

Journal of Religious Education

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JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION is a refereed publication for the academic exploration of the task of religious education in modern society. The journal helps disseminate original writings and research in religious education and catechesis -- and in related areas such as spirituality, theology, moral and faith development, cultural contexts, ministry and schooling. It includes a variety of feature sections -- on contemporary educational issues, book reviews, conferences, resources and practical hints for teachers. Articles for publication on religious education in various contexts and on the related areas noted above, as well as on any of the feature sections are welcome. See the inside back cover for details.

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THE PRESENCE AND PLACE OF STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT CATHOLICS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: AN ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Introduction

In many Australian Catholic schools, students who are not Catholics are increasingly seeking enrolment. While such students have always been present in Catholic schools their numbers have increased in recent years (Welbourne, 2001). In NSW Catholic schools, for instance, the number of these students has doubled in percentage terms in the past 15 years to around five percent of the total student population, while the total increase in students has been marginal (NSWCEC, 2003). The growing presence of students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools raises "questions about the changing nature and purpose of the Catholic school as a context for religious education" (Welbourne, 2003, p. 1). These questions focus on the nature and purpose of the classroom religion program and the evangelical and catechetical possibilities that form part of the Catholic school's pastoral mission.

This article presents the results of an analysis of extracts from official Catholic church documents on education and catechesis concerning the enrolment in Catholic schools of students who are not Catholics. Membership Categorisation Analysis is the tool of analysis used to review these documents. The discussion of results and findings provides directions for further research as well as questions for reflection for school administrators and religious educators.

The Church documents selected for study here are those deemed influential on the theory and practice of Catholic schools. Freebody (2003, p. 179) argues that understanding how texts operate is critical for educators because: "contemporary educational practice is saturated by texts; public educational arrangements are defined and regulated by texts; and, public educational activities are challenged, changed and legitimated by texts. Freebody's second point, "public educational arrangements are defined and regulated by texts", is central to this study. For religious educators and leaders in Catholic schools, the official church documents on education and catechesis define and regulate practices in Catholic schools.

This article poses two main questions for these official documents. First, how do church officials regard the presence in Catholic schools of students

who are not Catholics? This question seeks to judge the extent to which these students are welcome in Catholic schools. Second, what is the place of these students in Catholic schools? This question examines what is expected of these students when they attend a Catholic school.

Methodology

First, extracts were selected from the documents of Vatican II and the major postconciliar documents on education and catechesis. They are presented for analysis in chronological order so that a sense of development and increasing specificity can be noted. The Vatican II documents are used as a starting point since they represent a sea-change in church attitudes to the issue of students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools. The documents of Vatican II and those that followed were written in an era of ecumenical interest and concern. Previously, educational documents exhibited signs of exclusion and defensiveness in relation to other religious groups. The reforms of the Council and subsequent period opened the church to a new era of cooperation and harmony. The extracts below need to be read with this shift in mind.

Next, these selected text extracts were analysed using Membership Categorisation Analysis (henceforth, MCA). MCA, which is briefly explained below, exemplifies how those students who are not Catholics are constructed in the documentary extracts. MCA is an analytic tool that investigates how knowledge is organised in interaction and texts (Have ten, 2004). Sacks (in Have ten, 2004) argues that a large part of such knowledge is organised in terms of categories of people referred to by speakers or writers and the category predicates in the forms of activities or attributions assigned to those categories. Categories can be linked to certain collections or Membership Categorisation Devices (henceforth MCDs). Sacks (1984) thinks that our understanding of people and how they act depends on which collection or MCD they belong to. For example, the category of "man" could be understood in any number of ways but if placed in the MCD of "family" could be categorised as "husband", "father" or "grandfather" rather than "student", "artist" or "criminal" and would expect to be associated with such activities and/or attributions as "protective", "caring",

“provider” and so on. If other predicates that were not normally associated with the MCD of “family” were assigned, such as “abuser” or “cruelty”, then we would see these as remarkable and requiring explanation or substantiation.

In the following extracts, the MCD “students in Catholic schools” is the collection to which categories belong. By examining these features in each of the following text extracts we are afforded particular insights into how knowledge is organised in relation to the categories of students raised by the texts, the types of activities assigned to each category and how these categories are described.

Analysis

This article seeks to examine the presence and place of students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools from the perspective of official church documents. Within these selected text extracts students are referred to as several different categories that belong to the central organising MCD of *students in Catholic schools* and are bound by the central activity of *attending Catholic schools*. The focus of these extracts is the various categories generated for the students who are not Catholic. Tracing the development of the subtle changes made to these categories in each of the documents chronologically, affords further insights into the ways they have been positioned in Catholic schools between the years 1965 and 1998. Table 1 on the following page outlines all categories assigned to students, their category bound predicates (their activities and attributions) as well as implied attributions. Each document extract is analysed separately.

Document 1: Vatican II. (1965). *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church).

12. Let Christians labour and collaborate with others in rightly regulating the affairs of social and economic life. With special care, let them devote themselves to the education of children and young people by means of different kinds of schools, which should be considered not only as the most excellent means of forming and developing Christian youth, but also as a valuable public service, especially in the developing nations, working toward the uplifting of human dignity, and toward better living conditions.

In 1965 students are categorised as “children and young people” who can be “formed and developed by different kinds of schools”. Some of these children and young people can be formed and developed into “Christian youth”, though it is not clear whether this formation and development process is designed only for those who are already

Christians at the time of their enrolment. For these students and the balance of students in the school who are not to be formed and developed as Christians, the school offers a valuable public service. The nature of this public service is not specified, but is seen to be most applicable to schools in developing nations.

Document 2: Vatican II. (1965). *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education)

9. To this concept of a Catholic school all schools that are in any way dependent on the Church must conform as far as possible, though the Catholic school is to take on different forms in keeping with local circumstances. Thus the Church considers very dear to her heart those Catholic schools, found especially in the areas of the new churches, which are attended also by students who are not Catholics...

This Sacred Council of the Church earnestly entreats pastors and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfil their function in a continually more perfect way, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith.

In this document, these students are categorised as “students who are not Catholics”. Not only can they attend Catholic schools, but more significantly this presence is sanctioned and indeed promoted by the church which considers such schools “very dear to her heart”. Later in this same document, these students are referred to as “those who are strangers to the gift of Faith”. It is not made clear whether the gift of Faith refers to Christianity or Catholicism. As these “strangers to the gift of Faith”, they are to have their needs cared for by “Catholic schools” with the assistance of “pastors and all the faithful”. Hence, their presence is welcome and their place is as the objects of care. However, the types of needs and care are not explained or specified.

Document 3: Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. (1982). *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*.

42. At times there are students in Catholic schools who do not profess the Catholic faith, or perhaps are without any religious faith at all. Faith does not admit of violence; it is a free response of the human person to God as He reveals

Table 1.
Categories Assigned to Students in Catholic Schools

Categories	Category Bound Predicates	Implied Attributions
<p><i>1965 Ad Gentes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people • Christian youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educated by devoted Christians and others • formed and developed by different kinds of schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian and not Christian • these students are Christian
<p><i>1965 Gravissimum Educationis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students who are not Catholics • those 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend Catholic schools which make those schools "very dear to the heart" of the church • who are strangers to the gift of Faith • are to be cared for by Catholic schools with help of pastors and all the faithful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are subject to favour by the church • are either not Catholic or not Christian
<p><i>1982 Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students in Catholic schools • students who are not Catholics • anyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not profess the Catholic faith • perhaps are without any religious faith at all • are to be respected by Catholic educators • honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience are to be warmly and sincerely appreciated by Catholic educators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are either not Catholic or not Christian • only those seeking God are to be warmly and sincerely appreciated
<p><i>1988 The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not all students • a vast majority in some countries • student body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are members of the Catholic church • are not Catholics • religious freedom and personal conscience must be respected • (this freedom) is explicitly recognised by the church • includes increasing numbers of young people from different faiths and different ideological backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are either not Catholic or not Christian • these students are not Catholic/Christian • their religious practices are acceptable
<p><i>1997 The General Directory for Catechesis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students • students and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belong to families who associated themselves with the school because of its Catholic character • can receive the ministry of the word in its multiple forms: primary proclamation, scholastic religious instruction, catechesis, homily. • become associated with the school because of its quality of education or other reasons receive limited catechesis and a religious instruction accentuating its cultural character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are Catholic • are not Catholic
<p><i>1998 The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholics • all those • in countries where Christians are not the majority children of families who are not Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend Catholic schools but these schools are not reserved for them only • who appreciate and share its qualified educational project • can attend Catholic schools • receive the sort of education they wish for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if they do not appreciate and share its qualified educational project, they will not be able to attend Catholic schools • are not Christian

Himself. Therefore, while Catholic educators will teach doctrine in conformity with their own religious convictions and in accord with the identity of the school, they must at the same time have the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholics. They should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience.

In this document students who were not Catholics are initially referred to as those who “do not profess the Catholic faith, or perhaps are without any religious faith at all.” Implied in this description is that they could belong to other Christian denominations or to religions other than Christianity, or have no faith. They are then categorised as, “students who are not Catholics” and as such “are to be respected by Catholic educators.” In the following sentence their category becomes, “anyone honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience” and this category is to be “be warmly and sincerely appreciated by Catholic educators”.

These categories and category bound activities raise some measure of ambiguity. Certainly the presence of students in Catholic schools who are not Catholics and/or who have no faith is acknowledged, although not as positively as in the document *Gravissimum Educationis* where their welcome appeared warmer. However, their place in a Catholic school is not as clearly described. On the one hand “students who are not Catholics are to be respected by Catholic educators” but on the other “anyone honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience” deserves “warm and sincere appreciation” by Catholic educators. It appears that the amount of respect due to students, who are not Catholics, is dependent upon their intentions regarding their faith.

Document 4: Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic School*.

6. Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians. There are, in fact, countries in which the vast majority of the students are not Catholics - a reality which the Council called attention to. The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this

freedom is explicitly recognised by the Church. On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law.

108. We have already referred to the fact that, in many parts of the world, the student body in a Catholic school includes increasing numbers of young people from different faiths and different ideological backgrounds. In these situations it is essential to clarify the relationship between religious development and cultural growth. It is a question which must not be ignored, and dealing with it is the responsibility of each Christian member of the educational community.

In these situations, however, evangelisation is not easy - it may not even be possible. We should look to preevangelisation: to the development of a religious sense of life. In order to do this, the process of formation must constantly raise questions about the "how" and the "why" and the "what" and then point out and deepen the positive results of this investigation.

The transmission of a culture ought to be especially attentive to the practical effects of that culture, and strengthen those aspects of it which will make a person more human. In particular, it ought to pay attention to the religious dimension of the culture and the emerging ethical requirements to be found in it. There can be unity in the midst of pluralism, and we need to exercise a wise discernment in order to distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental. Prudent use of the "why" and the "what" and the "how" will lead to integral human development in the formation process, and this is what we mean by a genuine pre-evangelisation. It is fertile ground which may, at some future time, be able to bear fruit.

This document refers to students who are not Catholics in three ways: (1) “not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic church”; (2) “the vast majority of the students are not Catholics”; and, (3) “student body” in many

parts of the world, which “includes increasing numbers of young people from different faiths and different ideological backgrounds”. The latter part of this last category has widened the category from religious beliefs to include other ideologies, which could be inferred as humanism, existentialism, or other contemporary forms of spirituality. A further point of note is that this document specifies in more detail the issue of respect by stating: “the religious freedom and personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected”. But the document did not qualify by whom, although it could be implied as, all associated with the Catholic school. It went on to state that “this freedom is explicitly recognised by the church.”

Regarding the presence of these students in Catholic schools, this document continues in the same manner as its predecessor – they exist; and, their presence is acknowledged. In addition, this existence in some parts of the world is increasing. Their place however, takes on another layer. Whereas previously these students who were not Catholics were to be respected, this document goes further to say that their “religious freedom and personal conscience” are to be respected and adds that this freedom is “explicitly recognised by the church.” The issue of respect for religious freedom and personal conscience is significant. Implied in this statement is that no matter what these students believe and what religion they practise, not only are they welcome in the Catholic school but their religious affiliations are to be respected. It must also be acknowledged that the school’s role “to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education” is reaffirmed in this document but “to proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however”. The place of these students in Catholic schools is one in which their religious freedom and personal conscience are to be respected, and whilst they can receive the proclamation of the gospel and be offered formation, Catholicism is not to be imposed upon them.

Document 5: Congregation for the Clergy. (1997). *The General Directory for Catechesis*.

260. *When most students attending a Catholic school belong to families who associate themselves with the school because of its Catholic character, the ministry of the word can be exercised in it in multiple forms: primary proclamation, scholastic religious instruction, catechesis, homily. Two of these forms, however, have a particular importance in the Catholic school: religious instruction in the school and catechesis whose respective characteristics have already*

been discussed. When students and their families become associated with Catholic schools because of the quality of education offered in the school, or for other possible reasons, catechetical activity is necessarily limited and even religious education - when possible - accentuates its cultural character. The contribution of such schools is always "a service of great value to men", as well as an internal element of evangelisation of the Church.

This extract generates two categories of students whose presence is expressed in terms of their reasons for seeking enrolment in Catholic schools. The first category is named as, students who “belong to families who associate themselves with the school because of its Catholic character.” These students could be both Catholic students or students who are not Catholics but their presence is defined by the nature of the reasons they seek enrolment in the Catholic school. The second part of this sentence describes the place of such students in terms of the religious education that can be offered. “The ministry of the word can be exercised in it in multiple forms: primary proclamation, scholastic religious instruction, catechesis, homily”. For these students catechesis, in addition to religious instruction is appropriate. These students then can be proclaimed to, educated, catechised and preached to because of their motivating reasons for seeking enrolment, not because of their personal religious preference.

The second category, on the other hand, is described as students and their families who “become associated with Catholic schools because of its quality of education or other possible reasons”. The presence of this second category that could either be Catholic students or students who are not Catholics, is acceptable also; it does not matter that they are not there for the Catholic character of the school. The place of these students in terms of the ministry of the word is that “catechetical activity is necessarily limited.” The schools’ contribution is as “an internal element of evangelisation of the church.” In other words, the place of these students is to hear or experience the ministry of the word only, since they are not willingly seeking faith development.

So, the presence of students in Catholic schools according to this document is defined not by their commitment to Catholicism, but rather by what they seek. Their reasons for seeking enrolment need not be religious ones. It seems from the statements in this extract that enrolment in Catholic schools is open to everyone, as there are no limiting criteria to guide enrolment. A student’s religion is not

specified: the document implies that students who are Catholics and students who are not Catholics, can be in either category.

Document 6: Congregation for Catholic Education. (1998). *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*.

16. The school cannot be considered separately from other educational institutions and administered as an entity apart, but must be related to the world of politics, economy, culture and society as a whole. For her part the Catholic school must be firmly resolved to take the new cultural situation in her stride and, by her refusal to accept unquestioningly educational projects which are merely partial, be an example and stimulus for other educational institutions, in the forefront of ecclesial community's concern for education. In this way the Catholic school's public role is clearly perceived. It has not come into being as a private initiative, but as an expression of the reality of the Church, having by its very nature a public character. It fulfils a service of public usefulness and, although clearly and decidedly configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith, is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project. This dimension of openness becomes particularly evident in countries in which Christians are not in the majority or developing countries, where Catholic schools have always promoted civil progress and human development without discrimination of any kind. Catholic schools, moreover, like state schools, fulfil a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for them.

The group identified as “Catholic” students – as one of the categories of students attending Catholic schools – has been generated in this document: “it (the Catholic school) is not reserved to Catholics only”. The document asserts that the Catholic school “is open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project.” Note that those students who are not Catholics are identified not by their religious beliefs or non-beliefs – this is implied by the previous statement that Catholic schools are not just for Catholic students – rather, they are identified as “those who appreciate and

share its qualified educational project.” The nature of the “qualified educational project” is not described. When compared with these students’ presence and place in the document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic School* wherein their beliefs were to be respected, this document implies that students who are not Catholics are only welcome if they “appreciate and share its qualified educational project” – whatever that project may be.

As for their place, nothing definite is stated regarding how these students are to be treated. The only category bound activity generated for students in Catholic schools, is for “families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for them.” This implies that families rather than the school administrators determine their children’s place in Catholic schools. This document is perhaps the most ambiguous regarding the presence and place of students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools.

Discussion

The presence in Catholic schools of students who are not Catholics has been positively acknowledged and affirmed in all documents. A noteworthy point is the different ways these students have been described and identified across the years, which for the most part referred to their religious beliefs or lack thereof. However, for the first time in 1988 this description was expanded to include students “from different ideological backgrounds”. Religion was no longer the only defining criterion to describe these students. Identifying these students using criteria other than religion, continued, and in 1998 the Catholic school was to be “open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project” (CCE, 1998), and for “students and their families who become associated with the school because of its quality of education or other reasons”(CC, 1997). These latter descriptions raise issues for enrolment policies. First, what is the Catholic school’s “qualified educational project” and how can it be used as a criterion? Second, when families seek to enrol their children in a Catholic school because of its “quality of education or other reasons”, on what grounds could they be refused? This criterion virtually legitimates the enrolment of all regardless of their reasons. On what grounds then, are Catholic schools able to implement enrolment policies that apply religious criteria to prospective enrolling families?

Further to the presence of students who are not Catholics, nowhere in any of these documents is it specified how many of these students could be enrolled in Catholic schools. In fact the 1988 document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* acknowledges that in some

countries “the vast majority of students are not Catholics” (CCE, 1988). Obviously a school is built to take a limited number of students but are these to be reserved for Catholics only? According to the document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, “It (the Catholic school) is not reserved to Catholics only”(CCE, 1998). How many students who are not Catholics seeking enrolment in Catholic schools, can be accepted?

Certainly, the presence of students who are not Catholics is acknowledged and affirmed by these documents, but how they are selected and how many can be enrolled, are both left unclear.

What, then, of the place of these students in Catholic schools? MCA highlighted the ambiguous nature of the place of students who are not Catholics by focusing on their category bound activities and attributions within the Catholic schools. In 1965 students who are not Catholics were seen as “strangers to the gift of Faith” (*Gravissimum Educationis*) who were to be cared for. The exact nature of this care was not outlined. Does this care imply Catholic educators are to include some form of religious formation in order to bring these students to the “gift of Faith”?

The place of students who are not Catholics in the 1982 document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* was to be respected. However, this document raised more questions than answers, as it implied that the degree of respect shown to these students depended on their religious intentions. First, how can Catholic educators exhibit different degrees of response? How does the showing of respect differ from “warm and sincere appreciation” and further, does this imply discrimination against those students perceived to be less deserving? How can the difference between these two categories be measured? This document generates more confusion than clarity.

The role of the school was expanded in later documents. In 1988 in addition to respecting these students and their “religious freedom and personal choice”, the school was to proclaim the gospel and offer religious formation, but not to impose (CCE, 1988). What are the implications of such roles for the place of the students who are not Catholics? Is presence at religious ceremonies, where the gospel will be proclaimed, invitational? To offer is to invite. Invitation implies choice; choice implies the capacity to reject. When the gospel is offered at assemblies and liturgies can students refuse to go? If students are required to attend, is that imposition?

More recently in the 1997 document *The General Directory for Catechesis*, the place of students who are not Catholics continues to be linked to the

gospel, expressed in terms of the “ministry of the word”(CC, 1997). This document clearly states that the catechetical and religious instruction elements of the ministry of the word when applied to these students are necessarily limited, and goes on to say the school’s role is one of evangelisation.

Conclusion

The church’s official documentary tradition since Vatican II accepts and welcomes students in Catholic schools who are not Catholics. All parts of the church’s leadership affirm the presence of these students as a sign of the church’s commitment to the common good in all communities, especially those in poor and developing regions. However, while their presence is welcomed, greater ambivalence is apparent over the place of these students in Catholic schools. Images of respect for personal religious preferences, evangelisation and conversion are contained in these documents. In sum, Catholic school communities lack clear and definitive guidance from these documents regarding their treatment of students who are not Catholics. These documents, whilst clarifying the presence of students who are not Catholics, do little to clarify their place.

In the light of this analysis of official church documents the following questions are offered as a guide for further research and reflection.

1. What are the Catholic school’s religious and educational goals for their students who are not Catholics?
2. In relation to religious observance and practice, what can and should students who are not Catholics do in Catholic schools?
3. What are the specific criteria that students (and families?) need to demonstrate who are prepared “to appreciate and share the qualified educational project of the Catholic school” (*The Catholic School on Threshold of Third Millennium*, #. 16)?
4. When schools impose arbitrary enrolment quotas for students who are not Catholics, on what basis are these quotas determined?
5. How are administrators and leaders in Catholic education applying these official documentary prescriptions?
6. Does the presence of students who are not Catholics impact on the Catholicity of the Catholic school?

7. How does the presence and place of students who are not Catholics influence official church understandings of evangelisation, catechesis and religious education?

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ERRATUM

The quotation in volume 53(4), p. 18 of the *Journal of Religious Education* has been wrongly ascribed as a reference from an article by Richard Rymarz.