we witnessed in Jewish SRE, the teachers provide real life examples, which research has shown then affects the children's overall behaviour in both class and in the playground (Hawkes, 2010, p. 236).

The concept of a safe place is an integral part of Côté's notion of identity capital, since it enables the students to negotiate their religious identity within a warm and fun environment. By studying the traditions and culture of their own faith, children can develop a positive sense of self, which can assist them to counter the negativity that they encounter through racist comments and verbal bullying on the playground. Thus, the teaching–learning experience can be seen as an act of security and protection. This complies with the recommendation of the Council of Europe (2010) in creating the religious education classroom as a 'safe place' (Jackson 2014, pp. 46, 47). In creating this safe place, SRE teachers also need to be aware of the religious diversity within their classes.

Religious education for those who choose this approach can also serve as a platform for both students and staff to deepen their understanding of issues concerned with ethics and morality. SRE can contribute to the need for a common vocabulary as part of values education including awareness of our social interconnection, concern for others, justice and peace. Reflection is a very important element in this process and can be part of prayer and meditation within a religious context.

SRE can provide an approach to deal with the challenges discussed above of pluralism, secularisation and individualism, both in a normative sense, that is values education within the framework of in-faith education, and in a practical sense, through reflective teaching and modelling within the SRE classroom. This can be a source of inspiration for values education, which is reinforced by belief in a higher spiritual being.

This discussion is equally pertinent to other religious faiths, particularly the small, minority faiths in Australia, such as the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Bahá'ís, which also emphasise the need for SRE classes. Lovat (1995) found that Hindu interviewees supported teaching Hinduism in the GRE Studies of Religion, but noted that in Hinduism, there is a 'spiritual dimension, which defies the kind of teaching to which school curricula are restricted' (Lovat 1995, p. 178). This can be included in SRE classes for Hindu children. As discussed, there is a dispute as to whether the multicultural state has a role to play in 'in-faith' religious education (SRE). Cragg (1986) argues that the 'welfare or demise of particular conceptions of the good … is not the business of the state' (p.47). This contrasts with Kymlicka's (1995) contention that without a specific educational framework for minority cultures and their ethical values, the majority culture will prevail.

Given that each religious faith develops its own 'particular conception of the good', if state schools are not permitted to have SRE classes, this will weaken the structure of a

multifaith society, since students will not have the opportunity to be exposed to their own religious heritage within the classroom in government schools. SRE enables the construction of a designated safe place in state schools for students to develop their unique religious identity capital (Gross, 2006).

SRE can be a key to thick multiculturalism. In our observations, we found that Jewish SRE teachers implemented Jackson's (1997) interpretive approach (discussed below), which made the educational experience for the students more relevant and powerful. It actually represented acceptance of the different forms of Jewish identification existing in the SRE class, enabling the fostering and enhancement of identity capital, on one hand, and the exposure to diverse interpretations, on the other. In contrast to the claim that one of the components of confessional religious education is indoctrination (Bouma and Halafoff, 2009; Byrne, 2009, 2013), our research found that the Jewish SRE message was inclusive and pluralistic and offered within a reflective framework.

Jewish students, who study in public schools, are situated in a 'borderland area'. They have to negotiate two cultures, two languages and two worlds (Cline and Neccochea, 2006, p. 268). Hence, they need to accommodate their particularistic culture to the universalistic setting in which they are located. SRE becomes a context that makes this viable. By gaining knowledge of their rich heritage, which encompasses 4000 years of tradition, the students are exposed to their own cultural assets. This enables them later to contribute to cultural pluralism.

The Australian Frameworks document stresses the importance of the whole school approach in values education. Whilst SRE is only offered for one period a week in primary school, it provides a message that religious belief is still of value in contemporary society and can contribute to both wellbeing and values education.

As noted, the findings of both the authors' research into SRE in Sydney and Melbourne and Ben-Moshe's specific case study of Jewish children in Canberra schools can be relevant for other faith groups, especially Muslims and indigenous Australians. There is clearly pervasive racism against these groups in Australian schools that needs to be countered. SRE can play a very positive role for this issue, by providing a safe place for children and, particularly at primary level, enabling them to develop self-confidence in their own religious identity. This is important in terms of social cohesion.

Social Cohesion and SRE

Whilst many scholars oppose separate religious faith-based education, whether in separate schools or in SRE classes, as harmful to social cohesion, our research, as well as that of other scholars, has illustrated that confessional religious education can actually be a positive factor for social cohesion.

Geoffrey Short (2002, 2003) has analysed the different arguments opposing confessional religious education within the formal school days in relation to schools in the United Kingdom and has argued that they are 'logically flawed, ahistorical or lacking in empirical foundation' (2002, p. 560). For example, in relation to denominational schools in Ireland, he refers to the studies which claim that these schools reinforce the sectarian divide

between Catholics and Protestants. Yet, he points out this divide existed well before free, compulsory education was introduced into Ireland.

In contrast he claims that faith-based schools can 'enhance their pupils' academic attainment, self-esteem and sense of cultural identity and that the result of such enhancement is the strengthening of inter-communal ties' (ibid). He stresses the proven causal connection between self-esteem and tolerance. As such, he challenges the assumptions used to oppose SRE. He notes the problems of individual and institutional racism, which can exist in government schools, can limit students' academic potential, and notes that this 'pernicious and pervasive racism' led to specific ethnic groups in the UK, such as the Asian community and various Black groups to lobby for their own schools under the voluntary-aided program. He stressed that the key issue in terms of faith schools and adapting to the broader society lay within the curricular content students are exposed to in their school education. He validated this point through his discussion of a study he undertook in terms of Jewish schools in the United Kingdom (Short, 2003).

The same applies to SRE classes, both in terms of curricular content and the pedagogy utilised. Thus, as discussed above, we found that SRE provides a safe place for students who attend these classes and allows small religions to preserve their unique cultural and religious heritage. This also applies to many Christian SRE classes, helping the children to feel a sense of belonging, to contribute to their identity formation and provide them with an avenue for spiritual nurturing.

The exposure of the Jewish children to their particularistic cultural assets strengthened their sense of belonging. In a study relating to Mexican Americans, Kibler (1996) noted the importance for children from minority cultures to be exposed to literature from their own culture, helping them to 'normalise and validate painful life experiences' (p.239). Recent research has stressed that literacy is more than reading and writing, but also involves 'cultural and critical literacy'. Schachter and Galili-Schachter (2012) argue that there is a third category, 'identity literacy', which they define as the 'reader's proficiency and willingness to engage the meaning systems embedded within texts and to consider adopting them as part of their own personal meaning system' (p.1).

This also applies to the SRE classes, where the students can explore their own culture through reading texts together with their friends in an environment of trust and belonging. This helps to meet Objective 1.5 of the government's multicultural education policy:

> *Schools deliver differentiated curriculum and targeted teaching and learning programs to address the specific learning and wellbeing needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, including newly arrived and refugee students.*

Providing SRE classes for the students from the very diverse religious backgrounds of students of NSW schools allows for a more targeted teaching and learning approach to religious belief and fostering spirituality, as well as religious values.

Social networking facilitates learning because it serves as a prerequisite for teaching and instruction. As discussed above, Anderson, Hamilton, and Hattie (2004) demonstrated that students' motivation is strengthened through a strong sense of community. Our findings showed that this is certainly the case in Jewish SRE.

Thus, SRE in New South Wales government schools can assist in accommodating the needs of ethnic and religious minorities, as illustrated by our case study of Jewish SRE. Within the framework of the debate on SRE, this report argues in support of maintaining SRE for those parents who wish to send their children to these classes. It supports Geoffrey Short's arguments that separate confessional education, whether in the separate religious school system or through SRE, does not threaten social cohesion in Australia, but on the contrary can provide important benefits to students' health and wellbeing. This is provided that the curricula and pedagogy foster recognition of all other faiths as being of value to society. As Short expresses it, 'it is the curricular content of such [faith] schools rather than their existence that is the crucial issue' (Short, 2002, p. 570).

PART III: BRINGING SRE INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The 2015 Review of SRE in NSW Government Schools

As discussed above, in 2014 the NSW Government commissioned a full review of SRE, and in 2015 the first detailed study of the whole system was undertaken. This review made a number of very important recommendations for both SRE and SEE. Since this report focuses on SRE, we shall only deal with the issues relevant to this area.

In summary, the key issues emerging from the review's 'Eight Terms of Reference' are as follows.

The Need for Monitoring, Transparency and Accountability

The review found that more information should be made public and available to all stakeholders in every aspect of SRE, both in terms of government responsibility, and the rights and responsibilities of the teachers, supervisors and providers.

Areas where greater transparency is required included:

- the provision of information about provider approval process
- teacher accreditation
- curriculum content of each of the SRE providers.

Implementation

The review found that overall there was a significant need for more government involvement in the implementation of SRE. It argued that this is because procedures have evolved historically over time and do not address the complexities of current schooling and SRE. Therefore, the review recommended a full revision of the implementation procedures, in consultation with the sector, to ensure that the procedures are consistent with broader department policies, as well as taking into consideration the difference between primary and secondary education.

The review also found that there was confusion with the 'parental opting in' (rather than opting out) provision in the 2014 form and recommended improving the processes of parental choice. Whilst the SRE providers preferred the opt out process, secondary principals recommended the opt in process because it allowed for better transparency. On the other hand, most primary principals did not express a preference.

In the light of these findings, the review recommended that the suitability of the new school enrolment form be evaluated, and that parents should be provided with clear information, with the opt out process for primary schools and opt in for secondary schools.

Teacher Accreditation, Professional Development and Evaluation

The 2015 Review found that most providers do provide basic training for their teachers, covering the areas of child protection and classroom management, and include at least

one session on curriculum. Smaller providers tended to link to the larger faith groups or external providers for this basic training. However, evidence of both the quality of this basic training and ongoing training is mixed with considerable variation between providers. There is also no evidence of the regular mentoring of teachers. Only Jewish SRE conducts formal annual evaluation of their teachers.

In terms of pedagogy, the fact that most SRE teachers are volunteers means that many lack basic teaching skills so that often the class teacher will remain in the classroom to assist with discipline. This is an area where improvement is needed, and the 2015 review set out eight specific recommendations for SRE providers to improve in this area.

The review recommended that a better system be developed for the accreditation of teachers, with all SRE teachers being required to complete the same basic teacher accreditation course across all the faith communities. As well, the review stressed the need for ongoing professional development of teachers, and the need for supervision and monitoring the performance of SRE teachers through regular audits.

Curricular Content

Another area of recommended reform is the area of content offered in SRE classes, particularly in terms of age appropriateness. The review found that the curriculum scope and sequence made available to the public was often insufficient and patchy, with only a minority setting out desired student outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills, and that the educational quality of the curriculum materials varied significantly. The review pointed out that there were 'a considerable proportion of teachers' manuals, privileged teacher-directed lessons and activities requiring very low levels of cognitive understanding' (p. xxvi). There was also a lack of instruction for the teachers in terms of age appropriate approaches.

New Modes and Patterns of Delivery Using Technology

Large Christian providers want SRE to be able to utilise the most recent technology, including interactive white boards and supplementing material with on-line resources during the SRE lessons. Whilst some of the on-line resources are approved by the SRE coordinators, this is not always the case. As well, using the interactive white boards, which are often linked to the school's internal networks, could be problematic because of the outside framework of the visiting teachers. About 20% of teachers were not confident in using these new delivery modes. The review recommended further training of the SRE teachers by providers to deal with these issues.

Complaints Procedures and Protocols

Complaints procedures are conducted via the Department's *Complaints Handling Guidelines* and according to the findings from the review are well known by SRE providers. Complaints are usually resolved at the local level between the school and the provider. More serious complaints are escalated. Most principals had received one or two complaints in the past two years, normally relating to content (58%) and the effect on the child (29%). The review again recommended a more transparent approach: by schools clarifying the role of the school; by the providers in terms of complaints procedures; and in terms of the policy and procedures undertaken by the individual

providers. As well, the Department' *Complaints and Handling Policy* should be reference in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and linked to the RE webpage.

Registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees

The review noted that there were at least 170 SRE boards operating. Those boards operating successfully are of great benefit to the program because they facilitate resource provision and help ensure well organised SRE lessons. However, the review again raised the issue of the lack of transparency to the school community. The different ways of overcoming this problem, strengthening the boards, and ensuring greater uniformity and accountability are discussed, including the issue of payment of teachers. The review recommended that the Department should draft advice for the schools as part of the review of implementation procedures, and that this should include how and on what basis a paid SRE teacher is involved in organising SRE and limit their role in broader school activities. As well the constitution, membership, and networks of all board, associations and committees, the review recommended that these should be provided to the Department annually and this information made publicly available to ensure greater transparency.

The Department of Education's Response

In all, there were 39 recommendations relating to SRE made by the review for the NSW Government. The Department went through all the recommendations and argued that a number were already effectively in existence. They disagreed with some of these recommendations, and stated that others, such as state-wide monitoring of SRE, were not feasible with present departmental resources. Other recommendations were supported in principle, implying that these would not be actioned immediately. Finally, a third group of recommendations were listed as 'supported'.

In order to move forward with the review's recommendations, a NSW Consultative Committee was formed, and it was decided that the Department would act on the key recommendations in conjunction with this committee, which would have representatives from all the faith groups offering SRE.

From a total of 38 recommendations in SRE Review 2015, the Committee selected 16 as being the most important to take action on. Included in those selected was Recommendation 17, which was the formation of a joint committee of all faith SRE providers. In June 2017, Rachele Schonberger was engaged as the advisor and consultant for this group. Their work covered the main issues relating to the 2015 Review as discussed above.

- ***The need for monitoring, transparency and accountability:*** *particularly in terms of ensuring common minimum standards for the authorisation of all SRE teachers and transparency in this regard (Recommendation 15).*

- ***Teacher accreditation, professional development and evaluation:*** *with the implementation of a common basic training approach, including ongoing mentoring and observation (Recommendation 24); regular audits of teachers, facilitating teacher self-reflection, regular evaluation, and random classroom*

observations by supervisors (Recommendation 16); and improvement of pedagogy and ensuring age appropriateness (Recommendation 32).

- ***Curricular content:*** *development of guidelines for a well-structured curriculum, with shared access to education experts (Recommendation 30); development of a generic teacher's manual as part of the curriculum including teaching with sensitivity, age appropriateness, communicating with students, classroom management and lesson planning (Recommendation 31); improved pedagogy (Recommendations 32 and 33); and regular reviews of the curriculum over a five-year cycle (Recommendation 34).*

- ***New modes and patterns of delivery using technology:*** *the SRE Consultative Committee agreed that internet resources, which a number of providers already use, should be included and that teacher training should be available, as well as SRE curriculum developers be encouraged to provide guidelines (Recommendation 28); and that training for use of interactive white boards also be provided (Recommendation 29).*

- ***Complaints procedures and protocols:*** *all providers should ensure that their complaints policy and procedures are placed in the public domain (Recommendation 23).*

- ***Registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees:*** *in terms of informing the Department annually about the SRE Boards, the Consultative Committee agreed with this in principle, but felt at this stage it was not feasible to implement (Recommendation 25); however, they agreed that providers should inform the schools annually about 'third party organisations' (Recommendation 26).*

Pedagogic Approaches

A number of the recommendations of the 2015 Review deal with pedagogic issues. Recommendation 35 notes that:

> *Providers seek advice from education experts (the department is one source of advice) to develop a shared understanding about what is meant by the terms:*
> - *effective pedagogies*
> - *relevant learning experiences*
> - *age appropriate learning experiences. (pp. xxvii-xxviii)*

The Consultative Committee supported this recommendation, which is certainly very important in terms of bringing SRE into the twenty-first century.

As discussed above, there have been major changes in Australian society, reflecting world-wide trends. However, religious curricula and the pedagogic strategies have struggled to keep up with these changes. Many SRE teachers are still using old fashioned, essentialist types of identity definitions rather than building on constructivist, pluralistic, multicultural types, which are more relevant to the needs of the twenty-first century.

Thus, there is a challenge to the facilitators of SRE to make their religious education curricula more meaningful to the new generation and to recognise that intergenerational transmission involves effective teaching and learning strategies.

A key issue for confessional, in-faith education is what are the most effective and relevant pedagogic approaches for this area of education. Opponents to SRE are concerned with the largely exclusively Christian orientation of these classes within the NSW Government schools, which, they demonstrate, are becoming increasingly multifaith and multicultural (Bouma and Halafoff, 2009; Lovat et al., 2010). Byrne's (2009) research has demonstrated that in some Christian SRE classes in New South Wales, children have been taught that they will 'burn in hell' if they are not baptised (Minus, 2010). Byrne claims that the religious teachers' approaches are authoritarian, discourages questioning and, in some cases, teaches creationism. She argues that SRE teachers take an institutional approach, representing the hegemonic institutional voice of the Church in a normative fashion, and fails to consider the voice of the 'other.' As such, these opponents see SRE as a form of indoctrination, adding to the public's suspicion of religion in schools. Referring to both confessional (SRE) and non-confessional (GRE) religious education, Miller (2018) claims that this is 'deeply damaging to religious education as a whole' (p. 4). Opponents also claim that it is impossible to teach anything in a 20-minute weekly class, so that the lessons are ineffective and a waste of time (Byrne, 2009).

The difficulties highlighted by the critics of SRE, as discussed above, can possibly be attributed to the lack of training many SRE teachers have. Most of these teachers take an instrumental approach to their teaching of their religion, rather than a reflective approach, which would facilitate questioning of key concepts and encourage the students to struggle with essential existential religious questions, validating student perspectives. Through a reflective process, SRE teachers would be enabled to introduce 'teachable moments' into their classroom.

Bringing the expertise of the authors of this report in regard to Recommendation 35 of the 2015 Review, and indeed most of the recommendations relating to teachers, pedagogy and the curriculum context, the following key issues need to be taken into account and incorporated into the teachers' professional development. They include the need for a constructivist, rather than an essentialist approach, using experiential and informal education techniques, developing a reflective rather than an instrumental teaching approaches, and implementing Jackson's interpretative approach.

For most SRE teachers, who are volunteers, teaching SRE is a vocation rather than a profession, and if they can be assisted in developing these techniques then they will be more successful in delivering their religious and spiritual messages for today's society.

Socialisation and Education

Within the context of SRE, a combination to socialisation and education is required.

Austrian-born American sociologist, Peter Berger (1990 [1967]), defines socialisation as a 'learning process' which enables one generation to transmit its cultural values to the next

generation, thereby initiating them into 'the meanings of the culture' (p. 15). The new generation 'learns to participate in its established tasks and to accept the roles as well as the identities that make up its social structure' (p. 15). Socialisation is important in terms of fostering group identity, relating to both ethnic and religious education, and allows for a holistic approach. Berger, however, emphasises that socialisation not only involves learning about an objective meaning but also incorporating and being shaped by these meanings. Thus, he explains the need of the individual 'to draw them into himself and to make them his meanings' (p. 15). However, to successfully achieve this goal, there needs to be a symmetry between 'the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual' (p. 15).

Educational historian, Lawrence Cremin, defines 'education' as 'the deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities as well as any outcomes of that effort' (1977, p. viii). Joseph Reimer (2007) argues that education involves three types of deliberate activities: transmitting knowledge (in terms of transferring information); evoking knowledge (in terms of involving students in the learning process more actively); and, from the learner's perspective, acquiring knowledge, where students initiate the learning on their own volition.

Socialisation and education are in fact complementary processes. Within the context of Jewish education, Reimer argues that 'socialization gets Jews to a point where they experience Jewish life as plausible; education allows them to make Judaism personally and communally meaningful' (2007, p. 21.) This understanding applies to all religious education. Following Reimer, Jeffrey Kress (2014) argues that socialisation allows for the initiation of students as 'a gateway to education' (Reimer, 2007, p. 14), but that for effective education to occur, this needs to go beyond the social interaction to facilitate a deeper level of learning (Raviv, 2000). In other words, when we are talking about SRE, socialisation means to get the students to a point where they experience religious life, while education enables the students to make religion meaningful both at the individual level and within their faith community.

Socialisation usually takes place in informal settings and, in many cases, it resides where experiential education also occurs. Thus, experiential learning and informality are the medium where socialisation and education can be fostered in a complementary manner in order to initiate students into their cultural and religious heritage (Berger, 1990 [1967]).

These concepts are central to understanding the value of SRE as being part of a child's holistic education for those families who choose it, because SRE allows for a combination of the socialization of the students into their specific cultural and religious heritage, as well as providing moral education for a set of values.

Essentialist vs Constructivist

It is very important for SRE teachers to use a constructivist approach for SRE teaching, but many do not understand what this means and how it compares with an essentialist approach. Sagi (2002) distinguishes between essentialist and constructivist definitions of

identity. The essentialist definition assumes that the 'self' has political/religious/cultural characteristics that are independent of the historical, cultural, and social contexts within which it is situated. The constructivist approach assumes that personal identity is constructed and produced within the historical, cultural, and social contexts. Whereas an essentialist approach emphasises the holistic, harmonious, static aspect of identity, the constructivist approach emphasizes the fragmentary, dialectic, and constructive nature of identity.

The essence of much of the strong criticism of SRE as discussed above lies in its essentialist approach. Hence, this report argues for SRE teachers to be enabled to employ a more open-ended, constructivist approach in their classes. Research has shown that the current generation responds better to concepts that are adapted to their personal lives through interactive learning (Twenge, 2009, p. 398), especially when it relates to the process of religious education. SRE teaching needs to encourage participation and exploration, drawing on informal learning techniques and experiential, interactive pedagogic strategies, which facilitate relevance and a better understanding of their identity.

Experiential Learning

At the centre of informal education is the need for students to actually experience for themselves what is being conveyed. There is a debate among scholars regarding how to delineate the boundary between 'informal' and 'experiential' education. Recently, some scholars have argued that the term 'informal' refers to the setting, such as camps compared with the formal classroom situation, while the term 'experiential' refers to the teaching methodology or approach and is not necessarily tied to either setting (Bryfman, 2008, and Kress, 2014).

Learning through experience is a 'process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). According to Jeff Jacobs, experiential learning is 'a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skills, and value from direct experiences' (Jacobs, 1999, p. 51). Joseph and Rea Zajda differentiate between experiential learning theory (ELT) and experiential learning, with the latter relating to 'a classroom strategy where pedagogues create a cooperative learning environment, engaging learners in a meaning-making process' (Zajda and Zajda, 2008, p. 243). ELT, on the other hand, refers to the theoretical basis relating to 'experimental learning', stressing 'the significance of life experience in learning' on which those classroom strategies are based (pp. 242–243).

Dewey (1939) argues that experiential learning provides opportunities for students to be actively engaged in the learning process. Learning through experience is 'a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 14). In today's secular society, this transformational approach is particularly required in religious education.

The concept of experiential learning began with John Dewey. As a science teacher using experiments both in the laboratory and in the field as part of his pedagogy, he recognised the importance of experience in the learning process, which he analysed in his seminal book, *Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1963 [1938]). Experiential learning provides opportunities for students to be actively engaged in the learning process. Students can thus move away from being recipients of information to active knowledge acquisition. However, in the second chapter of his book, headed 'The Need of a Theory of Experience', Dewey distinguishes between experiences which are educationally worthwhile and those which are not. He posits that:

> *The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. (p. 13)*

Dewey relates to an 'experiential continuum', through which one experience generates another experience (p. 17). He concludes that 'the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences' (p. 45). From this point of view, 'every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after' (p. 27). Hence, every experience can be seen as a 'moving force', whose 'value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into' (p. 31).

A primary responsibility of educators is not only to be aware of the general principle of shaping an actual experience, but also to recognise that experience should lead to growth. According to Dewey, experiences are pre-planned educational devices which consciously and intentionally utilise the potential embedded within the social and physical surroundings of the individual to enhance specific educational ends meant to construct and deconstruct the individual's worldview, value system and moral code.

A number of scholars have analysed the elements of experiential education. According to Bernard Reisman (1991), religious and moral experiential education involves four main elements: (1) the needs of the participants; (2) the creation of effective group contexts; (3) the development of a trusting atmosphere; and (4) the encouragement of participants to explore. Barry Chazan (2003) added four more characteristics: (5) the centrality of the experience; (6) developing a curriculum of religious and moral experiences and values; (7) creating a culture of religious and moral education; and (8) ensuring that this is facilitated by a holistic religious and moral education. All of these characteristics need to be part of a well-integrated educational programme (Reimer, 2007).

The list of these elements has been further refined by Kress (2014), who delineates a differently weighted set of eight components. These begin with the need for a holistic programme; the importance of activities which are interpersonal, engaging and fun;

include social and emotional dynamics; are learner-centred; provide scaffolding opportunities for reflection; involve continuity rather than 'oneshot' programmes; incorporate challenges; and encourage facilitation, rather than being didactic (p. 324). These elements are part of an immersion learning situation.

Key sociocultural elements in pedagogy are also often neglected in the religious education discourse. Referring to Vygotsky (1978), Greenfield and Lave (1982) have argued that learning involves three basic strategies: trial and error, shaping, and scaffolding. Cristancho and Vining (2009, p. 234) argued that trial and error involve a more individual process, whereas shaping and scaffolding are more communal and experiential in approach.

A key element of experiential education is student participation in the learning process. Sfard distinguished between two kinds of discourses: acquisition (learning knowledge), and participation (being part of the broader religious discourse) (Sfard, 1998, 2007). Many schools, particularly within faith-based schools, tend to focus on acquisition rather than participation.

SRE pedagogy needs to understand the importance of experiential learning and incorporate all the elements discussed above into its teaching and learning strategies. For example, when teaching about care and compassion, the students can raise funds to buy sweets and presents for very sick children in the NSW Children's Hospitals. Thus, as well as being participatory and experiential learning, they can also experience the joy of giving and assisting others who are less fortunate than themselves. Through experiencing this compassion, they will fully understand its importance.

Informal Education

While the term 'informal' was introduced into the educational lexicon in the early 1970s to contrast with the formal classroom situation, one of the main problems of the investigation of informal systems was the lack of a systematic analytical theory. Reuven Kahane's 'code of informality' (Kahane, 1997, pp. 9–11, 23–27) has helped to fill this gap. Referring to youth movements, Kahane claimed that the difference between formal and informal organisations does not lie in their goals or in the way they function, but rather in the codes of behaviour underlying them. Inspired by American sociologist Talcott Parsons' code of behaviour (Parsons, 1967), Kahane attempted to define the code which characterises informal education, using terminology derived from psychology, sociology and philosophy. According to Kahane (1997), the code of informality (in the context of adolescent learning) consists of the following eight components:

1. *Voluntarism: The choice to join or leave the activity, thereby increasing the adolescent's bargaining power and commitment to values.*
2. *Multiplexity: A wide spectrum of activities which have equal value and meet the different areas of interest of the individual.*
3. *Symmetry: A balanced reciprocal relationship based on equivalence of resources and mutuality of expectations where no side can impose his or her will on the other.*

4. *Dualism: Adolescents can simultaneously function in different categories; they can compete and collaborate like children or like adults.*
5. *Moratorium: Adolescents temporarily postpone their duties and decisions, allowing them to undergo a process of trial and error in different roles and rules. Moratorium enables behaviour which is simultaneously normative, radical and innovative.*
6. *Modularity: Activities are constructed eclectically according to changing interests and circumstances. A system is modular if it consists of units which can be changed or organised differently. This enables participants to adopt and adapt themselves to different circumstances, making the system more flexible.*
7. *Expressive instrumentalism: Activities which are performed for their own sake and as a means to achieve future goals.*
8. *Pragmatic symbolism: Ascribing symbolic significance to deeds or the interpretation of symbols as deeds. Man is a symbolic creature. We can understand human beings if we analyse the symbols and concepts which they use. (pp. 23–30)*

Kahane's typology enables us to conceptualise and better understand the informal code dimension and its complexity. The challenge for experiential learning in informal settings is to create a meaningful connection between socialisation and education. As Reimer stresses, 'fun can be a vital facilitator of Jewish experience'', but there is a need to ''design activities that simultaneously demand and delight'' (Reimer, 2007, p. 22). While this deeper level of approach ensures that the learning is not superficial, implementing such a complicated approach is challenging, and this is a challenge which SRE teachers need to understand and incorporate.

In a longitudinal study (2008–2015) undertaken by the authors of an information religious education camp called Counterpoint, we found that most of the directors found it difficult to incorporate and integrate both socialisation and education (Gross and Rutland, 2017b). Some of the directors focused more on the socialisation element while others focused more on the educational elements. However, these binary approaches were problematic. Those who focused on socialisation ensured that the students had fun, but they did not take away with them any in depth and meaningful religious messages; whilst those who focused more on education, failed to take into account the importance of socialisation as a gateway to that education.

In a follow-up study, a key Jewish educator explained the importance of both approaches:

> *Definitely both – Judaism cannot be relegated to the cognitive or emotional alone. One of the first questions I am often asked on Counterpoint is what it's like to keep Shabbat and other meaningful religious activities. In response I ask the person to describe the taste of Coca-Cola to someone that has never drunk liquid before. They generally begin to stammer: ''its fizzy … smooth … refreshing … black in colour …'' ''Yes'', I say, ''but what does it taste like?'' ''What about love?'', I ask. ''What does it feel like?'' … They reply that one needs to taste coke or feel love. It is impossible to reduce flavours, textures and familiarities to mere technical principles, for cerebral*

> *understanding cannot achieve the same tactile sensation or palpable feeling as authentic experience. The same is true with the power and philosophy of Judaism (Head of Informal Education, Gross and Rutland, 2017b, p.43).*

Thus, Counterpoint aims to operate at many different levels, and to combine both cognitive and affective knowledge effectively.

Yet, we heard very critical comments from some students, graduates and parents, reflecting the difficult challenge of combining socialisation and education. One student complained about the lack of educational challenge at his camp:

> *So, definitely I would 100 per cent say more learning … right now they're catering for the middle. But if you incorporate more logical thinking ways … that will maybe cater for the two separate [groups], the religious and the logical [more secular]. (Female student, Year 11, 2015)*

The role the educator plays in experiential education is crucial in challenging students to dive deeper, creating an environment which facilitates the combination of socialisation and education. As Reimer stresses, the presence of 'a trustworthy and talented educator who can sponsor that venture and model its rewards' is a key element in this religious educational practice (p.21). This complicated process redefines the educational approach, and requires a deeper understanding of the functions of socialisation and education and their differences. For this development to occur in the teaching and learning of the SRE classes, the educators need to understand the importance of reflection.

Reflective Teaching and Learning

In addition to incorporating experiential and informal teaching and learning techniques into the SRE classroom, reflection is another key component in effective pedagogy. Well-known German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, argued that all human knowledge is influenced by people's interests. He delineated three levels of knowledge. The first was pragmatic – for human development knowing where sources of food existed, and moving from there to growing the food and the subsequent technological developments. The second level was influenced by symbols developed within a cultural and social context including language, social constructs and cultural symbols (Crotty, 2010, p.635). The third level was self-reflective and critical. Reflective teaching enables a teacher to examine what she is doing in the classroom and how she can improve her approaches for the future. As such, in relation to pedagogy, this third level of knowledge is very important and can be shared by students as well as by teachers.

An important component within the values education of SRE is to ensure that students should not be presented with a dogmatic approach to values, but rather be exposed to the variety and multidimensional religious approaches to ethical dilemmas within their specific faith community, and encouraged to grapple with this plurality central to crucial moral and ethical beliefs (Swanson, 2010). Thus, students need to be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their values and beliefs within contemporary society, including the moral challenges which they face. This can be achieved through religious education

and it is important for students growing up in the current materialistic, globalised world. Thus, 'at its best, religious education can have a significant role both in developing (without inculcation, still less indoctrination) students' sense of value and in giving them access to a broader sense of what wellbeing consists of than they might otherwise have access to' (Haydon, 2010, p.198). Religious education can also provide students, particularly in high school, to deal with and reflect on the 'deep questions' of life.

As well, students need to consider issues relating to conflicting values, which can also occur. To give an example from Judaism, the rabbis of the Talmud struggled with the fact that key values of truth and peace can, at times, conflict. They used as the example what does one say to a bride at her wedding, when she is not beautiful, and debated the conflict in this case between the truth and peace – not upsetting the bride on her wedding day https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.17a?lang=bi, accessed 20 October 2018).

To be successful, the teachers need to consider of the ethnic, cultural and religious background of the students in their SRE class, and this demands professional reflection and finding a balance between abstract moral ideas, including religious beliefs and the practical situation in the classroom (Carr, 2010, p. 72).

Differences Between Instrumental and Reflective Teaching Styles

Pedagogical literature distinguishes between instrumental teachers, who consider their principal function to be the transmission of knowledge in areas of specific behaviours, rules and customs (Keiny, 1993, 1998), and reflective teachers, who examine knowledge critically and inquisitively enabling an analysis of experiences, thereby conceptualizing practical knowledge and transforming it into theories of action (Zeichner 1994; Schon 1987, 1988). The structure of instrumental discourse is rigid, objective, and of an empirical nature; whereas the structure of reflective discourse is tentative, subjective, and constructivist. These two kinds of discourse are discussed below dichotomously. However, in reality, they function as part of a continuum, which may have a combination of components. These two conceptually different pedagogic approaches are particularly relevant to SRE, with research clearly illustrating the value of reflective teaching for SRE (Gross, 2010).

Reflection deals primarily with meaning-making based on experience (Dewey, 1933). Rodgers (2002) claims that 'the creation of meaning out of experience is at the very heart of what it means to be human' (p.848). Meaning-making is also one of the essences of religiosity (Oser, 1991) and religious education (Tirri, et al., 2006). Thus, it seems that the meeting between reflection and religiosity is a natural one, since both are the products of an experience that makes human beings unique in the universe.

Religious education prepares individuals to be aware of God at all times, to believe in God's existence, sense God's sublime presence, and act in accordance with Divine commandments and imperatives. According to the instrumental approach, the school curriculum is a finished product that includes a structured collection of educational activities. It is the teacher's task to develop a variety of teaching methods and skills with the objective of elevating the quantity and quality of the religious product (i.e., the extent of religious observance among students) and their 'religious consumption' (after

Willis, 2003, who coined the term 'cultural consumption'). Teachers who employ the instrumental approach function according to the basic assumption that the corpus of religious knowledge they are charged with imparting to their students is objective, structured, and organised. Consequently, the learning process involves the passive reception of messages, and the teacher's role is the systematic transmission of the requisite knowledge.

The reflective approach, in contrast, maintains that the religious education curriculum is neither fixed nor predictable but is part of a dynamic process of interaction between the learner and the knowledge. It perceives the goal of teaching as the structuring of religious socialisation to yield proactive learners whose religious commitment is part of their personal structuring and the result of the internalisation of religious knowledge. Such knowledge emerges and evolves as a result of interaction with the environment and constitutes an integral part of cognition (see Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003). Accordingly, the learning process entails the active structuring of religious knowledge and its implications on religious praxis. The teacher's role is to foster students' development as independent learners who structure and 'own' their religious knowledge, in keeping with their individual intellectual tendencies, diverse motivations and styles of learning, and other personal traits (see Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003). Reflective teachers learn to respond to students' differential learning needs, account for the variance in their individual points of entry into the learning process, and design teaching methods to supply anchors and mediation that ensure their progress (McEntee, et al., 2003).

The forms of reflection within the context of religious education translate into differential emphases on the teaching of religious skills (technical), the decision to adopt a religious lifestyle under the inspiration of assorted religious ideologies and schools of thought, such as in Judaism ultra-Orthodox, modern Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and the like (practical), and criticism of religious theory and practice from an ethical–social standpoint (critical). The first two types of reflection relate to the instrumental teaching method and the third to reflective–constructivist teaching. Under certain circumstances, practical reflection may also involve a critical approach.

Religious Education: Which Teaching Style Is Better?

The question of whether the instrumental or the reflective style of teaching is more appropriate for religious education is a complex one and depends on the developmental stage of the student's religious identity and thinking. It also relates to the issue of age appropriateness, which is a key element in the recommendations of the 2015 Review. According to Fowler (1981), the higher the stage of religious development, the greater the autonomy exercised in religious reasoning. Thus, instrumental teaching seems more suited to the needs of the early stages of religious development, whereas reflective teaching would be more appropriate to the developmental needs of the later stages.

A study of religious schools in Israel found that the style of most of the religious education teachers is instrumental; only a small minority of those interviewed utilised reflective strategies. However, these teachers had a meaningful impact on their students' religious socialization processes.

In general, teachers who maintain a tentative and open-ended worldview are perceived as more conducive to the shaping of a stable and coherent religious world for students than are those who adhere to a more rigid outlook on life. The interviewees stressed the central role of the teacher as a model of respect and openness. This served as a catalyst for transformation and growth.

The respondents recoiled from discourse of an empirical nature that utilised objective evidence and preferred discourse of a constructivist nature. In some sense, by displaying respect, caring, and concern for their students, *Ulpana* (the more religious and selective schools in Israel) teachers were conceived both as more human and as embodying 'shades of the ultimate Being,' thereby playing an important role in moulding their students' religious judgment. In contrast, the religious development and identity formation in government religious high schools are developed through coercion and punishment. Students considered this approach to be less effective, apparently because of the negative interaction between teachers and students on religious issues (Gross, 2010).

In general, pedagogic religious discourse in the school context incorporates very little reflection on reflection (van Manen, 1991), an approach considered unsuited to the spirit of most religious schools, which value their role as agents of religious preservation (apparently because of its critical slant). The teachers delivered what they wanted to teach and not what the students wanted to learn (see also Rodgers, 2002). As such, it is not surprising that only a few students, who attended schools considered highly liberal, described the pedagogic structuring of their religious identity as a critical process of reflection.

There is something extremely human about this reflective approach. The reflective process incorporates an honesty and religious authenticity that transforms the encounter with the sublime into a very personal experience. The move beyond political correctness is called by Vacarr (2001) 'the cultivation of mindful presence' (p. 292). These moments where the teacher 'sacrifices his own humanity' (p. 292) are 'teachable moments' that have a long-lasting educational impact on students.

Thus, Gross (2010) has demonstrated that the use of a monologue approach in religious education, creating a pedagogic–religious style of rhetoric, including conventional religious slogans, clichés, and 'closed' religious messages, was perceived as limited and ineffective. In some cases, this instrumental and authoritarian approach led to post-school religious rebellion (Gross, 2003). In contrast, religious education that employs reflection, including dialogue between teacher and student, and within teachers' inner selves, using open-ended and even half-formed messages, is perceived as more meaningful in structuring the religious world of adolescents and shaping their religious integrity and coherence, particularly in the long term.

Processes of a positive nature in religious education have a constructivist influence attesting to attachment, caring, and mutual respect. Processes of a rejective nature in religious education have a castrating influence. What constructs the religious horizons of the students in the long run is more the form than the content; into these shapes and

structures, students insert different contents through the course of their lives. In the religious arena, students mainly remember the unconventional constructs: those that are not functional and have a nonlinear structure. The tentative construct of the discourse is considered to be more reliable and human. We need to tighten our argument that reflective teaching is the core of SRE and the core of values education.

Thus, as noted above, the moments of tentative reflection in religious education processes are considered 'teachable moments' and are remembered as the climax of the educational aspects of the curriculum, as distinct from the instructional aspects. These concepts and processes are important in understanding effective pedagogy SRE.

Religious Education: An interpretative approach

In a postmodern, multicultural society, the interpretive approach of Jackson (1997) is relevant to SRE classes. This consists of three basic tenets: first, representation that is taught in ways that recognises the uniqueness of each religion, as well as the diversity which exists within individual religious traditions; second, interpretation, where students' subjective interpretations are recognised as an essential part of the learning process within a hermeneutic context; and third, reflection, so that students can reassess their own ways of life and take a constructive, critical approach, ensuring that SRE does not indoctrinate.

Further, Jackson (2014), in his book dealing with religious and intercultural education, draws on the 2010 recommendations of the Council of Europe, suggesting the need for 'provision of a safe learning space to encourage expression without fear of being judged or held to ridicule' (p. 47). He argues that creating a 'safe place' for a religious education student is a prerequisite, and that both policy-makers and practitioners need to take this into account. Even though he uses this concept for the issue of exploring diversity and recognising different viewpoints, he does pinpoint the need for the sensitivity of complexity of the religious education classroom, where 'controversial issues are discussed and different claims to truth are made' (p. 57).

These are all important issues, many of which have been discussed above, particular in relation to reflective teaching, the need for a constructivist approach, creating a safe place, and recognising the diversity of students within a SRE classroom. These elements all need to be incorporated into the ongoing professional development of SRE teachers, as recommended by the Department's 2015 Review.

SRE Teaching as a Profession and/or a Vocation

Most of the teachers in the NSW SRE system, as well as SEE, work on a voluntary basis, so for them, SRE teaching is very much a vocation. At the same time, they do need professional training. In developing a teacher education program for these teachers, we need to focus on the values and respect due to all people. Within this framework, Gellel (2010) sets out that are three important elements:

a) *the inherent ability and need to be a relationship;*
b) *the essential element of autonomy; and*

c) *respect that every person is unique, unrepeatable and therefore incommensurable. (p. 171)*

Whilst these elements are part of humanistic belief, today they have also become part of religious teachings for the Abrahamic faiths and the Eastern religions.

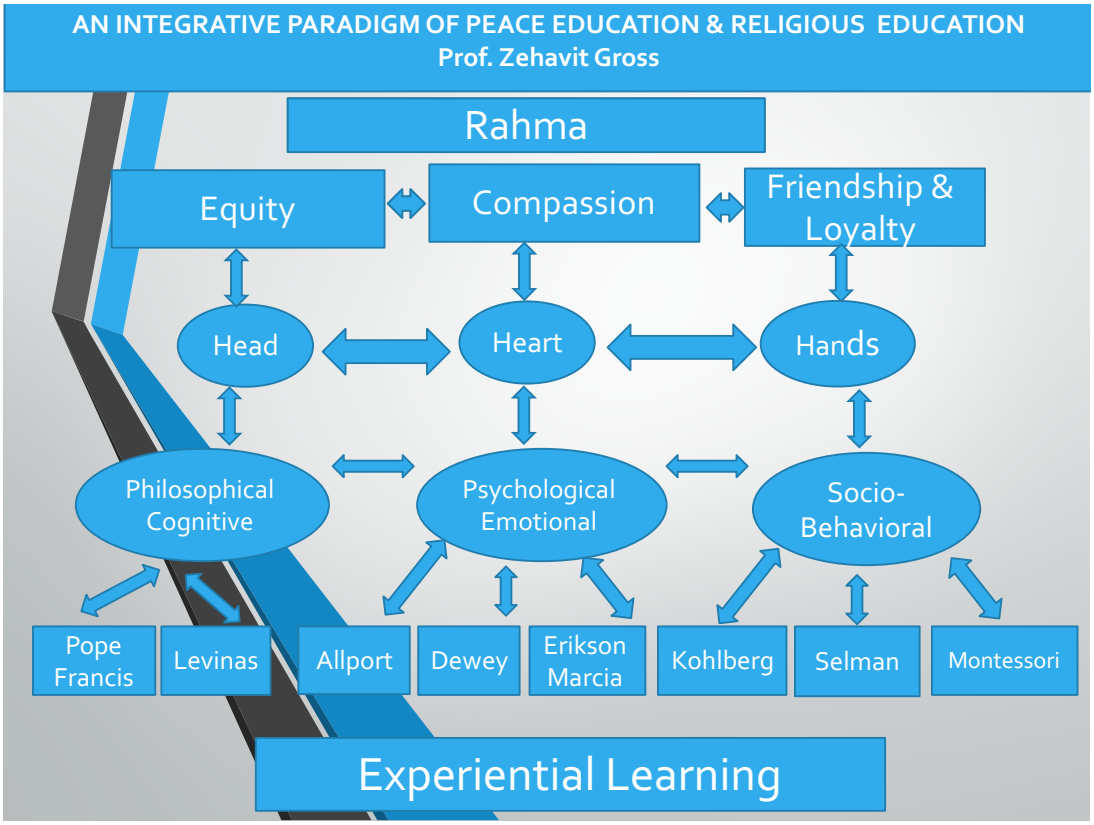
In religious education there is a need, on the one hand, to construct a relationship between the teacher and the students, and the students and the teaching material, which includes a corpus of knowledge and also understandings and practice of moral behaviour through religious codes. However, at the same time it is important to make sure that the students can preserve their intellectual freedom and their autonomy as a free human being. Achieving this combination is a complicated challenge, but if SRE teachers can be assisted to incorporate the key pedagogic elements discussed above, it will be much more feasible for them to rise to this challenge in the SRE classroom.

Case Study 2: Teaching Care and Compassion in SRE

The aim of this case study is to gain an understanding of the teaching and learning approaches of the different faith groups to the key value of care and compassion from the Australian Government's values framework. This has been undertaken through a study of the different lesson plans which are used by key faith groups in New South Wales, including the various Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam, Baha'i and Buddhism. This specific analysis has the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the strengths of SRE, as well as clarifying ways in which the approaches can be improved and brought into the twenty-first century, incorporating more effectively the various pedagogic approaches discussed above.

Introduction and Background

The secular schooling system has no integrative models capable of coping in a multi-faceted manner with fundamental abstract concepts that arise in applied teaching. Below we present an integrative multidimensional model, holistic in nature, that involves all components of the human personality, that is, head, heart and hands. The model addresses the possibility of processing the concepts of *care* and *compassion* as the foundational concepts for creating relationships of interfaith respect and fraternity, thereby contributing to a multicultural society. The authors of this report also argue that care and compassion are central to all religious belief and as such as a key constituent of SRE.



The terms ‘care and compassion’ include a number of different concepts which have a strong religious connotation. According to the Macquarie Dictionary, the word ‘care’ includes concern for others, solicitude and the desire to look after those in need. The word compassion is defined as ‘a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another suffering misfortune accompanied with the desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause’. These two terms encompass the concepts of pity as well as mercy, that is ‘kindness shown by not punishing or hurting an offender’. Within the religious context, mercy especially relates to God, or a higher spiritual being, showing compassion for suffering human beings, and it also includes the concepts of benevolence and forbearance.

Compassion is a controversial subject with different theorists coming to conflicting conclusions as to whether it is a distinct emotion or if it is based on moral principles. Goetz et al, have sought to gain a better understanding of compassion, which they claim has been neglected in traditional emotional taxonomies and research. They define compassion as ‘the feeling that arises in witnessing another’s suffering and that motives a subsequent desire to help’ (2010, p. 2), leading to a ‘reduction of suffering’ (p. 6), and argue that sympathy and pity belong to the same emotional family but are slightly different.

There are three theoretical models for compassion. The first sees it as a form of emotional distress; the second, not as an emotion on its own, but part of sadness or love, tenderness and caring; and the third stresses that it is a distinct emotion, with some overlap with sadness, which is different to the previous two concepts. The research of Goetz et al (2010) demonstrates a clear difference between both distress and sadness, with their focus on the self, compared with compassion which involves a focus on others, creating a positive sense of helping unlike distress and sadness. The authors also argue that there is a clear connection with the autonomic nervous system, with compassion being associated with heart deceleration unlike distress which leads to acceleration, and that there are other physiological differences with people’s reaction to compassion, compared with sadness and distress. Thus:

> *… compassion is a distinct emotion— best suited to synthesize the existing empirical data. Compassion arises as the result of appraisals of suffering, and is associated with signaling behavior (e.g., soothing tactile contact), reduced heart rate, subjective feelings of concern, and social behaviors that alleviate suffering. This approach also incorporates many of the claims of the other hypotheses into a coherent framework. (p. 18)*

Compassion is an emotion with a relational character. It has a social element that impels people to relate to sorrow, physical or mental illness, or any other human tribulations manifested in something external to them: a person, an environment, including my home, my school. Compassion makes people step out of their self-centred comfort zone in order to help others. It is an emotion with societal implications and is capable of changing its social structure and hierarchy. The emotion of compassion is an essential

ingredient that typifies God in the religious beliefs of almost every faith community and includes the concept of mercy.

The world behaves according to the rule of law, but the rule of mercy is also important for human society. The various religions consider the rule of mercy as reflecting God's goodness and grace: it is not a given but occurs as the outcome of a divine action that goes beyond the letter of the law, attesting to His goodness and grace. The action of compassion in the human sphere requires individuals to think about the good of their fellow human beings. It expresses a physical and mental action of downplaying the self for the sake of bringing others into one's own 'existential mental space'. The concept of compassion is a vital foundation for living in this world, and equally for education and acceptance of the 'Other'. Since compassion is a central concept in every religion, it can provide an excellent foundation for intercultural and multicultural education.

Which existential area does the emotion of compassion belong to? Is it part of the cognitive domain in human existence or is it purely emotional? Some maintain that compassion derives from a conscious, rational decision to show compassion, and is not at all the outcome of an emotion. In contrast, others argue that compassion fundamentally is part of the human emotional system. Yet others contend that the emotion of compassion is chiefly a conscious step applied by an individual and is produced by feelings. Compassion that stems from awareness but does not bring into play the human emotional system, will usually not be fulfilled because it will not lead to action. The emotional system helps the individual to assimilate the thought and – via the emotions – to bring it to practical implementation. In contrast, compassion that is not based on cognitive awareness can also be problematic since people may show compassion for the undeserving. In relation to this, the Hebrew Sages said: 'He who is compassionate to the cruel will ultimately become cruel to the compassionate' (http://www.acpr.org.il/english-nativ/06-issue/shochetman-6.htm). Therefore, there is something in the inner emotional mechanism that causes individuals to act humanely towards those who deserve it. But when the feeling deteriorates or is biased, it can become flawed and cause an individual to act brutally towards compassionate people. Thus, for compassion to be effective within the human domain, it requires both emotion and rationality.

In his writings, Emanuel Levinas describes compassion as the 'supreme ethical principle,' an opportunity to recognise and respect the 'Other,' and to enable individuals' spiritual growth. Allport, who developed the theory of contact, argued that contact between people creates a relationship that sees compassion as a means for meaningful communication between individuals. Compassion is an intersubjective process where the subject both interacts and is acted upon, and it happens within the domain of mutuality and reciprocity. In fact, simple human interactions enable great empathy and also generate compassion. The applied aspects of activating the concept of compassion in life are found in the spirit of the humanistic and social theories of Erik Erikson, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Selman, and Maria Montessori. Without activating compassion, human interactions cannot be maintained. The human relationship is based on the compassion and mercy that people show to others, through willingness to open their hearts and 'step outside' of the self—to give up aspects of the self for the benefit of creating profound relationships with others.

The cognitive psychologist, Jean Piaget (1932), argued that there are two levels of thinking in moral judgement. The first level is the heteronomous level, which deals with obedience to authority, reward and punishment, and the second one is the autonomous level, which focuses on the way an individual deals with moral laws through an intrinsic approach. According to the first approach, an individual does or does not do a specific action because he obeys the authority or because he is afraid of punishment. According to the second level, a person acts according to moral laws. He does not steal not because it is forbidden but because it harms the natural symmetry of human being. Thus, one understands that stealing goes against the natural justice of human beings through one's inner conscience. Piaget, who developed these levels of thinking, found that the heteronomous level is part of the younger ages, because their intellectual development is not that advanced, whilst as people mature, they move to the autonomous level.

Piaget's student, Lawrence Kohlberg, developed these ideas and analysed three stages of moral development, with each stage divided into two sub-levels (a total of six levels). He defined the three main stages as pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional morality. The first stage, the pre-conventional, is split into first an orientation of obedience to authority and punishment, and second to self-interest, namely doing something to meet one's own needs. The second stage is the conventional, again divided into two levels, the first being conformity to social norms, and the second relating to authority and maintaining the social order due to following social norms. The third stage, the post-conventional, is the level that one acts out of a social contract where there is a social agreement of how to behave. The final level in the third stage is the conscience and morality of individuals who do good deeds and obey the laws due to universal ethical principles, and because they do not want to hurt the symmetry of the other. They are fully in tune with the needs of the other and no longer absorbed with self.

Kohlberg argued that the progression from one stage to the next is incremental, age related, and that there is a clear relationship between a child's intellectual and moral development. Moreover, this progression through the stages is true of all human beings regardless of their culture, religion and ethnicity, and is a product of socialisation. He believed that there were common patterns of social life relating to family, peer groups and social structures across the spectrum of human societies, and that the development of children's ability to be able to think how others would act enables cooperation. By progressing to the final stage, children are able to be more inclusive and can be more effective in handling complex dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1973).

Following Socrates and Dewey, Kohlberg argued that a child's moral development is the most important goal of education. He also argued that it is important for public schools to educate for ethics and morality, and that it was possible to do this without indoctrination. He stressed that human beings are motivated to explore, but within the framework of their exploration, they look towards key adults as role models. Thus, school teachers can play a very important part in children's development of morality, values and ethics in terms of being role models as well as providing cognitive knowledge.

We are all creatures of compassion and mercy, who were born as the result of compassion, and, therefore, we are obligated to show compassion. It is interesting to note that in Hebrew, the word for mercy/compassion (*rachamim*) derives from the root r.ch.m., which refers to the same organ where human creation takes place—the womb—in Hebrew *rechem*. The womb is a natural biological mechanism where the unmediated relationship is created between the sperm and the ovum, between the mother and the embryo taking shape within her. The woman is the receptacle where life and spirituality are generated, and thus it also symbolises the location where compassion is generated and takes shape. Goetz et al (2010) have demonstrated how compassion is a common value across many nations and religions, with the concept of benevolence ranking highly with most groupings. The various studies of different cultures demonstrate that 'suffering and need are universal elicitors of compassion' (p. 20).

A key element of the teaching of care and compassion in SRE is the development of a strong religious identity which relates to this key value through belief in God or a higher being. Erikson (1968) was the first to develop a definition of identity that includes the concept of sameness and continuity. Erikson (1950, 1968), in his developmental theory, described the development of an individual as an identity formation process. This is an ongoing process which continues throughout life and is divided, according to Erikson (1950), into eight stages. At the centre of each stage, there is a crisis or conflict which leads the individual to one of two possible outcomes: a positive or negative solution. A positive solution of the crisis will strengthen the individual's sense of wholeness, and will improve the individual's ability to make judgments and to succeed in reaching personal expectations and those of society. A negative solution of the crisis may lead to the development of an unstable, un-unique and unsocial personality. The fifth stage, identity vs. identity confusion, takes place during adolescence and the transition to adulthood.

Erikson argued that exploration is a prerequisite for identity achievement. This dimension of the identity formation process was further developed by Marcia (1980) and is defined as 'identity work' (Grotevant, 1987, p. 204). Drawing on Lichtenberg (1989), who outlines five 'motivational systems' influencing behavior, Morgan posits that his 'exploration-assertion motivational system' is a significant factor contributing to attachment (2010, p. 14). Morgan uses this analysis in relation to a child's willingness to move away from an attachment figure in order to explore his or her surroundings, thereby developing an integrated model of human attachment and identity. In the case of SRE, teachers aim to create a sense of attachment not just to family, school and society in general, but to the religious beliefs of their faith community.

With the significant changes of the twenty-first century, there has been an increasing interest in adolescents' identity exploration, which begins during upper primary school in Years 5 and 6 (Halevi & Gross, 2018). This includes important further distinctions between *in-breadth exploration* (weighing various alternative commitments before choosing one or more) and *in-depth exploration* (thinking and gathering information about a current commitment) (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2006). These important major styles of exploration were developed in light of criticisms (Schwartz, 2005) that Marcia's identity status model both ignored the social component

of identity as described in Erikson's theory (Côté & Levine, 1988) and disregarded the developmental component of the identity formation process (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001).

Modern teaching in SRE needs to incorporate the exploration element into its lesson plans and teaching and learning approaches, according to the age of the children, as well as the key other pedagogic issues, in order to make it more relevant to the postmodern world, with all its challenges as discussed above.

In every religion, compassion is a central feature because God is seen as definitive goodness and works to do good in the world. Accordingly, the attitude to compassion has philosophical cognitive aspects that attempts to conceptualize that emotion. Pope Francis, for example, sees the connection between the head, heart, and hands as an inherent religious philosophical relationship attesting to the relationship of the Holy Trinity. Thus, educators who plan to teach the concepts of care and compassion need to feature in their pedagogic work rational, emotional and practical elements or, in the language of Pope Francis, they must call on the head, the heart, and the hands: 'Mercy, both in Jesus and in us, is a journey that starts from the heart to get to the hands. What does this mean? Jesus looks at you, heals you with his mercy, tells you: "Get up!", And your heart is new.' (https://fll.cc/en/inspire/pope-francis-mercy-from-heart-to-hands/, accessed 28 October 2018).

Cattaro (2017) discusses the need to synthesise the development of ethos and culture in the educational community. He explains that culture, in this concept, 'accepts community values and the interdependence that is reflected and honoured in respectful relationships, and recognises the bond of the community' (p. 51). Ethos reflects 'the deeper convictions of the community lived in morals, beliefs, attitudes and virtues' (p. 53). He suggests initiating a culture of encounter, which involves an authentic atmosphere of respect, esteem sincere listening and solidarity, without the need to blur or lessen one's identity. Such a culture is capable of responding to 'the many forms of violence, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, marginalisation, waste and restrictions on freedom' (p. 58). He argues that 'culture in dialogue with capital produces an encountering capital that has an effective impact on the social and personal skills of actors (both educators and students), and an affective impact on the social engagement of the educational project in the local community' (p. 58). He advocates the need to initiate a dialogue between praxis, ethos and culture (p. 60).

This study of the lesson plans on care and compassion seeks to analyse them with the various theoretical frameworks discussed above.

Methodology

This qualitative study examined and analysed the lesson plans dealing with the value of care and compassion of seven different religious providers operating within the SRE framework: Anglican, Baha'i, Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, Islamic and Jewish. The plans were chosen by the providers and sent to the 'Better Balanced Futures' committee coordinator.

This approach of using the value of care and compassion as a case study was carried out according to Stake (2000) and Yin (2004). A case study can be used to investigate complex phenomena not yet theoretically described. It contributes to our knowledge of individuals, groups, and uncharted phenomena (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Yin argues that the case study method is appropriate when the goal is to uncover contextual conditions of a contemporary phenomenon, and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not evident (Yin, 2004, 2009). The goal is to produce an integrated, holistic description of real-life events, and to establish a framework for discussion and debate (Lovat, 2003).

In order to analyse the lesson plans qualitatively and develop our grounded theory, we employed a constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin, 1997), enabling a more nuanced understanding of the main phenomenon investigated. Our analysis consisted of five stages:

1. open coding, in which recurring topics in the lesson plans were identified and defined
2. axial coding, involving the formulation of categories defining criteria and continuing theoretical sampling
3. selective coding, which consists of refining and finalising criteria to include a series of categories
4. formulating the hierarchy and identifying core categories; and
5. creating a category-based theoretical structure linked to the literature, and proposing a theoretical model. (Gross and Rutland, 2017)

Findings

As discussed in the literature there are different ways to interpret the value of compassion, which can include the concepts of helping, forgiveness and loving kindness (Goetz et al, 2010). This analysis demonstrates how the different NSW faith groups interpret this value through an examination of their lesson plans, with some focusing on the element of helping, others focusing on forgiveness, and still others on the concept of loving kindness.

Thus, for example, the lesson plans of Islam focused on the concepts of helping others in their nine-week lesson unit dealing with care and compassion, with a stress on caring for others that also included animals and the environment. So, when discussing Islam's attitude to animals, the teacher needs to 'explain to the students that Allah has created the animal, just like He created humans and other things. We must at all times treat Allah's creation with kindness and compassion' ('Islam teaches me to care', Lesson 1, p. 3). Each lesson tended to move from the more universal value of helping others to the more specific elements of what Allah and Muhammed required from Muslims. This unit also introduces relevant terms in Arabic, such as *Silatur-Rahim*, which is the Muslim concept of caring for family, friends, of brotherhood and love. In the story of Ahmad and Hamza (lesson 7), the importance of friendship is stressed as a form of compassion which is valued by Allah.

Some of the other faiths also focused more on the importance of helping in relation to compassion. The Baha'i lesson plan stresses the need to help people in trouble, and

provided various examples of specific cases and the best way to react. To illustrate this point, the children are also told the story of a simple woman who wished to meet with Abdu'l Bahá as he travelled the world. However, she was told she could not see him as he was in a meeting with some very important people. She started to walk away, deeply disappointed, when his voice was heard saying he wished to see her: *'A heart has been hurt. Hasten, hasten, bring her to me!'.* This story demonstrates the compassion of Abdu'l Bahá who was prepared to interrupt an important meeting to ensure that a simple woman was not distressed at being unable to meet with him and to help her.

Another element of compassion is forgiveness, and a couple of the faiths decided to focus on this aspect of compassion. Thus, for Judaism, the focus was on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when Jews ask their fellow human beings for forgiveness for any wrong doing they might have committed against them and also to God (Hashem). The lesson plans also notes the importance of being sympathetic and having concern for others. The aims of the unit are set out clearly as follows:

> ***Year K-2*** *Students will be able to:*
> - *Associate Yom Kippur with the act of forgiveness and being compassionate to others*
>
> ***Year 3-4*** *Students will be able to:*
> - *Students will be able to explain the difference between asking for forgiveness and forgiving others as an act of compassion*
>
> ***Year 5-6*** *Students will be able to:*
> - *Explain the positive feeling associated with Yom Kippur by being able to forgive and be compassionate to others*
> - *List some of the confessions mentioned (Unit, Yom Kippur, BJE SRE, p. 3)*

Songs, again, are embedded in the unit, with a traditional Jewish prayer, *Adon HaSlichot*, Master of Forgiveness, referring to God:

> *Master of Forgiveness,*
> *Examiner of Hearts,*
> *Revealer of Depths,*
> *Who speaks righteously*
> *We have sinned before You,*
> *Have mercy upon us.*

The children are then taught another little song:

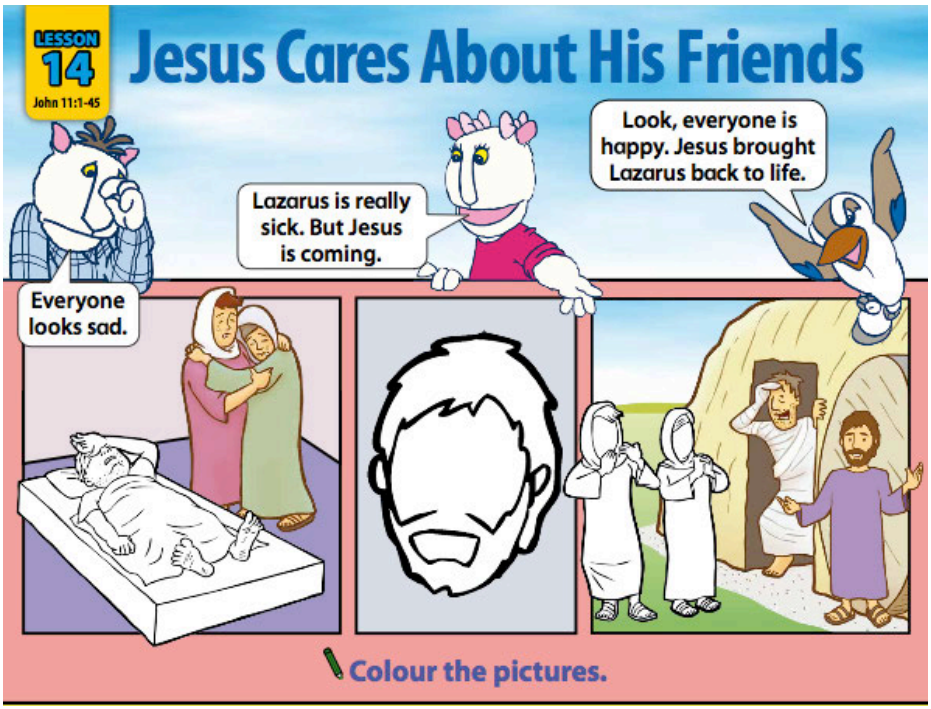
> *I'm so sorry, forgive me*
> *Be my friend and please believe me.*
> *If I hurt you, I was wrong.*
> *Please listen to what I say:*
> *From now on I do promise*
> *to behave the right way.*
> *I'm so sorry, forgive me,*
> *Be my friend and please believe me. (Unit, Yom Kippur, BJE SRE, p.4)*

These two songs are directly connected with the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, a 25-hour fast day when Jewish people are required to apologise to anyone they may have hurt during the year, and also pray for forgiveness for their sins to God. Such requests for forgiveness are seen as an integral part of compassion. In Judaism, God is seen as displaying the ultimate level by showing mercy and forgiveness. These songs represent two levels of compassion. The first one, the prayer to God as 'Master of Mercy', is heteronomic, while the second song is autonomic, where the child takes the initiative by not only asking for forgiveness but also promising to behave better in the future. It also involves the concept that a good friend will forgive one for any hurt caused or any wrongdoing.

For the Baptists, forgiveness was also a central plank of compassion. The lesson stresses that to seek the forgiveness of someone one needs to start with an apology. Their lesson plans include teaching the five key rules relating to apologising to ensure that one's apology is effective:

1. *Admit specific details (no ifs, buts or maybes)*
2. *Apologise and acknowledge the hurt*
3. *Accept consequences*
4. *Ask for forgiveness*
5. *Alter your behavior (Topic 9, worksheet 5)*

They also focus on the Gospel story of the miraculous recovery of Lazarus after he was presumed to be dying thanks to Jesus's miraculous cure.



The cartoon above (GSY_Eep–2018, Lesson 14) presents a very emotional story relating to Jesus saving Lazarus, which would appeal to young children. It is a linear process between cause and effect, and highlights value of compassion and caring.

Another key concept is that of loving kindness, with the Anglican lesson plans drawing on the gospel story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the point. Although there were tensions between the Jews and the Samaritans when a Jewish man was injured and lying on the road, it was a Samaritan, rather than a Jewish priest or Levite, who stopped to assist him. The aim of the lesson is:

> To help students to understand that those who are part of God's kingdom love everyone, even those who are different to them, because God has loved them first! This is how you can recognise those who follow Jesus. (A2, Upper Primary, Lesson 5, p. 1)

The outcomes were set out as follows:

Students will learn about:

- how the Samaritan man showed love to the Jewish man
- how Jesus wants us to show love to others because God loved us first.

Students will learn to:

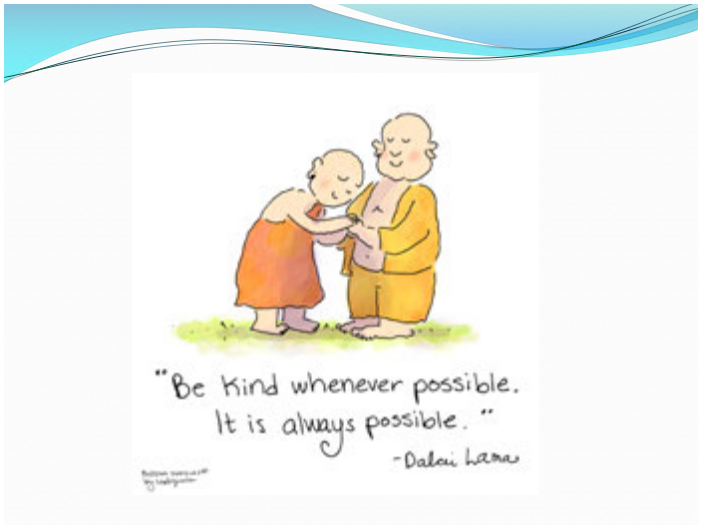
- state how they can show God's love and kindness to others.

(A2, Upper Primary, Lesson 5, p. 1)

This story stresses that the concept that one needs to show compassion to everyone, even if they are different or your enemy, just as the Samaritan assisted the Jewish man, even though there were tensions between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time.

One of the Roman Catholic lesson also drew on the concepts of love and showing kindness as being part of compassion. Their unit drew on the stories of various saints to illustrate this point. For example, their Lesson 7 activity sheet highlights the story of Mary Glowrey, MD, who was one of the earliest women to graduate as a doctor in Victoria in 1910, who felt a calling to travel to India as a medical missionary when she learnt of the high death rate there. She left Australia in 1920 and established a hospital in Guntur, training locals as pharmacists, nurses and midwives. Later, she established the Catholic Hospital Association in India. She said that her only regret in life was that she had not done enough, that she could have done more. This story provides a role model for the children, with the students being asked how she represented the feet, hands and eyes of Christ.

Similarly, the Buddhist unit focused on the concept of loving-kindness and the need to bring joy and kindness into all one's activities, as well as the importance of unconditional love. They provided a definition of compassion with different examples and raised the concept 'to give back to life' ('Loving Kindness and Compassion', LN Example). In their PowerPoint presentation for the class, they provided many different illustrations from everyday life and included these two images:



('Loving Kindness and Compassion', LN Example)

These simple images, together with the message from the Dalai Lama convey the importance of loving-kindness. These images stress that it is possible to be kind, that it is viable, and that it should be an integral part of the students' everyday life and the routine of human existence. The first image also stresses that the duration of kindness should be infinite. In this way, the Buddhist message stresses 'universal compassion', that should not just occur when responding to suffering, but should be for all people at all times, so that 'unlike our limited compassion, which already arises naturally from time to

time, universal compassion must first be cultivated through training over a long period of time' ('Loving Kindness and Compassion', LN Example).

Particularly in the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the lesson content also stresses the role of God. In the case of Islam, the focus is on Allah but also on his prophet, Muhammed. For example, in one lesson, the children are told:

> *During the emigration, Abu Bakr took great care of the Prophet. While they were traveling, Abu Bakr would circle around Muhammad PBUH to protect him from anyone that might attack him. We should also look out for our friends as Muhammad PBUH and his Companions did. (Lesson 5, Term 3)*

This story stresses the fact that Muhammad's followers cared for his safety and protected him from danger and that this should be an example for the students to also take care of their friends in the same way.

The lesson devoted to the Muslim festival of Eid Al-Adha stressed the importance of religious belief. The children are taught a song and told that they:

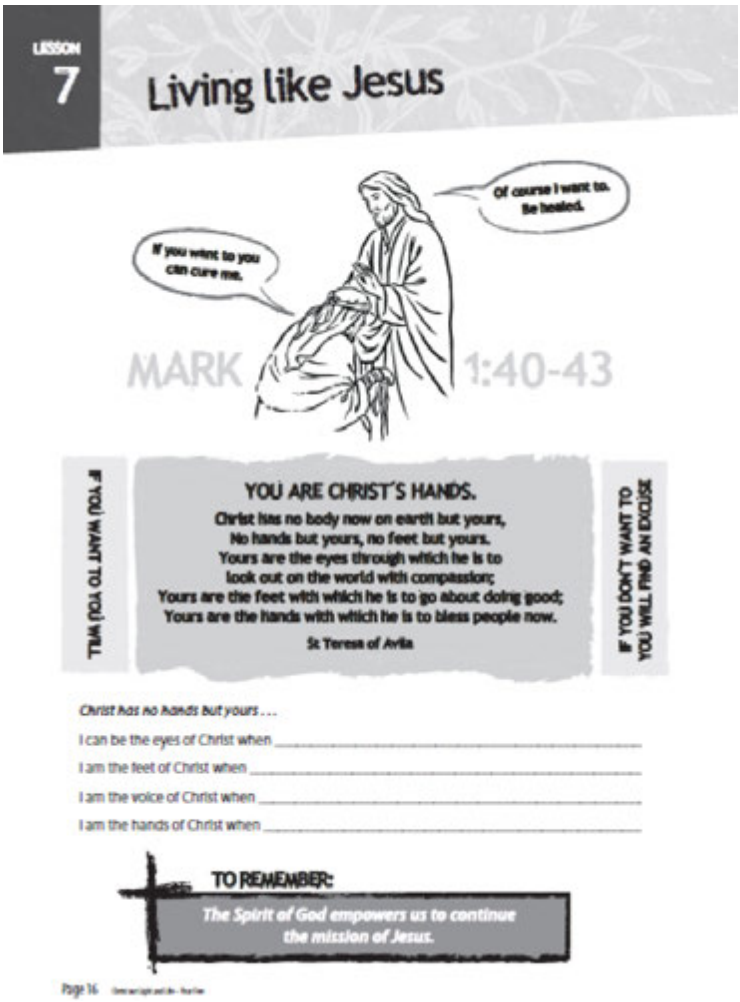
> *1) Learn the Eid Takbir:*
> *Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest) – three times*
> *Lailaha illa Allah (There is no God but Allah) – once*
> *Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest) – twice*
> *Wa Lilahil Hamd (And Praise is for Him) – once*

The refrain of this song is:

> *All over the world*
> *Under the big-blue sky*
> *Muslims unite to worship Allah*
> *It's a time of brotherhood, a time of peace*
> *Muslims are singing praises to Allah*
> *Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest)*
> *Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest*) (Lesson 6, Term 3)

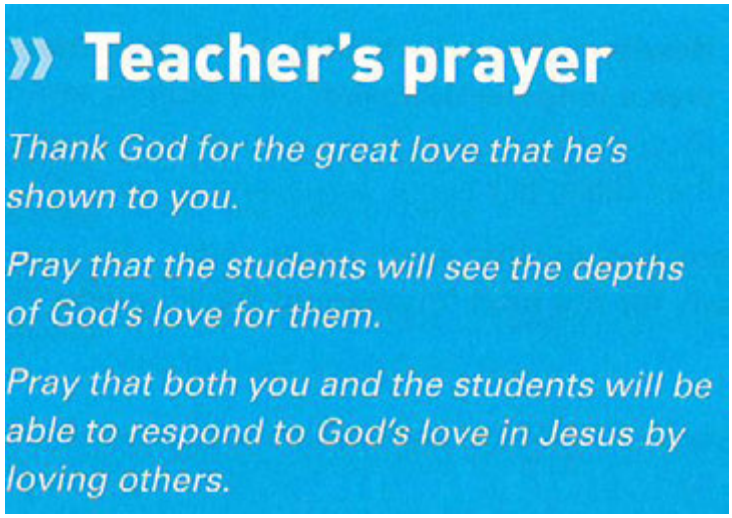
Because of the fact that Allah is the greatest, he is the source of compassion and care. Therefore, his followers have to care, and employ compassion and brotherhood in their own lives.

In the case of the Christian denominations the focus was more on Jesus with his being a living example of how to behave in a compassionate manner.



(Roman Catholic Activity sheet, Lesson 7, 'Living like Jesus')

With the Baptists, this was seen with the story of Lazarus, while the Anglicans in Lesson 5, 'God's People Love Everyone', included the following teacher's prayer:



This approach indicates the reciprocity element of the concept of compassion. For example, in the Roman Catholic lesson plans of the story of the woman who was considered to have been involved with many bad deeds, but who came to Jesus and expressed love and concern, there is the concept that if one gives to God, God will give to you in return.

In the Judaism unit, the focus is on God as the Master of Forgiveness, with the lesson plan for Years 5 and 6 setting out the following:

> *Following the ten days during which we apologise to our family and friends, comes Yom Kippur. Most of that day is spent in the synagogue asking HaShem to forgive us.*
> *One of the prayers sung on Yom Kippur is 'Adon HaSlichot'*
> *Please note that the* ***aim in teaching the prayer differs from grade to grade****.*
> *Listen with students to 'Adon HaSlichot' (found on the BJE site.)*
> ***Before Listening:***
> *Explain that the song is admitting to HaShem our wrongdoings toward Him and asking Him for forgiveness.*

Thus, this study showed that care and compassion is a major value within all the religions we studied, and is perceived as a core element of the SRE curricula. A careful analysis of the lesson plans of the major religious providers dealing with care and compassion demonstrates the commonality of focus on these values, but also reveals a different level of emphasis in the specific approach of each religion. In some cases, the emphasis focused on helping, in others, on forgiveness and still others, on loving kindness, which reflects the uniqueness of each religion's beliefs.

<u>Discussion</u>

The main aim in values education is to develop the ability among students to change and transform. This report argues that a person's belief in a higher spiritual being provides people with the ability to change, and that this change can result in transformation. All the teaching plans we investigated aimed to show the importance of the value of care and compassion, and so assist the students to transform themselves in a practical way to become better people and improve the world. As well, in all the lesson plans from the different faith groups, the concept of human agency is embedded. Thus, asking for forgiveness is an example of human agency, since the person has to decide whether to undertake this action or not.

As Kohlberg (1976) points out, there are common patterns in the social life of all societies which are faced with common challenges in terms of offering care and compassion. A central aim of all the faith groups is to improve the actions of human beings in order to make the world a better place. To achieve this aim, the different faiths use God, with Christianity using Jesus, the son of God, and Islam, Allah and Muhammed, the prophet, or a higher spiritual being, as an example and a role model of the perfect behaviour. The lessons plans across the faith groups seek to encourage the students to follow these role models through their spiritual beliefs and so recruit the children to emulate the higher

being's example in their personal capacity. These messages relate to relationships within the family, the students' peer groups and school, as well as helping others in society in general.

However, whilst the aim of the various faith communities' lesson plans was to enable the students to become more caring and helpful people, thereby facilitating a transformation, the approaches that we saw in both the content and pedagogy tended to be essentialist (Sagi, 2002) and instrumental (Gross, 2010). Our observation is that there is a tendency in religious education to focus on acquisition rather than participation (Sfard, 1998) with the teaching approaches offering the students a fixed, one dimensional 'commodity' that they are forced to acquire, rather than knowledge engagement. Therefore, it is not surprising that the SRE classes often do not achieve their aim of moral improvement and transformation.

Yet, as we have discussed earlier, meaningful learning involves reflective teaching (Gross, 2010) and one needs to make sure that SRE teachers use a constructivist and not an essentialist approach, and incorporate Jackson's concept of the interpretative approach (1997). Not all the lesson plans incorporated these elements and a number still contained essentialist elements. Compassion is a challenge when it is presented not only as a condition, but rather something people do out of their free will. If it is done only under the threat of punishment, it will not be true compassion.

Applying Bob Jackson's interpretive approach (1997) to SRE is a significant challenge, but one which needs to be met, because it enables the teaching and learning process to structure religious consciousness in the shadow of a complex and multi-layered construct, which is part of the twenty-first century world. As discussed above, Jackson's interpretive approach to the study of religious diversity consists of three basic tenets: representation, interpretation and reflection. This can be adopted and adapted to the arena of SRE in terms of teaching care and compassion provided that SRE teachers gain a better understanding of these concepts and how to incorporate them into their lesson plans in an age appropriate fashion through professional development. Particularly with the older groups, it is important to present different representations, aimed at revealing diverse voices and interpretations which in turn allow a critical reflective discourse to take shape. The methodical approach which Jackson proposes will enable SRE teachers to structure learning systematically. Applying his interpretive approach to those epistemological and theological challenges in an increasing racist and violent world will ensure a mature approach which transforms tough religious questions into a source of resilience and hope within each religious faith group (Gross, 2014), where the concepts of care and compassion can play a key role by stressing that these apply not only to the students' own religious community but to all of human kind (Gross, 2014).

In her article, *Teaching Generation Me*, Twenge (2009) has shown that 'most young people no longer respond to appeals to duty; instead, they want to know exactly why they are doing something and want to feel that they are having a personal impact' (p.404). This was confirmed by the findings of our study of SRE (Gross & Rutland, 2015) , where the students desire to know that the instruction is relevant for their personal survival and will help them to be a competent adults in their cultural context. Thus, it is

important to ensure that care and compassion are presented as an opportunity and not as a threat, and that the teaching of this value is not conditioned and manipulated by the SRE approach.

An analysis of the lesson plans show that most are stuck in the first level of Kohlberg's pre-conventional stage and the heteronomous level of Piaget. Yet, Piaget argued that the heteronomous level applies only to the younger ages. This is the challenge of religious education because, on the one hand, SRE providers wish to convey the authority of God but, on the other hand, students need to be encouraged to accept this through constructing their free will, so that they will choose to accept the authority of God on their own volition. Therefore, when a lesson plan suggests a linear path between deed and punishment or reward in a very simplistic manner, it will not appeal to the 'Me Generation' in the post-modern world. The students are searching for this more complex relationship with moral development and this should be further investigated whether it is being offered effectively in SRE classes.

Within the framework of Piaget and Kohlberg's theorisation, the issue of age appropriateness needs to be considered more carefully. For the older students, the message needs to be conveyed that true compassion is due to intrinsic factors rather than an extrinsic need. Many of the lesson plans did differentiate on the basis of age, but they tended to focus more on additional content rather than higher order thinking. Yet, as both Piaget and Kohlberg have demonstrated, moral development is connected with intellectual development, so that students in the older age groups need intellectual challenges. For example, present a dilemma and then discuss the approach of the individual SRE faith to resolving the dilemma using the above-mentioned Jackson's interpretive approach.

In today's neoliberal world, students often want a more universalistic approach to their Religious Studies learning. At the same time, they also wanted the instruction to be more relevant to their own lives rather than taking the traditional, particularistic approach (see Gross & Rutland, 2014). Yet, each major faith does have universalistic messages which SRE classes could focus on.

Another challenge is the relationship between education, with its focus on objective knowledge, and socialisation and its focus on subjective knowledge (Berger, 1990 [1967]). There is a tension between students wanting, on the one hand, an objective approach, but at the same time desiring that both their classroom learning and their outside, informal activities would relate to the subjective rather than the objective perspective (Gross, 2010; Gross and Rutland, 2017). With the teaching of care and compassion, there is a need to bridge this gap between the objective messages of the religious faiths and the subjective world of the students. This can be achieved by asking the students to reflect on their own life and bring examples from their own experience. Some of the lesson plans were more successful in bridging this gap than others. More professional development with discussion and sharing across the faiths could assist SRE teachers to introduce pedagogic approaches to deal with this tension between objective and subjective knowledge.

As Kohlberg argues (1976), children look towards adults as role models. The spiritual growth of students in SRE can be fostered by what the literature calls 'a responsible adult'. This means that the SRE teacher's role is not to indoctrinate, but rather to enable the students to deal with the inner conflict that they experience between accepting God's authority, on the one hand, while at the same time being autonomous, as stressed in the postmodern world with its focus on individual freedom. Professional development of both the supervisors and the teachers can assist them to achieve this aim through more effective lesson planning.

Exploration is another important element in education as compared with indoctrination. As discussed, the need for exploration is a prerequisite in the process of identity formation (Erikson, 1968, Marcia, 1980; Grotevant, 1987; Morgan, 2010) and can be a critical factor in student motivation. This needs to be taken into account in SRE lesson planning. The current generation have a strong desire to explore their connection to their individual religious beliefs at a deeper layer. Yet, very often such belief is presented in the lesson plans in an authoritarian fashion, without providing the students with opportunities for an open-ended discussion as to why such behaviour is important.

Particularly as they mature, students can be presented with dilemmas, which will enable them to explore for themselves the best approach towards helping others and ensuring that they are tuned into the needs of others, rather than just being self-absorbed in their own needs. Too often the message conveyed in contemporary Western society is that people should focus on their own needs and rights, with little focus on obligations. The theme of care and compassion can be an ideal venue to examine why such individualism can be problematic at both the micro and the macro levels of society. Thus, such exploration needs to be encouraged by the SRE teachers in an age appropriate manner.

Morgan's research (2010) has demonstrated the connection between exploration and place attachment, using the example of a child gradually moving away from her mother to explore her surroundings. This reinforces Kohlberg's theory of identity development that children need to explore but at the same time they also look to key adults as role models. Drawing on Morgan's analogy, older students need to examine issues and criticisms, what has been described as 'wrestling with God', in order to reinforce their own religious identities and beliefs. The SRE teacher can help and guide them in their journey of exploration through showing the beauty of religious belief through a positive prism. This constructivist approach will work better than the essentialist approach which focuses on the construction of the authority of God or a higher spiritual being and the need to obey the religious laws.

We have argued for the importance of incorporating experiential and informal education techniques into SRE. An analysis of the various lesson plans revealed that many of the faith providers have tried to incorporate the use of experiential educational techniques which involve Pope Francis's 'head, heart and hand' approach (Pope Francis Q&A on the challenges of Education, Zenit.org, November 23, 2015 , https:qqzenit.orgqarticlesqpope-s-q-and-a-on- the challenges –of –education, accessed on 5 February 2018). This can be seen in the incorporation of prayer and song (heart), of discussion and reason (head), of appealing to the students' feelings (heart) and of creative drawings and images (hands).

At the same time, each faith group has their own unique understanding of and approach to the concepts of care and compassion, drawing from the wellsprings of their spiritual beliefs. In this way, SRE can be 'actualized by the pedagogies of Pope Francis weaving the heart, hands and minds within the educational practice, thus allowing the educative process to be interactive, combining the pragmatic with the Aristotelian concepts of logos with pathos' (Cattaro, 2017, p.54). If a reciprocal relationship of dialogue can be developed in the SRE lesson plans between heart, hand and mind, 'all three can be like concept of the Holy Trinity: becoming one to form the whole, yet separate in function' (Cattaro, 2017, p. 54). This will facilitate a conversation in the SRE classroom between heart, mind, and hands.

SRE also needs to create a synergy between culture and ethos (Cattaro, 2017) and this is what the lesson plans attempt to do. Yet, they need to be more reflective and include the way the students comprehend and encounter religion in the educational process. As discussed, Jackson's concept of reflection is very relevant here as SRE teachers need to integrate into the educational process the life histories of the students and the way they interpret the religious reality into their own lives. This will initiate a dialogue between Cattaro's (2017) concept of praxis, ethos and culture (p. 60) and enable to students to better understand the importance of helping and being kind to others.

The experiential learning in SRE can facilitate transformation through its values education aspect, which also stress religious belief. If this can be achieved through improved lesson planning and pedagogy, the education that is imparted through SRE will become more meaningful from a moral point of view. The lesson plans need to focus on a holistic approach which involves the integration between the head, the heart and the hands. Systematic experiential learning can effect at both the micro and the macro levels. From the point of view of values education, such transformation is of central importance.

PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This report has demonstrated that religion is still relevant for our society. There is a polarisation about the role of religion in contemporary Australian society, but at the government level, every effort should be made to minimise this polarisation by encouraging respect for different beliefs, whether religious or secular, while at the same time recognising that there are central moral and ethical principles that apply to all citizens of Australia. Through SRE, government schools can still teach ethics and values with the added dimension of religious belief, the advantages of which have been demonstrated in current educational and psychological theory as discussed in this report.

Values education and wellbeing are major constituents of SRE. As such, SRE should be encouraged, not only in primary schools but also for adolescence in high schools, as the contemporary study by Chen and van der Veereleere (2018) on adolescence, religious upbringing and subsequent health and wellbeing has demonstrated. To remove SRE at both primary and high school levels for those who choose it, would be to remove an important spiritual and religious element from values and religious education and practice which has been clearly demonstrated to be important for student and adult wellbeing.

This report argues for the importance of maintaining SRE but there is a need to ensure that the programs are developed within a reflective and critical lens, taking into consideration the nine key values delineated by the Australian Government and all the recommendations from the 2015 NSW Government Report, to strengthen young people's personal identity and to convey the importance of religious education for their moral and ethical development. By continuing to offer the choice of SRE and SEE, while at the same time ensuring that the implementation of both meets with the highest pedagogic standards in current teaching and learning practices, the polarisation experienced at present can be minimised.

SRE should be perceived as a strategy to foster multiculturalism in schools, yet this should be conducted along with a systematic critique of any extreme religious ideology. Hence, following Jackson's (1997) interpretive approach, SRE should provide reflective religious education (Gross, 2010). If we want students to be able to negotiate their lives within the broader global context of being exposed to other religions (Ziebertz, 2012), they need first to have an understanding of their own particularistic identity. Meeting the needs of small minority groups such as Bahá'ís, Hindus and other Eastern faiths, as well as the Abrahamic faiths, enriches a multifaith society, and teachers need to be informed of the importance of such an approach.

At the same time, all teachers of SRE classes need to be aware of the boundaries required to create respect for all faiths within the liberal state, so as to ensure that one faith does not undermine the other faiths in order to promote its own ends. In this regard, a combination of SRE and GRE is optimal, since it enables students to develop and reflect on their own identity capital, as well as understanding other religious faiths and

the different perceptions of the ways to achieve a good and moral existence. This, however, is age related, since children first need to develop their own identity before they are able to understand broader identities.

While significant literature exists on the need for minority groups to be exposed to other cultures, there is not enough literature on the ways in which a minority group can strengthen its own culture within a multicultural society. SRE classes can play a positive role in the child's development. We found that SRE contributed to the children's sense of connectedness within the community, promoted their feeling of security and provided them with a protective safety net of identity capital and spirituality (Gross and Rutland, 2015). Such classes need to be respectful of different traditions, both within and across faiths, so that the children can learn to recognise the value of religious diversity. Thus, the challenge is to create more effective SRE classrooms where the reality for all students is inclusiveness, assisting them to move along a path of belonging and to make meaning of the complexities of the human experience.

If the various faith groups want SRE to continue, each provider needs to move from traditional methods of teaching religious beliefs where a more authoritarian approach was acceptable to a more open-ended approach which encourages questioning and searching.

In meeting this goal, we can see three main shifts. The first is a cognitive shift, which is a constructivist perspective that shifts attention from discussing what religious education is, to a discussion about how we define and thus construct and conceptionalise religious education. The second is the issue of relevance: religious education is the emergence of global and local relevancy spaces. The third is subjectivation: students act from a subjective standpoint so that there is a need to investigate current practices and materials to constitute new forms of subjectivation. (Macgilchrist & Christophe, 2011).

Our study identified a number of relevant factors associated with religious transmission for the current generation. Religious education should be constructivist, with students gradually constructing their identity. Such instruction should be reflective, not instrumental (Gross, 2010). Following Alexander (2001), SRE should be situated 'between the subjectivism and relativism of the left and the dogmatism and fundamentalism of the right' (p. xiii). There needs to be a dialectic between a compulsory, core curriculum and a flexible, open-ended, vibrant approach (Weisse, 2011).

One of the challenges facing SRE is the lack of professional development for its teachers, most of whom work in an honorary capacity as volunteers and lack any professional training. As well, many of them are older and have not been exposed to these current educational theories and pedagogy. To develop the skills needed to teach in SRE professional development needs to be an essential component. Teachers need to be aware of the five main pedagogic values found in the research: trust, respect, care, safety and creating a sense of belonging.

These improvements can be achieved by:

- Introducing a basic training course through the Department of Education for all SRE beginning teachers that includes the various pedagogic approaches discussed above
- Opportunities for ongoing professional development, both within and across the faith groups
- More effective supervision and monitoring to the teaching body
- The establishment of a mixed-faith evaluation committee of curricula and lesson plans to ensure that the materials taught offer a broad and inclusive perspective that encourages the students' autonomy in their religious beliefs
- Greater transparency in all aspects of SRE teaching

Informal religious education is the most meaningful approach, together with experiential and interactive learning, for the transmission of religious knowledge and identity. This can occur through a variety of channels, including formal classroom instruction, camps and social learning. Students like to be directly involved with their learning, and when direct instruction is required, there are many modern technologies which teachers can employ, such as graphics, short video clips and the smart board (Twenge, 2009, p.403). However, according to the students' testimony, their teachers do not use these strategies. Incentives are required for these teachers to improve their skills, so that they can learn to use modern teaching techniques and make the subject matter more relevant. In addition, more investment into producing local Australian quality teachers through a basic training course and professional development, as well as teaching materials, are needed. There is also an increasing dichotomy between those concerned with maintaining religious particularism (uniqueness or fundamentalism) and those whose approach is more secular and universalistic.

Longitudinal and diachronic observations into changes in transmission of cultural and religious heritages are required to develop better strategies (Greenfield, Maynard and Childs, 2000; Ziebertz, 2003). Our findings relate to the sustainability of religious education in government schools via SRE as part of the rich tapestry of multicultural New South Wales and Australia. Our main conclusion is that developing a good balance between schooling, multiculturalism and religious commitment is a key challenge for the twenty-first century, of concern for the future mental health and wellbeing of the current generation and New South Wales and Australian public policy.

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