Religious and Moral Education Council Executive 2011/12

President
Sharon Malec
Bus 403-327-3402
Fax 403-320-2078
sharon.malec@holyspirit.ab.ca or
slmalec@shaw.ca

Past President
Mark Nixon
Bus 403-327-4596
Fax 403-320-8896
mark.nixon@holyspirit.ab.ca or
mark.nixon@shaw.ca

Vice-President
Carl Fakeley
Bus 403-342-4800
cfakeley@rdcrd.ab.ca

Secretary
Elaine Wille-Larsen
Bus 780-753-6838
Fax 780-753-6206
ewillette-larsen@sta.ecsd16.ab.ca or
amber01@telusplanet.net

Treasurer
TBD

Conference Director 2012
Ron Baier
Bus 780-632-2266
Fax 780-632-6886
ronb@eies.ab.ca or
ronb@cable_lynx.net

Newsjournal Coeditors
Dorothy Burns
Bus 403-938-2659
Fax 403-938-4575
dburns@redeemer.ab.ca

Tim Cusack
Bus 780-479-5847
Fax 780-437-7228
cusackt@ecsd.net

Historian
Gwen Davies
Bus 780-455-9743
Fax 780-456-2354
daviesg@ecsd.net

Webmaster
Carl Fakeley
Bus 403-342-4800
cfakeley@rdcrd.ab.ca

PEC Liaison
Léo Richer
Bus 403-342-4800, ext 3253
leo.richer@teachers.ab.ca or
lricher@rdcrd.ab.ca

ATA Staff Advisor
Cynthia Malner-Charest
Bus 403-265-2672 or
1-800-332-1280
Fax 403-266-6190
c.malner-charest@ata.ab.ca

Guidelines

The RMEC newsjournal Embrace the Spirit is published to
• promote professional development of educators in the areas of
religious and moral education and
• provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious
and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal
reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where
appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:
• Classroom and school projects
• Upcoming events
• Book reviews
• Reflections
• Feature articles and interviews
• Humour in religion
• Liturgies

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word
format. The manuscript should include a title page that states the
author’s name, professional position, address and phone number(s).
Submissions should be typed and double-spaced and may be any length
to a maximum of 5,000 words. References must appear in full in a list at
the end of the article.

Send contributions or enquiries to the editor: Dorothy Burns,
1 McRae Street, Box 1318, Okotoks, AB T1S 1B3; phone 403-938-6051 (res)
or 403-938-4265 (bus); fax 403-938-4575; e-mail dburns@redeemer.ab.ca.
The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and
space, reviews all submissions.
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Winter 2011

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The theme of our fall conference was “World Religions in Dialogue: The New Frontier.” We had two excellent speakers: Father Stefano Penna and Dr Suzanne Bремault-Phillips. It was also a pleasure to hear the perspectives of our brothers and sisters in other faith traditions and visit their sacred spaces (see the article on the conference for more details). One thing that I took away from the conference is the necessity of asking good questions to get to the heart of matters. This is a thread that seems to run through some of our articles this time around.

As moral and religious educators we should be considering many questions. What should we be teaching and how should we be teaching it? Who decides what is important to teach? How do we know that what we are doing is actually making a difference? These are some of the questions to keep in mind when reading the scholarly article by Burns and Burns (no relation), which explores “what the empirical facts one learns from educational research have to do with the normative values of moral education.” This article underlines the importance of not accepting at face value what the experts say we should be doing. Even researchers bring a set of presuppositions to their work. How do we respectfully discuss their work with them? It is important that religious and moral educators strive to base their work on solid research.

Tim Cusack interviewed Dr Thomas Groome, an internationally renowned religious educator. What a privilege for Tim, and for us as well! Dr Groome has had a major influence on the methodology and praxis of religious education, particularly in the Catholic tradition, for many decades. His shared-praxis method underlies the religion curriculum used in Catholic schools in Alberta. This does not mean that his is the only method to which we should subscribe. Over the past few years, Dr Groome’s work has been critiqued by some very thoughtful people. Hopefully, in a future issue of the journal we can shed some light on this discussion. In the meantime, I refer you to some articles that will clarify some of the issues in contention: www.satsonline.org/userfiles/Woodbridge_ReviewGroome.pdf and www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6515.

Just a few words now about this issue of Embrace the Spirit.

Due to his many other commitments, Tim Cusack will not be continuing as coeditor of Embrace the Spirit, but will continue to make contributions to the journal. As always, Michael Marien provides some practical wisdom for us to consider in making what we do relevant and meaningful for students.

Mission trips have an impact on students; the anecdotal evidence is clear, as we can see in the article by Lea Foy. Even as I put this issue to print I am thinking about the spring issue of Embrace the Spirit. If there is anything happening in your district or school that you would like us to know about, please send information. Pictures and articles are always welcome too, as are book and resource reviews and practical teaching ideas.

Until next time.

Dorothy Burns

Editor’s note: both websites noted above were accessed on November 10, 2011.
Lakeland Catholic Mission Trip Opens Our Hearts to Our Brothers and Sisters in Mexico

Lea Foy

Lea Foy is religious education coordinator for Lakeland Roman Catholic School District No 150, in Bonnyville, Alberta.

In April 2011, a group of twelve students from Notre Dame High and Assumption schools, two staff members and two parents travelled to Cuernavaca, Mexico, to live out our call to love and serve others. This was the fourth such mission trip that Lakeland Catholic high school students have experienced. During our stay, the students developed a deeper sense of justice and service through the activities planned by the staff of the Cuernavaca Centre for Inter-cultural Dialogue on Development (CCIDD). The program began shortly after our arrival, with the Cuernavaca Quest, when students got a taste of the realities of living in poverty as they shopped for groceries with 30 pesos, a typical day’s wage for the people they were to meet. The second excursion took us to the homes of families in La Estación, an impoverished squatters’ settlement in the city of Cuernavaca. This was a turning point for many of the students and the supervisors—they reported that most of their learning came from the Mexican people they encountered, especially the families of La Estación. This was a time to visit the homes of people who work every day, yet live in poverty. There was also time for working alongside two of these families—cleaning, moving, repairing and rebuilding, and mixing concrete by hand to build stone walls to improve their homes. The 10 days were filled with such experiences as well as with cultural excursions and listening to speakers who addressed topics from politics to religion. There was also time to pray, debrief and reflect, which helped us absorb and make sense of the learning.

The thing that I remember the most and found the most inspiring from our mission trip was the attitudes and outlooks of all the people. Despite being at the very bottom and ignored by most of their society, they were so welcoming, caring and just happy to live. It made me realize just how much money has changed people in Canada. They have much more material things than people in Mexico. We take things for granted, but in Mexico people have to work hard to get the basics of life. We take the things we have for granted. For example, when Parliament squabbles I’m gratified that they squabble over what matters most to them. During our stay in Mexico, we had the opportunity to see how people live their daily life and how they get along with one another. This was a turning point for many of the students and the supervisors.

What did the students bring back to Canada? These are some of their comments: “We learned so much from them.” “I realized that they are families just like us; they have the same hopes for their children—they were just born in different circumstances.” “We laughed at the same things, listen to the same music, and even though there was a language barrier, we could work together, play and understand one another.” “I will appreciate the things I have back home and not take for granted things like running water and a bathroom of my own.” “I will not take anything I have for granted, especially my family and the relationships that I have.” The following is one participant’s reflection several months after the trip.

The thing that I remember the most and found the most inspiring from our mission trip was the attitudes and outlooks of all the people. Despite being at the very bottom and ignored by most of their society, they were so welcoming, caring and just happy to live. It made me realize just how much money has changed people in Canada. They have much more material things than people in Mexico. We take things for granted, but in Mexico people have to work hard to get the basics of life. We take the things we have for granted. For example, when Parliament squabbles I’m gratified that they squabble over what matters most to them. During our stay in Mexico, we had the opportunity to see how people live their daily life and how they get along with one another. This was a turning point for many of the students and the supervisors.

The most important factor in student achievement is the quality of instruction in the classroom. The best teachers, like all great leaders, have a clear sense of what they want to accomplish. They are great communicators, help others believe in their ability to be successful, and persist until they accomplish their goals.

—Richard DuFour and Robert J Marzano, in Leaders of Learning, 2011, Solution Tree

As we journey through this school year, try to remember this quote. A wise woman, Carol Koran, sent this to the staff at the school where I have the privilege of teaching.

Our students have been entrusted to our care by their parents and guardians. As a teacher you have the ability to shape these children. You will give them the best education that you can because you are a caring teacher. Elementary teachers wipe noses, help with coats and guide little ones. Junior high teachers deal with hormones and teenagers. High school teachers guide their students to careers and education placements. All teachers strive to have their students become the best that they can become.

Whether you teach pre-K or Physics 30, you have a sense of what you want to accomplish that day. The rewards are sometimes nebulous, but you will know that you have been a servant teacher. Enjoy the laughter with your students.

Seven Days of Inspiration

Take one a day and feel great all week! Day 1—You are 100 per cent wonderful. Day 2—Count the steps you take, not the mistakes you make. Day 3—Today will bring you a new reason to smile. Day 4—Positivity is the best fuel. Day 5—There are angels among us. You’re one of them. Day 6—Things can turn out better than you expect. Day 7—Your dreams are close.

Special Acknowledgements

This year there are two people leaving our executive to whom we would like to give special thanks:

• Bob Gleeson, who served as webmaster from 1999 to 2007 and has been treasurer since 2003, and

• Michael Marien, who was conference codirector in 2000, conference director for 2009 and 2010 and secretary this past year.

Thank you both for your service, and all best wishes.

Sharon Malec
Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers’ Association

Mission Statement
The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to inspire and foster learning communities by providing professional development for teachers to help them nurture the moral, ethical and spiritual lives of students.

Vision Statement
The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values
We are committed to serving teachers of all traditions and cultures, through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.

4. Appropriate Time and Length
Consideration for the time of year really depends on the retreat theme. If the focus is on team building and school leadership, then plan for the fall. I like the fall retreats rather than late spring or end of year—there seems to be a more reflective mood earlier in the year.

While there may be a long-standing tradition of providing overnight retreats for students in your school, consider the retreat’s purpose. You might plan some amazing experiences for your students’ two-day retreat, only to find that no one wants to participate in the day two activities because of lack of sleep. Ask yourself if what you are planning really needs more than one day and whether your students will benefit.

5. Provide for Multiple Intelligences
Some of the best-planned student retreats I have seen are those in which students get a wide variety of experiences. For example, one school in my district divides its Grades 7 and 8 students into groups of 10 to 12. The students then rotate through teacher-led events, each with a different focus—art, cooking, music, Scripture reading, drama—but all connected to the same theme. Students come away from the retreat having been challenged but also affirmed by the variety of intelligences that were engaged by the activities.

6. Self-Reflection and Silence
The retreat should incorporate opportunities for self-reflection. If there are a variety of activities, provide some time at end of each for some journal writing or verbal debriefing. Journal writing is particularly effective, because everyone has a chance to “speak” and a chance for silent time with God. Besides being nature deprived, we are also silence deprived. This is why the natural setting is so important. We all need to get away from the hubbub of modern life. Perhaps a retreat activity could be to contemplate Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.”

7. Home Work
Let’s say you have your retreat on a Friday before a long weekend. What happens on Tuesday? Is there some follow-up? In some instances, the retreat could be a cornerstone for a religious studies unit. Referring to the event in class on a continuous basis will keep the experience vibrant in the students. Depending on the theme, it could also change the whole classroom dynamic. But it won’t happen unless it becomes part of future planning. Bring it home to the students by keeping the experience uppermost in their minds.

8. Assessment
Don’t leave the final step in a successful retreat—assessment—to the end. Start thinking about assessment both of and for learning when you start planning for the retreat. Start with the question “How will we know that the retreat has been a success?” Once you have established the criteria for success, the rest of the planning becomes easier and more focused. Collect data and responses from the participants so that you have something to work with the following year.

Another important question: What are your summative assessment expectations? For some high school retreats, summative assessment may play a significant role. On a related note, it is important for religious studies programs in Alberta to follow the current regulations for locally developed courses. Hours of face-to-face instruction need to be accurately determined—time spent eating and sleeping on the retreat doesn’t count for credit! If a credit is to be awarded, there must be a formal summative assessment included.

Whatever you choose to do, assessment of the experience will be essential.

A Memory Maker
A successful retreat can be one of the most powerful memories that students will take with them into their adult lives. With thoughtful planning, a retreat can bring students to a deeper understanding of themselves, their peers and their teachers. Most important, it can be a time for them to be still and know their God.
The Student Retreat as Memory Maker

Michael Marion

In faith-based schools across the province, many teachers and students attend some type of faith experience that is as old as religion itself—the retreat. In fact, it is not uncommon in the secular domain to hear of staff and executives going to visioning or team-building retreats. In this article, let’s look at the retreat as a LIFE experience by exploring eight key features of a successful student retreat. If we think about it, most of the same elements that make for an excellent classroom experience also make for an excellent retreat.

Eight Key Features

1. A Retreat Environment

One of the first decisions a classroom teacher makes at the beginning of the school year is the way the classroom is set up. This should also be the first decision when planning a retreat. Although theme and facilitators are critical, I believe that the retreat setting will last the longest in student memories. Consider where most spiritual retreats are set—in quiet isolated areas surrounded by nature. Despite this, though, many of our decisions on where to go are limited by school finances, so a local church basement becomes a ready space, free of the cost of transportation. This is a huge disservice to the retreat’s effectiveness. There is a growing body of evidence that our children are suffering from nature deficit disorder (see www.childrenandnature.org). If finances make it impossible to get to a natural setting, then make sure that part of the experience includes a walk in the park.

2. Learner Input into Planning

In the many years that I have facilitated retreats or worked with staff to coordinate them, I can’t think of a time when there was direct student input into the nature of the retreat. Perhaps this is just a reflection of my personal experience, as I would imagine that a Grade 12 graduation retreat committee would involve the participants in planning. But why not have student input at every grade level? If we want this to be an engaging learning experience, there must be some process for student involvement in the planning. Our students in faith-based schools come with all kinds of experiences, particularly from summer camps. Students will share everything from songs to boredom busters to team games, if given the chance. At the very least, give them some choice on the food to be eaten!

3. Staff Engagement

There are tremendous retreat programs that schools can access. In the Catholic milieu to which I am accustomed, groups like the National Evangelization Team do incredible work. Young and energetic, they provide another faith voice for students. There is a danger here, however. Because the work of facilitating the retreat is done for them, school staff have no role at all. So if it is a retreat, shouldn’t the staff be involved as well?

At each of the sites we visited we were graciously received and heard an explanation of the beliefs and spiritual practices of its tradition.

• Chin Yin Buddhist Temple—host Mr Robert Rosinski
• Hindu Temple—host Mr Sushil Kalia and Mrs Renu Narang
• Sikh Temple—host Dr Randy Randhawa

In his opening remarks, Father Penna set the parameters for dialogue with other faith traditions, noting that in an increasingly secular culture such as ours we can become scattered, lost in the crowd of fellow seekers who are open to the transcendent.

Dr Suzette Bremault-Phillips enlightened us on the pilgrim way and spoke of the spiritual journey having a starting point, a path and an endpoint. It is the path that is similar among traditions. For Christians, the path and endpoint are not what, but who. Dr Bremault-Phillips gave us a series of questions that we should ask in seeking to understand other faith traditions:

• How are person, path and potential understood?
• What spiritual practices are employed?
• What is the goal of the spiritual practices?
• What symbols and rituals are part of the tradition?
• What texts are seen as sacred/authoritative?
• Is the tradition monotheistic?
• What is its understanding of death and life?
• What are the basic tenets of the tradition?
• What or who do adherents follow?
• What is the same and different among Christian traditions?
• What is common between Christian and other traditions?

What is different?

• Do words (for example, love) mean the same thing in different traditions?
• What is syncretism? How do we caution against it?

Father Penna noted how non-Christian eastern religions have influenced pop culture: today, a majority of people are consequentialists with a strong sense of karma. Non-Christian eastern religions are deeply rooted in mysticism. In today’s culture there is an emphasis on feelings rather than thinking, which makes it difficult to engage in dialogue. The rituals are all the same but the beliefs are radically different. This is why the oft-used story of the blind men and the elephant is a poor analogy.

Father Penna discussed the Catholic Christian perspective of commitment to the truth as a relational decision, primarily an encounter. Marriage is a stronger analogy: “I give thee my troth.”

There is a confidence that my spouse is presenting herself to me.
There is a demand that I respond to and have a passion for the truth of my spouse.

There is a recognition that one never has the full truth of the other—there is always a mystery waiting.

These are just some of the highlights of the many insights we received.

The conference concluded with a wine and cheese and awards ceremony. This year three people were recognized.

**The Award of Merit** recognizes exemplary classroom teaching, leadership, and/or service in the field of religious studies and moral education. There were two recipients:

- Kathleen Macridis, Grade 3 teacher, St Gregory Catholic Elementary School, Hinton. Her nomination was supported by Tim Zarski, principal of St Gregory.
- Miss Macridis is an extremely devoted professional teacher who recognizes the importance that each child plays in society and clearly understands the relevance of Catholic teaching to each child. She is very passionate about Catholic education and displays her enthusiasm both in and outside of her classroom. Her passion is evident in her willingness to act as a coach for Smart Boards in our school and to accept new initiatives with excitement and dedication.

- Kathleen Macridis and Sharon Malec well. She was responsible for the organization of our annual Grade 4 Blessing Ceremony and has performed the re-enactment of the Last Supper with her students. Kathleen has her students involved in drama—they perform parables and act out New Testament stories. Morning prayers, daily intentions, traditional prayers and a fun grace are evident in her classroom.

- Steven Dempsey, principal of Holy Spirit Catholic School, Devon, was nominated by Michael Hauptman, deputy superintendent of Evergreen Catholic Schools. Mr Dempsey was unable to attend the conference.

As principal, Steve Dempsey understands his role as Catholic leader, teacher and partner in faith. At the opening mass, at St Maria Goretti Parish in Devon, Steve explained to the students some of the behaviour expectations for mass and gave a little talk about how we don’t take communion but rather receive it, thereby emphasizing the significance of the consecration. His own

faith shines through especially brightly in moments such as these. He welcomes the clergy into his school, where they play an important role. Our division youth minister, who works in all of our schools, says that he feels most welcome at Holy Spirit because of its welcoming environment and the strong Catholic presence evident as soon as one enters the foyer. Steve is directly responsible for many of the attributes that have contributed to this culture of a Christ-centred school. He sets the standard for Catholic leadership and faith permeation.

- **The Dr Peter Craigie Award** is presented to an individual or organization for service that has contributed to the professional growth of RMEC members. This year’s recipient was Sharon Malec, nominated by Dr Mark A Nixon. They are colleagues at Catholic Central High School, in Lethbridge.

As a classroom teacher, Sharon Malec has developed and maintained an excellent standard of teaching combined with an attitude of compassion. She never stops learning to improve her teaching skills, and

1. A positive understanding of the human person and the great potential of every student
2. A sacramental outlook on life in the world, seeing “the more than meets the eye”
3. A commitment to community that is for one and one for all
4. A participative and holistic way of knowing that is likely to lead people to wisdom and responsibility
5. An appreciation and reclaiming of the “funded capital of civilisation” bequeathed from our foreparents, with emphasis on accessing the spiritual wisdom of scripture and tradition
6. A politics that is deeply committed to justice for all
7. A spirituality that puts faith to work every day
8. A catholicity that has no borders to its welcome and outreach (pp 255–56)

Groome reminds us that “many of these commitments overlap, and none can stand alone. When woven together, however, they amount to a Catholic philosophy and spirituality of education” (p 256).
reader to create a personal context in coming to understand his ideas. He states “the overarching approach I propose invites people to ‘bring their lives to their Faith, and their Faith to their lives’” (p 13). On the surface, this sounds straightforward. Upon closer inspection, however, we come to the realization that our faith and our lives, as intertwined as they should be, are often kept apart. Groome revisits several topics he raised in his 1998 book, Educating for Life, in particular the pressures and demands of our countercultural society on the individual. He reminds us that many distractions make it difficult to bring our faith and lives into harmony. Throughout his new book’s nine chapters, we gain rich insights into how Groome’s new approach can affect both our faith and our lives. His approach challenges the reader to:

- educate people to know, understand, and embrace with personal conviction Christianity’s core beliefs and values (inform);
- develop people’s identity through a formative pedagogy and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community (form); and
- open people to a lifelong journey of conversation toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and “for the life of the world” (John 6:51) (transform).

Groome supports this model with the reassessment that “effective religious education demands the intentional participation of three key agents—the home, the parish, and the school or formal program of instruction. All three stakeholders in education must work in coalition” (pp 13–14). So that the efforts of these integral partners can be calibrated, Groome provides an inventory of guiding ideas that all three agents need to explore to the point of clarity. Specifically, parents, parishes, and schools need to be clear about:

- who they are teaching and those learners’ potential as persons and disciples of Jesus Christ;
- the nature of Christian faith that they want to pass on—how holistic it is (engaging head, heart, and hands), its salvific and liberating possibilities and social responsibilities, its potential to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable, and its great truths and spiritual wisdom for life;
- the purpose of educating in faith—the educators’ task of enabling people to flourish through Christian commitment, know their faith in ways that inform, form, and transform their identity, and commit to the positive difference for life for all that Christian faith can effect in society;
- the context of Christian religious education—the family, parish and school/program, and the imperative that the three be intentionally crafted to work together to socialize people into Christian identity and faith; and
- how to go about it—how to develop a consistent pedagogy of religious education that constantly invites people, both learners and teachers (who are also learners), to “bring their lives to their Faith and their Faith to their lives” (pp 14–15).

In his introduction, Groome clearly establishes the foundational issues upon which his text is built. The subsequent chapters expand, in wonderful detail, upon these premises, drawing upon a life-to-faith-to-life pedagogy. Through his renowned welcoming tone and rich sense of humour, Groome invites the reader into the conversation and, at various checkpoints along the way, poses reflective questions that deepen the experience of his text. Groome comments that “the times are most challenging, and we need a new vision and approach for effective religious education in this postmodern age” (p 15). In response to the challenge of the times, Groome reminds us that:

The first responsibility of religious educators is to inform and form people in their own particular tradition, giving them a sense of belonging to a spiritual home. We must ground them in the particular, however, in a way that diligently discourages sectarianism and bitterness towards “others.” Let us enable people, instead, to embrace the universality of God’s love for all humankind and to respect and appreciate all life-giving religious traditions. (p 11)

From exploring such topics as theological anthropology and the power of community, to understanding and emulating the pedagogy of Jesus, Will There Be Faith? informs, forms and transforms the reader towards a fuller awareness of the challenges and responsibilities of religious education. The book discusses a praxis for realizing the new vision of Catholic education: “commitment to a humanizing education for persons and serving the common good of society. Catholic educators are called to stretch into this vision by implementing the following values throughout the whole school curriculum” (p 255). The commitments Groome establishes are listed below:

Always focusing on what will work best for her students. Sharon has the spiritual insight to accept students as they are. She is open, authentic and considerate. She is a positive role model for her peers and for all she serves. Sharon’s witness of faith is demonstrated in her teaching style. She models Christian values to her students in all courses and activities. As an executive member of RMIC, Sharon has guided our executive to a place of stability and provided a solid foundation from which our members will be better able to “nurture the moral, ethical and spiritual lives of students.” Her involvement in many conferences, at which she provides liturgies, music and reflections, has not only enriched the moment but given us samples to take back to our classrooms for our own spiritual development. Congratulations and thanks to these award-winning teachers.
Moral Education’s Normative and Empirical Dimensions: A Reflection Through Examples

David P Burns and Amy M N Burns

% There is an important tension in teaching between empirical arguments and normative arguments. Empirical arguments relate (in loose terms) to claims being made about how something is. It is an empirical claim to say, for example, that a certain approach to guided reading improves student literacy outcomes. Empirical arguments are fundamentally distinct from normative arguments, which relate instead to claims about how something should be. It is a normative claim to say, for example, that teachers should use a particular form of guided reading. These two forms of argument are related. One could, for example, decide what form of guided reading should be used in a classroom by consulting studies about the effectiveness of various alternatives. This relationship is complicated, however, nowhere more so than in the field of moral education. Put simply, it is not always clear what our empirical knowledge has to do with our normative goals for moral learning. This is why, in this paper, we ask what the empirical facts one learns from educational research have to do with the normative values of moral education. How does what we think we know inform our decisions about how we should teach about morality?

This is a complex and ancient question, so rather than attempting to resolve it, we will instead content ourselves with simply drawing some of the theoretical conversation about this question into a more practical arena. We will begin by discussing the philosophical background to this question, using an example that might be familiar to many educators—the work of Lawrence Kohlberg. Then we will introduce a contemporary example drawn from a recent empirical study conducted in Alberta high schools (Burns 2009). Once we have introduced this example we will use it to explain a series of concerns that moral educators should keep in mind when thinking about the relevance of educational research to moral educational practice.

The Kohlbergian Example

Lawrence Kohlberg’s work on moral development is some of the most famous in 20th-century educational thought. Kohlberg (1966) argued that teachers in liberal societies (like Canada) are faced with a question, using an example that might be familiar to many educators—the work of Lawrence Kohlberg. Then we will introduce a contemporary example drawn from a recent empirical study conducted in Alberta high schools (Burns 2009). Once we have introduced this example we will use it to explain a series of concerns that moral educators should keep in mind when thinking about the relevance of educational research to moral educational practice.

The Narrow Way: Issues at the Heart of Religious Educational Leadership

Will There Be Faith? Thomas Has No Doubt

Tim Cusack

Tim Cusack serves with Edmonton Catholic Schools in the St Jerome learning community.

One day, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was passing through the region between Samaria and Galilee. Along the way, he was discussing parables and giving examples of the faith and strength of heart that his followers would need for the difficult times ahead:

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?”

Jesus raises a question that reminds us of our proclivity to turn away from God. In one sense the question appears to be a lament. Like Moses, who showed God’s presence through signs and miracles, Jesus proclaimed the coming of God’s kingdom but, despite the many times people saw God’s power and love made manifest, they turned away from God. Like Thomas, who needed to see the wounds on Christ’s hands and feet, human faith can be fleeting. We are reminded that, despite the great injustices that exist in this world, God is just and acts with compassion and mercy for his beloved. The last verse of this passage, however, depicts Jesus in a very introspective moment. Jesus is contemplating God’s profound mercy and unconditional love for humanity, yet, in the same instant, he wonders, despite everything—all the signs, miracles, and his eventual death and resurrection—when the Son of Man comes, “Will there be faith?”

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Will There Be Faith? Thomas Has No Doubt

Note: Adapted from Moral Education and the Schools: A Developmental View, by L. Kohlberg, 1966, p 7.

Table 1: Kohlberg’s Stage Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Form of reasoning employed within stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Obedience and punishment orientation. Persons in this stage defer to prestige and power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Naively egoistic orientation. Persons in this stage view action as instrumental to the meeting of personal needs. There is some awareness of the needs of others and the concept of reciprocity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good-boy orientation. Persons in this stage focus on seeking approval and conforming to behavioural norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Authority and social-order-maintaining orientation. Persons in this stage focus on doing their perceived duty and respecting social order and authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contractual legalistic orientation. Persons in this stage recognize that rules and expectations have arbitrary starting points and that duty involves contract, respect for others and majority opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Conscience or principle orientation. Persons in this stage focus on principles of universal and consistent applicability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Moral Education and the Schools: A Developmental View, by L. Kohlberg, 1966, p 7.
Thomas: Catholic schools should not be indoctrinating people, that’s for sure. The Catholic schools in Pakistan and Korea provide an example of how it is very possible to give students a good Catholic education without indoctrination. If a person send their children to Catholic schools, the Catholic faith indeed should be represented there. We can expose students to Catholic Christian faith in ways that stu-
dents can learn from it for their lives, being enriched spiritually and morally with their encounter with this great and rich tradition of faith, even if they don’t decide to ordain a profession or take on a vocation, become a Muslim and buy a prayer mat. Yet, he taught and learned from the spiritual wisdom in the Muslim tradition of turning to God five times a day. Whose life wouldn’t be enriched or confronted or inspired by such a practice of prayer throughout the day if it is properly presented? Of course, we all know that there’s a way to teach so that people simply learn about religious traditions: I think, however, that is a bit of a waste of time. On the other hand, there’s a way to teach a religious tradition so that people become it— they take it on as their identity. They embrace it as their life com-
mitment. Of course, for Catholic students in our schools, this intent can be perfectly appropriate. However, in a kind of middle ground, there is a way to teach so that students learn from it for their lives regardless of what path they take home to God. That’s how we should teach religion in our Catho-
lic high schools and, pedagogi-
cally, it is very necessary that the learning end up being confined to what the teacher needs to keep control in this personal, individual, idiosyn-
cratic approach (these stages are reproduced in Table 1). Kohlberg was clearly working at the intersection of the empirical and the normative. To begin with, his argument against character education involved citing studies, such as the famous Hartshorne and May research (1928–30), which he believed demonstrated that character education simply did not work (see Kohlberg 1966). He argued that the Hartshorne and May study indicated that moral behaviour is essentially situational and not dictated by virtues or character traits. In other words, Kohlberg believed that this research refuted the normative arguments for character education by undermining the very idea of character. The philosophical substance of this argument is built upon this significant jump between an empirical claim and a supposedly consequent normative claim. In this element of Kohlberg’s argu-
ment, the empirical case serves not to support his proposals but to undermine the proposals of char-
acter educators. We should not pursue character education, he argued, because the empirical research fails to prove the exis-
tence of character traits. Kohlberg also, however, used empirical research to support his own proposals. He argued that this judgment is a relevant and consis-
tent element of moral behaviour. Thus, he argued, character education serves as a foundation, underpinning his normative arguments. Since judgment, unlike character traits, is a consistent part of moral behav-
ior, moral educators should teach judgment. So it seems clear that Kohlberg viewed empirical research as playing two important guiding roles in moral education. First, he used empirical research to under-
mine the normative arguments of others. Since character traits have little empirical basis, moral educators should not seek to inculcate charac-
ter traits. Second, he used empirical research to build a foundation for his own normative arguments. Since development of justice reasoning is empirically supported, moral education should be about justice reasoning.

The Problem

The depth of the controversy regarding arguments like these is significant. Carr (2007) summar-
izes this controversy in saying that “the claim that this issue started from the facts is not itself a fact, it is not the sort of claim that could itself be supported by evidence in any non-question-begging way” (Carr 2007, 399). Carr argues that empirical investigation (both historically, as in Kohlberg, and today) merely reproduces the divisions already found in compa-
rible philosophical work. The reason for this reproduction is rooted, Carr argues, in the way in which empirical research is conducted. “What we regard as a matter for moral empirical investi-
gation must obviously depend on what we count as morally significant rather than vice versa” (Carr 2007, 398). The significance of this observation to the question at hand cannot be overstated. The act of seeking evidence for the development of justice reasoning (as in Kohlberg’s case) is itself a normative assertion. That is, the fact that Kohlberg described what he found
as justice at all, combined with the fact that he was looking for evi-
dence of this sort of thought, is a function of the normative assump-
tions with which he began his
work. To search for evidence of justice reasoning is to privilege
justice as a moral concept.

As a result of the way in which
normative choices like these
become manifest through the
process of empirical research, it
has been argued that these sorts of
supposedly empirical investiga-
tions are, in actuality, normative
“all the way down” (Carr 2007, 400). While it is not always
impossible for one to tell when
this begins and the others, end,
clear evidence of both presents itself. All
of this is philosophical history,
though, and we can now move on
to a more contemporary discussion
through our modern-day moral–
psychological example.

The Example
The study we will discuss was
conducted in 2008 and was
designed to measure the effectiveness
of an educational intervention (Burns 2009). Specifically, it sought
to “evaluate whether [an] …
educational presentation was
effective in … increasing adoles-
cent[s’] knowledge about the signs
and symptoms of schizophrenia and
decreasing negative attribu-
tions and social distance” (p. 9). In
short, it sought to measure the
extent to which an educational intervention reduced stigmatiza-
tion of people suffering from
schizophrenia. The presentation,
provided by the Edmonton Early Psychosis Intervention Clinic
(EEPIC), “focuses on major myths, early warning signs, and the role
of stigma and discrimination as obstacles to care and recovery”
(Burns 2009, 2).

This study used a combination
of education, in the form of a
presentation given by two nurses
to high school students, and
indirect contact, in the form of a
20-minute video about people with
schizophrenia. The fundamental
reasoning, in both the presentation
and in this study about it, is
that stigma is a consequence of igno-
rance (see Brockington et al 1993;
Corrigan et al 2001) and that
addressing public ignorance is a
worthwhile educational activity.
The study itself was conducted
by applying two assessments:
the Attribution Questionnaire (AQ-27)
(Corrigan et al 2003), which
mea-
sures attitudes towards people
with mental illness, and the World
Psychiatric Association’s (WPA)
Stigma Questionnaire (WPA 2005),
which measures knowledge, distance
and prior exposure to persons with
mental illness. Both instruments
were administered one week prior
to and immediately following the
educational intervention, which
itself lasted approximately 80 min-
utes. Overall, 98 preintervention
questionnaires and 154 postinter-
vension questionnaires were
received: a total of 78 respondents
provided the necessary consent
forms. These numbers resulted in
a response rate of 36.4 per cent.
The results of the study were
modest but encouraging. The data
from the AQ-27 assessment indi-
cates statistically significant positive
changes in “pity,” “fear” and
“dangerousness.” That is, students
taking part in the educational
intervention reported less fear and
pity towards persons with
schizophrenia and viewed such persons
as less dangerous after the inter-
vension. No statistically significant
positive changes occurred, how-
ever, in “responsibility,” “anger,”
“help,” “coercion,” “immor-
tality,” or “avoidance.”

A Difficult Balance
The first difficulty one encoun-
ters when trying to interpret work
like this for a moral educational
daughter is the qualified nature of the
claims being made. Empirical
research like this rarely results in
straightforward claims about what
does or does not happen in a class-
room. It is tempting, for instance,
to read the above summary and con-
clude that teaching students about
mental illness makes them more
tolerant of their fellow
students who suffer from such illness.
This, however, is not the case,
looking at data in actuality, a
being put to work through a
school curriculum. This philoso-
phy/spirituality can sustain any
educator in a very life-giving
vocation. I feel blessed that some of my work has contributed to
making what might be a
truly Catholic spirituality of
education, one that could be
shared by any person of good will.
Some years ago I did some
extensive work with the Catholic
schools in Pakistan. I there found
an amazing Catholic school sys-
tem, about 500 schools throughout
the country, all of them with
predominantly Muslim students, teachers and adminis-
ters. They also reported,
however, feeling less likely to
maintain a friendship with such a
person.

Overall, the study indicates that
this particular educational inter-
vention increased knowledge about
psychosis and schizophrenia and
reduced some, though not all,
aspects of reported social distance.
But what does this mean? What
might a moral educator make of
this sort of information? What
normative conclusions can be
drawn once this empirical infor-
mation is understood?

What makes a school a Catholic
school? Indeed, what makes anyone a Catholic educator?”

Meanwhile, the challenge, at
least in the USA and maybe in
Canada as well, is increasingly
related to funding. The US Catho-
lie school system has expanded five
times its size if it had public
funding, providing a good educa-
tion, often when other educational
institutions, in our inner cities and poor rural
neighbourhoods. In many of our
inner-city schools, learning has all
but ceased. Whereas the Catholic
schools in the same neighbour-
hoods are doing a heck of a job
giving young disadvantaged
children a great and humanizing
education. Sadly, many of our
inner-city schools are barely able
to survive at this stage. So, while the
finance issue has become more
urgent, the identity issue for our
Catholic schools has become more
defined.

Tim: One of the issues in Alberta
is talk about the duplication of
education systems: public and separate. Some argue that to
have two is redundant and that per-
haps reverting to one, secular
system is in the best interest of
taxpayers. How would you respond to an argument like that?

Thomas: Well, for sure, Alberta
society would be all the poorer.
That common good would not
be served by cutting off public
funding to Catholic schools. In
the United States, the federal and state
governments refuse to give Catho-
lie schools funding because they
say it would not serve the common
good. But, on the contrary, a lot
of research makes the same point:
just that the US Catholic
schools are turning out tremen-
dous citizens, well educated in
the basics and also with a good moral
compass; you could hire them to
work in a bank or business and
they’d be less likely to cheat on
you. In other words, the US Catho-
lie schools have done a tremen-
dous service to the common good
of this nation. So, the irony of
theories is the claim that US Catho-
lie schools should not get funding
because it wouldn’t serve the
good. In fact, the US
public school system most often
doesn’t even come close to serving
the common good as effectively as
the Catholic school system does—
and, most often, at one-third of the
cost.

Tim: One of the criticisms of
Catholic education in general
pertains to the issue of teaching the
truth. At what point does teaching
our truth, our lived reality, cross
the line into indoctrination? What
are your thoughts on this?
Salt of the Earth: Perspectives from Catholic Educators

In Conversation with Thomas Groome

Tim Cusack

Dedication: Thomas H Groome was born on County Kildare, Ireland. Professor Groome holds the equivalent of an MDiv from St Patrick’s Seminary in Carlow, Ireland, an MA from Fordham University and a doctoral degree in religious education from Union Theological Seminary/Columbia University. Professor Groome’s publications include What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life (Harper San Francisco), Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent (Crossroads), Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision (Jossey-Bass), Language for a “Catholic” Church (Sheed and Ward) and Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (Wipf and Stock). Professor Groome is the primary author of various religion textbook series from W H Sadlier, most recently the Coming to Faith series. He is currently authoring a religious curriculum for adolescents entitled the Credo Series (Veritas USA). His most recent text, Will There Be Faith? (HarrerCollins), was published in summer 2011. Biographical details courtesy of Boston College website, www.bc.edu/schools/stm/faculty/groome.html.

Tim: I am thankful for this opportunity to meet with you. As an introductory question, I am wondering if you could touch upon what have been the significant changes in Catholic education in the time that has passed since you wrote Educating for Life. In particular, what have been some of the successes and what have been some of the ongoing challenges?

Thomas: I think Catholic education, with new urgency, is asking the question: What does it mean to offer a Catholic education and what does it mean to have a Catholic education? Back in the 1960s and 70s, we were almost embarrassed by our Catholicism and perhaps for good reason. We made so many exaggerated truth claims as if we have the fullness of all truth—with no more to be learned—and, since we are the one true faith, every other tradition is simply false, defective and incapable of mediating God’s salvation. Thank God we came out of Vatican II and backed off from all that excessive chauvinism we had as Catholics. Likewise for Catholic schools—we tempered our claims and, for example, began to realize that John Dewey, with his experimental education, was not an enemy, as he was commonly portrayed among Catholic educators, but an ally and, indeed, an echo of Thomas Aquinas and his “way of knowing.” So we backed off of sectarian Catholicism, in both our faith identity and in our schools. Having been tempered away from a Catholic chauvinism, we yet needed to reclaim our particular story, to cherish our identity as Catholic Christians. Maybe we don’t have the megalomaniac that explains everything to everybody all the time and everywhere. Yet, we have a great particular story of faith and education. This is what we need to reclaim as our own without allowing it to turn us against other people. Whatever turns me against my neighbour is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Catholic educators, we simply must claim our own particular narrative, our distinctive-ness—which isn’t to say that we’re better than everybody else, or that nobody else cares about children or is committed to good education except us. Yet, the truth is that this Catholic Christian tradition has the potential of an extraordinarily life-giving and positive philosophy of education, or better still, a spirituality of education, care because it reflects deep faith convictions far more tentative sort of claim is being made that is replete with significant qualifications. Unfortunately, the methods through which these qualifications are made are necessarily technical. For example, a key section of this study’s conclusion reads “Upon completion of the presentation, respondents endorsed less pity for Harry, Z = -2.95, p < 0.01, r = -0.24, and were less fearful of Harry, Z = -3.10, p < 0.01, r = -0.25. In addition, they regarded Harry as less dangerous, Z = -4.16, p = 0.001, r = -0.33” (Burns 2009, 19). To the trained eye these numbers indicate important qualifications that hold back the strength of the claim being made. They are, in effect, a way of saying how confident the researcher is in what she has found. To the untrained eye, however, it is difficult to understand how such annotations change the conclusion being made. This disconnect is an important one, and evidence of it presents itself even in formal moral educational scholarship. Take Gilligan’s (1982) work on care ethics, for example. Gilligan’s psychological research had a significant impact on moral education and, along with the pedagogical elaboration provided by Noddings (1984), her work forms the core of what is today called the care-ethical approach to moral education. Gilligan’s work centred on her study of the experience of women during unplanned pregnancy. Her central conclusion was that these women did not progress through stages of justice reasoning, as Kohlberg had argued people do, but rather stages of care reasoning. This work has been used ever since to critique Kohlberg’s arguments. This debate between justice and care, because it began in the early 1980s, has resulted in extensive debate ever since. For our purposes, though, the important element of this debate is not who might have been correct. The important element is the confusion regarding what exactly this evidence means for moral educators. In short, understanding of the nature of this debate had become so confused that Walker and Frimer (2009), two psychologists at the University of British Columbia, felt it necessary to summarize the empirical case regarding Gilligan’s work, much of which, they argued, had been greatly exaggerated.

A more objective review of the relevant evidence indicates that [certain] empirical claims for Gilligan’s model cannot be sustained. The data indicated that individuals are not consistent in their moral orientation, even within the limited context of real-life dilemmas. The claim of gender differences in moral orientations does not accord with the evidence. The allegation of pervasive bias in Kohlberg’s model against women with a care orientation has no empirical validity. The core assumptions of Gilligan’s theory and the scientific legitimacy of her gender critique lack empirical warrant. There is no evidence that Gilligan’s model has supplanted Kohlberg’s and none of substantive impact on moral/character education programmes. (Walker and Frimer 2009, 65)

Empirical psychologists clearly do not always agree about what the body of research on a particular question means, even in the case of summarized analyses of the sort Walker and Frimer are referring in their paper. But the fundamental level of disagreement identified by this example does indicate something more provisional. Simply put, the disagreement evident in Walker and Frimer’s discussion leaves a moral educator with two wholly exclusive arguments about the same empirical work. Because the qualifications made in empirical work often require particular technical training, and because even those with this training appear to fundamentally disagree, what is an overworked educator to make of this sort of research? The answer is unclear. It is important to note that this disconnect operates in more than one direction, and is not merely a problem for nonpsychologists reading psychology. One of the chief critiques of Kohlberg has always been that he failed to accurately portray the contentious nature of the philosophy built into his psychology. Carr (1991) identifies Kohlberg’s failure to account for the affective aspects of ethical life. Kohlberg’s myopic focus on justice reasoning has been similarly critiqued. It now appears to be widely held that “justice concerns do not exhaust moral concerns” (Kristjánsson 2003, 187).

Conclusion

There is a clear gap between the sorts of work conducted from a normative perspective (as in moral philosophy) and the sorts of work conducted from an empirical perspective (as in psychology). Important insights from one side do not always translate very well into the other. Kohlberg oversimplified his philosophy, for example, while modern-day moral educationalists sometimes seem to misinterpret Gilligan’s psychological work.

For these reasons it is important to understand the interplay...
between normative and empirical arguments that takes place in moral educational research. As the Kohlbergian example shows, there are important tests that must be passed in both normative and empirical senses. In order for Kohlberg’s work to be useful in classrooms, it would have to be both empirically rigorous and philosophically compelling. In other words, a teacher would need to be convinced by both the methods of his science and the strength of his ideas about how the world should be. One might object to, say, Kohlberg’s use of only male subjects (an empirical concern) or his assumptions about the centrality of justice to moral education (a normative concern). Precisely these kinds of concerns should be considered when examining the stigma study we use as an example.

The stigma study is an effort to gauge the effectiveness of an intervention designed to reduce vicious behaviour (in this case, stigmatization). It is justified in terms of informing future efforts at moral educational intervention (reducing stigmatization). The fact that the intervention is supplied by health care professionals and evaluated by an empirically minded psychologist means only that the methods of its conduct are discussed in largely empirical terms. It is a fundamentally normative and moral enterprise because it was undertaken for normative and moral reasons. As a result of this reality, one’s use of this study must be tempered by judgments about its normative background and by the strength of the study’s empirical judgments (such as the sample size or method of testing). One might, for example, decide that improving the lives of students with mental illness is an important element of moral educational practice. This is a normative decision that must be made for philosophical reasons. It is a decision that is important to what this study means to a teacher who reads it.

**Bibliography**


