Discourse

Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Higher Education **Academy**

Discourse:
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Contents

Editorial—10 years of the Subject Centre

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Welcome to a new edition of *Discourse* from a new editor. Dr David Mossley, the previous editor, is on secondment to another role in the Higher Education Academy; in his absence, I welcome the opportunity to continue the stewardship of a resource that has consolidated the importance of pedagogical research in our disciplines.

This edition of Discourse comes out in the tenth year of the Subject Centre's operation. Since its inception as the PRS-LTSN in 2000, we have seen great changes to the sector, and there are undoubtedly difficult times ahead for our higher education system. However, one feature that has been consistent over the past 10 years is our commitment to promoting the best teaching, and to funding projects and publishing articles that build on the solid foundations of good pedagogy in our disciplines; and

remain committed to supporting our disciplines as we face the challenges of the coming years.

Volume 9.2 has a focus on Theology and Religious Studies (TRS), and largely comprises the outputs from two conferences organised by the Subject Centre.

'Teaching Spirituality' was an interdisciplinary event to explore issues around teaching spirituality in higher education in the UK, within and outside TRS departments. A variety of papers are presented here, ranging from problem-based learning approaches to the topic, use of games in teaching, and views on approaches to the subject in various disciplines.
'Beyond the Ordinary: Creative Approaches in Learning and Teaching in Theology and Religious Studies' was an interactive workshop, bringing together those using innovative and creative methods in their teaching for a valuable day of discussion and practical

sessions. Again, we have a range of interesting papers, including focus on flexible provision, use of art and creative writing in teaching and assessment, and use of Intercultural Development Models in the classroom.

In addition to this we have the winning essay from our 2009 student competition, and other papers on pedagogy in our disciplines, in the UK and internationally.

We are currently finalising our twelfth tranche of project funding. We received 26 proposals of high quality, and are likely to award over £29,000 of funding to nine successful projects. The projects will shortly be announced on our website - please see **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/ grants/funded_projects.ht ml**.

Especially in the current funding climate, it has never been more important for the Subject Centre to be able to demonstrate that its work has

impact and is valued by our disciplinary communities. As such, we would be very grateful if you could find the time to fill in our annual survey, either by returning the questionnaire sheet in the prepaid envelope provided, or online at: **https://surveys.heacademy. ac.uk/prs_2010**.

If you would like find out more about the Subject Centre and how you can get involved with our work, or have any suggestions of how we can improve our services to our academic communities, please feel free to contact me at clare@prs.heacademy.ac.uk.

Best wishes for a relaxing summer, Clare.

The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Its aims and objectives are:

1. To be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences;
2. To support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience;
3. To lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education;
4. To promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience;
5. To lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience;
6. To be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk

The Subject Network

The Subject Network is a network of 24 subject centres based in higher education institutions throughout the UK. It is funded by the four HE funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of successful practice in all subject disciplines.

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales, Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies.

Mission statement

Supporting teachers and learners in Philosophical and Religious Studies in higher education across the UK.

Strategic Aims

- To identify, develop and disseminate appropriate enhancements in higher education practice.
- To actively support, encourage and participate in the sharing of relevant, diverse and effective practice and research.
- To support individuals and departments in enabling and managing change; and promote their needs and strengths through that change.
- To provide and develop an accessible and flexible repository of relevant knowledge, resources and expertise that adds value to student learning.
- To work effectively and collaboratively across the Higher Education Academy and the sector to add value to our activities.

Visit our website at **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk**
or contact us directly:
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HumBox Open Educational Resources Project

HumBox is a new way of storing, publishing and sharing your Humanities teaching resources on the web.

You can upload things like seminar activities, lecture slides, podcasts and assignments and download and adapt resources others have deposited. It's all about sharing ideas, approaches and resources and saving you time.

The HumBox project focuses on the Humanities and is a collaboration between four Humanities Subject Centres (LLAS, English, History and Philosophical and Religious Studies), and at least twelve different institutions across the country. It is part of a wider Open Educational Resources initiative funded by the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) and the HEA, to showcase UK Higher Education by encouraging teachers within HE institutions to publish excellent teaching and learning resources openly on the web.

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You can find HumBox at:

http://humbox.eprints.org/

What kinds of resources can I find in HumBox?

The HumBox contains a wide variety of learning and teaching resources for use in the Humanities. The resources consist of all media types, including videos, audios, images, text files and online activities. All resources have been uploaded by teachers and lecturers from UK Higher Education institutions, and all resources have been used for teaching and learning. There is a broad range of subject matter, activity-type, technical format, pedagogic method, all of which highlight the innovative nature of humanities teaching in the UK.

Who regulates the content on HumBox?

You, the HumBox community of registered users, regulate HumBox by adding useful comments to resources and adding extra files or information to resources to enhance their teaching/learning potential. All of the material on HumBox has educational value, but you should be warned that some of the content on HumBox may deal with potentially shocking topics. If you have any issues with any of the content on HumBox then tell us by clicking the 'report a problem' button at the bottom of the page.

Competition

There is currently an opportunity to win £250 by submitting your resources to HumBox. Simply upload resources tagged with philosophy, theology or religious studies, before the end of July 2010, to be in with a chance of winning. For more details, see our website: **http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsnews/114**.

Theology and Religious Studies: Priorities and Impact

Liverpool Hope University, 2-3 September 2010

This two day event will examine the challenges facing TRS in this difficult time for HE, providing an opportunity for delegates to be better informed about the changes taking place and their significance for TRS in a fast-changing landscape, to garner different perspectives and to feed into discussion about ways forward at a national level.

The AUDTRS Committee is acutely conscious of the need for everyone within our membership, and our disciplines in general, to be able to address these challenges. In light of this, AUDTRS and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies are co-organising this event to create a space for reflection on these important issues. The event will include this year's AUDTRS AGM.

A number of speakers who are able to explore these issues from a range of perspectives have agreed to join us, including:
- Professor Dianne Willcocks (Vice Chancellor of York St John University)
- Professor Gerald Pillay (Vice Chancellor of Liverpool Hope University)
- Professor Robin Osborne (Arts and Humanities User Group)
- Professor Douglas Davies (President of the British Association for the Study of Religions)
- Professor Helen Beebee (Director of the British Philosophical Association)

There will be workshops on:
- Taught postgraduate benchmarking
- Representing the interests of research students and those in post-doctoral positions
- The REF and the 'impact' agenda

As well as members of AUDTRS, this meeting is open to all members of staff in Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) departments, and to those who identify themselves as teaching TRS outside of TRS departments.

Draft programme (subject to change)

September 2nd

> 12.00 Registration and lunch
> 14.00 Opening address from Professor Gerald Pillay, the Vice Chancellor of Liverpool Hope (a Church Historian by discipline).
> 15.30 Other sessions
> 19.00 Reception hosted by the Subject Centre for PRS
> 20.00 Conference dinner

September 3rd

> 09.00 Workshops and sessions, including time for discussion and networking.
> 13.00 Lunch
> 14.00 AUDRS AGM. All delegates are encouraged to attend.

Rates and registration

Delegate packages, and their associated costs are as follows:

- Whole conference (includes bed and breakfast on 2nd Sept, lunch and refreshments on both days and a three course self-service evening meal on 2nd Sept)   £106.45
- Day delegate (includes refreshments and lunch on either 2nd or 3rd September)   £29.50
- Day delegate – both days (includes refreshments and lunch on 2nd and 3rd September 2010)   £59.00
- Conference dinner only 2nd September 2010 (for day delegates wishing to attend the evening meal)   £15.75

Please contact Ron Geaves, **geavesr@hope.ac.uk** to discuss your requirements if the above options are not suitable.

For more information and registration please see our website: **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/preview.html/PrsEvents/473**

In the End, it Needed a Cunning Plan:

Pedagogical Reflections on the Teaching of Spirituality to Social Work Students.

Bernard Moss

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Abstract

Social work education in the UK has been wary about spirituality, fearing that it might in some ways jeopardise the profession's hard-earned academic pedigree. In the USA by contrast, spirituality has been recognised as being an important dimension for social workers to take into account in their holistic practice. International recognition of its importance has led some UK social work academics

and others to begin to explore this concept, and relate it to the UK context. This article describes how one social work programme has tackled the challenge, and offers a critique of its success.

Setting the scene

It may come as no surprise, perhaps, to learn that that most secular of people-work professions—social work in the UK—has not welcomed the teaching of spirituality with open arms. There are good reasons for this. Social work has endured a long, hard journey to gain its academic respectability. It draws heavily upon more established academic disciples—sociology, law, psychology, for example—but has needed time to establish its own distinctive research and knowledge base. The profession has been very wary, therefore, of anything that may threaten to undermine its hard-earned reputation for academic integrity. Furthermore, in its early days, the influence of Freud and Marx and their challenges to, and undermining of, traditional religious faith and belief made considerable impact upon social work education and training. As a result, for many years social workers tended to regard religion as part of a person's problem and not part of a solution. This view was captured by Channer (1998) who talked about Christian social work students' fear and reluctance to discuss anything to do with their faith and its impact upon their practice anywhere other than 'in the corridors'. It certainly was not encouraged to be the focus of debate within the classroom. Social workers who had entered the profession as a result of their religious faith or as an expression of it, felt the need therefore to 'remain in the closet' for fear of being rebuked or marginalised. Against such a backdrop, any talk of spirituality seemed to be a way of introducing religion 'by the back door', rather than being understood as a far more comprehensive, all -embracing concept that captures the heart and spirit of what it means to be human (Moss.2005), and what the social work enterprise is all about (Canda & Furman, 2010).

Social work has also been proud of its strong stance on anti-discriminatory practice and its opposition to oppression, whether this be at the personal, cultural or societal level (Thompson 2006). Social workers have noted how minority groups and women have often

been treated in oppressive ways within some religious communities. There is a certain irony here, however. Social work is also distinctive for its support and celebration of diversity, and for seeking to work with the whole person. It is a strong advocate of empowerment and the development of resilience in people. And yet it has been slow to acknowledge that for many people a religious faith is an enriching, life-enhancing experience that empowers and strengthens their resilience, especially in challenging and difficult times. One significant example of this is within mental health where it has been the 'voice' of service users in recovery which has been calling particularly upon profession-als who are seeking to help and support them to take seriously their religious and spiritual needs (Coyte 2007).

Elsewhere in the world, however, such reticence has been radi-cally challenged. In the USA , for example, students going out into social work practice suddenly found themselves exposed to a religious-ly and culturally diverse context to their work. They felt ill-equipped to handle the spiritual and religious dimensions to the work they were undertaking, and took their social work educators to task for failing to address such issues in their education and training curricula. A detailed debate then took place, resulting in new regulations which insisted that any new social work curriculum must include considerations of spiri-tual and religious issues. (Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999; Sheridan et al, 1994; Canda & Furman, 2010; Council on Social Work Education, 1994).

Back here in the UK, although there was no equivalent protest from newly qualified workers as there had been in the USA—the UK culture and context is, after all, very different—interest in such issues was slowly gathering momentum. The former Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) produced a seminal influential report (Patel, 1998) about religion and ethnicity in social work. Leading scholars began to produce journal articles on these themes (Bowpitt, 1998; Cree, 1996; Lloyd, 1997; Bowpitt, 1998, 2000; Moss, 2002; Gilligan 2003; Gilligan & Furness, 2005; and Holloway 2005 and 2007). Furthermore, the developing interest in spirituality at an international level began to move it closer to centre stage in social work thinking, education and training.

A seminal moment in the development of social work's under-standing of the importance of spirituality came in October 2004 when

the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Federation of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) held their conferences jointly in Adelaide. For the first time, a major stream of papers focused on the topic of spirituality. In the same year, in its revised statement of principles, the IFSW affirmed that social workers should uphold each person's 'spiritual integrity and well-being' (IFSW, 2004). In their jointly formulated global standards, both organizations identified that *spiritual issues are part of the knowledge base needed by social workers to understand human behaviour and development* (IASSW & IFSW, 2004)(our emphasis). Spirituality as a core theme for social work had arrived on the global social work agenda. (Holloway &Moss, 2010).

If we add to this 'mix' some research evidence from Furman and her colleagues (Furman *et al*, 2004) who showed that there was a far greater interest in such issues among social workers than had previously been realised, then we can see that the question was no longer whether spirituality should be addressed in UK social work curricula, but how. The rest of this article explores and evaluates the journey taken by the author in a pedagogical attempt to meet this developing challenge.

Initial attempts : one social work progamme's experience

One of the first opportunities to incorporate a discussion of spirituality and religious issues into the social work curriculum came about as a result of a validation process of the (then) new social work degree introduced in 2003. This required : 1) a review of the existing curriculum; 2) the development of new modules, and 3) the updating of existing modules. This provided an opportunity for a re-working of some the module descriptors so that religious and spiritual perspectives could be included in modules which explored, for example, Social Work Values; Life Span Development; Working with Children and Families, and Community Care. In the level 3 dissertation module, where students were encouraged to choose topics that particularly appealed to them, one or two chose to explore spirituality as their major theme.

An additional impetus to this process was also given by the General Social Care Council (GSCC) inspector who had previously asked some very pointed questions to the team about why such issues were not being included in the curriculum.

It is one thing to have these issues included in module descriptors: it is quite another thing to ensure they are put into practice, especially in an already overcrowded curriculum. Without the enthusiastic commitment to these themes by the teaching team for each module, it is too easy for some topics to be omitted or left to students to follow up if their interests lie in that direction. Spirituality ran that risk, although undoubtedly some progress was made as a result of this validation process. Sessions on spirituality and mental health; and on its relevance to loss, death, dying and bereavement were introduced, but a wider ownership of the topic by staff and students did not show a marked improvement. It still remained the domain of the topic's two main champions in the team.

Another approach involved offering an open workshop on Spirituality and Social Work, to which all social work students and staff were invited. About 30 students attended (total student cohort 160) from all three levels. This proved to be a profoundly moving event. Each participant was invited to bring some artefact to share with the group which somehow expressed the 'heart and spirit of who they were'. Some brought religious objects; others some deeply personal items, such as a newborn baby's name-tag; some brought explicitly secular items like their season ticket for their football club: but everyone shared and explored these in an open and supportive context, and explained how these items provided a deep insight into who they really were. Thus they began to understand that spirituality is about 'what makes us tick', and how this informs and enriches their social work practice. The workshop concluded with an exploration into how to engage service users with these issues in a constructive, non- threatening and sensitive way.

Overall, the workshop was deeply appreciated by those who attended, but it still left major questions unanswered. Only a minority of students attended (the keen ones, as they called themselves). The exploration of spirituality had still not been fully incorporated into the mainstream curriculum, nor had it featured in any way in the assessment schedule. Until that could be achieved, spirituality was likely to

remain on the margins. It was to meet that pedagogical challenge, therefore, that a cunning plan was devised.

The cunning plan... introducing PBL.

It was clear that in order better to locate spirituality in the mainstream curriculum, two criteria had to be met. First, it had to be compulsory for all students to explore it; and secondly, it needed to be assessed in order for its importance and significance to be emphasised. A further challenge was to find a way in which students would not feel immediately alienated from a subject that perhaps they had never encountered before, or to which they were likely to bring a set of preconceptions, prejudices or antagonisms.

The approach adopted was to develop a Problem Based Learning Scenario (PBL) that would establish from the outset a spirit of honest, open enquiry within the student group, which is essential for a subject such as spirituality. The value of PBL as a pedagogic strategy has been well documented (e.g. Savin-Baden, 2000; Boud & Feletti, 1997; Wilkerson & Gijselaers, 1996) and is well established in (but by no means limited to) various people-work education and training programmes (e.g. medical and nursing awards). Its basic approach requires students in small groups (8-10 max) to work together over a period of time (say 4-6 weeks, but this can vary), starting from a basic brief 'scenario' or 'problem' presented to them by the tutor. As Boud and Feletti (1997) explain,

> Problem-based courses start with problems rather than with exposition of disciplinary knowledge. They move students towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills through a staged sequence.... together with assorted learning materials and support from teachers (p.2)

The 'problem' serves as a 'trigger' designed to get the students thinking, and importantly to help them identify a range of issues, questions, or information that they need to research in order to prepare a final report. Each student will need to play a role in the research and reporting back process, and to learn the skills of working collaboratively towards a common goal. The tutor's role, therefore, is no longer that

of teacher or imparter of knowledge: instead their role is to ensure that the process is followed; that the group is heading in the right direction; and sometimes to signpost them in some important directions so that each member of the group makes the best use of the limited research time available. The 'end product' will (often) be a summatively - assessed report/ presentation from the group as a whole, where the mark allocated to the group will then appear on the marks grid for each individual student member who has contributed to the process.

The social work scenario

The PBL project on this social work programme was located within a Skills for Social Work Practice module which, *inter alia*, had a group work/ inter-professional learning outcome worth 30% of the final mark for the module. It took place in the second semester for the first year student cohort, by which time they had begun to 'gel' as a group and had developed some experience of working together. They were divided up into groups of between 8-10 students, and allocated separate rooms in which to work. Any plenary sessions (at the beginning of each week, for example) were devoted to questions of process rather than how each group was progressing. Care was taken by the tutor to explain the process, which was outlined in detail in the project handbook. Students were also clearly informed about how the presentation would be assessed, and how each student would receive as an individual mark the grade point awarded to the group as a whole. They were left in no doubt that this was an important element in the overall assessment of the module as a whole, and that they needed to pass it.

The scenario chosen was as follows:

You work in a multi-disciplinary mental health setting.

Your team manager has just announced in a team meeting that at a national level increasing emphasis is being placed on the contribution that spirituality can make to a person's recovery.

> Your team manager has asked you as a team to find out more about this, and to prepare a report with some action points for the team to consider.

> You are due to present this report to the Managers' meeting scheduled to take place on …… (date to be notified – see handbook)

The journey begins

The first task for each group was to identify what they did not know about this scenario, and what they needed to find out for their next group meeting . One of the issues that the tutor urged them to consider was what sort of mental health team did they want to be for the purposes of the project, and what range of professionals (and others) did they represent. Some chose to be a predominantly adult services team, while others preferred to have a Children and Young People's focus. Some chose to be a day centre team; others a more structured hospital setting. This decision would influence the way they researched the topic and presented their final report and action plan.

A central feature of the PBL process is identifying what the group does not (yet) know but needs to find out in order to fulfil the requirements of the project. In this case some of the questions included:

- What is meant by a multi disciplinary mental health setting?
- What is meant by the phrase 'at a national level increasing emphasis.....'?
- What is spirituality? Is it religion by another name, or something else?
- What is meant by recovery?

These, and any other questions, dominate the first two sessions of the group—in this case, there were five x 2 hour sessions altogether, with the fifth and final session being given over to last minute fine-tuning of their material, and the presentations themselves. Time, therefore, was limited, and each group member was tasked with exploring one partic-

ular question or theme each week, sometimes working individually, sometimes in pairs, and then reporting back.

The challenge to the group becomes acute when they have begun to assemble more material than they can possibly use or need for their presentation. How they negotiate this process is an important skill, as this will determine how they meet the assignment brief of presenting their final report. It is also a skill they will need in their social work practice when preparing reports for case conferences, court or similar situations, so this project provided them with an early opportunity to grapple with this set of professional, as well as pedagogic, challenges.

In the three years this project has been running, it has been significant to note the level of enthusiasm that each group has immediately developed for the task. Although some hesitations and uncertainties were inevitable at the outset, they were always quickly resolved, as the following example illustrates:

> Tutor (to group) : is everyone clear about what you need to be doing?

> Student A   (puzzled) : no—I don't understand what we are supposed to be doing!

> Student B (before tutor could respond) It's OK D..., it's up to us to work together to help find the answers to the things we need to know—we'll work it out—you don't need to worry!

When the tutor next looked in to see how this group was progressing, student D was enthusiastically debating an issue and was clearly fully involved. The group has taken responsibility for empowering each other to participate fully in the learning process.

Another student voiced similar concerns to the tutor outside the group setting before the second session.

> Student : I have to say that when we 'divvied up' the tasks last week no wanted to look at what spirituality was, so being a bit of a soft touch I said all right—I'll do it. I felt I had drawn the short straw and was a bit fed up about it ... but then I started to delve into the topic and did a bit of web browsing, and before I knew it 3 hours had passed and I was totally absorbed and fascinated by it all. You

are a very cunning teacher!

Each group has to decide how to present their report. Powerpoint facilities were available, but a clear message was given that each group needed to decide how most effectively to deliver their report, and that imagination and creativity were welcomed. The presentation would be one of the early experiences of speaking before a group of people, so each group needed to identify its strengths and plan accordingly. Not everyone was expected to speak, but everyone had to identify how their contribution had enriched the report as a whole.

Once again the empowering nature of PBL led to some startling and imaginative contributions which clearly demonstrated that students had spent a lot of time carefully deciding on which approach to adopt. Among the best presentations there were:

- Some video clips
- Excellent clear graphics
- Well-designed leaflets targeting particular service user groups
- Enacted role plays illustrating particular viewpoints, comparing and contrasting medical and social perspectives
- Interviews conducted with faith leaders and mental health professionals
- Strong emphasis upon service user perspectives, including an interview with a member of the university's Service User and Carers Group
- Powerful creative posters/art work.

Another 'spin-off' was the way in which some students engaged their personal academic tutors in the discussions in preparation for the report. This served not only as a signpost to what the students were doing; it also made the tutors engage with a topic which otherwise some of them might have studiously avoided. As a result some tutors were keen to join the management-panel and to take part in the assessment process, and were deeply impressed by the quality of the work produced. It is significant that no single group has ever failed this assessment: the vast majority gain marks between 60-80%.

The overall impact, therefore, has been 'win win'. The tutor wins

because this topic has been explored, discussed and engaged with by all the students; spirituality has begun to be mainstreamed in the curriculum, and has been part of the assessment regime for the award. The students win because they have all engaged with a topic they have found interesting, fascinating and relevant to practice; and because they have all brought energy and enthusiasm to the project, most of them have all gained high marks which has enhanced their 'feel-good' factor. They have also developed confidence in their group working skills and research capabilities, and have gained some early success in how to present a report in front of an audience of staff and fellow students. Another 'spin-off' was the very positive way in which the External Examiners have highlighted this project in their end of year reports, and have singled it out for high commendation for its originality and creativity, and for the quality of the student experience and contribution.

Critique

For all its strengths and success as a project and as a successful 'cunning plan', there are some significant issues that have emerged, mainly from the module evaluation sheets which students completed at the end of the project, some of which are familiar to PBL champions.

First, the groups (and eventually the tutor) sometimes have to deal with two problems that can emerge: student absence, and students wanting an 'easy ride'. It is a group responsibility to keep a register of attendance, and there is a clear ground-rule that if a student misses two of the 5 sessions they will not be eligible for the individual mark. It is the tutor's role to ensure that this ground-rule is observed, to interview any students whose behaviour or attendance causes concern, and to explain the consequences.

If a student misses the first session, however, it is usually possible to introduce them to an existing group in week 2, although sometimes a small group who come into this category can be formed into a new group to start a week late. Group identity is quickly established in PBL work, so this needs to be handled sensitively.

Any subsequent absences can cause difficulties if the student missing the session has not submitted to their group the results of their

research and any materials they have gained. Again it is up to the group to keep in touch with each other to minimise such disruptions, but sometimes this can result in a de-motivating resentment against the absentee member.

Similar feelings can arise if a student attends regularly but quickly assumes a 'passenger' role in the group, rarely volunteering to undertake tasks, generally under-performing, but wanting to have their individual mark at the end. At times the tutor will need to intervene, and if need be challenge the student to perform more equitably; but this is a common feature in many teams, and it is good experience for students to learn how to handle this sort of conflict.

Student who do not gain their mark as a result of absence, clearly have the right to re-sit, and this can present real difficulties administratively and procedurally. If only one or two fail, they can hardly constitute a new PBL group. And in any case the re-sit period is during July and August when it is not possible to bring students together for collaborative project work. One way forward being explored is to create an e-project using Blackboard (or similar VLE) so that students needing to re-sit can at least collaborate electronically. Otherwise, the 'fall-back' will be the requirement for the student to present a short individual Powerpoint presentation with a brief commentary, demonstrating how they have explored this topic, but with a different focus from the original group project.

The 'purist' PBL position on the role of the tutor would normally require a tutor to be in each group as a facilitator for all but one 'non-facilitated' session. This clearly is labour-intensive, and this programme, together with many others, is not able to devote that level of staff resources to this project. As a result, on any one day when these PBL groups are running, one tutor needs to facilitate three or four student groups who are working in separate rooms for the two hour slot. In practice, this has worked well. Each week begins with a plenary to clarify process issues and answer any general questions. Each group is told how to contact the tutor in case they need help or intervention. The tutor will 'pop in' to each group once or twice during the 2 hour session to check that all is well, but more often than not the group will ignore this arrival. On one or two occasions the group have asked the tutor to leave because (to quote one group), 'we are getting on fine thank you, and if we need you we will come and find you'. That is

perhaps the ultimate compliment any student group can give to a tutor!

One further challenge has emerged. As with many topics in HE curricula, even with awards that have to meet professional requirements, a lot depends upon individual tutors' knowledge, interests, enthusiasm, and willingness to take risks pedagogically. Not every tutor is willing to use PBL as a pedagogic strategy: indeed, some will question its validity as a method for developing sound and accurate knowledge in students. Some will find the facilitative role demanded by PBL too challenging to their more traditional 'teaching' style. As suggested in the context-setting introduction above, spirituality is still regarded with some suspicion by some social work academics, who will happily ignore the challenge to explore it with their students, or who will only give it a tokenistic 'guest appearance' in their module syllabus. Every topic needs its champion, and when that champion goes there is no guarantee that the legacy will be taken forward unless it is a commitment owned by the team as a whole. This remains a major challenge for social work education as a whole, so that spirituality becomes part of the main-stream curriculum that everyone acknowledges to be important.

Conclusion

Developing imaginative, creative and enjoyable ways of learning is the challenge facing every academic in Higher Education—and indeed in all education at whatever level . Gifted teachers always inspire, and are able to choose pedagogic approaches that engage students, and help them to become deep rather than surface learners. One of the strengths of PBL at its best is that it fosters deep learning, and this proved to be the case with this project, at least for a good number of students involved. The challenge of spirituality is that it cannot be tackled or taught dispassionately. Inevitably the student (and the tutor) are drawn into the process , and begin to ask questions about their own spirituality and understanding, and how their own experiences have shaped their particular world-view and understanding of spirituality. At times students will bring a more reflective and deeply understood response than perhaps the tutor is able to provide, and this can be a source of great mutual enrichment in the learning group, providing the tutor's

anxieties do not stifle this process.

The 'cunning plan' outlined in this project amounted to no more, but certainly no less, than a valuing of each and every student's potential contribution to the learning process, and the importance of each student's own spirituality, however ill-defined or conceptualised it might have been before the project began. The project helped students to understand more clearly the journey upon which they had already embarked, and to realise that, far entering alien territory, they were discovering what it means really to be human. They began to glimpse the significance of understanding, at individual and corporate levels, the richness and complexity of the human spirit. And that led them into the very heart of what social work is all about.

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Teaching and Assessing Spirituality In and Out of Religion Departments:

Pedagogical Principles to Develop Reflective Learners in Two Disciplines

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Introduction

This paper is an examination of the ways in which Spirituality is taught in two programmes, Early Childhood Studies and Religion, Culture and Ethics, at Oxford Brookes University. It is also a study which provides indicative evidence of the varied contem-

porary approaches to the study of spirituality in UK Higher Education institutions. The focus of the paper is the teaching and assessment of students within these two different programmes. Both undergraduate programmes have modules that examine different ideas of spirituality, how it is practiced and understood within the academy and by practitioners in the field. Equally, both have discourse specific conceptions of the spiritual. Both employ innovative teaching to meet learning outcomes.

The paper will first examine the literature and discourse specific conception and purposes of Religion and Early Childhood studies including teaching spirituality in their programmes. Secondly, the paper will summarise how concepts are developed in the structure and activities of the modules relating to spirituality. Thirdly the paper will engage with assessment methods. The role of formative and non-assessed components of student writing and feedback using Virtual Learning Environments will illuminate some perceptions of the students taking these modules. Equally the role of journey in student learning and as a trope in spiritual narratives will be explored both as pedagogic technique and assessment assignment in the form of learning journals. The paper is a reflective examination of theories and themes in teaching spirituality in HEIs that uses two modules taught in 2009 to examine and exemplify these themes.

Differing discourses? Early Childhood Studies and Study of Religions

The rising interest in spirituality in popular discourse has been one of the key themes in the development of novel forms of religiosity in post-industrial secular society. It has been described by some social commentators, such as Steve Bruce[1], as evidence of a declining interest in religion—indicating a Weberian brief charismatic revival in the face of overwhelming rationalising and secularising forces. Other studies

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[1] Bruce, S., 'The New Age and Secularisation' in S. Sutcliffe and M. Bowman, eds., *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) pp. 220-236. and Bruce, S., *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

indicate the gradual establishment of systems and practices that are developing secure foundations in the social and economic structures of modernity.[2] Secondary analysis of spirituality has grown quickly in the last twenty years in academic texts, research programmes and, increasingly, in higher education modules and courses. One important element of this development in the 21st century is the creation of teaching courses outside programmes in Theology and the Study of Religions. Three significant examples provide evidence of this expansion of interest in the 21st century: The creation by academics outside Theology and Religion departments of a network in 2009 called the British Association for the Study of Spirituality, that has its inaugural event in May 2010; the conference organised by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, on 'Teaching Spirituality in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges' in January 2010; and the high incidence of academic articles on Spirituality in journals for academics and practitioners outside traditional TRS—the highest incidence of these being in health and social care related subjects.[3]

It is worth recognising another impetus in this cross-disciplinary interest in spirituality that derives from trends in academic pedagogy and forces in academic management that increasingly emphasise inter-disciplinarity in teaching, especially undergraduate programmes. In UK universities that operate modular systems this is accomplished by validation and approval of modules that are creditable towards awards in varied disciplines. The two modules and the two disciplines that form the foci of this paper are examples of this cross-disciplinarity. While the multiple programmes that use modules towards their accredited awards is pedagogically justifiable and provides efficiencies, as this paper will show, there remain some tensions that exist in disciplinary specific interests and benchmarking.

One of the challenges for educators from different disciplines is balancing issues of heterogeneity against those of homogeneity. Just as multiplicity and differentiation are evident in the many voices within

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[2] Heelas, P., Woodhead, L., Seel, B., Szerszyinski, B. and Tusting, K., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*, (Oxford: Blackwell 2005).

[3] See for example, Tanya, R. A.,. 'Towards Clarification of the Meaning of Spirituality', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 39:5, (2002) pp. 500-509.

religious traditions that necessitate plural expressions of Christianities, Buddhisms and Islams, so it is important to counteract a homogenised or univocal expression of spirituality. In many ways the study of spiritualities is a second order response to developments that are happening 'out there' in the field of popular discourse and practice; and spiritual practitioners are not limited by disciplinary boundaries. Thus varied ways of teaching and constructing the notion of spirituality by HE educators reflect the varied meanings in the field. However, there is equally some requirement to consider the range and uses of spirituality in HE teaching itself. For this is an emergent aspect of the field also.

The conceptual role of the word spirituality as an umbrella term is generally accepted, but unless it is to become a container-concept without intrinsic meaning, there need to be core definitional boundaries. This paper argues that the current state of teaching spirituality in higher education is evidence of a heterogeneous expression with differing disciplinary discourses, constructing varied definitions, some of which are complementary while some others may be contradictory. Students taking modules that include the term spirituality from different disciplines may be understandably confused. The challenge for HE educators is to accurately reflect differentiation of meaning and use while avoiding incoherence.

The national benchmark statements for undergraduate Honours programmes in the UK might be expected to clarify some of these issues, but merely indicate a lacuna in the framework. Thus, a search for the term spirituality elicits only three incidences: TRS, Healthcare programmes: Nursing and Paramedic Science. A further examination of the TRS statement shows that neither the term 'spirituality' nor the discipline Early Childhood Studies are to be found under lists of contiguous disciplines or social movements.[4] The single entry for spirituality is to be found under 'Appendix A - The current range of possible subject matters for theology and religious studies':

> cross-religious themes, eg mysticism/meditation/spirituality, devotion/liturgy, religious experience, myth, pilgrimage, rites of passage, concepts of the sacred, monasticism, fundamentalism,

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[4] See statements 2.6 and 2.7, QAA Benchmark for Theology and Religious Studies, **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Theology.asp** (2000, revised 2007) accessed 12 Feb, 2010).

violence, death; ethics in/and religion: nature of religious ethics, key values, and issues, such as the environment, war, economics, politics, bioethics (QAA, 2007)

Structure of the modules—purposes, content and pedagogical principles

The module taught in the programme of Religion, Culture and Ethics at OBU is called, 'Spiritualities and Human Identity'. It is a 'Stage 2' module available for level 5 and level 6 students that was validated for this programme in 2005 and is acceptable for credit towards awards in the host programme as well as Education Studies and Social Work. It may also be taken by students constructing their own degree pathways through Combined Studies, and on occasion by associate students interested in taking modules for personal interest without award aims. Students from all of these fields have taken the module, though the primary uptake is from Religion, Culture and Ethics.

There are multiple purposes in the creation and design of modules that form the building blocks of an Honours degree. Issues of progression and coherence dominate programme construction. Spiritualities and Human Identity was designed to meet specific interests of research active staff and requests by students from the previous Religious Studies programme. Moreover, while meeting the University directive to link teaching and research in the design of programmes, it also met the University's strategic priority of incorporating and promoting reflective independent learning, and, in the process of teaching the module toward an assessment based on a learning journal it also met the strategic priority defined as 'innovative teaching learning and assessment'. Furthermore, it was designed without prerequisites or co-requisites so that students from outside the field could access this module easily, thereby supporting the ethos, current at the time at Oxford Brookes, of a modular undergraduate framework with multiple combinations across fields.

Thus, the existence of Spiritualities and Human Identity has its own history, specific identity and purpose, as an option in various programme toolboxes. Its primary identity is within the combined degree

programme Religion Culture and Ethics and beyond that to the Quality Assurance Agency benchmarks for Theology and Religious Studies.[5] While the learning objectives for an approved module remain from one year to another, each 'run' of the module is adapted by the module tutor. The core content and delivery of the module in 2009-10 run is defined in detail in the module handbook.

The focus of this module is upon human identities that are constructed within the discourses of spiritualities. Thus the emphasis is upon the phenomenology of spiritualities, rather than sociology of human identity, and the elements of how these varied forms of spirituality create an idea of what it is to be human.

Modules in the programme of Religion Culture and Ethics rarely identify a single source as a core text for a whole module but in this case the recent publication of Ursula King's, *The Search of Spirituality: Our Global Quest for Meaning and Fulfilment* (2009) provided both a secure introduction to the breadth of spiritualities appropriate for the varied students, and a spine of central themes and ideas that supported the broader structure of the module. The content was defined in ten group taught lecture and seminar sessions and individual meetings on writing the learning journal:

Week One: Module introduction: Key themes, reading and
 how to write a learning journal
Week Two: Two S's – Secularism and Spirituality
Week Three: Childhood Spirituality
Week Four: Mysticism, Experience and Spirituality
Week Five: Christian Spiritualities
Week Six: Reading and Writing Week – individual sessions
 with course tutor
Week Seven: Death, Dying and Spirituality
Week Eight: Health, Well-Being and Spirituality
Week Nine: Alternative Spiritualities
Week Ten: Pagan Spiritualities
Week Eleven: Creative Spiritualities

Lectures and seminars were delivered by varied colleagues with spe-

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[5] Ibid.

cialist knowledge: Dr Martin Groves, a theologian, for Christian Spiritualities; Reverend Dr Robert Bates, a theologian and chaplain with experience working in hospices, for Death, Dying and Spirituality; Dr Andy Letcher, a specialist in pagan studies, for Pagan Spiritualities. The weekly topics, readings and lecture notes, made available on the VLE structured class discussion, while a common thread in each session led by the module tutor was the development of a learning journal. The purpose of this design was to provide breadth in the range of expressions and experiences of spirituality and depth in the contemporary context of spiritualities. Thus there are necessary lacunae in historical contexts and traditional religious sources. The parallel depth for the students was the development of reflexivity in their own understanding.

The module on 'Young Children's Spirituality' for the BA in Early Childhood Studies (ECS) at Oxford Brookes appears, like 'Spiritualities and Human Identity' as an optional module for second and third years. Last year 37 students registered for the module. Over 50% of course participants also had practical experience of working with children, and some were in regular employment in schools and early years settings. Initially four students self-identified as having membership of a faith community: one Roman Catholic, one Pentecostal and two Muslim. It would be interesting to conduct an enquiry into how religious affiliation might have affected the participants' attitudes, or even whether a pre-existing religious affiliation might have commended the module to those who joined, but this is outside the scope of this brief reflection.

Early Childhood Studies is a relatively new area of study. It combines practitioner perspectives with theories drawn from education, sociology and psychology. As the benchmarking statements describe it:

> The interdisciplinary nature of the area of ECS takes account of the ecology of children's lives, in studying the complexities of family life and of children's development from conception onwards, thus signifying the importance of both the intricate and interactive continuum of growth and development, and the significance of early childhood across cultures and societies. (QAA 2007)

Spiritual aspects of human development are not mentioned in the

subject benchmarks, and this, in some ways, reflects the ambiguity towards spiritual development in education identified by Eaude, who notes that while the term 'spiritual' is hard to define, children's spiritual development is nevertheless one aspect of government inspection of schools.[6] However the benchmarks do make mention of ECS graduates being able to 'reflect upon a range of philosophical, historical, psychological, sociological, cultural, health, welfare, legal, political and economic perspectives, and consider how these underpin different understandings of children and childhood, nationally and globally' and to 'detect meaningful patterns in behaviour and experience, and evaluate their significance'.[7] A case can be made, therefore, for seeing spirituality as part of the 'behaviour and experience' which is the proper study of Early Childhood. Students on this module are not theologians or students of the phenomenology of religion, but they are people with a theoretical (and often practice-based) understanding of the phenomena of childhood.

Students in ECS are used to dealing with contested concepts such as childhood and play; they were therefore invited to investigate spirituality in the same way as, earlier in their undergraduate career, they had begun to explore play, and they responded well to Eaude's assertion that spirituality is 'inherently elusive and contested.'[8] They understood this tension: while the QAA benchmarks and current government thinking about early childhood curricula are bounded by developmental discourses, theorists such as Bronfenbrenner see the child as part of a complex social system, and her/his development as a 'product of interaction between the growing human organism and its environment'.[9] This is the root of the ecological language reflected in the

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[6] See Eaude, T., *Children's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development*, 2nd ed. (Exeter: Learning Matters, 2005)

[7] Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/EarlyChildhoodStudies07.pdf** (2007) accessed March 12, 2010)

[8] Eaude, T., 'Strangely familiar? - Teachers Making Sense of Young Children's Spiritual Development', *Early Years*, 25: 3, (2005), p.238

[9] Bronfenbrenner, U., *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.* (London: Harvard University Press 1979 p16. A discussion of the literature around the current curriculum for the Foundation Stage in England is to be found in Evangelou, M., Sylva, K., Kyriacou, M., Wild, M., and Glenny G., 'Early Years Learning and Development: Literature Review Research', DCSF -RR176.

benchmarks. (DCSF 2007)

Student engagement—VLE and e-discussions

The module required participants to enter into the reflective process, looking in particular at the place spirituality might have in a child's culture, and in the (largely adult) definitions of childhood. A 'top-down' definition of the term 'spirituality' was avoided, and models of spirituality were explored through writers such as Wright, Harris, Eaude and Champagne.[10] Some of these texts were chosen explicitly in response to the students' on-line explorations of themes in spirituality described below.

By using the Virtual Learning Environment, students were encouraged to express in writing a process of reflection on how they might define the unfamiliar term spirituality. In order to allow as much range as possible in this reflective process, the module began with images, with the students exploring, in on-line discussions after the class, how three short video extracts might allow them to come towards a definition of spirituality. These were the Vigil Office from Groening's *Into Great Silence*, the initial testing of the boy then known as Lhamo from Scorsese's *Kundun*, and the 'Walking in the Air' sequence from Briggs/Jackson's *The Snowman*. The three were chosen to include two which depict mainstream religions and another from outside the overtly religious sphere; two were chosen because of the depiction of young children, which, given the focus of the module, was felt to be most appropriate. These were not chosen as visual representations of a major event in a community's religious history, a *Heilsgeschichte*, in order to allow students to explore and dissent from the narrative with less worry of offending other course participants, although *Kundun* comes closest

London: 2009).

[10] Wright, A., *Spirituality and Education*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), Harris, K., 'Re-conceptualizing Spirituality in the Light of Educating Young Children', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12: 3, (2007), pp. 263–275, Eaude, T., 'Strangely familiar? - Teachers Making Sense of Young Children's Spiritual Development', *Early Years*, 25: 3, (2005), pp. 237–248, Champagne, E., 'Being a Child, a Spiritual Child', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8: 1 (2003).

to a central religious narrative. Rather, this approach was intended to generate discussion - partly as a Philosophy for Children/Communities stimulus might do, but also as might be seen in a number of approaches to enquiry in humanities in primary education.[11]

Responses from the students were interesting: there was a general caution, sometimes even dislike, of the 'dark,' 'weird' and 'boring' sequence from the Carthusian monks at prayer in *Into Great Silence*; a warmer reception, mixed with some scepticism, was given to the boy being recognised as the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama in *Kundun*; and there was a very warm response to the musical sequence from *The Snowman*. Of the 'Walking in the Air' clip one student responded, 'I found it easy to connect to the music and childlike sense of wonder conveyed,' and wonder is a recurrent theme in these responses. The sense of connection with the sequence is echoed in a number of answers where students referred to their own memories, e.g. 'I think that this familiarity seemed to me to be more spiritual than the abstract concepts of God and religion. Perhaps familiarity is a main part of what is spiritual to the individual?' and 'For me, it brought back many a memory of [being] sat in front of the fire at Christmas watching this with my family. For me spirituality is not about religious experiences concerned wholly with the idea of a God, but through one off experiences in life.' These responses were perhaps in some measure an indication of the pre-formed notions of spirituality that the students brought to the module, but they found particular resonance in the work of Harris whose work begins with a remembering of her childhood fascination with kaleidoscopes, and in which she comments that 'Children's spirituality involves living, exploring, and belonging by building close relationships with peers'.[12]

The sequence in *Kundun* which a young boy is tested by being presented with possession from the previous Dalai Lama has an ambiguity which the students picked up on; is he responding to small encouragements from the visiting dignitaries as he picks up the 'right'objects? One student was of the opinion that it shows 'how it

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[11] SAPERE (2010) **http://www.sapere.org.uk/** accessed March 12, 2010
See also for example Eyre, G., 'Photos in Global Learning', *Primary Geographer* 71, (2010) pp. 20-21.
[12] Harris, K., 'Re-conceptualizing Spirituality in the Light of Educating Young Children', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12: 3, (2007), p. 271.

reflects the idea of predetermined destiny,' something she admitted was part of her own beliefs. This was a view echoed by other contributors, while others suggested that they 'couldn't get past that they were actors,' or that 'a child may easily choose a sequence of items when they get such positive praise from choosing the correct ones.' One student—herself an early years practitioner—brought the conversation back to the workplace: 'I wonder how this applies to young children; If my children saw the clip of the Dalai Lama, would they feel the same as if they saw *The Snowman*; Where would spirituality fit in then?'

As indicated earlier, the clip from *Into Great Silence* provoked the most debate. More than one student—even among those for whom the Carthusian life seemed difficult to understand—began to unpack the complex issues of how far spirituality, mystical experience and religious discipline are bound together: One respondent felt that it 'depicted a very religious view of spirituality,' while another commented 'the clip made me think what good can come from cutting yourself off the world, does this really bring you any closer to god or fulfilment? Is this extreme isolation supposed to enable a greater connection to the divine? Is it escapist, service, what were they searching for?' and a third suggested *Into Great Silence* showed 'spiritual experiences as solitary worship and prayer, with spirituality only achieved by a deeper connection with God through these activities.' Eaude likewise notes that for him, spirituality has 'the connotation of being primarily interior and individual, based within a religious tradition,' he is also looking for something that 'relates more to the individual's place within culture, to values and relationships'.[13] One student came close to expressing a dichotomy between formal religion and her definition of spirituality—'You would need to be very devoted to the religion. But that may not be the same as spiritual (not to me anyway)'—but in the nature of on-line discussion, does not give any more detail to her argument, and is not challenged by her colleagues. The dissonance they felt, however, provoked some expressions of tolerance, of which this quotation is not untypical: 'The isolation and intensity it showed is not something I relate to spirituality. But then this shows how everybody's

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[13] Eaude, T., 'Shining Lights in Unexpected Corners: New Angles on Young Children's Spiritual Development', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8: 2, (2003) p.153.

ideas of true spirituality can vary so much.'

Themes on spirituality that emerged from this activity range from the idea that spirituality is a personal thing, bringing with it all the variations that personality and personal history might encompass, to the notion that spirituality still sits at a point of connection (or perhaps disconnection) between the 'religious' and 'humanist'. It is worth noting, perhaps, that the level of reflection required was bound to produce multiple meanings of something elusive, complex and dynamic. As Craig points out 'multiple narrative truths—each based on human reflection and/or lack of it—swirl around any given narrative inquiry. In addition, because human experience is constantly in flux, reflection is never static.'[14]

Sheldrake suggests that reducing meaning to definitions may not be a fruitful way to progress,[15] and it was not the intention of this exercise to arrive at a single definition of spirituality, but to allow the students independently to explore a variety of themes, and for these themes to help form the approach to spirituality for the rest of the module. Student engagement with the themes of the module came close, therefore, to a co-construction of the themes—again, an approach familiar to at least some of the Early Childhood students, and to an approach to Early Years pedagogy heavily influenced by socio-constructivist thinking, that allows children to explore ideas and environments with adults rather than under adult direction.[16] It is worth noting that the social aspect of this exploration of ideas finds resonance in the social aspects of spirituality discussed by King where, following writers such as Thomas Merton, she describes the human condition as a dance and where spiritual exploration as individual and a group activities have historically been seen as 'closely related and interdependent'.[17] The social aspects of Early Years practice are deeply embedded

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[14] Craig, C., 'Learning about Reflection Through Exploring Narrative Inquiry', *Reflective Practice*, 10: 1, (2009) p. 112.

[15] Sheldrake, P., *Spirituality and History*. (London: SPCK, 1995).

[16] See, for example, Jordan, B., 'Scaffolding Learning and Co-constructing Understandings', in Anning, A., Cullen, J. and Fleer, M., *Early Childhood Education* 2nd ed (London: Sage, 2009) and Evangelou, M., Sylva, K., Kyriacou, M., Wild, M., and Glenny G., 'Early Years Learning and Development: Literature Review Research', DCSF -RR176. (London: 2009) p. 23.

[17] King, U., *The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for Meaning and*

in UK pedagogy—something the ECS students were already aware of —and would include effective use of formative assessment at an informal level.

Choosing to place the reflective element for the ECS module outside the assessment gave the students 'room' to shape a definition of the term 'spirituality' without attempting to reach an orthodoxy that the course tutor had, in any case, not intended. Such an approach also allowed students to engage positively with the process of coming to a definition themselves, through on-line discussion of key imagery and themes arising from it. However, there was a clear purpose in this; the assignment gave the barebones title 'A report on children's spirituality' as the major part of the final assessment, and since the module assessment required the ECS students to seek approval for their final assignment focus in week 5 of 12, they needed to come to some view as to what aspect of spirituality they might wish to look at in their final essay. This, in turn, required some beginnings of a definition of spirituality in order for this thinking to take place. That is not to say that students were asked to produce a definition in order to progress in the module, but that the personal reflection required in the opening sessions (in class and via VLE discussions) would be allowed to enrich the more formally assessed work towards the end of the semester.

Learning journals and reflexive learners

As an optional module, rather than core or required, only students whose interests were raised by the title, content summary, details from the handbook or on the Virtual Learning Environment or who had been inspired by presentations on their programme options, selected the module. Thus the experience of these students was mediated by their own specific purposes and interests, and by those of their colleagues. The nature and 'flavour' of the module are dependent on student engagement and their diverse interests shape the discussions in class as much as they shape the responses they provide in assessment. Students taking the module Spiritualities and Human Identity amply illustrated the intentions of the QAA subject benchmark statement,

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Fulfilment, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009) p.183 and 2009:78ff.

> 1.13 Whatever the subject, the acquisition of knowledge and under-standing is usually transformative at some level, changing a person's perspectives and often their attitudes. The nature of TRS means that studying the subject may have a profound impact on the student's life and outlook. The experience of studying this subject may con-tribute to a student's personal development, transforming horizons by engaging with cultures and societies other than their own, whether ancient or modern. It may foster a lifelong quest for wisdom, respect for one's own integrity and that of others, self-examination in terms of the beliefs and values adopted for one's own life, a better understanding of its role in geo-political conflict and, not least, the challenging of prejudices. (QAA, 2007)

The assessment for the module was structured to bring elements of formative discussion and development into a summative final paper. The module guide specified:

> You will write a Learning Journal that engages critically with the material you read and discuss in the course. This will allow you to reflect on the course content and the key concepts that have impacted upon your perceptions of how spirituality is used by spir-itual practitioners.

The purpose of this assessment was for students to reflect on their changing notions of spirituality through a diary of developing ideas. The learning journal as a tool within the assessment armaments of HE educators has grown significantly in the 21st century as issues of student-focused teaching and student experience through formative assessment have been highlighted in HE pedagogy—a point affirmed by Chris Park; 'Previous writers have emphasised the ways in which journals, by focusing on the process of learning rather than the product of learning, provide valuable educational benefits'.[18]

Moreover, it was more than intellectual conceit to recognise that the tropes of 'journey' and 'progress' in literatures of spirituality are mirrored in the progress and journey involved in learning about these tropes. It was in part a pedagogical principle that students should reflexively engage with the development of their ideas and in part a

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[18] Park, C., 'Engaging Students in the Learning Process: The Learning Journal', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 27: 2, (2003) p. 184.

recognition of the fact that the body of students would be largely composed of individuals with intrinsic interests in spirituality that the learning journal was so appropriate as the assessment for this module.

> The learning journal is much more than just a log of what was being covered in the course, because producing it is a learning experience in itself. As one student (E) thoughtfully suggested, it is 'a learning journey more than a learning journal'. Like much of life, it is about the journey perhaps as much as the destination—the very act of writing the journal is much more important (certainly to the writer) than the finished product. Some of the more interesting journals made a virtue out of this, by documenting how the student's thoughts and understandings changed through time. (Park, 2003:190)

There are easily recognisable values in using learning journals. However, this researchers' previous experience of them (across OBU and as external for a number of programmes in other HEIs) raised flags of warning. First the students are not accustomed to this mode of writing and extensive explanation of the format is required. Second, even with a clear rationale for the use of learning journals students find it challenging to construct an extended piece of writing that is both personal and academic. Moreover, their attempts to provide the narrative of their learning can disadvantage them in achieving academic and critical learning outcomes. Third, it is equally challenging for markers to assess the quality of personal reflection, especially when the learning journal may be written in the form of a personal diary—there is a kind of discourse disjuncture that makes ascribing a specific mark and grade worryingly impressionistic.

Jennifer Moon, author of the influential text, *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Reflective Practice and Professional Development*, recognises that there are issues of quality and depth in student learning journals and prescribes exercises 'to encourage the deepening of reflection'.[19] However, this leads to a tension in the time allocated to the ostensible object of the module, *viz* spirituality, and teaching students about techniques for the assessment of their learning. While it is a valid

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[19] Moon, J., *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Reflective Practice and Professional Development*, 2nd Ed. (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 41.

pedagogical principle that assessment drives learning, there is an equal principle, outmoded in current pedagogies, that there are intrinsic values in providing learning opportunities that are not merely vehicles towards completing assignments. Indeed there is a common complaint in HEIs about 'instrumentalism' amongst students, where assignment success overrides the intrinsic elements of learning about the subject.

Wary of these possibilities the assignment for 'Spiritualities and Human Identity' was clearly defined around a broad 'frame'. The frame included a compulsory single specified coursework title with three sub-sections: A. Critical Reflections on the Variety of Meanings and Uses of Spirituality; B. Attractions of Spirituality in Modern Society; C. Personal Reflections on Spirituality as a Part of Human Identity. The process of student reflexivity was therefore both intrinsic to the design of the module and the student experience within the module. Moreover, the assessment both drove the learning experience and was aligned to achievement of the learning outcomes. From a pedagogical perspective this necessitated an explicit examination of each of these features, (reflexivity in learning, learning outcomes and the purposes of assessment) from the beginning of the module. Thus students were asked to discuss the nature of the assignment and their reactions to it.

> To begin to assess the potential for reflective thinking as a practice engendered in the use of learning journals, one can begin by assessing student perceptions and uses of the vehicle itself. What students feel about the required assignment can affect their performance in fulfilling the aim of achieving critical reflection. (Langer 2002:349)

Students stated that they were 'excited' and 'nervous' about the form of assessment—becoming more influenced by the latter as the deadline approached. As the module progressed their engagement with the learning journal from which they would derive the personal reflection was mixed. Some adopted a rigorous diary approach, examining their changing perspectives and reflecting on their individual perceptions, sometimes at the expense of the more academic critical reflections on other's uses and meanings of spiritualities. Other students chose a more formal approach emphasising the more traditional academic skills of summarising the literature and effacing the 'I' that the learning journal encouraged. Discussion about the nature and content of these journals was a preface to each taught session to further encourage the reflective

process. The summative assessment then grew out of this continuous formative engagement. From this single run of the module it is impossible to derive significant conclusions, though three observations provide some indicative points for further reflection on the use of learning journals, and which suggest a relative success for this mode of assessment: all the students passed the module, some with high grades, with an average mark above the whole course average; one student explicitly stated her personal reflections on spirituality were private and adopted the second formal mode, summarising key literature and concepts following the chronological sequence of the module; one student adopted the learning journal and three-part writing frame as the template for an independent study on the topic of contemporary funerary sites and rites.

Conclusions

It is perhaps worth noting that the authors, like many colleagues, bring to their work in Higher Education experiences from teaching Early Years, Primary and Secondary children in the maintained sector. Thus they bring to their teaching an understanding of the contexts in which their students have been situated previously, or to which they are professionally linked. Dominic is alert to how students are 'not accustomed' to the reflective mode the assessment demands, and Nick is aware of how 'multiple definitions' can exist for Early Years practitioners. Both of us from different discourses have accepted the fluid nature of the concept and practices related to spirituality—and accordingly set up learning and assessment opportunities that reflect that fluidity. We have paid attention to programme learning outcomes, benchmarks and sector requirements in order to facilitate a 'constructive alignment' of learning objectives.[20]

    A key principle has been to foster graduate skills of critical and reflexive thinking. In 'Young Children's Spirituality' students engaged

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[20] Biggs J., *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* 2nd Ed (Maidenhead: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also Reid-Bowen, P., and Robinson C., 'Staff Expectation and Student Experience: A Case Study of First Year Undergraduate Curriculum planning and Evaluation', *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies,* vol. 8, no. 1, (2008) p. 76.

in discussion on the VLE to reflect on the film extracts. In 'Spiritualities and Human Identity' the learning journal culminated in reflections on the concepts and personal journey undertaken by students through the module. These understandings inform their practice. There is room for a struggle for meaning, an ambiguity, for example in the spaces between organised religion and a more secular view of spiritual development. There is room too for a challenge to the notion of an orthodoxy (not necessarily in ecclesial terms) to which the student should subscribe to succeed. Perhaps most important of all, the notion that there can be learning—even a product from that learning—that arises from reflection but is not the subject of immediate scrutiny by assessors/markers suggests a belief that there remains space for personal reflection in Higher Education.

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Unseen Worlds:
Placing Children's Spirituality on the Map in Education Studies

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Teaching about spirituality in higher education departments outside of religion and philosophy can carry its own particular challenges, but those challenges are not necessarily ones that might be anticipated. This paper offers an overview of the creation of a module on children's spirituality in a department of education studies, describing its context, an outline of its content and students' responses to the course, together with a consideration of the issues arising from the module.

The birth of the module

Shortly after my gaining employment as a senior lecturer in education studies at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, our team was called to a meeting to discuss the 'exciting' prospect of revalidation. This was an opportunity to create a suite of optional modules for students on a three year BA/BSc (Hons) degree in Education and Subject Studies. Students spend 50% of their time in Education Studies and the other 50% studying a subject of their choice. The degree includes 15 weeks of placement which are undertaken in primary schools and a school for pupils with special educational needs, with further options in second and third years to apply for additional placements in either a primary or secondary school and/or in an alternative education setting such as a museum, art gallery or outdoor centre. The degree does not offer qualified teacher status but, after graduation, the majority move onto teacher training courses.

Revalidation provided scope to use the team's research expertise to influence teaching. As a specialist in children's spirituality, I proposed a final year module which would explore the place of children's spirituality in education. Teachers are required, by law, to promote the spiritual development of pupils in their care, introduced in the Education Reform Act 1988 and reiterated in subsequent laws including the Education Act 2002. Further, the Education (Schools) Act 1992 created the government inspection body, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), who were charged with the task of inspecting schools' provision for spiritual development alongside that for pupils' moral, social and cultural development.

Spiritual development thus has a natural place within England's school curriculum but despite this, initial teacher education often places little emphasis on it, leaving many teachers with an inadequate understanding of what it is and how it should be addressed in the classroom (Wright 2000). Given that the majority of our students choose to become teachers after completing this degree, the new module would also have a highly practical as well as theoretical outcome, being relevant to their future career. In their second year of the degree, students had undertaken an assessment task on the provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in their placement setting,

and so entered the third year with a basic understanding of the concepts.

The module was titled 'Unseen Worlds: Children's Spirituality', which refers to the hidden nature of their spiritual worlds; hidden because of society's lack of understanding and valuing of them and because children often do not share their experiences for fear of ridicule or dismissal (Hay and Nye 2006; Adams, Hyde and Woolley 2009). It was validated without being questioned (although it should be noted that some colleagues felt that it would be of little interest to students) as it sat comfortably within our remit, being closely aligned to the education curriculum in schools. Further, the university college has an Anglican foundation (although the module is not faith based) so with these two elements combined, there was overall institutional support for the module that other HEIs might not enjoy.

The structure and content of the module

The module is worth 10 credits, is timetabled for six sessions and has now run for three years, each time recruiting well in comparison with the options running alongside it (approximately 28 students per year). Across these sessions a range of teaching strategies is utilised including direct teaching, reflection, small and whole group discussion, brainstorming, debate, independent study and a practical activity. Through these strategies, theoretical and practical issues are explored. Key debates such as the definition of spirituality in the context of education are examined, and a critical approach to policy definitions is encouraged, including a deconstruction of government guidelines (SCAA 1995, Ofsted 2004). Practical issues are raised such as the lack of agreement over definition (Watson 2001) and the need to consider alternative terms to that of 'spiritual development' (Meehan 2002).

Theories relating to children's spirituality are examined alongside an investigation of children's spiritual experiences (including Hart 2003; Scott 2004; Hay and Nye 2006; Adams, Hyde and Woolley 2009). Emphasis is placed on the students developing empathy with children and of being open to different ways of understanding a reported experience. The students are supported in learning how to analyse an experience with appropriate literature. Attention is also

given to the implications for educators, to enable students to link theory with practice and develop ideas about how they will interact with children with regards to their spirituality.

Embedded into the course is a practical task which aims to convey that words are often inadequate for describing the spiritual in general, and spiritual experience in particular. This links with Best's statement:

> of all experiences, it is the spiritual which, it seems, is the most resistant to operational definition. At its worst, attempts to pin it down lead only to a greater awareness of its intangibility and pervasiveness. Best (2000, p.10)

Initially, for the first two years, this task was to create a piece of artwork, prose or poetry which depicted a spiritual experience—either one of their own or of one taken from the literature. A small number of students were uncomfortable doing this type of work because they felt that they did not have sufficient creative skills of this type. This potential scenario had been pre-empted and so the option to work collaboratively was given if they so chose. Nevertheless the task did not benefit all as some took a passive role, so a new initiative was introduced for the third year of the module's life which consisted of creating a multimedia project. This aligned with the university college's aim of extending the use of blended learning. The project was inspired by The National Association of Teachers of RE's (NATRE) annual Spirited Arts competition for young people aged 4-19, which is to create a project linking creativity to RE. Pupils send in entries under themes such as Mystery, Who is God, Spiritual Stories, Spiritual Space and Talking to God: where is God? (NATRE 2010).

Whilst most of the entries to NATRE's competition are in the form of drawings, paintings, or collage, recently entries have been submitted in the form of short films. Working closely with NATRE, I was able to show the undergraduates some of the pupils' movies as models which served as sources of inspiration. Students formed their own groups and managed their own project from design to presentation to the group, creating a two minute movie on a theme of their choice, themes such as 'Where is God?' and 'What is Spiritual?'

The assessment

Rather than writing a conventional essay, students are assessed by means of a brochure aimed at school governors, written from the point of view of a headteacher at a fictional school who is offering a rationale for why their school values spiritual development. A critical analysis of literature and theory is expected, together with a theoretical analysis of a child's spiritual experience which synthesises literature from a range of sources. An awareness of the practical implications of theory and children's experience, including difficulties, is included in the brochure.

The students' marks have been relatively high in comparison to the overall cohort's academic achievement with an average over three years of 25% of those studying spirituality obtaining 70% or higher (1st) in their assignment. This compares favourably to an average of 8% of the overall cohort comprising of an average of 160 students obtaining a first in their overall degree classification. (All assignments awarded 70% or higher are second marked and moderated and are subject to exam board approval.) This success was in part due to structured nature of the assessment, and the constructive alignment of tasks and learning objectives, but was also influenced by students' deep engagement with the subject.

Student evaluations

Student evaluations are consistently high. Each year, every component has achieved a grade 1 which equates to 80% or higher of students in the group agreeing and/or strongly agreeing with a statement. These statements relate to the content, quality of the teaching, effectiveness of delivery, opportunities to contribute to class, assessment criteria being clear, assessment tasks being linked to outcomes and clear expectations of what was to be learnt in the module and the availability of library resources. The students have, almost without exception, awarded this grade with 100% agreement. The lowest score, although still achieving an overall grade 1 but with a lower level of agreement than 100%, has applied to the availability of resources in the library. This is despite

efforts to engage students in accessing our e-resources, giving extensive handouts of reading and placing additional reading on the Virtual Learning Environment system which the statistics tracking facility shows were not accessed by all students in the group.

However other aspects of student evaluation need consideration, which were indicated in written comments on the evaluation sheet and in discussions. Firstly, response to the movie making task was mixed. Three written comments were offered on the evaluation sheets: one was positive, indicating that the task had helped the student clarify in their own mind what spirituality was. The other two responses were negative, indicating that the task was time consuming which they deemed problematic because it did not contribute to their assessment. Other indicators of negative feelings were implied when two groups did not have theirs ready for the group presentation (although one student in a group was ill) and did not subsequently submit them.

This negative response raises important issues for HE. It is, for example, assumed that undergraduates (perhaps excluding mature students) are digital natives (Prensky 2001) and are natural users of IT for both work and leisure. With the increased digitisation of the world, senior managers and external examiners seek to ensure higher components of virtual learning and use of e-technologies in modules. Yet there may be a conflict of interest in that many students do not utilise the VLE for straightforward purposes such as downloading reading or accessing notices from lecturers (as evidenced by the statistics tracking device). Further, there can be a mismatch in understanding of the purposes of education between lecturers and those students who have recently completed their schooling: these students have been subjected to a curriculum which is performative and focussed on results and league tables (Turner Bisset 2007) in which teaching to the test is the norm. Consequently, when in HE, many ask, 'why are we doing this? What does this have to do with our assessment?' as indeed some students asked in relation to the multimedia project. Lecturers, meanwhile, value learning *per se* and seek to encourage students to make broader links between the material they learn and what is used in their assessment.

Another type of learning…

The most significant finding about student responses to the module has not, however, derived from the formal evaluations but from an ongoing research project involving a questionnaire with open ended questions that students are invited to complete at the end of the module. The questionnaire was inspired by a concern that the learning objectives of the module were not necessarily capturing how students may be being affected by taking the module. The learning outcomes are academic in focus, including:

- acquire detailed knowledge of children's spirituality;
- synthesise a range of theoretical approaches to understanding children's spirituality.

Yet, during conversations in sessions during the first module it became apparent that other learning was occurring—learning that perhaps captured the very essence of spirituality—transforming, thought-provoking, and promoting reflection on matters of personal meaning and value as well as making sense of their own experiences.

Whilst the data has yet to be fully analysed, the initial finding is that a core number of students each year have benefited from engaging with the material on spirituality on a variety of levels which transcend the cognitive. Examples offered include a deep level of reflection on personal experiences, some of which had occurred in childhood and had been forgotten or had remained prominent since but had not been understood. Joshua wrote, 'I am glad of the opportunity to examine and question my beliefs in the light of more critical approaches and to further develop my own spirituality' whilst Amelia said that the course allowed her to relate more to herself and others.

Others have gained an insight into the richness of children's experiences which they had never associated with children before, and had not acknowledged how reflective some children are. For example, Carla stated 'It has made me think that children are 'deeper' thinkers than I realised' whilst Carrie commented, '[The module] made me realise how much children carry around with them under their care-free exterior'. There are frequent references to the fact that the course will positively impact on their future interaction with children, that they will listen more carefully to children and will give them more credit for

being able to construct their own meaning.

Of course, these findings which impinge on the transformative do not appear in formal evaluations which are disseminated to senior management and external examiners because these are not the questions asked on formal evaluation sheets. Yes, in this case, the formal evaluations are highly positive but they do not tell the whole story of the personal and professional impact of a module on many of its students.

Closing thoughts

Given the context of my department belonging to education, together with the faith affiliation of the university college, validating a module on spirituality was not an issue as it may be for others. This module can be categorised as successful in terms of recruitment, academic results and high student evaluations, and there has clearly been value for these students who are not necessarily achieving first class grades in their other work. However, a very real benefit has emerged in the transformative and reflective impact on many of the students—factors which are not assessed, and perhaps should not be assessed, but ones which would not have been given voice had I not invited students to express their thoughts on a research questionnaire.

Interestingly the negative student evaluations relating to a non assessed task and lack of library resources did not relate to the subject matter but are generic in nature. They could have occurred in any module on any topic, and indeed do, but were not anticipated responses when designing the content. They imply underlying issues such as attitudes towards the value of learning (i.e. that only what is assessed is important) and the nature of being an independent learner.

The spiritual development of children is important for many reasons, not least in the fact that it is a legal requirement for schools to promote it. It thus has a natural place in Education Studies and teacher training courses. However, there is little doubt that this module would not have the same impact if it were a compulsory module for all 160 students, in which case much of the teaching time would have been spent presenting rationales for why the spiritual development of children is even on schools' agendas. By virtue of being an optional module, only students with a genuine interest and desire to know more

elect to take it. Further, as students have a choice of modules to select from, group sizes are relatively small thus enabling a more nurturing approach and an environment which is more conducive to discussing personal thoughts and experiences. The danger, of course, with the current cuts in funding to higher education and associated reductions in staffing is that courses such as this, which are labour intensive with small numbers, may well begin to disappear.

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Spiritual Journey Board Game:

an Educational Tool for Teaching Spirituality in Higher Education

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Introduction

Spirituality teaching and learning in the context of health care and nursing can be challenging. Traditionally classroom teachings such as lectures, instructions and problem-based learning are all useful strategies that academics can utilise to promote students' understanding of the complex subject of spirituality. Although spirituality is not exclusively about religion and religious needs, some students tend to be dismissive when we explore spirituality because they sometimes

associate this concept with religiosity. For some the thought of religion conjures up in their heads images of religion and its alleged ill-effects which for some is counter-productive. There is the concern in health care and nursing that spirituality is under-addressed, with little attention being given to the interior lives of patients, in spite of the evidence that it is associated with patients' narratives about its beneficial effects for their health and well-being. This is not to say that all patients' spiritual needs in health are neglected, as some patients' spiritual needs are met by the staff of the Spiritual and Pastoral Care Departments in hospitals (Cornah, 2006). However, there is empirical evidence to suggest that health care professionals such as nurses may have to initiate actions that best address patients' holistic needs including theirs spiritual needs. My position is that if health care professionals are not able to recognise such needs when assessing the patients' health needs then they are mostly likely to overlook the spiritual care interventions that may be important to patients' lives. Indeed the health care literature shows that health care professionals are unable to address patients' spiritual needs sufficiently due to impoverished educational preparation in this dimension of health care, although its importance is acknowledged among many health care professionals and professional bodies such as Nursing and Midwifery Councils (NMC), the government's health policy directives and other agencies (Narayanasamy, 2006a; McSherry 2007).

As a subject specialist for diversity and spirituality teaching and learning, I have always explored alternative ways of teaching this subject as part of my efforts to create a better learning experience for students. I have tried various methods, ranging from lectures to small group didactic teaching and problem-based learning using clinical scenarios with varying degrees of success. It has been a real challenge to engage the less interested and more sceptical members of my class. The most resistant sceptics have been non-believers and those with antagonistic views towards religions. My concerns were to look for other innovative means to engage individuals with such inclinations. As I reflected and mulled over approaches to spirituality teaching, one early morning I woke with an inspirational idea about a board game as a spiritual journey. Boyle (1997) suggests that educational games are conducive to learning in that they encourage students' engagement as they find such learning delightful and powerful. My idea of an educational

game for spirituality teaching must have been implanted in my head by two other factors: first, my experiences with students, and secondly, my encounters with patients:

1) In one of the classroom sessions, some students reflected about their spiritual journey in terms of how their interior lives had been shaped by certain milestones in their lives or turning points when they reached a crossroad. It dawned on them that something spiritually was happening and how significant this had been to them in making key decisions in their lives, including their motivation to become health care professionals.

2) Some patients hinted to me that they sought comfort and healing through their spirituality including religions, but some found new meanings and purpose, though sometimes not through any recognisable religion or faith (Narayanasamy 2002).

These reflections, and the inspiration I felt on waking up in the early hours of the morning, compelled me to jot down quickly my ideas for the board game. I sketched the plan of the game and drafted some game rules to go with it. My family became the first tester of the prototype game and initial modifications were made to it in the light of their feedback. There then followed several trials of it in my teaching sessions as an introduction to spirituality and spiritual care to nursing students following courses to become registered nurses (RNs). Following each session the effectiveness of the game was evaluated and at the early stages the game's design and rules, were subjected to redrafts and further refinement. The final version of the spiritual journey game is given below.

There is evidence in the pedagogical literature that educational games tend to capture students' interest and engagement with the subject matter of the teaching session far more effectively than other conventional methods of teaching such as lectures and related didactic instructional methods (Boyle 1997). However, there is also the acknowledgement in the literature that educational games should not be a substitute for well tried conventional teaching methods such as instructions, particularly in the health sciences where safety is paramount to the health care and treatment. A recent systematic review on educational games in health sciences draws from several studies to suggest that high levels of knowledge were demonstrated among students exposed to educational games, but it is also inconclusive about

the overall effectiveness of such games (Blakely, Shirton, Copper et al. 2009). Furthermore, Jungman (1991) found, in an evaluation study of educational games, that students' responses were positive with indications of motivation, competition and non-threatening features. This evidence gave me the confidence in my approach to teaching spirituality to nursing students and health care practitioners using the spirituality game board. However, I also acknowledge that not all students find games beneficial to their learning experience (Blakely et al. 2009).

The Spiritual Journal Game

This educational game was developed in response to the concern in health care education that despite evidence about the importance of patients' spiritual needs, spiritual care education is impoverished (McSherry 2007; Narayanasamy 2006b). Although conventional teaching strategies including lectures and group sessions have been tried with varying degrees of success in teaching and learning spirituality, the sensitive nature of this subject appears to hinder academics and students' engagement with this topic due to fear of vulnerability and disclosure of personal beliefs and values. This educational board game is proposed as an alternative strategy for the teaching and learning of this complex but important subject.

The light hearted strategy of this educational game aims to inspire participants to gain insights into spirituality in patient care. The learning outcome of this game should improve spiritual care education, therefore benefiting health and well-being. The game draws attention to human potentials and vulnerability in terms of meaning making and purpose, connectedness, hope, love, peace and tranquillity, compassion, caring and so on. Participants should be able to appreciate through the game what caring companionship means to those in suffering when experiencing crisis and vulnerability as a consequence of illness or personal catastrophes.

This educational game sets 2-6 players on a personal spiritual journey to gain insights into how people use spirituality as a coping mechanism in their lives (Narayanasamy 2004). The game will prompt students to explore their own spiritual growth and development.

In several trials of this game, nursing students and practitioners,

as players, have undertaken the spiritual journey as an introduction to spirituality and well being. The game has been refined following evaluation feedback from game participants.

The game comprises a board, dice, rules and instructions, and facilitator's guidance notes. The game ends when the winner reaches the final destination on the board, which constitutes spiritual fulfilment in terms of spiritual growth and development. At the end of the game, the facilitator will proceed to explore what participants have derived from the game in terms of spiritual awareness in the context of health and well-being.

In the spiritual journey game that I had designed and used in my spirituality introductory session, students are encouraged to play the game to get some insights into spirituality and spiritual needs as a collective learning experience with peers. Throughout the spiritual journey, which takes place on the game board, it subjects the players with opportunities to collect spiritual resources cards which allow them to proceed with the game. The players could use the spiritual resource cards to keep out of spiritual distress and the winner is the one who arrives at the journey's destination which depicts spiritual fulfilment. At this point, the game ends and the discussion on spirituality is then facilitated by the session tutor.

Key features of the game

Before the game begins, the players are given instructions, both verbal and written, about the rudiments of the game and its rules. I have used the game with groups ranging from 6 to 70. In larger groups I have used up to 7 game boards. The players are asked to familiarise themselves with the various features of the games. The key features of the games are as follows.

Spiritual Well-being Centre

For the purpose of the game, the spiritual well-being centre is a virtual one. This centre is there to help spiritually distressed individuals to regain their spiritual strength by attaining meaning and purpose in their lives. The centre has both physical and staff resources to support indi-

viduals with provisions and space for personal retreat—for example it offers sacred space for those who want to have time for personal contemplations, quiet reflections, meditations and prayers. The centre offers the services of spiritual advisers and therapists for those who request support with their spiritual quest and search.

Players who collect the wild card or 4 spiritual distress cards are required to visit the spiritual well-being centre and stay there until they have made spiritual recovery. In this case, the players who resume the game are those who have had the opportunity to regain meaning and purpose (spiritual well-being) in their lives by accessing the facilities and resources of the centre. Players leave the spiritual well-being centre by rolling a '6' on the dice. If they don't roll a 6 on their first or second go whilst in the spiritual wellbeing centre, then they have to wait for their third go. As they exit from this centre, players take their place in the game by collecting a new beginnings card which indicates the number to locate their position.

Spiritual resource cards

Individual spiritual resource cards indicate spiritual attributes to depict spirituality and spiritual well-being. The more spiritual resource cards that players acquire, the better their state of spiritual well-being. Players can hand in their 4 spiritual resource cards to stay in the game should they get 4 spiritual distress cards. If they are unable to do this, then they are forced to go to the spiritual well-being centre.

At times players may end up with wild cards which normally indicate that they are facing major spiritual crisis in their lives (for example all catastrophes happening at the same time with events such as facing marital/relationship breakdown, being sacked from job and house repossession) and require time at the spiritual resource centre. In this case, if they possess 4 spiritual resource cards, then they may continue to stay in the game by surrendering them with the wild card.

Spiritual distress cards

Each spiritual distress card indicates attributes that are normally considered to generate negative experiences or spiritual distress. Players who have acquired 4 spiritual distress cards indicate that they are

facing severe spiritual distress and require time at the spiritual well-being centre. If they have do not have 4 spiritual resource cards to trade off the 4 spiritual distress cards, then they are required to spend time at the spiritual well-being centre.

Players can help others to stay in the game by donating spiritual resource cards. For example, they may let displaced players stay in the game by collecting a spiritual resource card from them, if they wish. (A displaced player is somebody who was on a particular spot, but then gets displaced by another player landing in the same spot, see rules).

Players may imaginatively improvise to allow flexibility in the way they treat their opponents, if it is at all possible. We all are companions in the spiritual journey as players constantly face ups and downs in the journey, with some making good progress, while for others the journey is hazardous as life is not straightforward. It is an expectation that players will collaborate and support each other in the journey. The game offers opportunities for self-awareness and reflections on human life, through empathy and insights into how spirituality offers coping mechanisms for individuals to regain some spiritual strength through new meanings and purpose.

Once the players have gone through the journey with the winner attaining spiritual fulfilment, the game ends and the session commences with personal reflections and subsequent discussion as indicated in the resource package that accompanies the board game.

The winner

The winner is the one who has attained spiritual fulfilment by negotiating and navigating through the smooth routes and rough terrains of the journey as part of the game. In attaining spiritual fulfilment the winner is entailed to collect all the spiritual resource cards from the game. At the end of the game all cards can be displayed to participants for personal reflections and discussion. Following the reflections on the game and insights derived, the discussion will focus on the spiritual resources and spiritual distresses to illustrate how spirituality features in people's lives and how this can be an important resource for coping with the challenges of life in health and illness.

Resource package

The resource package comprises the learning material for the session. The facilitator may use the presentation slides, found in the resource package, to introduce the concept of spirituality, spiritual needs, spiritual care and the seven steps of personal spiritual growth and development. The resource package could be used as independent learning material following the game.

Rules of the Spiritual Journey Game

This game entails players making a spiritual journey as part of their spiritual growth and development. Players gain greater awareness of what spirituality means in a light hearted manner by engaging in the game. There are ups and downs throughout the journey in which players make accelerated moves or move backwards several places. As players undertake the journey, they acquire both spiritual resource and spiritual distress cards. The winner is the one who completes the spiritual journey by acquiring spiritual resource cards from the box and other players, to depict that the winner has reached spiritual fulfilment. A reflective discussion starts on spirituality when the game ends.

> SR= Spiritual Resource
> SD= Spiritual Distress

1. 2 to 6 people can play the game.
2. Game starts when first one rolls dice with 6 or the next highest number; others follow by throwing any number.
3. Players move forward or backwards as per instructions in the card or board.
4. If you get 6, you can throw dice again.
5. When landed on SR (Spiritual Resource) collect Spiritual Resource Card, make sure all cards are different types in your possession. In most cases, landing on SR allows accelerated moves.
6. When landed on SD (Spiritual Distress) you collect Spiritual Distress Card and in some instances you may be

directed to go the spiritual well-being centre. See rule 7 how to get back into the game.

7. If a player acquires four spiritual distress cards, they move to the Spiritual Well-Being Centre for recovery and wait for their turn. The player waiting at this centre can only move by rolling 6 or on their third go. To join the game this player then picks a new beginnings card and takes position according to allocated number by returning 4 SD (Spiritual Distress) cards.

8. If someone lands on your position, you need to wait in the Spiritual Well-Being Centre, and join the gain game when you roll 6. At this point, you pick a new beginnings card and take position in the game according to the allocated number. (NB: the player who lands in your position has the option to allow you to stay in the game by accepting a spiritual resource card from you).

9. The game ends when the first one arrives at the finish point (100=Spiritual Fulfilment), and requires the exact number at the last stop to reach the finish point. For example, if you were on the '97' space, you can only roll a '3' to reach 100 or a '2' or a '1' to get closer; a '4' would not be accepted.

10. If you pick wild cards from the spiritual resource pack, this means that you had a spiritual crisis. You then proceed to the Spiritual Well-Being Centre to recover.

11. The winner achieves Spiritual Fulfilment, collects all SR cards from box and reads out the contents of the spiritual resource cards.

12. The runner-up and others read out the contents of the spiritual distress cards.

13. The facilitator leads the discussion on spirituality in the light of what insights participants have gained from the game, with regards to spiritual resources and spiritual distress. Facilitator resource package is used for all the sessions.

Dynamics of the game

The game is interactive and the players experience fun and frus-

trations. Players may collect spiritual resource cards and progress or collect spiritual distress cards and face delay in their journey. They can also land themselves at the spiritual well-being centre when they get a wild card with indications of extreme spiritual distress inflicted upon them. Moreover, the game offers opportunities for players to display empathy and altruistic gestures to their fellow travellers.

Reflections

At the end of the game, participants are asked to reflect about what they had derived from the game as follows: Take a moment to reflect on the spiritual journey you have undertaken. What insights have you gained from this game? You can look at the spiritual resource cards to aid your reflections. Jot down in the box below your reflections.

Examples of reflective points arising from students reflections:

- I thought the game was successful in showing that life can be shaken unpredictably and that spirituality can aid us in coping.
- I liked the game.
- It was a good idea and enjoyable but I would have preferred it to be accompanied by more practical, useful information about spirituality and nursing.
- Good fun, we wish we had longer to play.
- I loved the game, it helped me to understand spirituality, and my own spirituality as well.
- I love the game, you're welcome to do similar sessions for us.
- It was an interesting session which made the learning fun.
- It was fun, it aided learning in a relaxed environment, thanks.

The ASSET model

Following the discussion on the personal reflections about the game experience, there then follows a discussion on what we mean by spirituality and spiritual needs in the context of health care. The facilitator may use the teaching and learning package derived from the ASSET Model (Narayanasamy 2006b) that accompanies the game. I developed it as a framework for teaching spirituality in nurse education; to develop the reflections and discussions on spirituality and personal self-awareness. A CD comprising presentation slides as per details given below may used to support the session.

Self-awareness

What are my personal beliefs, values, prejudices, assumptions and feelings?

How may these influence the way in which I nurse?

Spirituality

What does holistic care mean to me?

What other beliefs are there?

What do I know about different belief systems including religious, humanist and secularist?

Spiritual nursing
(reflection on personal patient care; trigger questions)

Have I considered what things are important in this patient's life?

Am I open to verbal and non-verbal cues?

How does the patient relate to others? Who are the important people in the patient's life and how does she/he respond to them?

Is the patient displaying possible signs of spiritual distress?

Is the patient displaying any evidence of religious affiliation? (symbols, religious texts etc)

Am I facilitating a trusting, open nurse-patient relationship?

Am I providing the patient with privacy as well as opportunity to talk and express feelings?

Structure for the lesson (slides provided)

The following structure was used to develop the lesson.

What is spirituality?

Spirituality is considered to be 'the essence of our being and it gives meaning and purpose to our existence' (Narayanasamy 2006a). Our spirituality gives us a sense of personhood and individuality. It is the guiding force that gives us our uniqueness and acts as an inner source of power and energy, which makes us 'tick over' as people. Spirituality is the inner, intangible dimension that motivates us to be connected with others and our surroundings. It drives us to search for meaning and purpose, and establish positive and trusting relationship with others. There is a mysterious nature to our spirituality and it gives peace and tranquillity through our relationship with 'something other' or things we value as supreme.

Our spirituality sets us on a journey as part of our growth and development. It provides us with a sense of wholeness, stability, wellness, security, hope and peace. Spirituality can be an important source of wisdom, inspiration, meaning and purpose. According to Coyle (2002), spirituality 'motivates, enables, empowers, and provides hope'. It comes into focus at critical junctures in our lives when we face emotional stress, physical illness or death.

Religion

For most of us the word religion tends to create images in our minds of external things like buildings, religious officials and public rituals, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. For some individuals these are times when they come into contact with something to do with religion, with or without a deeper religious significance. Some people may be highly spiritual in nature but are not necessarily religious and others may be religious without being spiritual. Whilst some people may use religion as a medium to express their spirituality and as a way of relating to the transcendent (MacKinlay 2001), spirituality is more of a journey and religion may become the transport to help us in our journey.

Although there is evidence to suggest that membership of established 'mainstream churches' has dropped dramatically it is now esti-

mated that there may be many new religious groups in the United Kingdom (Brierley 2000). This may be due to the spiritual void that many people may be experiencing. The spiritual need for searching for meaning and purpose may act as intangible motivators for membership of New Religious Movements (NRMs).

Spiritual needs

Spiritual needs may be attained through meaning and purpose, loving and harmonious relationships, forgiveness, hope and strength, trust and personal beliefs and values, spiritual practices, concept of God/Deity, beliefs and practices, and creativity.

The search for meaning and purpose

- Finding meaning and purpose
- Finding meaning and purpose in illness and suffering
- Searching and seeking motivation as to why and how to live

Sources: Coyle (2002); Narayanasamy (2006b)

Love and harmonious relationships

- A universal need, especially love that is unconditional (no strings attached to it)
- Relationships with people, living harmoniously with people and their surroundings
- Deriving inner peace and security from love and harmonious relationships

  Sources: O'Brien (2003); Narayanasamy (2006b)

Forgiveness

- Guilt is a universal human phenomenon that needs to be overridden by forgiveness
- Believers may seek forgiveness through their faith/religion; however, non-believers may not have such opportunities but still need to find the means to be forgiven

  Sources: Narayanasamy (2006b; Macaskill 2002)

Hope and strength

- Sources, religious or spiritual, that gives hope and strength to go on living and face challenges of life
  Sources: Benson and Stark (1996); Thomsen (1998); Narayanasamy (2001); Koenig (2001).

Trust

- Emotional and physical security
- Stable environment and living give security and peace
  (Source: Narayanasamy (2006b)

Personal beliefs and values

- Life principles and values
- Religious and cultural beliefs
- Humanistic needs
  Source: Narayanasamy (2006b); O'Brien (2003)

Spiritual care

A problem based approach may be used systematically to plan care to meet the spiritual needs of their patients. Helping patients in their growth can lead to improvements in patients' overall well-being. There is the emphasis in the literature that the primary purpose of spiritual care is to help the person suffering from sickness or disability to attain or maintain peace of mind. The following steps may be used for spiritual care.

Assessment

Valuable information central to spiritual needs should be obtained from patients. The following Spiritual Assessment Guide may help with the gathering of such information (see table below).

Needs	Questions	Assessment Notes
Meaning and Purpose	What gives you a sense of meaning and purpose? Is there anything especially meaningful to you now? Does the patient/client make any sense of illness/suffering? Does the patient/client show any sense of meaning and purpose?	
Sources of Strength and Hope	Who is the most important person to you? To whom would you turn to when you need help? Is there anyone we can contact? In what ways do they help? What is your source of strength and hope? What helps you the most when you feel afraid or need special help?	
Love and Relatedness	How does patient relate to: • Family & relatives • Friends • Others • Surrounding Does patient/client appear peaceful? What gives patient/client peace?	
Self Esteem	Describe the state of client/patient's self esteem How does patient/client feel about self?	
Fear and Anxiety	Is patient/client fearful/anxious about anything? Is there anything that alleviates fear/anxiety?	

Needs	Questions	Assessment Notes
Anger	Is patient/client angry about anything? How does patient/client cope with anger? How does patient/client control this?	
Relation between spiritual beliefs and health	What has bothered you most being sick (or in what is happening to you?) What do you think is going to happen to you?	

Planning

The information from the application of above assessment guide may contribute to the formulation of spiritual care plans. When formulating the care plan, careful consideration should be given to the patient's individuality, the willingness of the nurse to get involved in the spirituality of the patient, the use of the therapeutic self, and the nurturing of the inner person (the spirit).

Implementation (Giving spiritual care)

Implementation is about spiritual care intervention based on an action plan which reflects caring for individual. It is necessary to develop a caring relationship which signifies to the person that he or she is significant. It requires an approach which combines support and assistance in growing spiritually. In order to implement spiritual care the following skills are necessary: Self-Awareness, Communication; Trust Building and Giving Hope (Narayanasamy 2001; McSherry 2000).

Evaluation

As part of evaluation, the following questions may be helpful:
- Is the patient's belief system strong?
- Do the patient's professed beliefs support and direct actions and words?

- Does the patient gain peace and strength from spiritual resources (such as prayer and minister's visits) to face the rigours of treatment, rehabilitation, or peaceful death?
- Does the patient seem more in control and have a clearer self-concept?
- Is the patient at ease in being alone? In having life plans changed?
- Is the patient's behaviour appropriate to the occasion?
- Has reconciliation of any differences taken place between the patient and others?
- Are mutual respect and love obvious in the patient's relationships with others?
- Are there any signs of physical improvement?
- Is there an improved rapport with other patients?

Seven Steps to Spiritual Growth and Development

Following the above presentation and discussion about spirituality and spiritual care in health practice, the facilitator may introduce participants to the seven steps to spirituality growth and development as way of helping them to become aware of their own spirituality. The Seven Steps offer strategies for participants to develop personal resources to enhance their spiritual well-being.

The Seven Steps will help you with your spiritual growth and development.

Step One: Positive Self Concept

- Consider yourself to be unique, rich in personality with diverse interests and qualities.
- Love yourself.
- Possess a positive self-looking glass: develop a positive self-image and self-esteem.
- Be generous in saying positive things about others, these will be reciprocated which in turn will be good for your self concept.
- Treat contradictions about yourself as unreal.
- The media creates false images and a totally unreal world around us. Do not let media illusions influence you.

Step Two: Self Awareness

- Appreciate your humanness.
- As part of your humanity you have strengths and weaknesses.
- You are not a superhuman, sometimes you are allowed to get things wrong.
- If things go wrong, do not put yourself down. We all make mistakes but some of us are good at covering them up.
- Recognise your strengths and weaknesses.
- Learn by your mistakes.
- Learn to be open and sincere. People will respect you for this.

Step Three: Meaningfulness and purpose

- Appreciate everything and every minute of your life.
- Be thankful of all your qualities as a person, with a body, mind and spirit.
- Nature/ your maker (whatever your beliefs are) created you to be a unique person of bright colour in the rich tapestry of life.
- Try to bring meaning to what you do, work, leisure, home etc.
- Accept that sometimes things can be meaningless and purposeless, but they never last. There is hope and work towards achieving meaning and purpose.

Step Four: Inner Peace and Be a Peace Maker

- Do everything possible to attain inner peace.
- Be contented with what you are by appreciating your uniqueness.
- Anger is destructive to self and others. There are no gains in being angry.
- Be a peace-maker
- Be the first person to make peace.
- Resolve conflicts at the earliest opportunity
- A peaceful person is always in control and generates a peaceful environment.

Step Five: Connectedness

- Be in tune with yourself.
- Seek opportunities to remain connected with others (family, friends) and your surroundings.
- If you are a believer, remain in touch with your God/Deity.

Step Six: Forgiveness

- Always forgive yourself and others.
- Self-blame and guilt feelings will only hurt you, not others, so why blame yourself?
- Resolve conflicts
- If you cannot easily forgive, learn to forgive, for example, writing it down.
- Putting thoughts/expressing feelings into writing may provide the emotional catharsis.

Step Seven: Create Space and Time for your Self

- Create a space in your accommodation, which you can call a personal/sacred space for yourself. A place where you can go and meditate/reflect undisturbed.
- Let others know you need time to be in your sacred space.
- Meditate or do relaxation exercises or pray, if you can. Do this regularly, and see results.

Conclusion

This game and its trials demonstrate how a small idea can be nurtured and translated into a potential resource for the teaching and learning of complex subjects such as spirituality, especially as a means to engage sceptical and antagonistic students with misconceptions. As in the case of any educational game, teaching may evoke unpredictable reactions affecting the educational milieu that may be detrimental to learning. As a consequence teachers may face challenges as how best to salvage the situation that is detrimental to learning. Educational games such as this offer opportunities to create desirable conditions, where mutual respect, sensitivity and understanding are required, to promote student

engagement and tolerance to diverse and contentious opinions that may occur when the intricacies of spirituality and spiritual needs are explored.

I have conducted several sessions so far, and apart from earlier teething problems with the game rules, this education game is proving to be popular with students. The students' qualitative feedback from the earlier sessions helped to refine the rules to eliminate ambiguity related to some areas. The refinement has rendered the game as a useful resource for teaching spirituality to both students and experienced health care practitioners returning to pursue with learning beyond registration courses. It is acknowledged that the teaching using this game is evolving and each spirituality session can be unique because sometimes spirituality evokes unpredictable reactions and it is the teacher and not the game who has the responsibility to address the class in a mutual and compassionate manner. Although students' qualitative feedback indicates largely positive comments, it is my intention to conduct evaluation studies of this game using quantitative measures to produce statistical evidence about its usefulness as teaching tool. It transpired from later sessions that this game could be adapted for teaching religious and ethical studies and leadership courses where the emphasis is in creating organisational well being, a recurrent theme in the current climate of fiscal retrenchment. I will be exploring opportunities to work with colleagues from these subject areas to adapt the game for their purposes as it has great potential as a teaching and learning resource.

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Spirituality in Healthcare, Social Work and Education

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My recent experience in teaching about spirituality comes from directing an MA programme delivered at the University of Hull. The MA arose after a number of years of activity among academics drawn from different faculties and departments in the University, specifically nursing, education, social work and the humanities. Members of the interdisciplinary group worked on a range of projects before eventually forming the Centre for Spirituality Studies.[1] The Centre engages in research independently and with other similar research centres throughout the UK. One of the Centre's aims from its inception has been to provide postgraduate teaching about spirituality. The task of designing and delivering the MA in Spirituality Studies fell

to me.

This paper is the outcome of my reflections upon the strengths and weaknesses of the MA. I will try to remark upon both evaluations, but the emphasis of the paper is upon points of dissatisfaction. The MA was worked out collectively, with the intention of reflecting what academic practitioners have to say about spirituality and conveying this to learners so that they might benefit from this knowledge in their professional practice. I myself am not a practitioner, and so when I come to reflect upon the content of the MA in private, as it were, the interests and concerns of professional service providers are not at the forefront of my thoughts. Theoretical considerations gain in importance, and it may be that these are too remote from matters to do with meeting the spiritual needs of service users to be of any practical worth. Nonetheless, the study of spirituality cannot be confined to the legitimate interests of public service professionals, nor the research methodologies of academic practitioners. As long as it is a valid aim of higher education to develop critical self-awareness concerning one's own practice, criticisms of a more theoretical sort are due consideration.

The Masters programme has three core modules. Theorising Spirituality examines different conceptualisations of spirituality. It does not attempt to reconcile different approaches, but rather to represent spirituality as it appears in the helping professions. It therefore identifies spirituality in the context of secular welfare services. A second core module, Researching Spirituality, introduces students to the distinctive methodologies that are involved in the study of spirituality, ranging from hermeneutics and phenomenological analysis to the use of specialist research databases. The final core module is a Research Seminar series in spirituality: students attend seminars delivered by academics and also make presentations themselves on their work in progress. In addition to these core elements there are optional modules. Three specialise in spirituality in social work, education, and nursing. They examine the specialist literature on spirituality in the separate disciplines, relating it to professional practice and policies. The MA also has besides these a range of optional modules available as part of the University's postgraduate training scheme. Finally, a

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[1] See the Centre for Spirituality Studies website at: **http://www2.hull.ac.uk/fass/css.aspx**.

further core element is the MA Dissertation, in which students reflect upon aspects of their professional practice.

On the whole, the MA contextualises spirituality, which is to say that it represents spirituality as this is known relative to the policies and operations of public services in health, social welfare and education. The sociological and historical structures of these services are undoubtedly important to the way in which spirituality is represented. Such an approach, which one might say is common in social scientific researches, is not entirely unproblematic; at least not when one considers that the reality of spirituality is also known in other ways. Of particular importance for the purposes of this paper is the point that spirituality is understood both philosophically and theologically in the Christian tradition. From this perspective, spirituality informs epistemology, in the sense that the spirit presents itself in knowing and that knowing takes in the presence of spirit. The paper considers the implications that follow from this for the status of questioning concerning spirituality in research carried out by academic practitioners in the helping professions.

The declaration for spirituality that is found in Christian theological and philosophical reflection may be perceived as a source of difficulty for some social scientific researchers. It is, after all, three and a half centuries since spirituality has been a regulating idea in any science; three and a half centuries since Cartesianism split the mind from itself, and the mind ceased to elevate nature to the spiritual plane. Contemporary research methods—the ethnographies, the discourse analyses, the sociological researches—tell us that spirituality is so diverse, so plural and so fragmented that, in fact, it cannot refer to anything that displays unity. And these researches are not wrong, inasmuch as they are scientific, i.e., inasmuch as they seek evidence, formulate inductive conclusions about the state of spirituality, and faithfully pursue an epistemology that is sundered from ontological principles.[2] Indeed, under these conditions, they are right to conclude

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[2] The observations made in this paper are the outcome of reflections on a large number of publications from academic practitioners in education, social work, and health care. References will be made to illustrative publications. No attempt is made to give a comprehensive bibliography. On epistemology and spirituality see Betts, C. E., 'Progress, Epistemology and Human Health and Welfare: What Nurses Need to Know and Why,' *Nursing Philosophy*, 2005, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 174-188; Gillen,

that spirituality exists in a veritable marketplace of ideas.[3]

At the same time, there is much to consider in the complaint that may be made against these researches, namely that despite taking spirituality as their theme, they do not say how the objective reality of spirituality is known. It is by no means certain that the methods of social and cultural analysis which are typical of the researches of academic practitioners do actually have either the spiritual or its concept in view. If there is in fact some confusion of the objects of the historical and social sciences, on the one hand, with the spiritual objects of philosophical comprehension on the other—such as truth, goodness, beauty, purity, holiness, simplicity, intellect, immensity, power, spirit, being, etc.—then this is due, at least in part, to the centuries of philosophical neglect of spiritual matters. Nonetheless, within the Christian tradition, the spirit is known to be the formal object of philosophy, which is to say that reason grasps spirit as an unlimited concept. It should be added immediately that spirit is at the same time a formal object of theology, and therefore something also known by the act of faith.

Indeed, it is as an object of theology that spirit appears at the heart of philosophical reflection. Were this not so, then reason alone would grasp spirit as concept, à la Hegel, and the self-revelation of the sovereign and free God would be excluded from the topic of spirituality. In its concept, spirit transcends the distinction between finite and infinite being. But in the Christian tradition, it is not the metaphysical universality of spirit that is taught, but rather the self-revelation of spirit as the mystery of being itself. Such a revelation cannot be reduced to the concept, but can be grasped only with the help of the divine illumination by grace. The act of faith guides philosophical reflection to its knowledge of the spirit.

It is also relevant to point out that in the Christian tradition the spirit is not understood to be the material object of the social and his-

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M. A., English, L. M., 'Controversy, Questions, and Suggestions for Further Reading,' *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, (2000) no. 85, pp. 85-92; Estanek, S.M., 'Redefining Spirituality: a New Discourse', *College Student Journal*, (2006) vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 270-281; Hurtado, A., 'Theory in the Flesh: Toward an Endarkened Epistemology,' *Qualitative Studies in Education*, (2003) vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 215-226.

[3] Heelas, P.; Woodhead, L.; Seel, B.; Szerszynski, B. and Tusting, K., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*, (London: Blackwell, 2004).

torical sciences. This is a recent psychological innovation. There is, however, no social scientific research that can determine the answer to the question of spirituality, for unlike the many other questions from which it has unburdened philosophy and theology, this question, concerning the reality and the essential nature of the spirit, is definitively philosophical and theological.

This is not to suggest that spirituality is an improper subject for social scientific research. Difficulties arise only when methodologies are applied with apparent insouciance regarding spiritual traditions.[4] For instance, when one speaks of spirituality within religious traditions, one is referring to spiritual practices that belong to a way of life. A person's spiritual practice draws upon the example of how other people have lived, learning of this from certain traditions that have grown up and been remembered through the generations. There emerge not only recognisable spiritual practices but also a body of literature reflecting upon these. With this comes the possibility of critical reflection upon the study of spirituality within particular traditions; for example, on the different spiritual schools, movements and personalities that have been recorded in history. Difficulties in comprehension are caused when spirituality is represented without reference to such sources. Generally, one does not find a great deal of such information in the research literature of academic practitioners. There is reason, then, to suspect that research methods are intended not to lead to objective knowledge about spirituality—i.e., not to guide the mind to attain the philosophical and theological objects to which the concept of spirituality refers—but rather to record data about social behaviours.

This is all the more puzzling when one considers that the common element of contemporary studies in spirituality is the ubiquitous theme of transcendence. The claim (which is virtually unanimous-

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[4] An important exception is Swinton, John and Mowat, Harriet, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (London: SCM, 2006). Some others that take notice of traditions are Weld, C., and Eriksen, E., 'Christian Clients' Preferences Regarding Prayer as a Counseling Intervention,' *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, (2007), vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 328-341; Mountain, V., 'Prayer is a Positive Activity for Children—a Report on Recent Research', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, (2005), vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 291-305; Ortega Ruiz, P., 'Moral Education as Pedagogy of Alterity,' *Journal of Moral Education*, (2004), vol. 33, no. 3, p. 271-289.

ly accepted among researchers) that spirituality is directed toward a transcendent object, towards a reality which is in itself transcending, ought to lead to considerations of what is encountered in some religious practices as a real and infinite object. But research does not go this way. There is, quite simply, no active engagement with religious knowledge. This may be observed especially in the research of social work and healthcare academics, which is sometimes resistant to the authenticity of religious experiences.

In these circumstances, perhaps, engagement with philosophy might be expected instead. Philosophical thinking is itself an inherently spiritual activity; at least as it is understood within the Christian tradition. Philosophy has its recorded history and its critical literature, of course, but apart from this it is essentially the quest for truth, for the knowledge of that which is real and of the being of all things. In this sense, philosophy is fundamental to each person's spiritual nature. I admit that this does not describe what goes on in philosophy departments in our universities. But this is hardly pertinent, since they have abandoned the topic of spirituality and, besides, say nothing either of spirituality in professional practice. Since our concern is with spirituality, the character of philosophical knowledge as it is understood within religious traditions has special relevance, and here philosophical reflection is thought of as possessing knowledge of spiritual realities.[5] The chief quality of thought in view is that it is sapiential. That is to say, philosophical reflection is thought that concerns the wisdom which inheres in each person and which is encountered inwardly as a way of knowing.

Truth as it is known by reason and as it is given in faith are two forms of reflection proper to spiritual life. Yet what is encountered in the research of academic practitioners from the helping professionals is, in most cases, a view of spirituality that recognises neither wisdom nor faith as forms of knowledge. This, in my experience, is the fundamental difficulty in teaching about spirituality. The MA in Spirituality Studies programme is designed, as has been mentioned, for professionals in the healthcare, social care/social work, and educational sectors. Workers in these areas have it as part of their roles to indentify and provide for what are termed the 'spiritual needs' of clients. The

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[5] See Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter, September 15, 1998.

research carried out by academic practitioners offers constructions of 'spirituality'. They represent spirituality as 'known' on the basis of empirical evidence, but without dwelling upon the reality of that which is known; and also without reflecting upon the status of knowing as a spiritual act. Spirituality, it is suggested, is simply 'known' according to empirical research methods.

This is perhaps the single most decisive characteristic of studies of what is sometimes called 'secular spirituality'. Spirituality is conceived as lacking any apologetic intent of any sort: there is no truth about spiritual possession to be defended. Spirituality attests to nothing other than itself, neither to being nor to God; it affirms nothing that goes forth as a revelation, nor that is salvifically willed by God; it does not know the unity, the truth, or the simplicity of being, nor the image of the God who is; nor yet does it know the effective symbols of this image, nor that this image dwells within us. Furthermore, in strictly philosophical terms, it does not attest to the act of being, nor to the intentionality of spiritual objects, nor their reality, whether potential or actual, nor either to their causes.

Since such knowledge is not pragmatic, it is easily disregarded; and, it should be added immediately in mitigation, it is expedient to disregard this, since the reserach funding bodies for the professional disciplines support research concerning evidence based practice. This, in any case, is the overriding impression given by the majority of the approximately five hundred bibliographical items that I read when researching what academic practitioners say concerning spirituality in the professional disciplines. The great majority of these items are articles published in professional journals. There are also several dozen books, mostly in education and nursing. None of them are of the sort that is produced as 'lifestyle' or 'body-mind-spirit' literature for popular markets. All are academic publications, with a few official publications included.

The questions that arise for me out of this reading are these. How is spirituality reduced to the level of mundane phenomena in education, social work, and health care research literature? How does it become a collection of truths that serves us, or more exactly that serves the secular mandate of professional service systems? Why does the concept of 'spirituality' no longer evoke a truth that we may serve? Why should we be convinced that the spiritual possession which a

person may desire is achieved in idea only and not in reality?

On the whole, the research literature tries to represent spirituality as purely mundane and categorical, as a chosen object upon which a person may decide, and which he or she may at a later time deem to be inadequate and replaceable. To get a precise view of the matter I will explore three reductions of spirituality which are typical of current research. Collectively these observations comprise an argument that the application of empirical research methods to spirituality achieves a rigorous reduction of the subjective conditions of spirituality; with the unfortunate outcome—and this is the chief critical point that I would emphasise—that the field of unconditional givenness which opens up in spiritual experience is unacknowledged. 'Spirituality' emerges as consciously affected by the concrete questions of the present-day individual. It is represented as being about the individuality of each person, defined as it were by their life-history, and understood as a narrative or text. In general, spirituality is understood with reference to culture and social context, but without judgement concerning true being.

Self-identities

On the whole, the professions of health, social work, and education treat spirituality as a complex, contemporary cultural phenomenon that in some way obliges professional praxis to submit to the experience of service users. Definitions and explanations of spirituality in health care, social work, and educational research literature reflect the service roles of professionals in the major institutions of the secular state. The advantage of studying spirituality in this way is that it enables us to reckon with the secular as a dimension of spirit.

More exactly, it enables consideration of one of the most basic meanings of secularity, namely that the subjectivity of human freedom is factual and historical, rather than transcendental. This is effectively to withdraw from spirituality any regulative function in relation to the epistemological principles of educational, nursing and social work practice. Or, to put this another way, it is to question the conformity of spiritual truths to the state of professional knowledge. Such conformity is typically secured on an intersubjective model of truth, for instance through the use of research methods such as discourse or narrative

analysis.

This is a major contribution to our understanding of spirituality; one that, perhaps, is likely only when the approach taken arises from practical experience of service provision. Academic practitioners tend to view spirituality as an expression of the secular consciousness of subjectivity, as a narration or recitation of the secular conditions of subjective identity, which leave the content of philosophical and religious doctrines alone.[6] The emphasis falls upon subjective experience and subjective self-consciousness, with particular attention to spiritual accounts of self-identity. Such an approach is valuable not only for its objective content, but also in causing renewed consideration of the relationship between the materiality of the individual and the spirituality of the transcendental subject. The validity of this contribution to knowledge about spirituality cannot be doubted.

At the same time it should be borne in mind that what are recounted as experiences of spirituality may, or may not, correspond with objective knowledge of spiritual realities; research findings have to be tested further, beyond the warrant that is provided by the application of social scientific research methodologies. A great obstacle is erected to viewing spirituality objectively when it is presupposed that the processes of cognition are wholly mediated by cultural conditions such as language, existing beliefs, etc. This has the consequence that the mind cannot apprehend spiritual objects, since spiritual discourses are supposed only to have figurative meaning. Indeed, such factors justify the application of qualitative methodologies in the effort to accurately describe the appropriation of the spiritual things in any given area of life. But such an approach fails to consider that spirituality may entail an understanding of cognition in its own terms. The

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[6] Kofer, B. K., 'Beliefs about Knowledge and Knowing: Integrating Domain Specificity and Domain Generality: A Response to Muis, Bendixen, and Haerle', *Educational Psychology Review*, (2006) vol. 18, no. 1; J. Campbell, Arnold, S., 'Application of Discourse Analysis to Nursing Inquiry', *Nurse Researcher*, (2004) vol. 12, no. 2., pp. 30-41; Sanga, D. and Sahoo, A. K., 'Social Work, Spirituality, and Diasporic Communities: the case of the Sathya Sai Baba Movement,' *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, (2005) vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 75-88; Park, Yoosun, 'Culture as Deficit: a Critical Discourse Analysis of the Concept of Culture in Contemporary Social Work Discourse', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, (2005) vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 11-33; Björnsdottir, K. 'Language, Research and Nursing Practice', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, (2001) vol. 33, no. 2., p. 159-60.

faculty of thought, in some philosophical traditions, signifies the spiritual and cognitive power of the soul.[7] The spiritual faculty has functions other than those of reciting subjective identity or religious/spiritual beliefs; it exercises judgement, reason, reflection, self-consciousness, attention, and in general those modes of personal activity that exhibit a cognitive power of a higher order. From this perspective, the study of spirituality involves a second-order reflection upon epistemological principles.

Academic researchers in spirituality are keen to point out a contrary view (one supported by contemporary psychology), when they apply notions of intelligence to the emotional and even the sensuous modes of cognition. It is typical for researchers to laud this tendency under the sobriquet 'holism'.[8] Whether this is anything more than a device to rule out the possibility that spirituality may involve its own positive doctrine concerning cognition is as yet an unexamined question.

The concept of 'holism' is thought to indicate that the person is to be looked at in a holistic way, with a greater awareness of the capacity for imagination and creativity, for emotion and feeling, and not just as a calculating and instrumental being. However, if we consider not only the inclusive terms that are associated with holism, but also what the concept signifies, namely a certain exercise of judgement that is critical of rationalist and idealist epistemologies, then we

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[7] Aristotle, *De Anima*, ii, 3.; Albert the Great, *De Intellectu et Intelligibili* and *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroem*; St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas*; idem. *Summa Theologica*, 1a, 79.

[8] For example, Taggart, G., 'Nurturing Spirtuality: a Rationale for Holistic Education,' *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, (2001) vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 325-339; Vogel, L. J., 'Reckoning with the Spiritual Lives of Adult Educators,' *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, (2000) no. 85, pp. 17-27; O'Brien, M. E., *Spirituality in Nursing: Standing on Holy Ground*, (Sudbury, Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1999); Miles, Andrew, 'On the interface between science, medicine, faith and values in the individualisation of clinical practice: a review and analysis of 'Medicine of the Person' Cox, J., Campbell, A. V. & Fulford, K. W. M, ed. (2007)', *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, (2009) vol. 15, no. 6, pp. 1000-1024; Bush, Tony; Bruni, Nina, 'Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Holistic Care: a Relational Interpretation', *International Journal of Palliative Nursing*, (2008) vol. 14, no. 11, pp. 539-545; Watts, Jacqueline H., 'Journeying with Morrie: Challenging Notions of Professional Delivery of Spiritual Care at the End of Life', *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, (2008) vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 305-319.

may appreciate that judgement of a higher order of reflection concerning spirituality is implied, one which understands that spirit exists in relation to the Absolute. Indeed, nothing could be more 'holistic' than the identity of knowing and being that is caused in the act of encountering the absolute Other; which is to say, nothing is more 'holistic' than the ability to declare 'You are'.

What I wish to suggest is that any definition of 'spirituality' should include not only the terms in which it is represented, but also the spiritual meaning of knowledge of the Other, or one might say of the being of spirituality in the act of discerning spiritual realities. The discernment of spiritual realities is the gift of those who exercise judgement, and not only of those who apply research methods. It is the intellect that gives a thing its spiritual meaning. The question of the 'whole person', i.e., of the human subject and its freedom, cannot come more clearly into focus when discussing spirituality than in this way.

If this is correct, and the intellect does indeed have a constructive role, rather than simply a declarative role, in what is meant by spirituality—and further this role is beyond that of society but is rather of an essentially personal nature—then the direction provided by both philosophy and theology needs to be followed. What the histories of these disciplines show is that spirituality is conceptualised with reference to the Absolute.

Historically, the great point of dispute is whether the human subject is understood as having the same substance as, or as being an emanation from, the Absolute; or, on the contrary, whether human subjects can have relations with the Absolute as one person with another. It can be seen that the great creation myths as well as some rationalist and idealist modern philosophies are variations on the first option; while the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions teach the second. But in all cases, fundamental anthropological questions of philosophical and theological significance are asked. The relation that in some way distinguishes the self from the Absolute ensures that the concept of the 'whole person' is more than an empty abstraction, and that it can be defended as the transcendental condition of spirituality.

By contrast (and despite its explicit interest in 'holism'), what is found in the research literature of education, social work, and health care academics is, generally speaking, a predominant emphasis upon humanist interpretations of subjectivity. There is on the whole a funda-

mental lack of confidence in, indeed a positive suspicion of, anything that is not grounded in us. The modernist assumption that all things are realised insofar as they are ascertained by us—that this separatist epistemology, rather than the active judgement, constitutes spirituality as something distinct in quality—is decisive in the methods and contents of education, health and social care researches. The suggestion of a foundation of spirituality in anything other than ourselves is often dismissed as biased opinion.

Yet to think realistically about spirituality clearly involves more than the application of empirical research methodologies. It involves intellectual activity, especially judgement. At the very least one may hope for a retrieval of philosophical conversation concerning human understanding.[9] For even without an appeal to religion, the understanding tells us that knowledge involves an actual relationship to spiritual realities. It tells of relations that precede the epistemological and psychological category of the subject that posits itself. Each individual subject understands its being self-aware, which is the great sign that the human subject contains within itself of a capacity for the Absolute.

Empiricist epistemology

The insight mentioned above in passing, that the human subject may relate to the Absolute as one person to another, is a spiritual and a religious one. It is also a difficult one for practitioners to deal with in their research; perhaps even the most difficult. The requirement that research funding bodies support evidence based research promotes the obverse idea, namely that empirical science alone can reach objective knowledge and that, consequently, knowledge of an essentially personal nature has at best the function of support for the sciences;[10] and this

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[9] It would be wrong to give the impression that none is taking place. Take a couple of examples from education theory: Verhesschen, P., 'The Poem's Invitation': Ricoeur's Concept of Mimesis and its Consequences for Narrative Educational Research', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, (2003) vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 449-465; Simon, R. I., 'Innocence Without Naivete, Uprightness Without Stupidity: the Pedagogical Kavannah of Emmanuel Levinas', *Studies in Philosophy & Education*, (2003) vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 45-59.

[10] Shahjahan, R. A., 'Spirituality in the Academy: Reclaiming from the Margins

leaves metaphysical judgements with possibly no discernible role whatsoever.[11]

However, philosophical inquiry is not merely a matter of confirming the epistemological criteria of the sciences. Philosophy possesses an idea of real and objective knowledge according to which philosophy itself—and let it be said theology also—is capable of knowledge. A search for truth is intrinsic to philosophy, just as a claim to truth is intrinsic to every act of faith. To distance assertions about spirituality from claims about truth is to mistrust reasoning itself. In general, however, it can come as no surprise that judgement about spirituality is scarcely practiced in published research. This is a consequence of the rejection of the philosophy of being in our culture (including our universities), and with this the rejection of the different orders of spiritual knowledge that have a supreme personal principle as their cause. A corollary to the oblivion of being is the widespread assumption of antirealism as well as constructivism in conceiving of any philosophical or theological objects, such as being, truth, or spirit. This is a working assumption in empirical researches concerning spirituality.

The consequent proliferation of specialised knowledge about spirituality in educational, health and social work research proceeds under the guidance of diverse epistemological principles, which is to say of methods. All this effort revolves around the conviction that there is no declarative truth corresponding to spiritual realities (especially the existence of God and the creation). For all its objective content, empiricism about spirituality weakens any connection between ontological causes and epistemological principles. It systematically reduces any knowledge of spiritual realities to opinion. What is sought after by researchers are data, the material from which may be fabricated an intersubjective—or even an interprofessional—consensus about spirituality. The 'truth' about spirituality thus consists in its efficient and utilitarian aspects.

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and Evoking a Transformative Way of Knowing the World', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, (2005) vol. 18, no. 6, pp. 685-711. Idem, 'Reclaiming and Reconnecting to our Spirituality in the Academy', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, (2004) vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 81-95.

[11] From the perspective of metaphysics, the role of reflection upon judgement is to understand knowledge according to the order of being.

This is symptomatic of a difficult problem for contemporary intellectual culture and its standing towards both philosophy and theology: how does one reconcile knowledge in the human sciences with religious conscience (both natural and theological)? It is one of the most important (yet still outstanding) tasks of research in spirituality to delineate a resolution which accommodates religious knowledge. Yet this should be an urgent task since there is religious knowledge, just as there is spiritual discernment. Because these are more abstract realities than the inductive methods of the social sciences can represent, the only possibility of a settlement concerning the question of spirituality would appear to come from the religious traditions.

Take, for instance, the religious sensibility of dependency, which accompanies the spiritual awareness of the Absolute as different in nature from the world yet knowable as in a personal relationship. This sensibility is in itself of vanishing significance in epistemology. But it is a curious situation that researchers in education, health and social care are aware of it as an important aspect of their practice, which involves daily experiences of profound dependency. The unfortunate thing is that while this knowledge precedes reflection upon spiritual matters, the adopted epistemic standards for research in spirituality point in other directions. More exactly, the awareness of absolute dependency precedes reflection upon the unveiling of being (*aletheia*); that is, upon the truth as something that is allowed to appear, rather than as something decided upon. At variance with this is the cultural presup-position that being is not revelatory; that, in the present technological age, being reveals nothing. This cultural and existential condition makes even the possibility of spiritual knowledge appear intolerable, with its suggestion of the nearness of mystery, not to say of religion.

If we wish to gain an appreciation of what this means for the state of questioning concerning spirituality, we need only notice that the research literature says little about those dimensions of life which are tied to the supernatural unveiling of being. Take, for instance, the case of prayer to God the Father. The research literature in the professional disciplines provides no description of prayer whatsoever, even though Christian liturgical worship is arguably an instance of special impor-tance when examining spirituality. For the Christian liturgy can be seen as the negation of secular humanist spirituality (which is, as has been mentioned, an underlying assumption of much research activity).

Liturgical worship implies a critique not only of 'religious experience'—so often the point of reference for empirical researches in spirituality—but also of categorical knowledge concerning subjectivity generally. Because Christian liturgical worship represents in practice the historical conditions for the transcendence of human nature (which is to say the means of supernatural grace apart from any claim to earthly existence), it raises the question of spirituality as transcendence towards God and of humanity being rendered entirely spirit. Liturgical practice gets before the phenomenon of 'mineness' or 'selfhood', since in worship God enacts a relationship that is prior to each person's historical destiny.

Nothing of this, however, is acknowledged or even considered in published research, despite the fact that the means of grace, which is to say the Church, and the practice of Christian liturgy (especially in the form of sacramental rites), are present in schools, hospitals, and charities. A reasonable conclusion to draw about the state of questioning—reasonable at least if one assumes a realistic attitude towards liturgy—is that research in spirituality needs in some degree to displace current epistemological priorities; it needs to introduce inflections of absence, otherness, difference and unknowing. If this is correct, then what should be encouraged is a kind of knowledge of subjectivity that emerges and is experienced only inasmuch as it is from another; a knowledge of subjectivity as stretched between two poles of freedom, the divine and the human. Naturally, such an epistemic posture would draw research closer to theology than is presently the case, or at least to theology that aspires to express the mystical knowledge and experience whose cause is the personal God.

This kind of knowledge—should it be admitted as such—meets the requirements of worldly concerns for service provision when the profound desire of oneself is satisfied only through the authentic recognition of others. In this kind of logic, knowledge of existence and of freedom becomes dialogic. Caution is required, as E. Levinas has shown, lest knowledge of the good shining in the face of the other simply masks an orientation to self-interest and autonomy.[12] In Christian liturgy, however, intentionality is sustained by unconditional

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[12] Levinas, E., *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 72-3.

openness towards the Holy Spirit, and the other is not merely regarded by us, but is spoken to us by God along with the fundamental address of Himself which is accepted in prayer. Love of God and neighbour is the principle which informs prayer.

Historicism

The references that have been made to the Christian liturgy—which is to say, to God's self-disclosing action and to the free human response made in the name of Christ—will hardly impress the majority of academic practitioners who carry out research on spirituality, and who are, after all, directly concerned with what goes on in the workplace and not in the Church. But such theological considerations are not so easily put aside, since the signs of spiritual truth, once recognised, call for acknowledgement in a particular form, namely that of proclamation. This form of knowledge, with its particular consequences for epistemology, is not recognised in the research literature.

The proclamation of the spiritual truth of the Gospel means that a sacrifice is offered to God in every place, including every workplace. Individual researchers may resist the logic of this conclusion, arguing for example that the study of spirituality is a post-Christian phenomenon;[13] in effect, that Christian proclamation is not a form of knowledge at all. But whether the proclamation of the Christian Gospel has any meaning for research in spirituality depends on one fact; and that fact is not the consent of researchers, nor the application of their research methods. It is, rather, the fact—if it is a fact—of there having been an event of universal reconciliation that includes all historical being. For the Christian faith proclaims that God has bestowed Himself as salvation, and that He has filled the world with His glory by the Incarnation of His Logos.

When viewed in relation to the Christian proclamation the published research on spirituality by health, education, and social work academics may be said to be in a sense historicist. It is not historicist in

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[13] Meehan, Christopher, 'Resolving the Confusion in the Spiritual Development Debate', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, (2002) vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 291-308.

the metaphysical sense of denying the reality of all things in being; research does not imply, for instance, that historical change is universal, eternal, and absolute. Nor is it historicist in the theological sense; it does not appeal to the history of spirit in order to dispute the identity of the Christian proclamation throughout the ages. Rather, research displays historicist approaches to spirituality when it defines its subject within the limits of professional praxis alone. Indeed, the research literature is quite anxious to make a virtue of this, since the disciplines, especially in the cases of social work and nursing, are enthusiastic about promoting their professionalism, and often do so on the foundation of applying scientific methods in their researches. In these circumstances, each discipline promotes its own knowledge system and entangles its professional identity with this. It is, then, no surprise that many of the research methods applied in the examination of spirituality reflect such an orientation, with the consequence that spirituality is represented as really being a matter of narratives, discourses, texts, and symbols; and the study of spirituality as really being a matter of the analytic techniques applied to decode these.

The truth of such historicist tendencies, a truth which research on spirituality reflects, is that the facts about spirituality are shown to conform to norms and concepts grasped by practitioners as true. But truth in the form of the event of salvation by grace does not signify some kind of factual truth, but rather the acceptance of the Incarnation in relation to oneself and the whole of creation. When the notion of spirit is examined by the application of research methods, a remarkable difficulty is encountered, namely that the reality of the Incarnation is inconceivable. For empirical researchers, Christ, who is the end and the fullness of all life, has no measurable historical reality. Contrary to empiricism, the history of Christ is related to the teaching of Christianity in Scripture and tradition.

Meeting the challenge of the historicist trend in spirituality research means questioning the exceedingly loose philosophical identification of God that very many researchers suppose contributes to the meaning of spirituality. There are numerous research papers which proceed on this basis. It is not inaccurate to say that this indulgence is due to the confusion of knowledge that consists in spiritual discernment with inferences about spirituality whose truth depends on the substantive terms within them. Are we to submit to this confusion, and to agree

that method intentionally articulates suspicions of truth and values? Are we to agree that method undermines every assumption of supernatural realities which express the relationship between God and His creatures (i.e., the hypostatic union, the beatific vision, the bestowal of supernatural grace)? There are many researchers who affirm such a point of view, declaring method alone to be objective and unbiased. What is to be said about such opinions? That they promote a god-less thinking about spirituality? That they approach the topic of spirituality without desire for or intelligence concerning God?

The point I would make is that the state of questioning concerning spirituality could be greatly improved by undertaking critical conversations with philosophers who are knowledgeable about religious traditions and with theologians. The evaluation of empirical findings on spirituality begins only when these findings, already assured of their scientific status by virtue of the rigorous application of methods, are further tested in such conversations.

Spooky Spirituality:

Exploring the Paranormal in HE

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Abstract

In this article I explore the place of paranormal phenomena in the life and experience of contemporary British society and ask why it is that our undergraduate religious studies courses so predictably avoid the topic. A draft module specification is offered as a possible approach to teaching the subject.

Widespread experience of the paranormal

In a nationwide survey sponsored by the BBC as part of its new millennium series, *Soul of Britain*, the British public were asked a number of questions relating to their spiritual lives (Hay & Hunt, 2000). Responses to a question about whether they had, 'been aware of, or influenced by a presence or power, whether they call it God or not, which is different from their everyday selves' were enlightening: 75% of respondents said that they were aware of such a spiritual dimension to their experience. This compared with a 48% positive response rate to the same question posed by Gallup in 1987 (Hay & Heald, 1987), a percentage increase which exactly reflects the percentage of decrease in church attendance over the same time period (Hay, 2002). Of the 75% identified in the BBC sponsored survey, 58% referred to an unfolding pattern of events in their life which gave meaning beyond their own making; 38% referred to an awareness of the presence of God; 29% to a sacred awareness or connectedness with nature; 25% considered that they had been in touch with someone who was dead; and, 25% had experienced an evil or malevolent presence (Hay, 2002).

On a wider international front, according to Jakub Pawlinkowski, 'a great majority in modern Western societies (including physicians) share a belief in miracles' (Pawlikowski, 2007, p1234). Pawlinkowski cites recent surveys of doctors in both USA and Poland in an order to support his claim (Kirschenbaum, 2007; Pawlinkowski et. al., 2006).

With three out of every four adults in Britain thus indicating awareness of a mysterious or paranormal dimension to their lives, and evidence that a majority of American and Polish doctors believe in miracles, we might assume that scientists, philosophers and theologians would be keen to explore this dimension further in order to make greater sense of it. Instead, the opposite seems to be the case.

Responses to public interest in paranormal phenomena

Mark Fox (Fox, 1996) identifies five forms of published responses to growing interest in paranormal phenomena and New Age attempts to

integrate such experiences into a meaningful whole-life perspective: *first*, publications by self-proponents of New Age movements, often in the form of auto-biography (eg. Shirley MacLaine,[1] David Icke); *secondly*, perspectives from scientists within the mainstream, orthodox scientific community, particularly members of CSICOP, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, including their quarterly journal, the *Skeptical Inquirer*[2]; *thirdly*, responses from orthodox religious communities, which have been largely negative, particularly in the case of responses from fundamentalist Christians; *fourthly*, interpretations from academics within the social, psychological and anthropological sciences, often attempting to understand the nature and causes of belief in paranormal phenomena; and *lastly*, journalistic explorations and critiques of New Age movements and the paranormal.

Social science perspectives

A review of the literature relating to belief in the paranormal from a social-sciences perspective offers an interesting indication of the nature and concerns of such research (Irwin, 1993). In his review for the Parapsychology Foundation Inc., Harvey Irvin summarises the range of questions which have been explored: these include a study of demographic correlates between belief in paranormal and the *social marginality hypothesis* (i.e. that people most susceptible to paranormal belief are members of socially marginal groups); studies of beliefs and practices associated with the paranormal and the *worldview hypothesis* (i.e. that people who believe in or practice paranormal activities are likely also to have other subjective and/or esoteric beliefs & practices); studies of cognitive aspects associated with paranormal belief, in order to explore the *cognitive deficits hypothesis* (i.e. that those who believe in such phenomena are intellectually credulous, illogical, uncritical or otherwise cognitively inadequate); studies of aspects of personality and

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[1] For example, Shirley MacLaine's *Out on a Limb* (1983, New York: Bantam Books) and *Dancing in the Light* (1985, New York: Bantam Books).

[2] The official journal of CSICOP, obtainable in the UK from 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex, IG10 4PZ.

their correlations with paranormal belief in order to explore the *psycho-dynamic functions hypothesis* (e.g. that such beliefs serve a social or psychological needs function of some kind, such as the need for a sense of control over the world as a result of childhood trauma). It is immediately obvious from this quick overview of the literature on paranormal belief that a great deal of the research assumes a sceptical perspective or else seeks to challenge such scepticism.

Responses from established religion

Such scepticism from the social sciences is unsurprising: for instance, paranormal experiences are one of the main indicators for the diagnosis of schizophrenia[3] (W.H.O., 2007). There is also no doubt that some claims about paranormal experience have been wildly exaggerated, and, often later proved to be unfounded. Examples of such phenomena include the Cottingley fairy photos, later admitted as a hoax.[4] Of particular interest to me however as a student and teacher of world religions, is the link between the paranormal and mainstream religion. As outlined above, it is fascinating to note that public awareness of paranormal experiences increased in direct inverse proportion to a decrease in formal religious commitment (Church attendance) between 1987 and the year 2000 in the UK. These two statistics cannot be proved to have a direct influence on each other, but the extent and direction of the comparative figures is intriguing. On the other hand, it is hardly surprising that traditional Christian churches have been less than affirming in their response to New Age movements, and to the many paranormal phenomena that such groups make reference to. These groups may

[3] Both the *American Diagnostic* and *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (present version: DSM-V1-TR), and the *World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases* (2007 version: ICD-10) identify hallucinations and delusions as typical symptoms of schizophrenia.

[4] This is a well known tale of two young girls, who claimed they played with garden fairies in Cottingley (in Bradford Metropolitan District), and in 1917 provided photographic evidence of the same. Seventy years later one of the girls confessed to having doctored the photographs, although some locals are still convinced that the photographs were real. Further information may be found at: **http://www.cottingleyconnect.org.uk/fairies.htm#top**.

be seen as competition to the Church in that they offer alternative explanations for phenomena which might historically have remained unquestioned within a narrow worldview shaped by religious doctrine. For the last few centuries however, the Church has had an ambivalent relationship with the world of miracles and the supernatural. Many theologians have sought to throw off the mantle of apparent superstition that such phenomena imply, preferring a modern mindset in which reason and scientific method prevail as the dominant perspective. In his brief summary of the history of western thinking about miracles Jakub Pawlikowski reminds us that this was not always so (Pawlikowski, 2007): historically, much related philosophical debate has been about the nature and definition of miracles rather than about whether or not they had physically occurred. Particularly in more recent centuries, arguments have focussed on such matters as whether all of existence was a miracle (Schleiermacher, 1768-1834), whether Hume's case against miracles was a mere circular argument (Lewis, 1947), whether they were better thought of as 'signs' of God's activity for those who choose to believe (Pascal: 1623-1662), and so on.

Educational responses to New Age and the paranormal

In surveying the breadth of literature on the subject of New age and the paranormal, Mark Fox identifies three particular contemporary educational perspectives in response to the growth of interest and belief in New Age ideas and practices (Fox, 1996, p27): the view by some Christians that such interest represents a failure by the Church to provide sound Christian teaching (Cole et. al., 1990); the view by some science teachers that such interest represents a failure to provide sound science education (eg. Eve & Dunn, 1990; Padian, 1993); the view (e.g. by James Lett, 1991) that it is the fault of an irresponsible mass media, '*who exploit the public taste for nonsense*' (Lett, cited in Fox, 1996 p27). In the higher education context, Lett's response to the challenge of such 'pseudo-science' has been to 'FILCH-proof' anthropology students, offering courses which aim to immunise them against acceptance of evidence which is not *Falsifiable*, *Logical*, *Comprehensive*, *Honest*, *Replicable* and *Sufficient* (FILCHeRS). In a similar vein

Richard Wesp (Wesp, 1998) uses the study of paranormal phenomena as a means for developing critical thinking skills in psychology students, arguing that such material is ideal because of the novel nature of the concepts and the opportunities provided for critical evaluation of scientific study methods.

However, although biologists, chemists and social scientists might balk at the idea of miracles or other such phenomena as apparently defying established laws of science, nuclear physicists are struggling to make sense of quantum discoveries in their field which also defy everything that Newtonian wisdom taught them: the discovery for instance, that, at the sub-atomic level, existence seems to be dependent on the presence of an observer.[5] This seems more in keeping with the Buddhist concept of *anatta* than of Newtonian physics.

Religious education and the paranormal

The study and practice of religions has always included an exploration of the esoteric. Almost every religion has its mystics, saints and miracle workers. Indeed, historians of religion propose that all religious myths, rites and doctrines are rooted in attempts by mankind to explain the unexplainable. One might therefore expect religious educators to be interested in such mysteries, precisely because they don't fit within the normal range of everyday experience and our contemporary understanding of the world. Why is it then that the academic study of theology and religion, both in schools and universities, fails to include an exploration of such phenomena? It would seem to me that there are

[5] Here I am referring to quantum laws such as quantum entanglement, and the Heisenburg uncertainty principle. The latter, in quantum mechanics states that, at the sub-atomic level, the more precisely one can measure the nature of one property (for instance, in the case of an electron, its position) the less certain one can be of its other properties (e.g. its velocity). Physicists are divided in how to make sense of this. In the case of quantum entanglement, or non-local connection, sub-atomic objects which are quite individual and separate from other objects nevertheless seem to be interconnected: one object can only be adequately identified and described by the inclusion of the other. Each, though totally separate, seems to be dependent on, and affected by, the other. A good explanation of all of this in layman's language can be found in Bill Bryson's, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (2003, London: Doubleday) pp. 183-192.

six possible reasons for this: first, it could be that academic scholarship into religious phenomena considers that it already deals sufficiently with such matters: in referring to angels, demons, miracles and such like within the scriptures and teachings of different faiths, and in exploring different philosophical perspectives on miracles and good and evil, such issues are already more than adequately covered. A second possibility is that religious academia considers that such matters are either not relevant, or else are of no interest to, those who study religions and theology. In other words, because religious scholars are concerned first and foremost with those experiences that are contained within the religious life, any wider unexplained or mysterious phenomena, found outside of formal religion, are more appropriately dealt with by other scholars—psychologists and anthropologists, for instance. A third possibility is that such mysterious phenomena are not explored within the subject simply because the material is religiously and culturally unorthodox: since it is not identified within the major religious denominations as an area of worthwhile consideration, and since it is not included in approved scientific fields of enquiry, so, likewise, religious scholars see no place for it within their own field of study. A fourth possibility is that the world of scholarship, across all of the historically recognised fields of academic study, are convinced that such phenomena are not worthy of serious consideration. Because contemporary academia is founded on rationalism and empiricism—the foundations of Enlightenment thinking—it could be that experiences which explicitly challenge that perspective are intrinsically suspect, and therefore intentionally excluded from serious debate. A fifth possibility is that there is an unspoken but powerful *taboo* against any recognition of such phenomena within religious academia. The concept of taboo is an interesting one: such requirements or prohibitions are either socially or religiously determined, and they often relate to practices or ideas that are considered sacred, or else for other reasons, out of bounds. Sigmund Freud postulated that there were usually strong unconscious factors determining the requirements of taboo, in addition to any rational, sociological or psychological reasoning (Freud, 1913). Could it be that a taboo against exploration of the paranormal has clouded the eyes of the religious academy to such an extent that even the possibility of such study has not been critically considered? The sixth, but most unlikely possibility, it seems to me, is that religious

academia has not engaged with paranormal phenomena because it does not feel comfortable or competent to do so: the material has never been included in undergraduate courses so academics themselves feel insecure in presenting any such material to others, not knowing quite how to approach it.

In this short paper I am not attempting to suggest which if any of these six possibilities, or any others, is the basis for any lack of serious engagement by religious studies departments, but I do consider that none of the above offers a substantive argument against the inclusion of any such phenomena within undergraduate theological modules or religious studies courses.

How then should we approach the topic in religious studies courses?

If we are to approach this subject as a field of genuine academic enquiry then, it goes without saying that we must approach it with an open mind. We will take it on ourselves to consider the range of different explanations and assumptions which have been attributed to, or imposed upon, the subject matter, but we will also consider each of these dispassionately, since we are searching for meaning and explanation rather than ultimate definition. The aim of our endeavour therefore is to explore, to unpack, and to expand the various experiences of individuals and communities, but also to explain the various meanings and interpretations that have been attributed to them by both religious and non-religious communities.

Perhaps one of the first tasks in any academic study is that of mapping the field of enquiry. I propose that in this case, we should encompass both phenomena that are particularly pertinent to religious believers (miracles, angelic visitations, healings, answers to prayer, etc.) and those that are less obviously so (for instance, UFO sightings, ghosts, apparitions, etc.). Of course, the field is too vast to cover everything, and so attempts should be made to include a suitable range of varied examples, perhaps leaving open scope for students to make their own individual studies of specific phenomena or particular experiences.

The purpose of the study can never be just to describe and define

however. As in every other field of serious enquiry, this exploration must ultimately be interested in seeking after truth. The student will want to know how we are ultimately to give meaning to experiences that seem to defy our normal, everyday (rational-scientific), forms of meaning-making. And this is where the student of philosophy and religious studies comes into his or her own; not that s/he has any ultimate answers, but that this is familiar territory. Where empirical scientists may struggle to gain hard evidence, or to make sense of any positive evidence of paranormal phenomena that they do encounter, students of the liberal arts may enjoy a wider scope for meaning-making. Regardless of the outcomes of clinical trials and quantitative evidence, something can still be said about the significance and power of the 'abnormal' in giving purpose and meaning to life.

The attached module outline (Appendix1, to be found at the end of this paper) offers an initial tentative draft for a study of the paranormal. At present this has been neither trialled, nor even critically scrutinised, so it is offered as a very rough-and-ready version of what might ultimately be presented as a validated module.[6]

I offer only one further comment on the attached module outline: there are those who would argue that we should avoid use of the terms 'para'-normal, or 'super'-natural, preferring instead such expressions as 'unexplained' or 'mysterious'. The argument goes that the former assumes a status for such phenomena that is outside of nature, and, if outside of nature, then this might imply that they are the work of a higher power or intelligence. Such language thus provides a stumbling-block both to secular-empiricists and to religious non-dualists. It would seem more reasonable therefore, so the argument goes, to avoid terminology that unnecessarily acts as a red rag to a bull. On the other hand however, the terms paranormal and supernatural are common parlance in literature, film and media, and they evoke the sense of mystery and intrigue which gives this subject it's power in the popular imagination. Lyall Watson in his classic book (Watson, 1973) uses the term *Supernature*, but, to me, this also gets us no closer to resolving the

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[6] It presently stands as a draft proposal for a year two (level 5) module in a new BA Theology degree programme at the Lincoln School of Theology, which is a joint enterprise between Lincoln University, Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln Diocese and Lincoln Cathedral.

tension between the two opposing perspectives. I prefer to use the term paranormal therefore, but would insist that part of any study of such phenomena should also include within it an exploration of exactly what we mean by 'para' and 'normal' in this respect.

I would be very keen to receive further reflections, comments or information on this topic, and can be contacted at **mark.plater@bishopg.ac.uk**.

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Appendix

Lincoln School of Theology
BACHELOR OF ARTS
THEOLOGY AND SOCIETY

RELIGION AT THE FRINGES

Code: Not known
Credit Rating: 15
Level: 5
Subject: Theology
Pre-requisites: N/A
Barred Combinations: N/A
Department: Lincoln School of Theology
Unit Co-ordinator: Jack Cunningham

Unit synopsis

This module complements and develops study in The World's

Religions module by exploring aspects of religion and spirituality which are beyond the fringes of mainstream institutional expression. It considers the psychology and theology behind paranormal and sensationalist elements of religion in contemporary British society and around the world, and the recent popularisation of religious conspiracy theories.

Outline of the syllabus

The module explores selected accounts of psychic and paranormal activity in the UK and elsewhere, considering popular, scientific and theological explanations for these phenomena. Historical mainstream and alternative religious teachings about angels, spirits, miracles, mystical experiences etc are explored, and a study is made of established mystery cults and sects, and the conspiracy theories which have often surrounded them.

Learning Outcomes

Subject specific outcomes

On successful completion of the unit students will be able to:
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a wide historical range of 'paranormal' and sensationalist religious phenomena, and ways in which mainstream religion has responded to them;
- demonstrate critical understanding of theological and alternative accounts for the existence and attraction of such phenomena to various different communities;
- analyse theories, accounts and sources and communicate personal perspectives on such phenomena using appropriate language.

Transferable skills and attributes

On successful completion of the unit students will be able to:
- employ skills of critical reflection, analysis and evaluation;
- clarify concepts through the interrogation of both primary

and secondary sources;
- effectively summarise and communicate ideas, concepts and theories.

Teaching and learning strategy/method

30 hours contact teaching
40 hours directed study
80 hours independent study

Indicative Reading

W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Collins Fontana, 1960.

T. Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, Inner Ocean, 2003.

J. J. Heaney, *The Sacred and the Psychic: parapsychology and Christian theology*, Paulist Press, 1984.

D. Radin, *The Conscious Universe*, HarperCollins, 1997.

J. Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings and Weeping Madonnas: Christianity & the Paranormal*, N.J. Paulist Press, 2004.

D. Tracy, & H. Häring, *The Fascination of Evil*, SCM Concilium, 1998.

L. Watson, *Supernature*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1973.

P. H. Wiebe, *God and Other Spirits*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Assessment Strategy

Essay- 1,500 words (50%)
Display presentation- 1,500 words equivalent (50%)

Relationship to Professional Body

None

Developing Creativity in the Theology and Religious Studies Curriculum

Richard Noake and Sue Yore

Department of Theology and Religious Studies
York St John University

Introduction

This paper reports on a two year project funded through the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS) and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Collaboration for Creativity (CETL: C4C) based at York St John University. The project aims were: to develop and enhance modules in Theology and Religious Studies which links subject study (teaching and learning) with the disciplines of creative

writing, literature and the visual arts; and to also devise assessment modes which provide opportunities for students to submit 'creative assessments' in the form of creative writing and visual artefacts as, potentially, the sole means of assessment. Although separately conceived, the two projects were focussing on the same kinds of challenge and always intended to complement each other; this report deals with them as a connected whole. While the project has highlighted issues and challenges that emerge when giving students the opportunity to do something creative, we are increasingly convinced that the potential for making deeper and more insightful links between religious and theological ideas and personal and cultural domains makes it a worthwhile risk.

By way of an introduction, we provide an overview of our project foci and outline our main objectives. We then explore notions of creativity in both national and local contexts and give an overview of a national survey and pilot study we ran and the subsequent stages of curriculum development. Following on from this we provide a selection of case studies which demonstrate student engagement with the modules. To conclude we offer some summative evaluation of our project and identify theoretical and pedagogical challenges as well as possible implications that a local project may have for the national context.

Project foci and intended objectives

The PRS funded project intended to focus on 'exploring the effective use of 'creative writing' and creativity in the teaching and assessment of TRS' whilst for the CETL project the focus was on 'developing effective strategies for the utilisation of a creative/creative arts approach to teaching, learning and assessment in the subject area'.

In total, the project objectives were to:

1. investigate current approaches within UK Higher Education departments of Theology and Religious Studies to teaching the subject where creativity/a creative approach, in particular creative writing and creative art practice, is utilised in both delivery and assessment;

2. explore, through student focus groups/extracurricular workshops, how students can demonstrate and employ

'creative writing' as summative assessment;

3. develop a final level undergraduate module which directly uses critical engagement with creative writing in teaching, learning and assessment;

4. enhance a current final level module, Religion and the Visual Arts, to incorporate a practical art based approach to assessment, through the employment of a professional artist/art educator to help students develop their artistic capacities through a series of workshops.

These broad project objectives translated into the following main actions:

- the development of a questionnaire that was electronically distributed to all TRS academics in the UK (as located through AUDTRS and a trawl of institution websites)—this basically asked 'what are you doing in your teaching and assessment that might be deemed to be innovative, alternative, creative and in particular in the area of creative writing and/or using creative art practice?';

- working with a self selecting group of level 1 and 2 students in extra curricular workshops, facilitated by a number of professional writers/creative writing tutors, to explore how effectively students can develop creative writing skills through a combination of workshops and tutorials to identify how these products can be used in a theology and religious studies discipline;

- reflecting on the creative writing workshops, the development of a final level module, entitled: Religion, Writing and the Creative Imagination, which incorporates a series of creative writing workshops and utilises creative writing as an aspect of summative assessment;

- the transformation of a final level module, Religion and the Visual Arts, to incorporate: visits to art galleries and museums in Glasgow; an experiential workshop day based in a regional Cathedral; a series of art workshops, facilitated by a professional artist/art educator; changed summative assessment from an essay with optional creative piece to the compulsory production of a piece of artwork with an accompanying portfolio commentary.

Creativity: theology and religious studies and the debate about creativity in higher education

The discussion about 'creativity' in higher education, as exemplified in the Imaginative Curriculum Project (ICP), is not a debate about subject areas developing links with those disciplines that work within the broad field of the arts, including art and design, performance, music, creative writing etc. It is, essentially, a debate about teaching and learning; about what, how and why we want students to learn. It is a debate about whether we want to encourage students to be 'creative' thinkers and actors, how we understand the processes involved in students being 'creative' and how we assess the extent to which students have been creative.

The ICP argues that in debating these issues we are also debating the whole notion of higher education, what it is about and how it is carried out. The ICP does, in part, point to higher education as being the place where the future workforce is created with all the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and application needed to maintain and develop our futures; it sees creativity as an essential component in this and therefore asks where in higher education do we find creativity being encouraged and facilitated. However, whilst acknowledging the inevitability of the links between higher education and the creation of a workforce it does not see this as its primary function. We read the ICP, as a narrative that sees higher education as being about learning for learning's sake, learning in a holistic way, and centrally concerned with expanding the ways we read and act on the word and the world. Jackson comments that:[1]

> Creativity operates on a continuum from the inventions and inter-ventions that change the world, through those that change a domain, to those that have local and personal significance: 'a sort of *personal effectiveness* in coping well with unknown territory and in recognising and making choices … life-wide creativity'[2]

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[1] We acknowledge broad links to the work of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972) and his treatise of moving away from a banking concept of education.

[2] Jackson et al, *Developing Creativity in Higher Education: The Imaginative*

He notes, and we agree, that higher education certainly has its impact at the personal and local level and subsequently has the further potential to make an impact in public domains. He also suggests that if we wish to see creativity evidenced we need to 'adopt and invent facilitative teaching methods'[3] and to challenge:

> transmission models of teaching where teachers attempt to transfer their own knowledge and sense-making to students through lecture-dominated teaching; where students' engagements in learning are predominantly based on information transfer, and are heavily prescribed and controlled by the teacher.[4]

The ICP acknowledges that creativity is hard to define, difficult to teach and difficult to assess. Contributors offer explanations as to what the concept might include in a higher education context and why higher education should be encouraging such as an element of the student curriculum experience. Jackson, drawing on the work of Dellas and Gaier, sees creativity as 'the ability to use imagination, insight, and intellect, as well as feeling and emotion, in order to move an idea from its present state to an alternate, previously unexplored state'.[5] Other contributors to the ICP routinely use words like: imagination/imaginative, innovation/innovative, novelty, newness/new thinking, complex, divergent, criticality and others. These are skills and applications that we would presumably want to see being demonstrated by students in theology and religious studies; indeed many of us publish criteria in student handbooks that state in order to achieve work of a high standard (first class) we expect students to demonstrate 'creativity', 'imagination', 'innovation' etc.

If we are serious about students demonstrating creativity we have to ask how do we manage this, particularly in undergraduate contexts[6] —where and how do we teach creativity or how to be creative, imaginative and innovative? Do we model good practice to students? Do we

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Curriculum (London: Routledge Falmer, 2006), p. 209.

[3] Ibid. p. 210.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. p. 8.

[6] Some might argue it is easier and possibly more appropriate in post-graduate study where we are looking for work of potentially publishable standard and contributing to new knowledge, understanding and application.

provide clear opportunities for students to demonstrate such in their learning and assessment? Jackson notes that utilising 'ways of thinking or methodologies from other disciplines are often involved in creative acts. The blending and intelligent use of these […] is potentially another source of creativity.'[7] Indeed, we see this throughout the study of Theology and/or Religious Studies where many of us utilise a range of inter and multi-disciplinary perspectives – in doing so, we, as teachers, and students in their endeavours to grasp the complexity of a multiplicity of disciplinary perspectives, are evidencing creativity.

Jackson and Shaw include 'being original', 'making use of imagination', 'finding and thinking about complex problems', 'willingness to explore in order to discover', 'making sense of complexity', 'thinking outside and transferring into the disciplinary box', 'synthesis, making connections and seeing relationships'[8] as further evidence of being creative/demonstrating creativity. We are sure these happen in many theology and religious studies programmes already and that they complement a multiplicity of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The ICP does not set out to propose an 'either-or' model: either we transmit knowledge or we facilitate creativity; but it does argue for a balance between what it identifies as the more traditional higher education emphasis, where value has only been placed on critical and rational thinking, and the necessity to promote and value student (and tutors, as facilitators of) creativity in learning and assessment. We would argue that it is as possible to show creativity as much in a critical essay or a well-crafted and delivered seminar paper as it is in less formal learning and teaching contexts—you do not have to have students wielding paint-brushes or writing creatively to demonstrate such; however, it may well be that we over-emphasise the 'academic' and risk students producing mechanistic responses to the teaching and learning we offer which may well stifle creativity.

We think it is perhaps sensible to locate this kind of learning at the final level of undergraduate study, where students have had the opportunity to learn and practice 'academic' skills and have studied something of the content of the subject area. It is then that they are

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7 Ibid at p. 100.
8 Jackson, N. and Shaw, M 'Developing Subject Perspectives on Creativity in Higher Education' in Jackson, N. et al, ibid., pp. 95-101.

more able to encounter, for example, different disciplinary perspectives and approaches and bring these to bear on the task of thinking through problems, making creative links and positing new ideas related to their study of theology and/or religious studies. This is supported by the ICP, which acknowledges that students are more ready to demonstrate advanced levels of creativity at the end of their degree.[9] However, when modules that demand such a creative response are located at the final level, given its somewhat experimental nature, module tutors have to be prepared for high anxiety on the part of students.

Project Objective 1: current approaches to creativity in higher education

The national picture

Initially, we were keen to find out if others were doing anything similar —and if they were, whether we could learn from their experiences. We have followed with interest the discussions from the early days of the Subject Centre about different ways to teach and assess in theology and religious studies. Gilliat Ray's[10] outlining of innovative teaching and learning methods, for example, mentions approaches that we too have been operating at York St John University for some time, like film and use of the Internet and her own use of art, which accords well with our own modules discussed here. She also talks of using drama and of one pre-course development experiment with group work in performance that may eventually feature as an assessment task. Jarvis and Cain[11] talk of various assessment tasks and mention writing other than essays, which move towards more of a 'creative' writing approach—newspa-

[9] Jackson, N. and Sinclair, C. in Jackson, N., ibid., p. 121.

[10] Gilliat Ray, S. 'Breaking Down the Classroom Walls: Innovative Teaching and Learning Methods in Religious Studies and Theology—Some Perspectives from the University of Wales', PRS LTSN Journal Summer 2003, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 200- 210.

[11] Jarvis, L. and Cain, J. 'Diversifying Assessment 1: Essays and Examinations in Undergraduate History of Science', PRS LTSN Journal Summer 2002, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 24-57.

per articles, letters and 'production of imagined communications between contemporary historic figures'.[12] Denise Cush[13] even mentions an enquiry by a student to use painting as a means of assessment—she stated it was not an accepted method at that point but concludes 'perhaps there are topics where a piece of artwork with an accompanying written piece might be possible'.[14] It is clear from these brief descriptions that others are engaged in or at least debating similar activity, but how widespread is it?

We undertook to carry out a questionnaire investigation of current practice in Theology and Religious Studies departments. Through the University's Enquiry Based Learning project we were successful in securing a Research Assistant bursary to employ a student (final level) for 100 hours to aid us in the construction and dissemination of the questionnaire. Lauri Bower worked with us to send out and collate the returns and we appreciate her contributions to this aspect of the project.

Academics were sent the following questions:

1. Do you teach any modules exploring the links between religion and the visual arts, film, creative writing, media or creativity?
2. Within these modules does part of the learning experience include some creative element?
3. In relation to assessment, are there alternative methods to the standard written essay or exam?
4. Is this assessed by itself or would there be an accompanying commentary?
5. If this is the case, which do you assess, the final product, or the process, or both?
6. Are there any modules not related to the arts, which are assessed through creative means?

We received 82 replies that contained positive or qualified responses. 18 claimed to teach modules explicitly on or utilising aspects of the areas listed in question 1 and in all these cases assessment utilised alter-

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[12] Ibid, p. 33.

[13] Cush, D., 'Engaged Religious Studies: Some Suggestions for the Content, Methods and Aims of Learning and Teaching in the Future Study of Religions' *Discourse* Spring 2005, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 83-105.

[14] Ibid. at p. 96.

native methods. 'Alternative' included generic reference to 'portfolio/file' where students could submit creative elements as an aspect of the assessments, for example: scripts, film, radio programme, blogs and postings on WEBCT, oral presentation, drama, story-telling, songs—in the majority of these there would be an accompanying or integral 'commentary'/'theological reflection' explaining and analysing the creative piece. In some cases the creative piece was assessed in conjunction with the commentary, in others it was solely the commentary that was assessed. In addition, there were some discrete assessment strategies which demanded a creative product as the mode of assessment (i.e. the creative product was not a part of a broader piece of writing but was the total assessment): DVD production, creative writing, journal, guide book; with these modes there was always an accompanying commentary. In response to question 5, all assessed both the commentary and the final product.

A further 25 responses identified modules on or utilising the areas in question 1, but where assessment was a standard essay and/or exam. Creative aspects (at least perceived by the respondent to be creative) involved in the learning experience included: showing film, looking at art, visiting religious sites/galleries/museums/theatre, performing a play. Three commented that students could submit creative elements in their assessment but none chose to do so; one commented that 'finding a means of fair assessment [fair criteria?] would be a barrier'.

A further 33 responses identified some, but minimal, focus on or use of areas in question 1 and with 'No' as the response to question 5. In one case, in saying 'No' to question 6, the qualification offered was: 'our school does not allow different forms of exam'—where exam presumably implies all assessment modes. A final 6 responses identified they did not teach on or utilise areas from question 1 but used to, intended to or wished they could.

The replies show that we are not unique in developing modules which focus on creative arts/creative writing with assessment which would include aspects of or be solely given over to the development of a 'creative product'. This is encouraging for us and the subject area as a whole (we believe). Time has not permitted us to follow up the replies, but we intend to and in particular to explore how colleagues elsewhere construct learning outcomes, assessment guidance and how

they ensure parity and fairness in marking and feedback across assessment.

The local context: learning and teaching at York St John University in theology and religious studies

For some time the department at York St John has delivered discrete modules which take as a focus areas like film, literature, the visual arts —there is little unique in that these days.[15] In addition, being a department located in one of the old teacher training colleges where, it could be argued, issues relating to learning, teaching and assessment have perhaps been fore-grounded more than in old universities, we have long engaged in debates about pedagogy and practice. We have worked hard to make sense of the language of learning outcomes, to develop a range of approaches to teaching and learning and to devise appropriate assessment strategies. Our methods have included experiential and placement based learning, alongside field work and project work. We have utilised group work, oral presentations, non-standard written assessment, for example, research files, newspaper articles, learning journals as well as the more time honoured essay and textual analysis. We do not use formal written exams and have not done so for over a decade. To develop modules where students might engage in creative writing or in creative art practice and use their products as part of formal assessment, may be a risk, certainly a challenge; however, we believed there was something worth exploring in this notion.

We were faced by a number of 'challenges' around the efficacy of developing modules at undergraduate level which utilised a creative arts and creative writing approach to teaching, learning *and* assessment. Initially we had to make decisions about whether they would 'look like' our other modules in that there would be clear learning outcomes linked to assessment strategies with transparent assessment criteria. We were tempted to quote Jackson[16] from his discussion about developing learning experiences for higher education that encourage

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[15] Although the film and theology course has a long history at YSJU being at least 25 years old (is it the longest running?) and led to one of the earliest UK edited collections, by YSJU staff, on the subject. See Marsh, C. and Ortiz, G., *Explorations in Theology and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[16] Ibid., at p. 4.

creativity: 'Creativity is inhibited by predictive outcome-based course designs, which set out what students will be expected to have learned with no room for unanticipated or student-determined outcomes' and consequently to develop modules without learning outcomes (not that he advocates such, simply a move to more generic, process focussed outcomes). However, we did eventually develop clear outcomes, building on our experience of running a pilot project.

Project objective 2: exploration of how students can demonstrate and employ 'creative writing' as summative assessment

Pilot project

We had discussed developing a module of this type pre-project but it did not begin to materialise until the project funding was made available. We had little idea how students would engage with a creative writing module in theology/religious studies—what would they do, how would we facilitate it, what might they produce and how could this link with outcomes and assessment strategies that would sit neatly within the subject? The project allowed us to set up experimental groups. We employed, in the first instance, the expertise of a resident (to the University) Royal Literary funded writer and later a creative writing tutor to work with us and a group of self selecting students in a series of extra-curricular workshops. These ran over two terms and engaged students at first and second level. The experience included developing skills, working with different genre, exploring implicit and explicit religious and theological ideas.

Evaluation of pilot project

The first trial of workshops was loosely based on Julian Cameron's model for 'discovering and recovering your creative self.'[17] While

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[17] Cameron, Julia, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: Jeremy P.Tarcher, 2002).

there are some good techniques and exercises here—particularly the recommendation to write 'morning pages' to help draw out creative insights, this moved significantly away from our aims to develop a module which fitted into our current curriculum provision. Basically, students ended up doing too much navel gazing resulting in many of the sessions developing into a type of pseudo-therapy. While this may be a valuable life experience and would certainly parallel creative writing modules elsewhere, it largely falls outside the remit of a taught module in theology and religious studies. This first workshop did however initiate a useful teaching and learning strategy which involved taking the students out of the university environment to surroundings that more readily stimulated creative writing.

For the second trial workshop, we employed a tutor who had past experience of teaching creative writing to students in higher education. Over a series of ten weeks of three hour sessions, she took the students through the various possibilities and skills that make creative writing effective. This engaged students and demonstrated that they were able to start writing creatively fairly quickly. One of the key things we learnt from both these trials is that the module tutor would have to help students make the links between creative writing *per se* and theological, religious or spiritual ideas and concepts. Having trialled the workshops these have become an integral part of the learning experience and embedded within the learning outcomes and assessment.

Project objective 3: creative writing module

Our aim was to develop two modules that would demonstrate a clear conceptual and pedagogic framework. Given the York St John University culture of module writing they needed to have learning outcomes that were clear and unambiguous and assessment strategies that linked to the outcomes. In the following case studies we explain how the validated learning outcomes and teaching and learning strategies relate to these considerations.

Religion, writing and the creative imagination

Validated module outcomes

The learning outcomes link to assessment that requires a piece of creative writing with a supporting commentary. The outcomes were debated and modified by the staff team;

1. *Produce a piece of creative writing in a selected literary genre utilising skills and understanding developed through participation in creative writing workshops*; in developing this outcome we ensure that students view the workshops as an integral aspect of the module and hence participate. In limiting the 'final product' writing to a specific genre (although hybrid writing is possible e.g. fantasy-horror, sci-fi-fantasy) we provide a framework for them.

2. *Demonstrate an understanding of intertextuality through the process of designing and writing a literary text with your own religious, spiritual or theological interpretation*; we felt this was a sound way for students to demonstrate how their writing draws on other texts, whether it is from their own life experience or literary/sacred texts.

3. *Evaluate how aspects of written language facilitate religious expression*; this outcome is reflected in the commentary and draws on reading and lecture input. It is an opportunity for students to show how well they have made sense of the module and the process they have gone through in developing their writing.

Teaching and learning

Some of the topics for the taught module include: the creative writer and the spiritual quest; the function of human creativity and imagination in theology and religious discourses; the use of story in World Religion; intertextuality—particularly how the bible is used in literature; the use of parable and metaphor to convey religious ideas; religious and theological ideas present in Sci-Fi and Fantasy literature; holocaust writing; myth and the hero archetype; theo-poetics: how creative writing challenges dominant discourses.

There are three key elements to the teaching and learning strategies. The first is the more conventional tutor led session—providing theoretical input and seminar discussion. The second, a series of creative writing workshops and the third, individual tutorials with both

the module tutor, to discuss their ideas for their writing project, and with the creative writing tutor who provides ideas and suggestions for improving their creative writing pieces.

Students are provided with five afternoons of workshops lasting three hours. A tutor with expertise in teaching creative writing skills facilitates these and covers aspects of creative writing such as: story structure; characterisation; using the senses; genre—drama, journaling, short stories, poetry; and the more technical aspect of creative writing —syntax, punctuation, layout and rhythm.

An example of how to encourage creative writing

We found the biggest challenge is to encourage students to put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard); it can be quite difficult for students to 'open up' or allow the creative process to begin. One example of an approach that has helped was when we took students to the York Art Gallery. This proved useful in encouraging students to engage imaginatively with an object or idea as opposed to written text and theories. Students were asked to find a painting that they felt drawn to for whatever reasons. They may experience an emotional response; they may find it aesthetically pleasing; perhaps the subject matter is something they have an interest in or see as reflecting their own life experience or values. We suggested they might identify a background figure whose story might be interesting to tell; alternatively they might want to imagine a series of events preceding or following the moment captured in the painting that would subvert the obvious meaning. The task was to write a short story that does not exceed 300 words. They were told to write quickly and without too much attention to punctuation, spelling etc—any editing could be done later. Given the nature of the module they are told to keep a focus on the religious, theological or spiritual implications—although these do not necessarily have to be explicit.

After returning to University they were told to write up and submit for sharing. The students agreed that this was a useful exercise as it opened them up to the possibilities that they could think and write creatively. The writing that emerged was fascinating and included topics such as: imagining how the baby Jesus felt tucked up on his mother's lap; how a peasant farmer reconciled poverty, death and illness; how a medieval pilgrim was angered by the opulence of the

church; how a giant human sculptured head represented the boundlessness of God; how a still life of bread and wine eclipsed the hectic life of a country vicar. This exercise is an example of a tutor led activity that helps students make the creative links between the process skills of creative writing and the expression of theological, religious or spiritual ideas and concepts. It also gives them a snapshot of what a piece of creative writing that forms part of their final assessment might look like as well as the confidence that the task is within their individual capabilities.

Assessment

Summative assessment is a creative piece of writing (3000 words) and a commentary (2500 words). The commentary should provide indication of the aim and rationale for the creative writing, identifying what the student wanted to achieve, alluding to textual influence/s and reasons for choice as well as rationale for decisions regarding style, language, and genre. In addition, students should reflect on the notion of 'creativity' providing a working definition; articulate how working through a creative project has impacted on their own learning and personal development and how it has aided religious or theological expression. Finally, they provide an analysis of their piece: What is it about? What are the key features? What is the overall dominant meaning or message they are trying to convey? How might it develop or challenge religious or theological knowledge and insight? What are the key intertextual allusions/influences and how have these helped to shape the piece?

Project objective 4: religion and art module

Religion and the visual arts

This module had been delivered for three years prior to the project. The project enabled significant changes to be experimented with and as a consequence the module was re-validated to incorporate these including an assessment strategy which asks for a piece of art as summative assessment.

Validated module outcomes

1. *Critically analyse a range of iconographic traditions and the work of selected individual artists in terms of their impact on religious ideas*; this outcome draws on teaching and learning (lectures, seminars, input from art historians and museum/gallery experts) on the module and would be similar to other modules that explore links between theology/study of religion and the visual arts—the focus is on the use of art and images in world religions as well as the religious motivations and works of art from individual artists.

2. *Demonstrate a critical understanding of relevant theoretical perspectives on the relationship between religion and the visual arts*; as with the first outcome this derives from the teaching and learning experience. This explores issues such as iconoclasm and nature of symbolism, as well as different functional aspects such as iconographical, sacramental, prophetic and didactic. It focuses on how images work as religious text as opposed to the written word or conversely how images critique religious institutions or open us up to ethical and sacred possibility.

3. *Demonstrate practical skills in the design and production of at least one image*; students are at liberty to produce an image that relates to theological, religious or spiritual import in any way they choose. While the image is the end point, it is not the focal point of assessment but stands instead as evidence of the process. The image is part of an accompanying portfolio, which needs to document the creative process and journey through the module by drawing on visual impressions in parallel to the reading associated with the above learning outcomes

4. *Reflect critically on the learning experience of the module with particular attention to personal, professional and academic outcomes*; this is the final aspect of the portfolio where students provide a critical reflection on the process and production of an image/artefact, identifying the potential for theological/study of religion ideas. In reality it is impossible to separate these domains out or predict that students will gain, for example, skills that will transfer into professional life. We are considering whether we should perhaps adopt a more holistic approach where this learning outcome is more open so that students identify where learning has happened?

Teaching and learning

Much like the creative writing module, there are a number of strands included in the approach to teaching and learning: lecture and seminar learning which has included: What is Religious art? Sacred Icons; Use of Visual Arts in Ministry; Sacramental Art in Hinduism; Art/Museum vs. Faith/Temple; Sacred Images of Motherhood; Art and Religious Identity in Aboriginal and Holocaust Art; Painting as Theological Process; Iconoclasm in Christianity and Islam.

In year one of the project we planned a two day educational visit to Glasgow to engage with a range of visual material at Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow Museum of Modern Art, The Burrell Collection and St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art. Such an experience allows students to study first hand the intersection between religion and the visual arts. We accessed the expertise of curators and museum staff to help us understand and appreciate a whole spectrum of art: from 'Islamic', to Chinese, to Christian Icons, tapestry, architecture, carving, stained glass and other ecclesiastical art through to Dutch, French and Italian masters, Holocaust art, art nouveau and deco, modern art and artefacts and icons from various religions. The students were able to view a broad range of 'real' art and experience the varying emotions and feelings that such an encounter entails. It also provided students with insights into how art can be used to explore tensions in society such as the sectarian violence that Glasgow has historically experienced between Celtic and Rangers or Catholic and Protestant groups (an exhibition at Glasgow Museum of Modern Art). The violent attack on an image of Shiva in St Mungo's by a Christian provides opportunities to expand this into the divisions between Christian faith and

other world religions.

In year two we re-validated the module to make the Glasgow visit an integral part of the learning experience. We also wanted to make the production of a visual artefact a compulsory element; however, we needed to ensure that students felt confident in their use of art media and considered one way of achieving this was to construct a series of full day workshops with a professional artist/art educator. We enlisted the expertise of a local artist and art educator, Jo Howes. In the first year most engaged in the workshops and the majority of these chose the visual image option for assessment—even students who felt challenged initially found the opportunity to be a rewarding one. In the re-validation we changed the assessment, removing the essay and making the production of an image with accompanying portfolio the only option for assessment. The workshops became an integral part of the module.

A new development in year two of the project has been a day workshop at Ripon Cathedral where students were introduced, by curate Rev. Dr. Nick Buxton, to a broad understanding of 'art' within a Cathedral context. This included discussion of architecture and sculpture, stained glass, woodwork and needlework. In addition, students were able to have a tactile experience of ecclesiastical vestments and silverware. The Heritage Officer, Toria Forsyth Moser, delivered a talk about the many mythological creatures and gargoyles found in the Cathedral and then conducted a tour of the Miserichords, stone and wood carvings. North Yorkshire Local Authority Art Adviser Jo York provided an artists view of the Cathedral, pointing out colours, textures and materials and discussed the different emotions these evoked. She also demonstrated various ways of capturing this in pencil and

watercolour through a short workshop on drawing in situ. Following the workshop students were given time to draw and paint. Most importantly perhaps, this latest innovation gave students the opportunity to combine cognitive, experiential and creative endeavours in an integrated manner.

The workshops at York St John University focus on the development of skills using acrylics, watercolour, ink, pencil, pastel and oils. Students are introduced to various techniques—many very simplistic but that deliver an immediate impact. Jo Howes also discusses the work of specific artists and although she has no formal qualifications in theology or study of religion she is able to talk from the perspective of the artist about links between artistic expression and religious and/or spiritual ideas. She provokes students to think how to represent feelings, emotions, theological and religious concepts in colour, shape, texture and links some of this work to artists like Rothko, Kandinsky, Chagall, and Dali.

Assessment

Summative assessment is a piece of 'art' and an accompanying assessment portfolio of 5-6000 words. In the module handbook students are guided to present their portfolio in such a way as to articulate 'evidence' and 'critical reflection'. Evidence would include: reference to a range of texts, documents and materials demonstrating they have engaged with the aims and learning outcomes. This will be different for each student depending upon the themes, iconographic traditions, artists and artworks they select and whether they base their 'image'/ final product on theological or religious studies theories and insights. In this section students are asked to focus writing on specific dimensions: Iconographic images from a specific religious context; the work of a specific artist e.g. Islamic, Christian, Hindu; art in context— reflecting on viewing art from the visits to galleries, museums and cathedral.

The exhibition

On the last day of the module students exhibit their visual images in a celebratory event where friends, family, tutors and other students are invited.[18] Each student is responsible for displaying their work and has

a guest book where visitors are invited to write comments on how they interpret the work, or how it makes them feel. This serves several personal, social and academic purposes:

- It allows the students to see their work as valuable in a non-judgemental context.
- It gives students the opportunity to make their ideas public.
- It provides useful feedback and interpretation which students can incorporate into their critical commentary which is an integral part of the portfolio.
- It showcases the module for prospective students in year 2.
- It acts as a catharsis for the module specifically and the programme of study more generally.

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[18] Yore, S. and Noake, R., *Creativity in Theology and Religious Studies Project*, DVD, (2009) York St John University.

Student outcomes

Case studies of student work

We see two purposes in our approach to creativity in the theology and religious studies curriculum: to consolidate and develop learning from past and current modules and to provide personal transferable skills that will benefit students beyond graduation. The following are four cases studies, two from each module, which demonstrate how this is facilitated within the modules. One will focus on how the student explores specific theological ideas and the other has been selected because it develops themes more relevant to religious studies. While we draw on elements of student work and experience, the students themselves have been given fictional names. We indicate aspects of the work that generated a higher grade as well as weaker areas that would point towards a lower end pass. Additionally we identify personal, academic and professional points of development.

Module: Religion, Writing and the Creative Imagination

Laura: Mixed-faith relationships in the genre of 'chick lit'

Laura, a standard entry student, first of her family to enter HE and coming from a multi-ethnic city in the north east. Her short story follows a fairly standard story line plot: Muslim boy meets Roman Catholic girl; they face conflict in that her father tries to stop her seeing the boy and he threatens to cast her out; a near fatal car crash occurs; the father comes to realise that family is more important than religious differences; the boy is accepted and the girl is reunited with her family.
   Tutor evaluation of the work:
The story drew on autobiography; it worked within the chosen style and did evoke an emotional response in the reader. It was highly readable and showed an aptitude for the genre. However, in relation to the aims and intended outcomes of the module it fell short on a number of fronts—both in the story itself and in the written commentary. The story did not relate specifically to Islamic/Roman Catholic traditions and related issues i.e. different attitudes to marriage and relationship, or

practices that would cause conflict between a mixed-faith couple. There was scant development of key issues affecting religious communities in the UK in the commentary. The story could have been reflected on in relation to wider issues such as inter-faith dialogue, secularism, pluralism and Muslim and Christian identity. While there was reference to some popular films such as East is East, this was more of an afterthought. The module requires evidence of subject knowledge and demonstration of intertextuality which was largely absent in this piece. Stories of women being cast out of their familiar environment because they are deviant in some way is a common trope in literature of all sorts e.g. the story of Hagar in the Hebrew Scriptures; Tess' plight in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*. This meant that it was difficult to develop an analytical commentary that made creative connections with other texts. In this instance, the student lost contact with the academic premise of the module through a single minded focus on the creative product.

John: A fantastical account of faith development

John, a mature student with a working background in science, is a high achiever on the degree, a lifelong Roman Catholic but recently engaging afresh with his faith; his short story merged personal and fantasy narrative. Throughout he drew on a rich blend of emotive childhood memories, Roman Catholic traditions, historical and literary characters and biblical motifs in order to, in his own words, 'explore and exteriorize [his] own spiritual quest' from the innocence of youth to the mature understanding of an adult. It starts with an overview of the young child's life in the context of a range of religious teachings and rituals that are accepted and adhered to but which may not at that point have a significance or deeper meaning. Events take a dramatic turn through a traumatic near death experience following a road traffic accident. Whilst slipping in and out of consciousness in the hospital, the fictional character is taken under the wing of a kindly guardian angel or 'daemon' who takes him on a fantastical journey through time to help this frightened child cope with life's big questions and to help him understand his own religious tradition. By taking this child back through time to experience the struggling community of faith in the first century, then the debates around the second Vatican council he realises that he is at home in his faith through a sense of continuity that

permeates that tradition.

   Tutor evaluation of the work:

While the narrative drew on personal experiences from childhood and travels to Roman Catholic sites in Rome as an adult, the student developed this significantly through wider reading and making creative leaps between various texts. There were specific examples of intertextuality that included: biblical passages referring to ephemeral beings that guide humans; Homer's *Iliad* and the questing hero; Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* which has as its central narrative a conversion to Roman Catholicism; and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time Volume 1: Swann's Way*, which refers to childhood experiences and how the senses can trigger a response in adults which transports them back in time to childhood memories. From a critical point of view, John's story could be described as slightly contrived in that it ticks all the boxes a bit too neatly. Nevertheless it fully meets the criteria for creativity and intertextuality, and more importantly, it demonstrates that these connections have been carefully thought through and articulated in a well-crafted story. In a twelve week module it would be hard to expect more of someone who has no real experience of writing creatively. What makes John's work stand out is that he took time to reflect on the task and thus made pertinent decisions to ensure the end product was of value in relation to the set aims and outcomes of the module. Equally, because there was a sophisticated understanding of various literary elements and an ability to incorporate past learning from Christian theology, woven skilfully into a creative piece of writing, it moved beyond the personal into something that had universal appeal. In the commentary the student reflected on key theological themes in relation to the development of doctrines and teaching in the Roman Catholic Church and how individual Catholics relate to them. Through devising an imagined narrative to explore the tensions between personal conscience and understanding and the Church's teaching the student has been able to conclude that the faith community is itself informed and transformed by creative insights.

Module: Religion and the Visual Arts

Sara: Imag(in)ing a world beyond religious conflict

Sara, a standard entry student, is dyslexic and relies on the help of a writing support tutor to get the best out of her writing. Sara's final image shows a stylised version of the Israel/Palestine Wall which has been blown apart to reveal mystical possibility through use of a trail of translucent paint which trails off into a glowing yellow hued light. To either side, black silhouettes depict people torn apart by the continuing conflict in this area. Her inspiration clearly comes from British graffiti artist Banksy, whose work appears on the actual wall, yet it also moves beyond mere imitation to draw on and incorporate a range of religious insights.

Tutor evaluation of the work:

This module requires her to move out of familiar territory. The workshop which helps students to finalise the image does not happen until the penultimate week of the module. This is followed up a week later by a public exhibition of students' work where comments and interpretations are collected and commented on in the written element for this module. This causes some anxiety for Sara as she feels more secure if she gets her work done weeks ahead of the scheduled hand in date. Additionally, the idea of publicly displaying her ideas, which are somewhat controversial, added to her anxiety. As Sara wants to eventually progress to postgraduate study these are important matters.

Sara was profoundly affected by a visit arranged through the University Chaplaincy to the region. Whilst there, she listened to harrowing personal narratives from both Israelis and Palestinians that impressed on her the human tragedy of something that is normally

conveyed to us largely through news reel so that we become desensitised to the reality of the suffering. Sara was left with unresolved issues and she reports that expressing this through a visual image gave her an outlet and allowed her to articulate a possible solution. While participating on the Religion and Visual Arts module she was researching and writing about Sufism, the mystical aspect of Islam for another module. She also had an understanding of Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist traditions from past studies and seems to draw on the notion of a mystical core at the heart of all religions. She tried to suggest that this identifies the potential to move beyond the differences around which conflicts arise towards a point of similarity and shared hope. Her visual image and the accompanying written commentary demonstrate a growing empathy with a range of religious perspectives, an ability to take an objective overview of the relationship between religion and socio-political contexts as well as demonstrating a personal learning trajectory where growing insights are consolidated. Sara achieved a grade above her average for this piece.

Stephen: An abstract portrayal of the Trinity

Stephen, a mature student, whose decision to study theology and religious studies was underpinned by his conviction in his future vocation as an ordained priest in the Anglican Church. He used an exercise from the workshop mimicking Rothko's use of blocks of colour to create an abstract image of the Trinity. There were three bands of colour ranging from a dark navy blue at the bottom, a yellowy green in the middle and a pale white with a tinge of yellow at the top. Between the colours there were some sketchy abstract shapes in white that blurred and confused the boundaries.


Tutor evaluation of the work: This student did not appear to present as someone who had any

particular interest in either the arts or being creative yet his final piece was aesthetically pleasing. He wrote a reasonable account of how this image conveyed a sense of the Trinity through exploring the symbolism—in particular how the blurred boundaries represent the doctrinal position that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct 'persons' and the unified Godhead. There was however a limited evidence of interconnection between the creative process, the image and the thinking it generated. For example, there could have been a development of how the image pushes our understandings of what the Trinity represents as a symbol of unity and relationship between humans, creation and God. While the reflection did show skills of interpretation it did not expand on previous understanding or indicate that there had been any personal or spiritual development as a result of making imaginative connections which would demonstrate an independent and creative approach to the task set. So although the final product was quite distinctive and could potentially invoke a range of theological responses, this student probably underachieved as his grade was slightly lower than his average grade. It is possible to surmise that the challenges of being creative was in some way perceived as a threat to firmly held religious beliefs so that the student took the 'safe' route through the module.

Other examples of student work
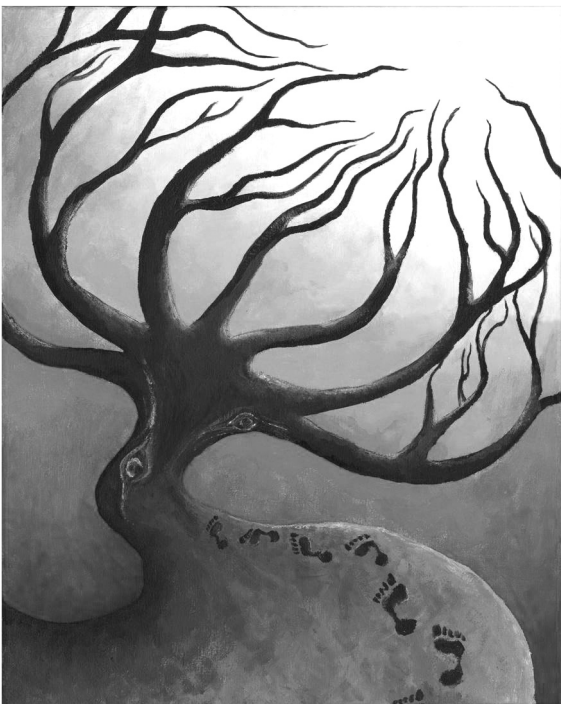
Facing: 'World Angel' by Leanne, top left: 'Towers of Terror' by Laurie, bottom left: 'Footsteps by Emma and bottom right: 'The Annunciation' by Emma.

Student and tutor learning—a few reflections

While some students, as in the case of Laura, do not achieve a high grade it tends to be consistent with their overall profile. There are additional benefits, which in the case of Laura included: producing something that was of value to her; something that she could share with others. Most significantly, in this instance, the student highlighted that the process of writing a creative piece which empathised with an intimate relationship between two people of different ethnic backgrounds helped her to engage with and go some way towards resolving her own bias and negative attitudes towards Muslims which she indicated as being endemic in her socio-cultural context.

Students may gain confidence through the workshops and move outside of their personal comfort zone to adopt a more holistic approach to learning. It is evident in the case of John, for example, that past experience was brought to bear on learning which enabled a more expansive understanding of the possible relationship between personal and public knowledge. Additionally, as the case of Sara illustrates, the creative process may provide an outlet for unexpressed emotions and help consolidate previous learning on theology and religious studies. The supplementary workshops are often evaluated as an enjoyable experience that brings back a notion of free play. Stephen reported that he could see the potential of using visual arts in his future ministry which means that the creative potential of his experience is still perhaps to be fully realised.

From a tutor's perspective, we can reflect on the fact that students should be guided to think through the choice of genre carefully. They should be encouraged initially to select a variety of possible projects, to work through the possibilities for each one and make final decisions further into the course. If students choose one at the start they feel reluctant to deviate from this and it might not be the best option to help them develop their creativity. In future, students will be asked to come up with at least three ideas and through discussion with tutors decide the best prospect for achieving the learning outcomes. Again this is where the tutor can facilitate the process and help the students make connections between their own quest for self-identity, relevant myths and stories, and knowledge in the subject area.

Drawing on autobiographical elements but developing the self as

a fully fictionalised character (which John did successfully) may allow the student to move beyond an overly subjective, confessional approach which can act as a barrier to creativity. Students' personal experience and insight have to be taken seriously and teaching and learning strategies need to be developed that support this. However, we found that some tended towards the overly subjective and it was difficult to shift them from this focus.

Reflecting on discussions at a symposium at Glasgow University to discuss the relationship between creative writing and theology[19] it seemed that the issue of subjectivity also arises within creative writing courses generally. While it is impossible to write creatively without drawing on life experiences, at the same time literature that is purely confessional has little value for the reader and prevents the writer moving beyond their own subjectivity. This can be dealt with in tutorials, class seminars and writing workshops to encourage students to fictionalise aspects of their life, add humour, hyperbole etc in order to depersonalise it somewhat. It can become a bit awkward for the tutor and painful for the student if after recounting significantly personal family traumas a tutor fails the work. We learnt that an intense focus on personal loss, drama or conflict failed to make the creative connections to other discourses and texts which the module outcomes required.

One of the key issues that have arisen is around the tutor's relationship with the creative writing and art workshops and the creative element of the summative assessment. Furthermore, to what extent should module tutors be creative themselves? In order to advise on the creative piece it would seem reasonable to expect that the module tutors should be involved in both aspects. Jackson *et al* argue that creativity within a higher education context from a tutor's perspective is evident through:

> connecting in imaginative and useful ways the knowledge, application and process skills, and ways of seeing the world from a disciplinary perspective to the needs and interests of students so that they might learn and be inspired to engage in learning in the subject. [20]

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[19] 9th January 2009 chaired by Prof. David Jasper.
[20] Jackson et al, ibid., 2006, pp. 200-201.

In this vein, the tutor would act as an intermediary between the workshops where creative writing skills are being developed, the themes and concepts relevant to the subject area of theology and religious studies, and the individual ideas that students want to develop in a creative piece. As an extension to this, Jackson et al have concluded that the tutor 'must act as a role model to show students what it means to be creative.'[21] In the context of the modules discussed here it does not necessarily mean that the tutor needs to be an accomplished creative writer or painter. Rather they need to demonstrate what creativity means in all tutor led activities by making conceptual and imaginative links between different discourses, subject related content, and subjectivities and context. A tutor's ultimate goal according to Jackson et al is about 'changing the way people see the world and helping people construct new meaning.'[22] And this is what we hope we can move our students to develop in their own creative assessments. In the process, it has proved beneficial for the tutor to take part in the workshops not as tutor, but as a student, in order to empathise with the task and demonstrate a willingness to take risks, as well as highlighting that the desire to be creative is more important than the quality of the final product. After all, we, like the majority our students, do not have any specialism in the craft of literary writing or visual arts.

Finally, and importantly, it might be perceived that work of this type is more immune to the problems of plagiarism but that is not the case and in many ways it is more difficult to detect. As a result we reflect on the centrality of the workshop experience and whether the genesis and substantial creation of the creative piece should not be generated in the workshop time. This might enable a greater number to witness its creation and to offer feedback and comment.

Student and tutor evaluation of the modules

In the main student feedback has been positive about their experience. In comparing student achievement on our modules to their achievement on other modules it would appear that most do at least as well.

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[21] Ibid., p.207.
[22] Ibid.

But even though they might not achieve significantly higher grades their evaluation of the modules is good, they seem to have benefited in ways that move beyond getting a grade. Evaluative comments range from the general—'the most enjoyable module of the whole pro-gramme', 'this is what higher education should be about'—to a more specific 'this has helped me in my PGCE interview'. A few students have openly evaluated the module as 'a life changing experience' while others are more low key and point to the assessment as providing 'a really nice change from writing essays'. It comes as no surprise that some identify 'a feeling of being outside my comfort zone' but reassur-ing to know that there are a significant number who report that the creative element has 'allowed me to develop deeper theological insights' or 'expand my own faith perspective'.

This suggests that students generally enjoy modules which allow them opportunities for creative expression and can identity that the experience opens up their learning. It is equally apparent that they feel it gives them additional value in relation to future aspirations. For some students, they are simply excited (or relieved) to be able to engage in 'something different' or what some students even described as 'relaxing' but most importantly a significant number identify where learning has happened and how the creative dimension has challenged them to see things in different ways.

Our project modules are elective and we attract a large number of students (c 20-35), one common factor for all is the concern that they will not do as well as they normally due in modules with a creative element. This is not just fear of failure because they are outside of their comfort zone but fear of failure in relation to damaging their chances of getting a good degree. What we try to achieve is an understanding that their creative endeavours are part of a whole process where they will be asked to articulate through a supporting commentary what they have been attempting to achieve. It is as the ICP noted in their evalua-tion of student feedback, an emphasis on creativity brings anxiety and 'a sense of frustration at a perceived conflict between being creative and being 'academic'.'[23] Students want to engage in these kinds of learning opportunities and many can see the value of it but they do not always see that higher education supports this way of working. In our

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[23] Oliver, M. et al in Jackson, N. et al, ibid., p. 54.

experience, students who would identify this as an area of conflict are quite right to do so and the frustrations are legion on the part of both students and teachers. Assessment criteria which highlight creativity, imagination, innovation etc as exemplifying work of a higher standard, but with little explanation as to what such means in practice, will contribute to student concern and frustration. To militate against this we explicitly teach about creativity, how it might be understood and how it might be exemplified in the context of our modules and an exploration of theology and/or religious studies.

When we first envisaged our projects we did not do so with an explicit agenda to enter the debate about creativity in higher education, but in researching where our project might be located in the broader context of pedagogic work in higher education we are now motivated to continue this exploration. We also consider that there is more to be said about the specificity of our work utilising a creative writing and creative arts approach. We believe that there is significance in students actually creating artefacts that they then analyse and we are now interested to explore issues around brain function and being creative and how this might open up new ways of thinking for theology and religious studies.

We began with challenges and two years on we are facing more challenges as we continue to understand and articulate why we are doing what we are doing. We continue to reflect on the student experience and the impact on them of engaging in learning and assessment that utilises a method that may be, and for many is, new and therefore challenging. We wonder whether there is something more holistic about this as an approach to teaching, learning and assessment (and even in research), as against more traditional, didactic, tutor-led approaches. We are encouraged by O'Loughlin's[24] outlining of the work of Pattison who sees and cautions against a shift towards an empirical, scientistic, preoccupation with the 'fetishism of facts'—for him in the study of and research into practical theology and, we might say, across the discipline. We value the contribution of empiricism and a scientific dimension, but we too share a view that in our teaching and

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[24] O'Loughlin, R., 'The Relationship Between Pedagogical and Discipline-specific Research Methods: Critical Perspectives', *Discourse*, Spring 2008, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 67 – 120.

learning in the subject we have to make space for methods and approaches that allow for 'subjectivity, insight, wisdom, intuition and the intrinsically valuable and interesting'[25] albeit supported and justified.

We hope that the modules as they are now configured provide students with an opportunity to engage with study of the discipline that demands they re-assess and re-present much of what they have previously learnt and understood. We hope that they are encouraged through being 'creative' to take these skills and the new insights gained of the discipline into their future pathways, careers and learning. We know that many will not return to the subject of their undergraduate degree—theology and/or religious studies, but we believe that this final level challenge will fit them well to be more creative, imaginative, and innovative human beings. For those that do return to be the researchers of tomorrow we are confident that this experience will encourage them in that endeavour too.

Conclusion

Based on student feedback and our own evaluation of the modules we are committed to offering them again and to finding ways of improving the experience for students. We are concerned that the module learning outcomes need to reflect more appropriately the possibility that students might determine their own direction of travel in relation to ideas, concepts, problems they will debate. To this end we will modify outcomes that appear to be too prescriptive in terms of subject focus and to open them out to be process driven and concerned with generic outcomes. We need to reflect more on process versus subject content outcomes not least because there would appear to be a growing discussion which suggests the slavish articulation of precise, subject focussed outcomes does inhibit student learning, particularly in a higher education culture which is beginning to debate methodologies like Enquiry Based Learning. We consider that it is important to discuss with each individual student what specific outcomes they want to work towards and to encourage them to articulate how and in what ways this

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[25] Ibid., p. 105.

enables them to demonstrate creativity in relation to the subject area.

To date we have not assessed the final product on its own merits —these are not modules in creative writing or creative arts practice and we are not expecting students to demonstrate expertise in and proficient demonstration of such skills; however, it is vital that students see the creative expression as central to their experience of the module and consequently we will continue to dedicate significant module time to the workshops to enable students to learn and practice some level of skill within these disciplines. We think it is appropriate that students provide a commentary with their creative artefact and through this to be able to demonstrate their understanding of the process and meaning they are creating. We believe the written reflection is an essential element to maintain academic integrity and to protect students whose creative projects do not match up to expectation.

In conclusion we need to ask if this development has enhanced the student experience. We believe that it has and that it has the potential to do so more, as we understand better what we are doing. Overall the evidence suggests that the modules enhance student ability to reflect theologically and make conceptual links between theology/ religion and literature/visual arts.

Our project has been what John Cowan describes as 'active experimentation'.[26] Rather than take a predetermined or established teaching and learning strategy this process has been organic, it has evolved and to some extent the student experience has driven the final outcome. We started with a strong inclination that if students engaged in creative expression through writing and art practice and linked this with their on-going and newly developed knowledge and understanding of the subject area they might stimulate, provoke, unlock new ways of thinking that would be more creative, more dynamic, more holistic, more affective. Jackson states that 'nurturing students' creativity in higher education is best achieved through a process- or activity-based curriculum that engages students in challenging, novel and unpredictable ways of working and learning'[27] and our approach certainly takes this seriously.

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[26] Cowan, J., *On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2006) p.156.
[27] Jackson, N., ibid., at p. 211.

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Hermits, Closed Orders and Congregations:

Issues around Promoting Communities of Theological Scholarship in a Globalised and IT-brokered World

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Introduction

This paper examines how the Open Theological College, a distance learning course in theology, has enabled students from a diverse background to study theology part-time alongside their other commitments in life. Important factors for their success include

flexibility and accessibility of the course. It is suggested that, for the future, besides any improvements related to learning technology, the OTC can work yet further to improve the accessibility of the course by working towards building a learning community that involves a yet wider range of individuals and approaches, and perspectives to theology within its boundaries. This includes such issues as how communal relationships should be construed and how power between the education provider and learners should be brokered.

Background

The Open Theological College (OTC) was originally formed in the early 1990s as a partnership of six UK bible colleges. Its mission was to promote theological education for those who could not attend traditional residential-based theology courses. Modeled in principle after the Open University, Level 1 courses were delivered by the partner colleges, and Levels 2 and 3 directly from the OTC. The administration of the course was also done from the OTC in Cheltenham. The programme was validated by the University of Gloucestershire (then Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education) and the College operated from the premises of the University.

The OTC was incorporated into the University in 2002 and became part of the Department of Humanities. Subsequently, the University decided to redevelop the programme. All levels would now be delivered by the University, and the old programme was to be phased out. The provision of electronic learning tools was enhanced, including with a greater integration of library facilities (including access to electronic articles via ATLA) and the addition of WebCT virtual learning environment software. Students could also now utilise a postal library. The programme had originally been delivered with no fixed time limits for completing each module as long as this was within the overall time limits of the students, but from 2006 the delivery of modules was moved into a semesterised system. Currently, the new programme has been completely developed, with some 35 modules either written or revised. New features for 2009-2010 include move to Moodle VLE software and minor revisions to the Level 1 programme. The student body is diverse, consisting of mature students in UK and

abroad. All study part-time, even though a full-time mode is also available upon request. As the student body is diverse, it is difficult to identify a typical student, but some examples of an OTC student might include a computer programmer studying on the course part-time alongside their work, a housewife, a retired professional, or a pastor in Christian ministry, whether with or without previous academic study, either in theology or some other field.

Learning model

Each module includes a substantial learning manual that guides students in their study and includes a basic explanation of the module content, activities to reinforce learning and links to guided readings. As students progress in their studies, they are also encouraged to move towards their own research. While no residentials where students physically gather together are required, each module offers a two-week Moodle discussion seminar, and students are also offered an annual residential summer school. Students submit their assignments to tutors with whom they can communicate by telephone and email. The assignments are marked by their tutor and moderated at the OTC office according to standard University moderating procedures. Students then have an opportunity to have a telephone or email tutorial with their tutors after receiving their assignments back marked.

Features that have enabled students to study successfully with the OTC

Probably the most important feature for the success of the programme has been the provision of carefully constructed modular course materials that are selfstanding, flexible and accessible. There are no entry requirements to Level 1, except for sufficient proficiency in English, and students can study at home in their own pace within the deadlines for assessment for each module. Associate students do not have any deadlines for the completion of their study programme, they only need to keep within the time limits of each module taken (they can forgo assessment if they do not aim to obtain formal credit for the module).

Extensions are available for students with mitigating circumstances. Each module comes with a module manual has been produced by a subject specialist, under the supervision of the Course Leader. (In this, the development process required some considerable effort—each manual is on average of the magnitude of 40,000 to 50,000 words, and manuals for 35 modules thus total some 1,500,000 words). Each module also involves a set of textbooks, and a separate reader of extracts is provided together with the module manual. Most modules are divided to about 15 study units that normally involve about three hours study so that one unit can be completed in one evening's study session. Module units incorporate readings, activities and study links, utilising electronic resources where applicable. The manuals promote various viewpoints, and facilitate the development of critical thinking and research skills as students progress in their studies. As already mentioned, the recent inclusion of VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) seminars has enabled interaction between students who may be far removed geographically. Each seminar typically involves guided asynchronous discussions over a two-week period and focuses on relevant aspects of the module where such discussions can particularly enhance the learning experience, and seminars generally also reinforce module content and bring out new perspectives on it. Recently the OTC has experimented with linking VLE discussions to assessment. For example, students on the first module 'Introduction to the Old Testament: The Pentateuch' are asked to write a reflective report on their WebCT (current VLE software used) seminar as part of their first assignment.

Blended Learning and the OTC

The advantages of campus-based learning usually include closer teacher-student and student-student interaction, the opportunity to take care of any administrative issues relating to studies in person with relevant officers at the University, and, importantly, overall feeling of community.[1] At the same time, except for cost considerations, the

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[1] Cf. e.g. V. Roach and L. Lemasters 'Satisfaction with Online Learning: A Comparative Descriptive Study', *Journal of Interactive Online Learning* 5.3 (2006),

advantages of distance learning include emphasis on study and research skills and on the development of student initiative in and responsibility for their own learning.[2] Blended learning of course would try to combine best aspects of both face to face and distance learning. Interestingly, most campus-based courses at the University of Gloucestershire now include a VLE site, and, in general, most higher education institutions in the UK have incorporated VLE. Because many part-time students on campus-based programmes are unable to attend campus regularly, it is useful for residential programmes to consider any issues relating to delivery that have traditionally been associated with distance learning (e.g. dealing with students who find it difficult to attend lectures), in case such considerations might help these students. At the same time, for example, VLE sites with links to resources and enhanced electronic library facilities will enhance the experience of both campus-based students and students at a distance.

Learning communities

Here we come to the questions of how learning happens and what makes good learning. It is clear that much of what we learn we learn from others. Of course, we also learn from experience, and while some of our experiences are individual, many of them arise from interaction with other people. Even when we learn from experiences that are not directly shaped by other people, we reflect on such experiences based on our previous understanding, and much of this has been shaped by our previous learning and experiences with others. And, of course, as language is the medium through which much of our reflection takes place, and language is learned from others, this means that ultimately practically all of our learning is communal one way or another, even when we sometimes might want to try to give as little acknowledgement to the communal element as possible. And, of course, much of our learning from others and from literature is based on a body of knowledge that has developed over generations, and hundreds, even thousands of years. While we may not always agree that all aspects of the

317-332 (pp. 321-322).
[2] Cf. e.g. Roach and Lemasters 'Satisfaction with Online Learning', p. 320.

body of knowledge available to us constitute an advance in knowledge, in some areas, such as technology-related subjects, this is certainly the case, save any ethical reservations we might have about the application of such knowledge. As for theological studies, in any case, it is the nature of the subject that one would be expected to interact critically with the interpretations of others that ultimately span the two-thousand-year history of the Christian church and beyond.

Learning communities and the development of knowledge

We may thus summarise that practically all of our learning is communal, whatever the case, and this can also very much be said about theological learning. However, throughout history people have had a differing idea of what communal learning should be like. In terms of theological education, people in the past have had a wide variety of understandings about what community means. If we take theological learning in a wide sense of incorporating anything that relates to learning about Christianity, the New Testament itself suggests guidelines for what a Christian (learning) community should be like. And yet, even (church) history has shown that various individuals have interpreted these guidelines differently. Related interpretations range from hermits who sought to get closer to the divine (invariably with a desire of a better understanding of the divine, which of course can be considered a form of learning) in isolated places, to monastic orders that were themselves more or less isolated but operated as a group to work together and share ideas to modern evangelistic congregations who often promote a more universal engagement. As for theological study in higher education, as with most other education, the predominant model has generally been that students come to the teacher to learn. This has probably been much the case since the development of universities in Middle Ages, but one might trace the roots of this for example to the scribal schools of ancient Mesopotamia. And, of course, in the Orient, a dominant traditional model of learning has been a close one-to one relationship between a master and a disciple. Ultimately, these have incorporated the idea that learning is 'delivered' by the teacher in close physical proximity to the student, with its associated

feedback and reflection in effect more or less taking place under the close physical supervision of the teacher. Certainly, such a model increases the power of the teacher to develop the student in ways that the teacher wishes. However, with the development, or, rather, proliferation of books, delivery has become less dependent on physical proximity between the student and teacher.[3] Naturally, in general, books have been available since the development of writing towards the end of the fourth millennium BC, but it has been only with the advent of the printing press that books could become the property of the masses (interestingly, libraries as such already existed before the invention of the printing press). Such developments have inevitably reduced the need for close proximity between students and teachers and enabled more independent learning. At the same time, they have probably decreased the direct power of teachers and other authorities, and this may ultimately have even been one important reason for the development of democracy in the West.[4] Of course, the choice of books often limits one's choices, making culture and scholarly communities more of a delimiting factor, and this is probably for example reflected in the way Western consciousness has worked since the enlightenment and the invention of the printing press and the development of modernity.[5]

Subsequent to the development of the printed page, the development of electronics and computers that started in the West, and in the latter part of the 20th century in particular, has further enabled access to information that requires less direct interaction between students and teachers. One interesting future development that is also very relevant for distance learning is the development of digital libraries. While digitising all books and articles in the world is still quite a way off, the trend is towards digitisation, and much has been digitised already. For example, OTC students can access the ATLA electronic database with a good number of articles available online, and can already preview books via Google books. Certain publishers make their books available also in electronic form, sometimes even free of charge.

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[3] Cf. Eriksen, T.H., *Globalization: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007), pp. 16-17. Eriksen also notes that books particularly (have) enabled the accumulation of knowledge.

[4] Cf. Eriksen, ibid., p. 24. Eriksen however notes that in another sense they have promoted standardisation of thought (ibid, pp. 24-25).

[5] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

Technology has of course also enabled those with similar interests to increasingly be able to communicate with each other without being in close physical proximity. While such communication already occurred via letters in antiquity, and telegraph and telephony from the 19th century on,[6] the recent development of the Internet in particular has enabled virtually instantaneous communications between various parts of the world (this includes email and internet telephony). The Internet, and recent computer technology in general, have enabled such innovations that relate to learning technology as VLEs that are presently taken for granted. In general, for example, with the OTC, students are constantly evaluating the practical side of delivery and, as one might guess, provide feedback about course delivery constantly. This means that it is important to work towards increasingly efficient and user-friendly delivery and access to learning resources that technology might enable. That said, interestingly, a number of students express that participating in VLE seminars has contributed towards a feeling of belonging and reduced their isolation, while some prefer to work on without much direct interaction with others.[7]

Technology thus both enables people to access increasing amounts of information without the need of physical proximity to the provider of that information, and at the same time potentially enables virtual contact with others with similar interests from their location.

[6] See e.g. Patricia Fara, *Science: A Four Thousand Year History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 212-213 on telegraph.

[7] Note here the comment in Roach and Lemasters, 'Satisfaction with Online Learning', pp. 320-321 (quoting G. Rosenfeld, 'A comparison of the outcomes of distance learning students versus traditional classroom students in the community college'. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 66[05] [2005], 1607) that, while the overall quality of learning between distance learning and face to face learning seems to be comparable, face to face learning seems to achieve higher completion rates. One might argue that this is because of a sense of community that face to face teaching enables. However, might one also at least partially think that as face to face learning generally requires a greater investment of time and money, those who have made such investments are less likely to drop out? The study *Non-Completion in Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education: A Literature Review Commissioned by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs* by C. McInnis, R. Hartley, J. Polesel and R. Teese, REB Report 4/00 (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 2000) also seems to imply that more complicated issues than just the question of being part of a closely interacting community are at stake.

Interestingly, such a situation seems at first sight to increase choices that are available to the individual in question. Consequently, those who wish to remain isolated hermits or equivalent can in many ways opt to do so (even when it is generally unlikely that they can withdraw to a cave, even though perhaps to a virtual cave instead),[8] on the other hand, those that wish to engage directly with others potentially have a global reach through the Internet. In this particular sense, technology seems fairly neutral, even though, it certainly seems to increase the potential for people to interact with each other, and this seems a useful trend. As one specific point, we should also mention here that, importantly, technology clearly seems to enable enhanced access to people with disabilities, including via distance when such people might find it difficult to move and travel about.

In terms of what is actually being taught, as learning (or, perhaps, rather, teaching) usually involves exercise of power, technology seems to at least partly devolve related power away from those that have traditionally decided what should be taught and what not, even if such decisions may sometimes have been implicit and influenced by tradition and culture. For example, students might have easy access to information that would not normally be recommended by teachers, for whatever reason. As one related observation, such devolving of power and the ability to pick and mix has probably further helped the advent of today's postmodern age. The advent of global communications has also enabled people to become more aware of other cultures and ways of thinking, even though language barriers are still one significant limit to true intracultural understanding. At the same time, on a different trajectory, the development of mass media (newspapers, radio and television—these are now also delivered through the Internet) has actually worked towards increasing the ability of those in power to at least influence their societies and beyond with their views.[9] There is thus a tension between individualism and democracy on one hand, and

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[8] Cf. Eriksen, *Globalization*, pp. 29-31 which discusses fragmentation and potential alienation in the contemporary globalised society.

[9] This was already the case since the invention of newspapers, and of radio and television. Interestingly, the power of experts can perhaps be associated with these developments, too, even when other issues are also at stake, and, recently, certain erosion of confidence in experts has taken place (cf. Eriksen, *Globalization*, pp. 29, 132-133).

control on the other, and it is no wonder that, for example, governments presently seem to be increasingly interested in monitoring the Internet, and even controlling its usage directly, at least in certain parts of the world. However, and as already implied, any education provider will also have to ask questions about the use of the Internet, certainly, making references to what are deemed as dodgy websites by students is a concern for the OTC. Of course, such uncritical referencing is a simple example, but, for example, how about if students are referring to and influenced by literature that advocates a particular academic stance which might not be considered as acceptable by the education provider? With the OTC this might for example include a student with non-trinitarian views, against which there are certainly no apparent explicit qualms as such, but such a student might still be in practice be marked down for holding such views, or even considered strange or at least to some extent the odd one out. Or, to what extent could a follower of Islam in practice really study on the OTC course? Or, in a wider sense, what role should personal faith commitments play in the study, and on what terms can and should people with varying faith commitments and presuppositions study on the course, considering that the relationship between faith and academic study is known to be a tricky issue for a number of those who study theology? In general, we know even from the history of science that new and radical views can be found difficult to accept, and if and when they have been accepted and eventually become mainstream, this may sometimes even have taken a considerable amount of time.[10] These simply suggest that what should be considered as acceptable and what less so, or not at all, may not be a clear-cut issue at a given time, and what is not considered acceptable at a given time might be considered thus later, or in a different academic culture.

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[10] See e.g. Kuhn, T.S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1996), P. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, 3rd edn (London/New York: Verso, 1993). Certainly, Kuhn's views, while influential, have been subject to extensive criticism and have not met universal acceptance, as for example Fara, *Science*, notes (see p. 184). While space precludes further comments here, we may note here that Fara herself points out cases where new ideas were not accepted immediately (e.g. Darwin lived his life as a recluse due to some vituperative opposition; see Fara, *Science*, p. 230), in many ways much in line with what Kuhn would argue in this respect.

Through these comments, we can see that an important issue is not only to ensure that people can be in a situation where they can learn, but the question of what they should learn and who controls the end product and how. Certainly, the development of technology has now enabled the coming together of minds from across the globe. Much of discussion with distance learning is about asking questions about the experience of students and ultimately the quality of student learning. While these are valid concerns, one may nevertheless ask the question of whether some of the worries are related to the question of how much the 'teachers' have control over students taught. In order to move forward in this, perhaps universities should think yet further of what constitutes good learning and scholarship. In theological subjects in particular, we know that, for example within the subfield of the Old Testament (the main area of specialisation of the author of this article), there are various schools of thought, each teaching their students in a particular way (mainstream, maximalist, minimalist). From the stand-point of culture, for example, can such learners that do not embrace the boundary conditions of the learning community be embraced? Or, better, how can the boundaries expanded to include a wider array of individuals with differing perspectives and approaches? In the past, communities have been able to ostracise or otherwise block the progress of learners who do not share their fundamental assumptions. The lessening of control in a number of ways in the modern world has (as it certainly seems) increased the freedom of learners to take views that differ from dominant ones. With the OTC, as suggested by comments above, sometimes issues relating to diversity in thinking arise directly from students. At other times, this may be less the case, and it is the task of the provider to reflect on these based on some other considerations. Certainly, students coming to a new field of study, such as the Old Testament, may often not be in a position to critique new approaches, and should be guided by the education provider. At the same time, as already hinted at, the provider may be fixed to a particular set of approaches, and it might require an innovative student or equivalent to give new ideas. Also, sometimes students might feel difficult to express different or radical ideas if they feel that the academic culture they are part of does not support such ideas. It might even be asked if, for example, some students who approach the subject from a personal faith perspective might, in the course of their studies, perceive

academic study as not supportive of faith and quietly withdraw, or, in general find the course as not what they expected. Or, vice versa, with faith-based courses, some students may feel that given approaches are too restrictive in terms of a particular denominational stance.[11] Certainly the OTC does have students who say that the course was not what they expected, and one may wonder if allowing for more diversity might have helped, even when it is sometimes not possible to be certain of the reasons. And, of course, if the course is perceived in a certain way, some prospective students might not wish to embark on it to start with. To address these types of issues, the balances of power need to be carefully considered in order to arrive at an optimal mix between traditional approaches to theological learning and innovation within such learning. If one can thus arrive at a balance that provides for optimal results with learning, we are in other words speaking about how to achieve enhanced quality and standards of learning.

Summary and prospects

To summarise, it is very beneficial to utilise technological innovations for enhancing student learning in a distance learning context in particular. Accordingly, providers should carefully pay attention to adapting helpful technologies for themselves. However, the technologies available should be used in a carefully considered manner. Ultimately we also come to issues of community and how power is used within communities. The potential danger of allowing too much freedom is the lack of quality of student learning. The danger of too much control is the lack of finding new innovative ways to learning and the subject matter, and potentially hampering the progress of students that do not fit in commonly known and accepted categories. In theological study, there are ample examples of both of these extremes. The task is to find approaches that make students aware of the rich tradition of theological study while at the same time enabling students to seek their own innovative views and perspectives on the subject.

[11] It is understandable that, say, faith based providers may have reasons to set certain more or less express boundaries, for example in terms of what might be required of a Christian minister operating in a certain denomination, however, they can nevertheless reflect on these related matters carefully.

As for universities, they have a fair bit of control over issues relating to learning through their course design and degree awarding powers. In addition, scholarly communities generally consist of persons qualified through university study. (In fact, these communities are fairly global nowadays, with much of their communication occurring as would happen with distance learning programmes, and with the occasional residentials [conferences]). With for example access to public funding, such communities, which of course have their own cultural characteristics and ways of thinking, also exert considerable power. As intimated, one of the tasks would then be for these communities to maximise access to existing body of knowledge without becoming overly prescriptive about what to do with it. Naturally, in this context, it is very important for such communities to continually reflect on what quality of learning is. Generally, monitoring quality takes place through peer review,[12] and the government also provides guidelines to education providers broadly based on the peer review process. Innovation will be to encourage people to higher understanding that truly transcends limits previously experienced, and the peer review process should allow for diversity and explorations of previously uncharted ideas and territories, including when external examiners might look at student work on a course they have been assigned to. In the past, hermits sought to withdraw from the world in order to transcend its limitations. Similarly, monastic communities, and churches in general sought to form their own communities that would again transcend the world around, and sometimes transform it. In theological learning, perhaps the task is to find a model of a learning community that can build on existing knowledge and at the same time truly attempt to transcend what already exists for better understanding and for a better world.[13] The challenge for distance learning (and for education in general) is to find a model that enhances the possibilities of students to move towards such a path. In this, studying at a distance naturally gives students the freedom to be more independent. At the same time, they perhaps have less personal access to a learning community in the

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[12] For a recent analysis of peer review, in terms of judging quality in particular, see Michèle Lamont, How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[13] Of course, what a 'better world' means is itself subject for discussion.

discipline that could help them benefit from the learning that the community has already achieved, in addition to any feeling of belonging that at least some might desire. The important point for future course design is to enable best aspects of both tradition and innovation. This in my view will also be a continuing challenge that the OTC course faces in the future, even when it is clear that the OTC has already worked to address many of these issues through its course design. As can be seen, the issue is ultimately not about mode of delivery, but about the way students are both made to understand what the existing knowledge is and how to truly transform and develop that knowledge further in innovative ways, and one may trust that this will ultimately benefit their respective communities, and society and humanity at large. This said, it is important to continually consider further ways to develop the way the OTC programme, and for that matter, all theological programmes are delivered at a practical level in support of these important goals.

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Guiding the 'Crisis of Faith':

What Do We Need to Consider When Using Intercultural Communication Tools in the Religious Studies Classroom?

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I truly enjoy participating fully in both of my cultures. (Integration Stage of the DMIS: Bennett, 1993: 11)

We believe there are many sincere and wonderful people in every religious denomination. But I must tell you with all due respect that only the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches the fullness of the gospel. (M. Russell Ballard 1993: 25).

The Quality Assurance Assessment states, parenthetically, that 'a degree of 'culture shock' may be involved in study of the past, as well as the encounter with the beliefs, doctrines, and practices of contemporary others.' In this brief article, I would like to utilize my intercultural[1] training and theoretical interests in religious studies to think creatively about this notion of 'culture shock' and offer up some preliminary questions about the opportunities and pitfalls of one popular model for intercultural sensitivity, Milton Bennett's Developmental Model for Intercultural Sensitivity, for us as educators in the field of religious studies. It is hoped that further pursuit of these questions might not only aid us pedagogically speaking but also contribute to ongoing conversations about the way(s) we conceptualize religion.

According to the majority of interculturalists, 'culture shock' is a good thing, even though it may not feel like it at the time. Dean Barnlund (in Bennett, 1998) defines it rather unnervingly as feeling 'trapped in an absurd and indecipherable nightmare' (47). He says, 'It is as if some hostile leprechaun has gotten into the works and as a comic caper has rewired the connections that hold society together' (47). When it comes to religion, we tend to call this a 'crisis of faith' and the terror is often existential in nature. While we may not willingly invite such an experience, the truth of the matter is that we are often faced with it whether we like it or not, and it is entirely possible that our own lectures, discussions, readings, and assignments may bring it about for our students. In terms of ethics, the question here is not whether we as teachers ethically have the right to destabilize[2] our

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[1] The term 'intercultural' is used here in distinction from other terms such as 'cross-cultural': 'Inter- means between or among, therefore the term intercultural means between or among cultures. Intercultural describes interactions between people from different cultures—an answer to the question, 'Who is communicating?' The focus is on the interaction and the people doing the interacting' (Carter 2006: 6-7).

[2] See O'Loughlin (2008): 'According to Philip L. Tite, a pervasive, yet under-discussed, problem in religious studies classrooms is the presence of faith crisis. He claims that many students face a type of cognitive dissonance when confronted with the critical-analytical approach in the academic study of religion. Kate Crosby, Stephen Pattison and Andrew Skilton have noted that in no other subject than TRS does the academic agenda confront so fundamental an aspect of the individual's identity. When experienced as such, this confrontation can lead students to suspend critical judgement and withdraw from the academic process to protect their faith, or to focus on 'safe subjects'. On the other hand, it may lead to their alienation from

students' most fundamental beliefs about the world—that will happen in relatively unpredictable and inevitable ways, both in the classroom and outside it. Rather, I want to bring up a different issue—that of how we manage that process. I am assuming that, as suggested in various aspects of the QAA about the nature of religious studies as a discipline, most of us here agree that what makes 'culture shock' or a 'crisis of faith' a *good thing* is the learning that can come out of it, particularly the force it may exert on us to complexify rather than simplify the people and world around us. In this sense, intercultural approaches to developing a capacity to work through experiences of difference in a sensitive manner (however defined) are certainly valuable in religious studies.

Most, if not all, of us are already using intercultural tools. Particularly in this field, most of us have studied, worked, lived, and/or taught abroad or in communities that were very different from the one(s) in which we grew up and feel comfortable. So in one way or another we are all personally familiar with the inherent difficulty of defining religion and culture in any way that entirely separates them from each other. If we were successful in our experiences in the new communities, it means that we found ways to adapt. If we struggled, we may empathize with our students' struggles when they first encounter the new ideas brought to their attention through our courses. We may generally know how to adapt to foreign ideas and practices from our experiences in diverse religious, cultural, and other settings. Perhaps we use those experiences to understand our students, to help them learn, and to encourage them to pose questions and experiment with practices that help them to adapt and learn from new experiences, too. In this era of student-centered learning, we often speak of 'tools' and 'resources' for students. We are 'equipping' them to think critically. To echo Paolo Freire, we are emphasizing the process of *becoming human* over against a banking style approach of depositing information into student minds—a difference of treating our students as subjects versus objects of education (1970). We promise our students that when they graduate from a religious studies program they should be able to think and communicate about sensitive issues, and we aim to give them a

their own faith background, even to the transferring of their faith on to the academic process as a substitute worldview' (online version).

framework for that rather than emphasizing (teacher-selected) content alone. Relatively speaking, this is a recent transformation of approach to education, and as a result we've had to rely on our own experiences as researchers and educators rather than on a clear pedagogical precedent. We might try relatively 'safe' activities like reading about and discussing people, religious and cultural practices, historical events, and so on that are different from the students' own, or more experimental, 'higher risk' activities such as service-learning, creative writing, or other forms of experiential education, but I would suggest that neither end of the spectrum is, in fact, 'safer' than the other. Consider, for instance, this tongue-in-cheek limerick which I found waiting for me on my orientation materials for the Lancaster Religious Studies department, attributed to Ninian Smart:

> Our approaches are Christian, Buddhistic,
> And even, indeed, rationalistic;
> But we cannot give degrees
> To whomever we please –
> E.g. to a practising mystic.

I think the humour in this limerick is not so much that we cannot imagine a mystic joining our courses but rather that, as much as we may desire for our students to understand its premise at the outset of their degree programs, the practicing mystic may very well walk through our door on the first day of class and take a seat beside a student who is not particularly religious, who in turn may be seated beside a Quaker. I will always remember my first experience of a religious studies class: my evangelical Christian classmate opened a Bible and prayed aloud while the teacher tried to deliver a seemingly harmless lecture on the New Testament. That classmate experienced even a lecture as a threat to his sense of being in the world and took action to defend himself. No matter who we expect in our classes, or how we hope to make it a comfortable environment that encourages learning, it seems that there will always be somebody who feels s/he has taken a great leap simply by showing up and finds it not in the least bit 'safe.'

To be a bit bold, I would like to re-assert that it is *not* our responsibility to preserve our students' perhaps fragile faiths. Again, the

'crisis of faith' can be a good thing. However, I would suggest that it is our responsibility to create a space in which our students learn how to stretch beyond their own fears, particularly to learn how to listen more effectively. By listening, I do not mean it in the common-sense way of sitting back and hearing what somebody says; rather, I'm speaking of it in terms of radical openness, the sort that allows for the possibility to be changed by what we hear (Farrin 2008). In my experiences of both religious studies classrooms and interfaith activities, I have found that most people would rather say what is acceptable in polite company than what is truly transformative for a given relationship, positive or negative; while a period of comfort-building is important and necessary, it does little good, in my opinion, to remain forever 'politically correct' in the religious studies classroom, yet our students may not know how to strike a balance between respecting the other and still asking the tough questions about the subject matter. In a keynote address at Willamette University for incoming freshmen in 2007, Salman Rushdie said, 'Be brutal with ideas but courteous to those who speak them.' How does one go about doing that? How does one *teach* that skill?

I believe intercultural strategies for pushing students to move beyond defensiveness may be extremely valuable to religious studies educators when handled with care for the subject matter. I will here briefly introduce Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS),[3] helpful to review because of its widespread use in both business and academic settings as a tested model for intercultural communication, and follow that with the research of Mohammed Abu-Nimer, who utilized the DMIS in an inter-religious peace-building course that raised questions and concerns that are helpful for the religious studies educator to consider, though with different aims in mind.

Bennett's DMIS is a powerful, practical tool with which I was mentored as an undergraduate while working as a peer coach for Japanese exchange students and several years later used to coach student workers as a university administrator. It proved to be an effective reference point in helping students to develop greater sensitivity

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[3] A more detailed summary of this model is available online, provided by Bennett himself. See Bennett & Hammer (1998) p. 317-332 (pp. 321-322).

and awareness of difference in a way that led to direct, positive changes in their relationships with others, and for that reason, along with the frequency and effectiveness of its use in research projects related to cultural issues (e.g. Carter 2006; Bray 2006), I have since wondered whether we might also find it useful in the religious studies classroom to help students process their experiences of religious difference, as well, and learn to better communicate about sensitive issues related to religion.[4] The model was developed by Milton Bennett 'as a framework to explain the reactions of people to cultural difference' (Bennett & Hammer, 1998: 1). A key assumption of the model is that 'as one's *experience of difference* becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relations increases' (1). The emphasis of the model is on experience over against knowledge—'street smarts'

[4] By no means a simplistic concern, I am assuming here that this model does have a practical applicability in the religious studies classroom. Some questions I have considered in this regard include: How might the DMIS model help us in the classroom or our religious studies programmes? Would it be only a conceptual tool we use behind the scenes, in order to better support our students, or would we use to help our students think about their experiences of difference, as Abu-Nimer attempted? Is it only useful in courses teaching ethnographic and interfaith skills, or can it provide a broader base of support? Based on my experience and reading around issues of pedagogy, I am more inclined to suggest using it as a conceptual tool for shaping courses, particularly those with experiential components, and with upper-level courses (undergraduates in their final year, Masters, and PhD-level students), as well as and when thinking of larger-scale programme structure.

[5] One may already question its value in the classroom on this assumption, but I would reiterate my earlier point that our students are, in fact, gaining experience of difference in and out of the classroom, beyond their readings (which some might argue are, in and of themselves, an opportunity to vicariously experience the lives of others). When our students discuss subjects with one another, they are often hearing new opinions and ideas from their classmates and tutors. For many of them, attending university is also the occasion of their first time living away from home, and outside of class they are joining activities and living with flatmates who may come from very different cultural and religious backgrounds. Mature students may have already developed a system for dealing with difference through their non-academic experiences, bringing along a rich source of ideas and sometimes unique challenges for the tutor. In short, even if our students don't already have interesting experiences of difference to aid them in their development, they would be hard-pressed to avoid such experiences on the university campus. Our interest may rightly be in what lessons for communication and understanding they take from those experiences (see also O'Loughlin 2008, particularly regarding the possibilities of utilizing 'phenomenography' and 'exposure learning' in a religious studies

over against 'book smarts,' we might say[5]—but nevertheless has a strong theoretical and pedagogical basis. It is divided into two areas, *ethnocentric* and *ethnorelative*, each with three stages. The ethnocentric stages are Denial, Defense and Minimization. The ethnorelative stages are Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. The terms 'ethnocentric' and 'ethnorelative' may already elicit questions from a religious studies audience; it is helpful to put forward Bennett's definition here and return to questions about them after discussing Abu-Nimer's findings. Bennett defines ethnocentric as 'meaning that one's own culture is experienced as central to reality in some way,' and ethnorelative as 'meaning that one's own culture is experience in the context of other cultures' (1). While there is no inherent value assigned to one or the other, Bennett's model is based on the goal of increasing intercultural competence and as a result aims to encourage students toward the ethnorelative stages, based on the premise that as long as one is 'self'-centered, it is difficult to negotiate meaning with others, particularly in contexts in which one's own values are not primary.[6]

Although I would encourage readers of this article to review one of the brief online guides available of the DMIS model (Bennett 1993a, Bennett & Hammer 1998), as these guides also provide examples of the developmental goals and tasks an educator might utilize to encourage students toward each progressive stage, the summarization of the stages here will enable us to focus on the key questions that arise from transferring the model to issues of inter-religious sensitivity, so with that purpose in mind the stages of the DMIS model are summarized here as follows.

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pedagogy).

[6] If I, as an American, were to visit Japan, I would not always be able to make decisions based on American values and receive the same outcomes I would expect in the United States. As one relatively simplistic example, if I were to lean forward and attempt to make direct eye contact with a Japanese person during a conversation, with the expectation that by doing so I am conveying that I am very interested in the conversation, I may be caught by surprise when she avoids looking back at me and/or angles her body away from me. Based on my American values, I might wonder, 'Is she not interested in what I have to say? Is she uncomfortable? Does she want to end the conversation?' I may not realize that according to Japanese values, she may simply be trying to convey respect or avoid appearing aggressive.

Ethnocentric stages

Denial

Students are unable 'to construe cultural difference' (Bennett 1993a: 1). Students in this stage either believe there are no differences or that differences can be unproblematically categorized (e.g. 'immigrants,' 'Indians').

Defense

Students may recognize differences in this stage but evaluate it negatively in comparison to their own culture,[7] often encouraging polarization (e.g. 'These people don't value life the way we do;' 'What a sexist society!').

Minimization

Students recognize 'superficial cultural differences…while holding that all human beings are essentially the same' (e.g. 'We are all children of God, whether we know it or not' [5]). They tend to universalize their own cultural values.

Ethnorelative stages

Acceptance

Students '[recognize] and [appreciate]…cultural differences in behavior and values' but may feel paralyzed in making decisions on how to act (7). Students may express 'cultural relativity' but do not know how to distinguish this from issues of 'moral or ethical relativity' (8).

Adaptation

Students are effective in using 'empathy, or frame of reference shifting, to understand and be understood across cultural boundaries' (9). They are learning to either empathize or even internalize multiple

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[7] Students also often experience this stage in reverse, seeing other culture(s) as superior to their own.

world views and shift based on given settings or circumstances.

Integration

Students are able to '[maintain] a definition of identity that is 'marginal' to any particular culture' and see themselves as 'in process' (11). They may either be able to draw on multiple frames of reference in order to interpret phenomena or accept 'an identity that is not primarily based in any one culture' (11). They may struggle with a sense of authenticity and in finding a place for themselves.

Hopefully the above summary has already provoked some questions with regard to the religious studies classroom for readers, while at the same time we may also recognize in it some of the vacillations of attitudes found among our students (at least, we might concede, on a cultural level). Before moving on to Abu-Nimer's study, I will add finally that a person may shift back and forth along this model based on their experiences, that this is natural and expected in its use, and that a person may be further along in one cultural setting than another. This flexibility in the model avoids some of the pitfalls of some more universalistic models, such as Fowler's model of religious development.

If we were to consider using this model as a conceptual and/or practical tool in religious studies classrooms, what issues must we resolve? The quotes at the opening of this essay illustrate one of the main difficulties of such a transfer. A person may say 'I enjoy both of my cultures' fairly easily, while saying the same about religion is more likely to be met with suspicion. Many religions, even respectfully, assert exclusive truth claims. We need to keep this in mind as we think about using intercultural strategies in our classrooms. Bennett points out explicitly,

> Most approaches to intercultural communication (and communication in general) treat it as a purely human phenomenon, not, for instance, as an expression of a divine plan. Any assumption of transcendental guidance immediately runs afoul of cultural differences in religious beliefs…Interculturalists generally leave questions of supernatural order to contexts where improving communication is not the goal' (Bennett, 1998: 10).

This certainly held true in a 2001 study by Mohammed Abu-Nimer who utilized Bennett's model in peace-building seminars to see if it

could be useful in resolving conflicts in which religion played a significant role. In general, the model was considered helpful in improving intercultural communication, and the early stages of the model were met with very little resistance. However, students in the study overwhelmingly problematized the final ethnorelative stages, particularly Adaptation and Integration. Only two of the seventy participants thought the Adaptation Stage was transferrable to inter-religious contexts, and no participants accepted the final Integration Stage. These two stages were critiqued primarily in the following ways: (1) Regarding *adaptation*, 'most [participants] felt they could not shift into a different religious system even temporarily without threatening their own religious identity…Many agreed that it is easier to achieve empathy in an intercultural setting than in an interreligious setting because it does not so strongly challenge their moral values, ethics, and faith' (Abu-Nimer 700). (2) Regarding *integration*, participants had two particularly valuable critiques: first, 'It is impossible to have multiple religions and multiple truths' (701) and second, 'Why is internalizing more than one religion superior to having one religion and respecting the others?' (701)

Approaching Abu-Nimer's study with a great deal of respect for its longevity and well-organized approach, I would suggest first that he has pin-pointed some significant concerns for us to consider but second that these concerns should not lead us to a full rejection of Bennett's model. Consider, for example, the complaints offered by the students about adaptation above. Although internalization is not a requirement but a possibility of the adaptation stage of the DMIS, the students interpreted 'frame of reference shifting' as something that could only be done with a certain level of internalization. Keeping in mind Bennett's definitions of 'ethnocentric' and 'ethnorelative,' I think Abu-Nimer could very well have found that most of his students were operating under an ethnocentric mindset, which he also suggests could have been a possibility (699). There is nothing inherently wrong with that mindset; it is a mindset which we all have on some level, Bennett would argue, with people whose lives are unfamiliar to our own. Abu-Nimer says his students perceived the model 'as a threat—an attempt at aggressive conversion' and concludes 'further research and experimental applications are needed to fully adapt the model to an interreligious setting' (701). Abu-Nimer's experience is not at odds with my

own in using the model; the training methods for students at different stages along the DMIS are significantly different and even students situated in different ethnocentric stages would indeed feel threatened by some of the training methods that are appropriate for their peers at different stages.[8] I think the more fundamental, underlying question here is one of ethics, values, and goals of the model. If these cannot be aligned with the goals of a religious studies program or course, it would not be helpful to us.

There is, in the end, a higher valuation of the abilities of people who reach the far end of the ethnorelative stages in the DMIS, and Abu-Nimer's students were justly concerned about that value. Is there or isn't there a difference between the Mormon who says he respectfully believes his religion is the only true path and the person in the denial stage who, if pushed, could become 'potentially genocidal when pressed into cross-cultural contact' (Bennett 1993a: 1). Is this not the very question at the heart of the frequent utilization of religious discourse both to incite and lend resonant meaning to acts of 'terror' and violence in our modern world? Why, indeed, would internalizing multiple religious views be superior to embracing one view as long as one respects the views of others? Or, as one member of our audience at the conference said, 'I don't expect my students to fully embrace the religions they study in order to understand them,' so is there really a need for students to move to the ethnorelative stages of the DMIS? These are very important questions, and I don't intend to answer them all here, but I will suggest a few avenues of thought which we might pursue.

To begin with, I think Abu-Nimer's study was troubled from the start by using the model in precisely the way Bennett warned against: the central aim of the study was that of improving communication in a way that was reflective of many interfaith activities (i.e., emphasizing a comfortable and welcoming space over challenging and questioning a particular religious stance in order to build understanding and positive community relationship for the sake of other goals, such as

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[8] For example, instructors working with students in the denial stage create opportunities for students to experience contrasting cultural practices (but 'embed differences in non-threatening contexts'), while in the defense stage instructors are advised to 'avoid cultural contrasts' and 'promote cooperative activities' (Bennett 1993a: 2, 4).

settling a dispute or fixing a problem in the local community). In contrast to such settings, very often in the classroom we are entirely focused on the question of religion itself, interrogating the phenomena of various religions and forms of spirituality and putting them into conversation with political, social, gendered, and other conceptual categories. We're often asking our students to consider the questions 'Why?' and 'How?' about varied religious and so-called 'secular' truths. We delve into the contested histories of books or practices that our students might have considered sacred, taboo, or even irrelevant prior to arriving in our classroom for the sake of our subject, which is religion itself.

I will only bring up one of many questions related to this difference: while the peace-builders experienced adaptation and integration from Bennett's model as threatening, do we and may we hold our students to a different expectation, and is that ethically acceptable? In other words, while we may not expect a local community member to be able to shift among multiple perspectives, perhaps we do expect that of the future world expert on the comparative ethics of the Abrahamic religions. Perhaps that person does need to be able to shift more or less fully between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish views to the best of his/her ability. Perhaps we do expect experts in religious studies to be able to become 'a part of and apart from a given cultural [or, in this case, religious] context' (Abu-Nimer 701), which is the definition of the integration stage of the DMIS, whether or not we like the vocabulary of relativity he uses, however cautiously, to categorize it. None of us are entirely strangers to what I am suggesting, I think, and we may find it easier to see its value for our graduate students, but how do first-year undergraduates fit between the two extremes of a community member who is just trying to be a better neighbour and the world expert? This is not necessarily an issue for all students, as some of them see no inherent problem with shifting frames of reference, but in my experience most students are coming into university without have developed that ability just yet, even on a cultural and not religious level. I worry about how we handle that question of ability; at the same time, I do not intend to promote a therapeutic approach to religious studies. I do not wish to suggest we should coddle our students on the off chance they can't handle the pressure of our questions. As I said at the outset, I think we're probably in agreement that a degree of culture

shock is a good thing for students. So, without settling the question, I suppose here I am asking all of us to consider whether the goal of the DMIS is appropriate, after all, for the religious studies student, and if its applicability is worth pursuing further.

When I have brought up this subject in the past, people have often suggested to me that it's a question of education research, not a question of religious studies. However, in this article I do want to trouble the relationship between our goals for processing intercultural and inter-religious experiences and suggest that this is not a question that needs to be relegated to education research alone but rather has everything to do with our subject matter. What happens if I introduce a radical question about the divine or sacred into my teaching method, in contrast to Bennett's limitation, for example? The nature of our subject demands respect for a notion of mystery (whether we personally embrace it or not) and opens up a whole geography of places such a question could lead. I think this openness very well could be described in terms of the 'constructive marginality' of the integration stage of the DMIS despite its critiques by Abu-Nimer's peace-builders. Perhaps we are, after all, the best people to trouble Bennett's distinction between cultural relativity and ethical/moral relativity on a theoretical and practical level. We, more than anyone else perhaps, have sought to grasp the varied ways in which the sacred interacts with humanity's day-to-day existence, sometimes in conflicting ways (as Durkheim's suggested distinction between socio-historical and inner experiences of faith, for example, makes plain), and ask what difference it makes whether those differences are understood as absolute, relative, or something more elusive.

As to the final stages of Bennett's model, I think there remains room for debate, but one thing I will assert in conclusion is that this kind of discussion is relevant to our approach to religious studies as a discipline and so much more than 'just' a teaching strategy. While at the conference at York St. John, I noticed in the materials we received in our packets a quote on the front of a magazine published there which stated the following:

> The neutral doesn't refer to neutrality or indifference; it is an ardent, burning activity.

I think this statement captures the essence of the DMIS integration stage in a way that we may find helpful in religious studies; that is, we as instructors may not want or expect our students to learn to live with the 'constructive margin' as a way to stay permanently 'on the fence' about issues and avoid having to say anything definitive about them. Rather, to teach as we do, we have for the most part had to take significant risks of both a conceptual and practical nature. Can we structure this ideal in a productive way for our students, in a way that does not make them feel we have chosen a path that is unfair to expect of them (if, indeed, we believe it isn't)? This is something that I have considered and want to encourage all of us to continue to consider in how we structure our religious studies classrooms and programmes.

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Ministry and Praxis:

Towards Integrated Education and Formation for Ministry

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Introduction

This paper, originally written for the conference 'Beyond the Ordinary', which took place at York St John University in June 2009, discusses a Level 2 module of the York St John Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry. This is the validated programme utilised across several dioceses and other church institutions within the Yorkshire region and beyond for the training of candidates for lay (and some ordained) ministries within the churches. Foundation Degrees were launched by the Government as part of the agenda for

widening participation in higher education, specifically by providing for innovative strategies of workplace based learning in which 'academic knowledge and understanding integrate with, and support the development of, vocational skills and competencies' (QAA 2004). Since church ministries could be seen as the 'classic' instance of vocational activity, a Foundation Degree would appear to be the ideal form of training for such ministries. The module, Ministry and Praxis, models a threefold pattern of learning for ministry embracing academic knowledge, contextual awareness (requiring reflective practice) and personal formation (both practical skills and faith development). The module design, its placement requirement, taught content and strategies for assessment and student learning support, aim to maximise the integration of these dimensions of learning.

Such an integrative approach requires students to make connections between academic study, practical ministry and personal development. It is this that invites creativity in teaching and learning: for example, a recent research report (Creativity Centre 2006) showed that National Teaching Fellows identified among the most salient criteria for creativity the ability to 'see unusual connections' and 'combine ideas'. Jackson's work on creativity in Higher Education teaching (Jackson et al 2006) argues that creative methods are demanded where situations of complexity have to be constructively negotiated and this fits closely with the nature of ministerial education outlined here.

Students undertake a placement in a church or sector-based pastoral context (e.g. a hospital or prison) other than their own. Teaching time is designed to supply a robust academic basis for learning by input on key areas students engage with in the context: e.g. styles of leadership and patterns of ministry, and to offer resources for their development as theologically reflective practitioners. The assessed work for the module is a portfolio in which students gather evidence for their learning in relation to theoretical models of ministerial leadership and practice as they identify these in the placement context, and draw out implications for their own developing practice. An interim draft of their portfolio is submitted for formative assessment to help sharpen critical reflection and formulate personal learning goals in the final version.

Theological models for ministerial education

The report *Shaping the Future: New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained* (Archbishops' Council 2006) offers a number of different models of theological and ministerial education as a stimulus to fresh thinking about the curriculum. In the section 'A vision for good practice in Reader/Preacher training', the task group put forward a threefold framework of Knowledge and Understanding, Competence (Skills) and Conviction (Spirituality) (p38). In 'Parameters of the curriculum', the relevant task group suggests a model comprising the three fields of Church/Mission/ Practice, Doctrine/History/Tradition, and Scripture/Hermeneutics/Homiletics. These models are different, as the second represents one way of dividing up the subject matter within the curriculum, whereas the first is based on a division of domains of learning (effectively, 'cognitive', 'affective' and 'psycho-motor' as in Bloom 1956, revised Anderson and Krathwohl 2001) that might spread across the whole curriculum. However, what both models suggest is that ministerial education is a complex entity in which (though differently expressed) there are at least three strands that need to be interwoven for learning to be made effective.

To explore this further we draw on the work of the theologian Edward Farley, who published in the 1980s two influential works on theological education, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Knowledge* (1983) and *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (1988). Farley (1988:137-8) proposed that theological education should be structured around what he termed the three 'dimensions of redemption':

- ecclesia, the context in which it occurs
- gospel, its origins and background in truth and in reality
- faith, the mode of living in which it is lived out.

Farley's model corresponded to his concept of theology as *habitus*, defined as 'a state or disposition of the soul which has the character of knowledge' (1983:13); 'theology is a practical, not theoretical, habit having the primary character of wisdom', or 'a cognitively disposed posture that attends salvation' (Farley 2003:19). In other words, there

is a layer of theological education that is properly neither theory nor practice viewed as the poles of a dialectic, but better described as 'inhabited wisdom' that shapes and sustains the character of the person of faith.

A further theological undergirding of this point may be found in the concept of performativity, as developed for example in the work of Stanley Hauerwas (e.g. 2004). If there is an ultimate 'learning outcome' of Christian theological education then it must have to do with the formation of 'communities of practice' that more effectively perform the faith visibly and distinctively amidst the world. Where ministerial training comes under the wing of an academic institution that validates and directly or indirectly delivers it, this will always raise questions. Some partners (e.g. some dioceses) may conclude that the way to handle this issue is to maintain a separation between the 'academic' and 'formational' components of training, and to see the University as responsible only for the former, while the diocese operates a distinct programme for the latter. Others strive for a more integrated approach. Hauerwas has commented that there is often an assumption that 'the kind of lives produced by modern university curriculums will be critical of everything, believing in nothing', and 'the kind of training in virtue that liberal educational practice involves cannot be acknowledged, because the neutrality that allegedly is required for education to be for anyone makes it impossible to make candid that any education is a moral education' (Hauerwas 2007:56).

The challenge that the FDTM might draw from Farley and Hauerwas is to attempt to become a vehicle for Christian ministerial formation in the broadest sense: not just measuring students' ability to handle academic material appropriately in writing and to demonstrate practical 'know how', but to aim for the integration of critically reflective practices into the lifelong processes of growth and development that embed ministerial competence within the wholeness of a spirituality that authentically performs the faith. It is this integration that the present module attempts to address. The next section expounds in a little more detail a theoretical model for ministerial education that undergirds the practice described here.

Three-dimensional education for ministry

Theological education for ministry is designed according to a threefold pattern. All three strands are theological. It is not the case that there is a 'theological' strand and a 'practical' one. The three interwoven strands are theology formed through intellectual knowledge (Farley's 'Gospel'), theology formed through pastoral practice ('ecclesia') and theology formed through spiritual character ('faith'). All three are intended to be reflective in character.

a. A theology formed through intellectual knowledge develops around sustained engagement with structured academic resourcing. The role of a public minister requires funding of the mind, which in turn demands carefully designed input from those who have devoted their time and abilities to specialised study of the historical sources, documents, movements and traditions of faith. Academic credentials are not sought in order to compete in the crowded marketplace of scholarship, but in order to develop in candidates a well-stocked mind capable of standing in a critical, discerning relation to the traditions in which spiritual wisdom and practical ministries are being formed. A knowledge-based theology opens up a spirit of seeking in which the positive value of questioning and exploration is owned, endorsed and commended to others.

b. A theology formed through pastoral practice in turn comes about through exposure to the context and creative engagement with the critical issues it raises for church life. Ministerial training is very distinctively rooted in contextual practice throughout. The rhythm of the candidates' coming together at the University for resourcing and reflection is built into the educational process, but the focus is always upon the needs of practical ministry and the life of the local ecclesial community. In this way, the spirit of stability embodied in wisdom and the spirit of seeking promoted through academic knowledge are applied to the development of a spirit of service oriented to the inter-locking needs of church and world, that is, to ministry and mission. This element is worked out in a collaborative manner involving parish projects and fieldwork, together with other elements of training that may be required by the church authorities. There is ongoing reflection on practice because candidates are training while they remain in the

context in which ministry is already being exercised.

c. A theology formed through spiritual character, sometimes called 'wisdom theology', develops around the kernel of an inhabited tradition. People build up a fund of theological experience through the habits of prayer, worship and discipleship that comprise the Christian life, lived in companionship with others. Wisdom theology is about the formation of personal identity through the rich resources of a shared and indwelt spiritual tradition. In this way, spiritual rootedness can foster a proper spirit of stability essential to authorised ministry. This is nurtured and sustained by reflective attention to the practical spiritual context in which the candidate is immersed and where ministry and discipleship are being formed in company with collaborative partners. The reflective attention that fosters wisdom is practised individually, with parish colleagues and congregation, and within the cohort of students.

Ministry and Praxis: the principle and the module

The principles of Christian praxis outlined above are designed into the module Ministry and Praxis in the following way.

As a placement module, Ministry and Praxis has 15 hours of contact time, comprising 8 hours of taught sessions, together with time allocated for tutorials with students, in groups or individually, and for student contact with a placement supervisor. Hence the taught component of the module has to be carefully and rigorously focused on supplying the robust academic foundation for the contextual praxis being undertaken through the placement. In order to harness this taught content to the module learning outcomes, the four two-hour sessions in 2009 covered the themes of understanding and developing reflective practice, exploring a variety of models and methods for theological reflection, theories of leadership and leadership styles, and the concept of vocation and the theology of various orders of ministry within the churches. These foundational elements are intended to provide a scaffolding for critical contextual reflection on practice as students both observe and participate in aspects of ministry and leadership in the placement context.

The placement experience is thoroughly interwoven with the taught input throughout the module, through the three hours allocated

for students to meet with their placement provider to plan and reflect on their learning, and the four hours for individual or group tutorials facilitated by the module tutors. This tutorial time is essential for the cultivation of the habits of reflection that turn the placement activity into material for lasting ministerial formation. It also performs the function of formative assessment for the student's developing work on the module assignment, as students are required to submit an initial draft of their proposed portfolio with an indication of the type of evidential material likely to be included in it. Within flexible parameters, the portfolio is expected to include at least:

• analysis of patterns of ministry and leadership observed in the placement context, drawing on the academic literature to support critical perceptions

• pieces of theological reflection on selected aspects of the placement experience

• reflection on academic, professional (i.e. ministerial) and personal (faith-related/spiritual) learning and areas for development resulting from the module.

Reviewing the experience of running the module for the first time with the Portfolio as the assessed work raised a number of reflections. First, there is considerable latitude about what a Portfolio is and what it should look like. Some of the offsite Centres where the FDTM is taught were quite prescriptive about both the format and content of Portfolio expected of their students. Because the individual pieces of writing in a portfolio are quite short, there is a risk that harnessing these tightly to particular learning outcomes could produce over-'filleted' portions of learning that could lack the reflective integration of the three dimensions set out earlier in this paper.[1]

Second, then, there are issues relating to the module's effectiveness in integrating academic learning, practical placement experience and personal formation:

(a) The 'academic' component has been delivered through four evening teaching sessions spread throughout the module. It is possible that this does not best serve the integration of academic knowledge

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[1] For observations on the undesirability of over-prescriptive approaches to Portfolio learning and assessment see Baume (2001:15), who notes that 'learning is rarely the linear process of movement towards immovable goals that the use of learning outcomes can sometimes suggest'.

with contextual learning; for example if the teaching were delivered early in the module it could then be referred back to more systematically as an agenda for tutorials, facilitating reflection with students on placement experience in the light of the teaching already received.

(b) The placement experience could benefit by being brought into closer contact with the teaching programme delivered at the university, for example by expecting more involvement of placement providers (supervisors) with the process of the module. There could there be at least one meeting together with students in situ with their placement provider, but this raises questions about how much should reasonably required of providers who are giving voluntarily of their time to support a student placement.

(c) Personal theological reflection could be practised more in the course of the module, for example by means of group work sessions providing a structured process of theological reflection with preparation and de-briefing. This could entail a more constructive use of Supported Open Learning activities to help students develop their reflective practice skills. Additionally, consideration might be given to introducing both the theory and practice of theological reflection more explicitly at Level One, to enable a stronger sense of progression to Level Two.

Third, the designing and delivery of a module of this kind creates an imperative for teaching staff to be committed to ongoing reflective practice (Moon 1999). It is not possible to retain strict control of the teaching and learning process when the students' choice of placement and the nature of the experiences they will gain through it, and the impact of these on their learning and how this relates to the academic input offered during the module, are all unknown at the outset. Insofar as the placement experience forms the heart of the student learning for the module, to be testified to and appropriately documented and sourced in the Portfolio, the tutor activities by way of both taught input in class, and individual tutorial support, constitute a scaffolding for learning, the precise construction of which may need to alter in the light of the edifice of learning the student is building. For staff, 'teaching' this module can never mean that learning and teaching materials are all prepared in advance and duly delivered within the parameters of the timetable. In some oft-quoted words of Erich Fromm (1959:53), creativity requires 'the courage to let go of certainties'.

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Are There Any Unacceptable Points of View in the Seminar Room?

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> 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.' Colossians 4:6

Freedom of speech is often considered a fundamental social and political right. It is often said to be a necessary factor in the pursuit of truth, a fundamental pillar of any democratic system, and a crucial element of human dignity and well-being. Yet in even the

most liberal of societies, it is widely recognised that there are constraints to what people should be allowed to say. Obscenities and incitements to violence or criminality are often constrained in this way. The issue addressed in this essay is what constraints to free speech there should be, if any, in an academic seminar.

The focus of this essay will be the discussion of religious beliefs in academic seminars in UK universities, although much of what is said can be extended to other kinds of controversial beliefs in other types of social interaction in other cultures. However, since the argument is grounded on several social and cultural norms, changing any of these three factors might well result in a different conclusion.[1]

I am going to argue that there are no points of view that are unacceptable in a seminar *per se*, but whether and how opinions are expressed should comply with certain rules. After arguing that freedom of speech is crucial to academic progress, I consider the distress that free speech might produce in participants of seminars in philosophy of religion and religious studies. I then argue that by advancing two practical measures, the level of distress can be maintained within reasonable bounds, undercutting any motivation to constrain free speech.

Freedom of speech in seminars

An academic seminar is the meeting of a group of students under the guidance of a tutor, to exchange information and discuss theories, with the aim of advancing academic thought and understanding. The seminar functions by bringing into focus different competing claims, and these are assessed by discussing their strengths, weaknesses and implications.

Academia is typically motivated by truth and knowledge, in that academics aim to increase human knowledge.[2] The academic seminar

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[1] In this essay, the term 'norm' is used in a semi-technical sense to designate a standard or set of rules.

[2] Plausibly there are exceptions to this, such as in disciplines that champion aesthetics (such as art history) or values (such as ethics or political science), but these disciplines are subject to parallel arguments motivated by such goals as creativity or moral right, instead of truth and knowledge. Moreover, both philosophy of religion and religious studies appear to be motivated by knowledge and truth.

room, as a microcosm of academic practice, should strive for the same.

The pursuit of truth and knowledge is often said to proceed most efficaciously with free speech. Progress is most likely to occur only if people are able to express, criticise and discuss all kinds of relevant ideas and information. If an idea is not articulated and debated, it cannot be objectively assessed, and we can never be confident of its truth unless it can survive legitimate challenges. To constrain discussion allows a claim to go unchallenged, and if it goes unchallenged, it will survive even if it is clearly false. So, it seems, to constrain discussion in a seminar is to inhibit the pursuit of truth.[3] Indeed, such a constraint would inhibit fundamentally the effectiveness of the seminar, especially in a subject like philosophy. It seems to be that one of the fundamental aims of philosophy is to bring to light and question the assumptions from which all arguments proceed, something that simply cannot happen if these assumptions are exempt from critical discussion

Consider the following historical example. In the 17th century, French philosopher Rene Descartes considered the possibility that God might not exist, in the course of arguing that in actual fact God does exist.[4] Descartes' approach was heavily criticised in some quarters for even suggesting that the non-existence of God is possible. Nevertheless, his arguments were highly influential in expanding the emphasis of philosophy from considering merely what there is (metaphysics), to also considering what we can know (epistemology). The moral seems to be that by defying the constraint that the existence of God should not be discussed, Descartes was able to significantly advance the study of philosophy.

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[3] The claim here is not, of course, that truth always emerges from a seminar, but merely that the seminar's environment should be conducive to its emergence. It may be, for example, that the participants are unable to see through irrational prejudice or distinguish truth from error, but if the discussion is constrained, it is even more difficult for the participants to deduce what is true.
[4] Descartes, Rene, ' Meditations on First Philosophy' , (1641) in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, translated John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

The distress caused by freedom of speech in seminars

Despite the virtues of free speech, in academia and elsewhere, it is generally accepted that it cannot be absolute. There are some things that we should not allow people to say, especially if these things will or might cause harm. Defamatory talk can damage a person's reputation and cause them social disadvantage, even when completely fabricated. Speech can also incite unwarranted hatred, such as when a political speech attacks a racial or religious group. As a result, even liberal democracies have laws to restrict the freedom of speech.

Although it is widely accepted that some speech should be constrained, it is more controversial which speech should be. Perhaps the two most important factors here are how valuable free speech is in the particular domain in question, and how harmful free speech might be if practised in that domain. Thus a reasonable judgement might uphold free speech in the seminar room if it were considered as more beneficial than harmful, and constrain free speech if it were considered as more harmful than beneficial. For the purposes of this essay, it seems reasonable to assume that this simple two-factor model can be effectively applied to the assessment of free speech in the seminar room.[5]

Given the fundamental importance of free speech to academic progress, as discussed above, free speech in seminars seems highly beneficial. Thus it should only be constrained if the harm it would or might cause is considerable. It could nevertheless be argued that this is indeed the case for some seminars, especially those in philosophy of religion and religious studies.

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[5] This model is not entirely uncontroversial, however. Most notably, it is plausible that the value of free speech in academia can never be wholly disentangled from its value in the broader culture. If, for example, democracy is highly valued as a political system, as is currently the case in the UK and elsewhere, then the value of free speech may be highly valued simply as a result of its role in the democratic system. Thus free speech in a UK seminar room may be valued more highly simply because free speech is highly valued as a political concept in the UK culture. However, such considerations seem to concern the details of the debate about the value of free speech, while this essay is concerned with a bigger, wider picture. So it seems a justifiable strategy in this essay to ignore such details and employ the simple two-factor model.

Both philosophy of religion and religious studies consider religion from a secular point of view, in that they study human religious belief and behaviour from outside any particular religious tradition or viewpoint. As a result, academics and students of both these disciplines need to be able to consider matters from outside their own religious beliefs in order to properly engage in their discipline.

For some students, especially those with strong religious convictions, this may not always be easy. In seminars and elsewhere in their studies, they can end up feeling that some of the beliefs they value most are being doubted, criticised or undermined. It is plausible that the distress so caused might be so great as to disrupt the student's studies, and perhaps even cause the abandonment of the class or course. As a result, it might be asserted that seminars in philosophy of religion and religious studies can be distressing enough to justify the constraint of free speech therein.

Understanding and reducing distress

Despite the risk of distress in seminars, it nevertheless seems that through the employment of two practical measures, distress can be kept at a low level. If this is so, then there does not appear to be good reason to constrain free speech in a seminar.

Distress occurs when a student is uncomfortable with the way a seminar is conducted. This could be for one of two broad reasons. The student might be uncomfortable with the norms by which a seminar is properly conducted, and/or the seminar might not be proceeding within these norms. One way to keep distress at an acceptably low level is to prevent either of these happening.

So it is firstly important to regulate how the seminar proceeds. Perhaps the two most important factors here are the norms that apply to social interaction and the norms that apply to the practice of the particular discipline. I consider these two factors in turn.

Social norms apply to a wide range of social interactions, including academic seminars, business meetings and other similar situations. These norms dictate how such social interaction is usually and properly guided and constrained in the particular culture. In the UK and other cultures, participation in such situations should be polite, non-aggres-

sive and relevant, and all attendees should have the opportunity to contribute. It is not, for example, permissible to punctuate a valid point with expletives, nor turn a question into an impassioned rant on a different issue. The aim should be to constructively develop ideas, not to pursue some personal agenda or go off into irrelevant areas.

Discipline norms are distinctive to the particular academic discipline concerned. They relate to the subject domains it covers, and the methods employed by practitioners. Philosophy of religion and religious studies are popular disciplines that are taught widely in UK universities. Their domains and methods are well-established. In philosophy of religion, debate is primarily focused on the existence of God, whereas religious studies compares and contrasts disparate beliefs from across different doctrines. In philosophy of religion, great emphasis is placed on evaluating the claim that God exists. In contrast, religious studies involves a comparison and contrast of the beliefs of different faiths, and there is less emphasis on evaluating them.

So, a seminar is properly conducted if it proceeds according to the social and discipline norms. If this does not occur, however, then the risk of student distress increases. For example, if a seminar in philosophy or religious studies is allowed to facilitate the destructive or malicious criticism of a particular religious belief, then this could easily become distressful for someone who held this belief. A participant should never be told that they are stupid or deluded for holding a particular religious belief, such as a belief in reincarnation or faith healing. The consequence is that the participants in a seminar—and most particularly the tutor—have a responsibility to ensure that the seminar is conducted within the social and discipline norms.

However, a seminar may also be distressful for a student, even if it is properly conducted, if the student is not comfortable with the norms by which the seminar properly proceeds. Philosophy of religion and religious studies require students to be open-minded enough to dispassionately consider various kinds of religious beliefs from different doctrines, including many that they might find implausible. So, for example, a student of philosophy of religion needs to be able to entertain both that God exists and that God does not exist, in order to engage fully with the subject.

Students should also be aware that a seminar room is a place of debate and discussion, and that such debates and discussions might

cover any ground within the subject's academic domain. To cross the threshold of the seminar room is to cross the threshold into academic debate. So merely on account of being in the seminar, participants have tacitly accepted the norms of discourse for their particular discipline.

It is possible, however, that a student has not realised what they have undertaken by enrolling onto the course. They may have simply not understood what is studied in philosophy of religion or religious studies, or the method by which this study takes place. They may not have realised that their own religious beliefs might be examined, assessed or criticised, and they may not be comfortable with this happening.

So if the students are aware of the social and discipline norms by which their subject proceeds, and only enrol on their course if they find these norms acceptable, and if the seminars of their course proceed within these norms, then the seminars should produce a low level of distress. It is my conviction that if this occurs, then there would be insufficient grounds to justify the constraining of speech in seminars.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this essay I have argued that no viewpoint in a seminar is unacceptable, but it should only be expressed if it can be done within the social and discipline norms that apply to the seminar.

The risk that students of philosophy of religion and religious studies might be distressed in their seminars suggests that two practical measures should be employed. First, it is important to ensure that seminars are conducted within the relevant social and discipline norms. Second, steps should be taken to ensure that students are aware of the norms by which their chosen discipline is studied before they enrol.

Inter-faith Pedagogy for Muslims and Christians:

Scriptural Reasoning and Christian and Muslim Youth Work

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University of Chester

Introduction

The University of Chester offers unique faith-sensitive provision for Youth Work training. Alongside an established course in Christian Youth Work, September 2007 saw the introduction of Britain's first Muslim Youth Work Course, which is professionally (JNC) accredited by the National Youth Agency. Both the Christian and the Muslim Youth Work degrees integrate the theory and practice of

youth work with Christian or Islamic values and contexts. In the third year of their degrees, students also join students in Theology, Religious Studies and Combined Honours degrees for part of their theoretical training. This determines that Theology and Religious Studies provision at Level 6 in Chester must be sensitive to the presence of religious insiders from two different religious traditions, studying alongside those who are engaging in studying comparative religion simply for academic interest and without any applicative element to the engagement with the subject. In order to support curriculum development for these students, and also in order to facilitate pedagogical research arising from the unique situation Chester finds itself in with regards to the teaching of members of other faith communities, the Learning and Teaching Institute at Chester funded a one year project in pedagogical research on the co-teaching of Muslim and Christian Youth Work students.[1] This project involved a pilot scheme, trialling 'scriptural reasoning' (the joint reading of scriptures together) as a means of facilitating dialogue between the students, with questionnaires, focus group work, and participant interviews as part of the research. The identities of the participants have been made anonymous for the purposes of all resulting reports and articles.

This article arises from aspects of that research, drawing on the data acquired from the pilot and questionnaires. It seeks to set out some of the complexities and issues found in this pedagogical setting, arising from theoretical and empirical study; to outline one mode of engagement that has the potential to facilitate inter-faith pedagogy (that of scriptural reasoning); to discuss the application of this method to the higher education classroom; and to outline some of the findings of the pilot scheme with regards to this method of study.

Recognizing some of the issues

As with many Departments of Theology and Religious Studies, the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Chester seeks to offer a 'dual track' approach to the study of religion.[2] The 'Theology' aspect takes a traditional insider-based approach, thinking from within the tradition. This thinking from within can either be in terms of an Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum*, or else a thought experiment in which students of no faith seek fully to immerse themselves in the Christian tradition in order to seek to understand it from within (to 'stand in their shoes', so to speak). The 'Religious Studies' aspect of the discipline seeks, rather, to think from an 'outsider' perspective, seeking to have academic distance from the subject studied, and to focus on the otherness of the other, trying not to allow one's own beliefs to impact on the empirical description of that other.[3]

Navigating the relationship between these two approaches to the study of religion and the religions is complex enough when there is only one largely homogeneous insider group.[4] In the case of the UK, this majority insider group has traditionally been Christian. Teaching this group alongside 'secular' students, who are studying comparative religion from an outsider perspective, can bring enough challenges with regards to assumptions made about truth claims and about methodological approaches to the discipline. However, if we then add into this the complexity of a second insider group, studying alongside insiders from another faith, and alongside those who seek to have an outsider approach, the need to think about group dynamics and

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[2] This is, indeed, reflected in there being two distinct degrees that the department offers. While there is overlap, and all students are required to take at least some core papers on the other aspect of the discipline, there is a Bachelor of Theology Degree offered and a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies degree offered.

[3] Useful literature on the relationship between insider and outsider perspectives includes McCutcheon, R., *Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Continuum, 1999); Ford, David, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2000); Lindbeck, George, A., *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

[4] Indeed, the complexity of this can be found in the original confessional nature of many departments / seminaries and theological institutions in the UK.

methodological assumptions for pedagogy becomes intensely complex. Furthermore, in an age in which emphasis should be placed on the student as learner,[5] attentiveness to the starting point of the students in our classrooms determines that questions of method are more than simply abstract discussions between researchers about the best possible means of study, and are instead issues that relate to the student as a learner.

These issues exhibit themselves in an even more complex way in Chester's situation because of the applicative element of the study of the subject for those students who are taught and learn alongside those who are studying primarily for a theoretical grounding in the discipline. These Muslim and Christian Youth Work students are training to become professional youth workers, and the theological and religious element of their training is provided in order to make them 'faith sensitive' in the exercise of their profession. This determines that their study of theology and religion is with a purposively applied focus for their future careers. This applicative aspect also determines that as well as an insider descriptive approach to theological study, the youth workers have a formative approach to theology as a discipline, seeking to explore not only what theology has said, but what it might, can and should say for the given contexts in which they are working.[6] Thus, in a Level 6 class at Chester, there are likely to be two different faith groups with insider approaches, some of whom will have an applied bent to their studies, alongside those pursuing an outsider approach to the discipline. Our present curriculum structure for Level 6 determines that there are 'insider' approach papers in Christian theology (including systematics, feminist theology, environmental ethics, and medical ethics); and 'outsider' approach papers in religion and culture, ritual, and minority faith communities. However, there are currently no clearly 'insider' papers for those of other faiths than Christianity who are studying their own religion. There are also no papers which allow for a comparative or dialogical 'insider' approach.

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[5] See Brandes, D. and Ginnis, P., A guide to student-centred learning (Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes, 1996).

[6] On formative theology, see my *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation: Restoring Particularity* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp. 1-2; and my *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging God, Scripture and the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 9.

Were this pedagogical situation not complex enough, the need for students to engage with different faiths has rarely been more pressing than in this generation. In a post-September 11th and 7th July world, this engagement with other religions cannot for many learners—perhaps especially those of faith—singularly be in a distanced, theoretical and comparative way. It is also necessary to recognize the imperative for people of faiths to think about the relationship that they have with members of other faith communities. This involves creative engagement with faith traditions, seeking fresh insights into the ways in which faith communities should understand themselves in relation to the religious other.[7] Furthermore, within this need for creative engagement between faith traditions, it is necessary for teachers to aid students in learning how to engage in inter-faith dialogue. Indeed, of the students surveyed by questionnaire for the Chester pilot,[8] all but one strongly agreed that inter-faith dialogue is important for contemporary society (the one remaining student 'agreeing' but not 'strongly agreeing' that this was the case). All students also agreed or strongly agreed that it is necessary to learn alongside members of other faiths in order to become better at inter-faith dialogue; that Muslims and Christians should be taught how to engage in inter-faith dialogue; and

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[7] A comparative and thorough engagement in related themes has been undertaken by Bob Jackson at Warwick University in relation to an ethnographic approach to the study of religions from an insider perspective. See, for example, Jackson, R., *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997); and Jackson, R., *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2004). Joyce Miller has also done some related work in Bradford, particularly with community cohesion and people becoming 'cultural navigators'.

[8] The eleven students involved in the pilot were all surveyed by questionnaire before engaging in the focus group. Because of two illnesses from Christian participants on the day, there were seven Muslims and four Christians involved in this. In order to even out the balance of Muslims and Christians in the pilot, a Christian doctoral student also participated on the day. The survey followed the guidance of Chryssides, G.D. and Geaves, R., *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods* (London: Continuum, 2007, pp. 305-7). The benefits of this aspect of the pilot was in terms of the capacity for participants to express entirely anonymously their beliefs without any fear of offending members of other faith communities or the interviewer. All students were asked to respond to a series of statements by circling either: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'.

that Muslim and Christian Youth Worker students should be taught community cohesion tools. The desire from learners in Chester to acquire tools which seem crucially important for religious peoples of the 21st century was marked.

Facilitating this learning is no easy task, however, for the lecturer. I have elsewhere outlined some of the complexities involved in (especially exclusivist) members of faith communities engaging in inter-faith dialogue.[9] These include the following issues. First, many religious people (especially in monotheistic faiths) understand their faiths in what is traditionally referred to as an exclusivist manner,[10] and to engage and dialogue with the religious other may be a denial or betrayal of that exclusivity: inter-faith engagements might be seen to undermine particularity or to relativize a uniquely considered or revealed perspective on the divine. This is related to, second, a fear of the pollution of the outsider. Third, there is the danger that exclusivist members of faith communities perceive that which unites those engaged in inter-faith dialogue as being some form of external liberalism to the claims and traditions of individual faith communities.[11] Fourth, while clearly public and political dimensions to inter-faith dialogue exists, this dialogue cannot be engineered or directed by the state or secular powers and agencies, but should—for sake of authenticity (linked to point three)—arise from within the community of faith. Fifth, the very people for whom it is most necessary to engage in inter-faith dialogue are those for whom it is most difficult—those who reject liberal pluralism.

A number of these themes were very clearly evident in the preparations for the pilot. Indeed, it was necessary to have a discussion for over an hour with each set of participants to allay fears that they had

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[9] See my 'Legitimizing and Necessitating Inter-faith Dialogue: The Dynamics of Inter-faith for Individual Faith Communities', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 4/2, 2010. The following paragraph is a summary of the argument contained in this paper.

[10] On inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism, see D'Costa, Gavin, 'Theology of Religions', in Ford, D., *The Modern Theologians : An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 626-644.

[11] Cf. MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), pp. 326-348.

about the engagement in the project. While the students thought that engagement in inter-faith was important, there was a considerable amount of discussion surrounding themes of exclusivity, and what seemed to be issues associated with the pollution of the outsider and a perceived political agenda that underlay the project. For example, a number of Muslim students stated that they felt that inter-faith dialogue was a predominantly Christian agenda, associated with liberal forms of Christian belief, which sought to undermine the taking seriously of the Qur'an for reasons of homogeneity. Christians expressed fear of pollution of the outsider in terms of Jesus' statement that he was 'the way, the truth and the life', and his warnings against false prophets who would follow him. The students' concerns and anxieties were plain to see, and this was before the pilot had even begun. Particularly acute among the Muslim participants was a fear—as a religious minority—that this enterprise was a Christian exercise arising from Christians' universalizing tendencies. Indeed, alongside group discussions, there were a number of telephone conversations with Muslim participants, and it was useful to notify them of the fatwa issued by the Shari'a Court in London in 2007, in order to provide legitimacy for the particular enterprise that this project was engaged in from a Muslim perspective. [12]

The various complications and asymmetric issues with engagement in inter-faith were further demonstrated in the responses to several of the themes raised in the questionnaire. Several notable and complexifying issues became apparent in participant response. One of the most interesting of these involved the radical inclusivity and exclusivity of monotheism. While all participants strongly agreed that there was only one God, there was complete variance in response to the statement 'I believe Christians and Muslims pray to the same God'. In response to this, three participants (27%) responded with 'strongly agree'; three participants (27%) 'agreed'; two participants (18%) 'disagreed'; and two participants (18%) 'strongly disagreed', with one respondent not answering. Furthermore, the division between agreeing and disagreeing did not take place along faith lines: both Muslims and

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[12] The fatwa can be accessed here:
http://www.scripturalreasoning.co.uk/fatwa_english.pdf, accessed 2nd September, 2009.

Christians agreed and disagreed with this statement, rather than (for reasons of supersession etc.) one group of faith members agreeing and the other not. It is clear from this response that even monotheism cannot be used as a uniting principle for peoples of faith in one God. In fact, even those who agreed with the statement concerning Muslims and Christians praying to the same God might not necessarily be affirming a uniting principle in this: for some, even praying to the same God need not preclude that the other prays in a manner which is idolatrous—something akin to 'obviously we pray to the same God because there is only one God, but *you* tell lies about God'. These are deeply complex issues, and there will always be a certain level of differentiation and asymmetrical relationality between both faiths and individual faith practitioners. Bringing people of different faiths together will always involve a variegated approach to the otherness of the religious other.

Some of these difficulties were expressed in the semi-structured interviews following the pilot. One participant (Participant A) commented: 'it's been tough because I've had to ask some serious questions, like, I've got this faith but I've never really looked into any other faiths.' There are clear faith and existential implications attached to students engaging in inter-faith dialogue. In recognizing this, it is necessary not to undermine the identity and faith commitments of the students, and to be sensitive to these and the issues the students believe they face. Indeed, in the questionnaire, all but one participant strongly agreed with the statement 'I want my faith commitment to be taken seriously in the academic modules I will study in the 3rd year'. Furthermore, while five participants (45%) strongly disagreed with the statement 'I am nervous about studying alongside members of different faiths, and atheists and agnostics in my 3rd year', the remaining students were dispersed in their response to this statement across the remaining categories (strongly agree, agree and disagree).

In designing trial material, therefore, for a pilot scheme to teach Muslim and Christian students together, it was necessary to think about issues of legitimacy for the enterprise from a faith perspective; issues of particularity and the capacity to affirm identity; issues relating to applied approaches to study; and issues of how to deal with the complex spread of assumptions and how to avoid essentialism regarding individual faith communities.

Finding a practice based way forward—Scriptural Reasoning

In order to address these concerns and to follow a practice based and student centred approach to learning which modelled methods that can be used in community cohesion,[13] it was decided that we should pilot a scriptural reasoning model for learning inter-faith dialogue.

Scriptural reasoning is a method which originated with (among others) Peter Ochs, David Ford and Daniel Hardy. Drawing on the model of engagement between Jewish philosophers (called 'textual reasoning'), scriptural reasoning offered a mode of engagement for members of Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities with each other which did not involve any rejection of deeply held faith commitments in order to enter some 'shared' (liberal) secular space, that relativizes truth claims, undermines faith commitment and under-plays difference. Steven Kepnes summarizes the practice of scriptural reasoning as follows:[14]

> SR [scriptural reasoning] is a practice of group reading of the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that builds sociality among its practitioners and releases sources of reason, compassion, and divine spirit for healing our separate communities and for repair of the world. Thus, SR theory aims at a scripturally reasoned triadic response to the problems of the world that is motivated and sustained by the healing and divine spirit of scripture.[15]

The practice of scriptural reasoning revolves around a shared sense of mutual hospitality in order to facilitate the dialogue. In this mutual hos-

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[13] All participants agreed or strongly agreed in the questionnaire that Christian and Muslim students should be taught community cohesion tools together.

[14] For other summaries of scriptural reasoning, see Ford, David F., *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 273-303; Ford, D. F. and Pecknold, C.C., eds, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2006); and Ford, David F., 'God and Our Public Space: A Scriptural Wisdom', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1/1, 2007, 71-3.

[15] Kepnes, Steven, 'A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning', *Modern Theology*, 22/3, 2006, 367. Much of the thinking that follows owes a good deal to Kepnes' article, seeking to apply his work to pedagogical settings.

pitality, there is a simultaneous engagement in being the host (with one's own text) and the guest (at someone else's sacred text). The practice is, therefore, in its simplest form, the shared reading of sacred scriptures by people of faith together.

This practice was initially undertaken at the American Academy of Religion, and there is still a 'Scriptural Reasoning – University' Group which meets before that conference, and for a few days each summer in Cambridge. However, the practice has spread tremendously throughout the USA and the UK, in various forms to fit the needs of the communities engaging in the practice.[16] What is continuous in all of the versions of the practice is a commitment to the reading of the scriptures of others before God for the sake of the world. This means that the texts are not simply read in a modernist, historico-critical manner (as in the manner of singularly outsider study), but are read as living texts which provide (variously and differently) the theological basis for the speech of each of the traditions of the book (i.e. insiders) present at the table. The dominant concern is, therefore, primarily hermeneutical.

In order to explain this practice, scriptural reasoning is some-times spoken of figuratively in terms of the biblical image (present in all three Abrahamic traditions) of the tent of meeting. This is an image drawn from the provisional tent which features throughout the Torah. Jewish participants point to the etymology of the Hebrew word *mishkan* (tent or tabernacle), which combines the meanings of both *shakhen* (a neighbour) and *Shekhinah* (Divine presence or glory). The image of the tent is used in order to point to a provisional place in which neighbours and strangers may become friends, and indeed even angels are entertained.

This image of the tent is used in a non-competitive way with the image of a house. The term 'house' is used figuratively in this inter-faith practice as a term for the institutional places of worship for the participants in scriptural reasoning (the synagogue, church and mosque). That the tent exists in a non-competitive relationship to the houses is important in two ways. Firstly, scriptural reasoning does not seek to supplant the houses, or to remove individual faith commitment,

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[16] There is, for example, a medieval research group that meets in Princeton, and a civic focused group that meets in London. See here Ford, David F., 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims', *Modern Theology*, 22/3, 2006, 364-5, n.9.

exclusivity or particularity, but rather to enable genuine conversation as conversation between people who share similarities but also differences. There is no requirement to give up any deeply held faith commitments; indeed, such commitment is affirmed. This determines that, secondly, as opposed to the modernist assumption that religion should either be a homogeneous glue that binds people together, or that—if heterogeneous—it should be replaced by a non-religious secular space, scriptural reasoning seeks to allow for a space in which particularity is needed and welcomed: particularity does not stand in aggressive opposition to dialogue and conversation but is required for dialogue and conversation.[17] As Taylor puts it:

> Rather than turning aside from our differences in an attempt to preserve some putative peace (not really peace at all), it is precisely through exploring these differences together that we learn the meaning of our profound interdependence.[18]

Kevin Hughes also discusses these issues in his *The Premises of Scriptural Reasoning*.[19] Outlining the problems that are often assumed to exist as the result of religious difference, Hughes offers the following diagnosis:

> Too often it is assumed, both by experts in conflict resolution and diplomats alike, that religion is always the problem and never part of the solution to the inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts raging in the world today. This assumption is strengthened by the observation that usually it is the most fervent adherents of a religious tradition who initiate or at the very least exacerbate these conflicts.

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[17] I have spoken elsewhere of the danger of engaging in 'in a dishonest dialogue dishonestly'. See my 'Bringing Barth's Critique of Religion to the Inter-faith Table', *Journal of Religion*, 80/1, 2008, p. 81.

[18] Taylor, William, *How to Pitch a Tent: A Beginners Guide to Scriptural Reasoning* (London: St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, 2008) p. 5.

[19] The following quotations are taken from Hughes, Kevin , 'The Premises of "Scriptural Reasoning"', Journal of Scriptural Reasoning Forum Website, 2006, available at:
http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/writings/HugPrem.html , accessed 2nd September, 2009.

However, he goes on to offer a different set of hypotheses, of which the fourth to eight are:

4. That, after centuries of terrible conflict, political and religious, this civilization introduced a competing model: an effort to achieve religious peace by eliminating religious difference, either through secularization of religious elites or through assimilation of any two of the Abrahamic religions to the cultural and political of the other one;
5. That, while the modern model has made some lasting contributions to inter-religious peace, it has also given rise to the most destructive inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts the world has ever known;
6. That there is strong evidence that the modern model cannot simply correct its own errors;
7. That the modern model must therefore be repaired and supplemented by additional models;
8. That scriptural reasoning offers one such model.

Scriptural reasoning seeks, therefore, to offer the possibility of dialogue based on the affirmation of each individual participant's faith commitment through the mutual hospitality offered to each other. This involves a commitment to both reaching out to members of other faiths and a commitment to dialoguing with them, simultaneous to a commitment to one's own particularity and faith for that reaching out and dialogue to be remotely meaningful.

In practice, this activity of scriptural reasoning normally arises in the form of small groups (ideally 6-8 people), with roughly equal numbers of each faith present. The group is convened by a person who facilitates the discussion and often – though not necessarily – chooses the texts (normally reasonably short ones) in consultation with members of the various faith traditions. Taylor helpfully summarizes the tasks of the convenor as follows:

• Hold the boundaries for the particular sessions (these include time boundaries as well as people boundaries)
• Help the group choose the order in which it will read the texts

- Help keep the discussion in SR mode – e.g. interrogative and text based
- Be mindful of group processes and help the group interpret these (you may need some help with this)
- Make sure the group chooses its themes and texts for the following session[20]

The sensitive issues that are inevitably present in such discussions determine that the convenor is crucial to the successful engagement in scriptural reasoning, especially for those new to the practice. It is impossible to describe any group and its individual dynamics, and each will vary considerably from group to group. As Kepnes puts it:

> SR is a practice before it is a theory. It properly can only be known in, its performance. The performative dimension gives SR a time-bound and context-specific characteristic. This means that every SR event is dependent upon the specific time and place and the particular group of individuals that assemble to practice SR.[21]

However, a useful sense of the period of time for a discussion might be between an hour and an hour and a half. It is hoped that a by-product of scriptural reasoning is the building of sociality between members, with friendships and relationships arising form the shared study and dialogue.

Scriptural reasoning certainly seeks to have an applicative nature and purpose in reply to the questions which prompted engagement in it in the first instance. However, none of the preceding discussion seeks to suggest that scriptural reasoning is not an academic practice which is suited to the academy.[22] The aspect of 'reasoning' determines that

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[20] Taylor, ibid. *How to Pitch a Tent*, p. 14.

[21] Kepnes, ibid.,'A Handbook',p. 370.

[22] The practice of scriptural reasoning hopes to allow for what Nick Adams has termed 'reparative reasoning'. See Adams, Nicholas, 'Reparative Reasoning', *Modern Theology* 24:3 (July 2008), 447-457; and Adams, Nicholas, 'Making Deep Reasonings Public', *Modern Theology* 22:3 (July 2006), 385-401. This is a philo-sophical term, which Adams explains in detail, but which might be summarized as 'a system of repair of systems of repair' (Adams, 'Reparative Reasoning', 453). In other terms, one might say that there are second order ethical implications involved in engaging in the practice of scriptural reasoning: it not only facilitates dialogue,

there is a need for due attention to be paid to the 'reasoning' (academic) process within these dialogues. Peter Ochs describes this aspect of scriptural reasoning well:

1. Study is a group as well as individual activity. Good scholars display social as well as strictly intellectual virtues. These include extending hospitality to fellow learners, listening, and speaking to the heart as well as mind.[23]

2. The primary intellectual virtue is reading well. Group study should focus, first, on a religion's primary scriptural sources, as they appear to have been received by their early reception communities and as they are scrutinized by text-historical scholars. Group study should focus, secondly, on the ways these sources are received by contemporary communities of practitioners.

3. Group study should address at least two different scriptural sources and scriptural traditions. After introductory instruction by specialists and representatives of each tradition, all scholars/students should contribute equally to the work of discussing and interpreting all of the sources. This work should move gradually through all appropriate Levels of study: from philological, semantic and rhetorical studies to intra-scriptural readings to comparative interpretations of the source texts' societal, ethical, and theological implications.

4. Comparative interpretations should be stimulated by a range of interests: from formal studies of hermeneutical and narrative patterns, to ethical and theological dialogue

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but repairs modes of dialogue to allow for the promotion of peace in the hope of healing the world.

[23] Cf. the cognitive approach of Piaget and Vygotsky. Vygotsky argued that a learner is a 'little apprentice' rather than a lone scientist, affirming the crucial nature of collaborative and discovery led learning. See Vygotsky, L., *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); cf. Schaffer, H. R., *Introducing Child Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); and Wood, D., *How Children Think and Learn*. Second Edition. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998).

among the traditions studied, to the implications of such studies for addressing contemporary intellectual and societal debates.[24]

While the practice is undertaken by people of faith from the perspective of faith, this practice of study is congruent with other traditional forms of study based on an Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum* method of theological inquiry. It thinks rationally from a tradition, and recognizes that modes of reasoning arise from within different traditional dialogues.[25] However, it recognizes that others (from different faiths) may be simultaneously pursuing such concerns also. As MacIntyre puts it, there is a need to recover from the Enlightenment:

> a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.[26]

Engaging, therefore, in theological study of texts does not undermine the process of reasoning, and may indeed help to underscore the need to recognize the danger of the modernist meta-narrative. Nor does this focus on tradition determine that dialogue is impossible. MacIntyre advocates that there is no necessary follow-on that one tradition cannot 'hear or be overheard by those of another. Traditions which differ in the most radical ways over certain subject matters may in respect of others share beliefs, images, and texts.'[27] Furthermore, in the context of scriptural reasoning one might see this at play in a two-fold sense: first, a recognition of a shared sense of being 'traditioned' (and thus a shared

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[24] Ochs, Peter, 'SR as an Academic Practice', Journal of Scriptural Reasoning Forum Website, 2006, available at:
http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/writings/OchFeat.html, accessed 2nd September, 2009. Cf. Ochs, Peter, 'Scripture', in Ford, D.F., Quash, B., and Soskice, J. M., *Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 104-18.

[25] Hence, once might see modernity as one tradition, post-modernity as another etc. On this theme more generally, see MacIntyre, ibid., *Whose Justice*.

[26] MacIntyre, ibid., *Whose Justice*, p. 7.

[27] MaIntyre, ibid., *Whose Justice*, p. 350.

sense of suspicion with regards to certain aspects of the Enlightenment project—undermining particularity and difference); second, specific aspects of the traditions that are shared (narratives and texts). Indeed, the use of scriptural texts as a means of facilitating dialogue arises precisely out of such a possibility of hearing and sharing traditions. Similarly, Kepnes further justifies the use of scripture as the primary text of study and inter-faith dialogue as follows: 'We do this, most simply, because Jews, Christians and Muslims share common narratives and they share a common respect for scripture as fundamental documents of revelation and religious foundation.'[28] Dialogue in this form is both possible and has a place within the academic curriculum.

Applying to the HE context: localizing the theory

Scriptural reasoning exists in many forms. Its nascence was among professors of philosophy and theology, but as a model it provides exciting possibilities for application in different settings. However, design of a credit bearing course utilizing this method requires rethinking for a classroom setting. There have already been movements in this direction (especially in ethics and philosophy) at the Universities of Toronto, Virginia and Northwestern.[29] However, the unique focus of Chester University, in which the project under discussion was based, required a primarily practice based approach with theory integrated for students training to be youth work professionals, alongside those undertaking the course for purely academic purposes. For this reason, it was decided that issues relating to young people and ministry would be explored through the simultaneous study of each other's texts by Muslim and Christian students.[30] The module and materials designed

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[28] Kepnes, ibid., 'A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning', p. 370.

[29] Examples of these can be found at 'Teaching Resources', Journal of Scriptural Reasoning Forum Website, 2006, available at:
http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/teaching.html, accessed 2nd September, 2009.

[30] The pilot did not involve this practice with students who do not profess a faith; this is a further project in which the PI wishes to engage. However, similarly to the way in which thinking from within is the basis for theological study for students who do not have faith, scriptural reasoning provides a mode of engagement for such

needed to be fully learner based, seeking to practice first and reflect upon the practice later. Furthermore, the situation in Chester is such that there is not a large presence of Jewish students in a department with a twin Christian and Muslim foci.[31] Therefore, the practice for the specific context of Chester required reinterpreting for the co-teaching of just two of the Abrahamic peoples.

The model of scriptural reasoning required applying, in other words, to the particular context both of British Higher Education and the teaching of undergraduates, and of the Chester situation in particular. The application of this method to the particular setting was trialled in a pilot scheme—a two session day of scriptural reasoning, using materials devised for a Level six course, followed by semi-structured interviews with the participants.[32] The texts chosen were around the theme of cross-generational family relations (focussing primarily on Luke 14:25-35 and Surah 31:12-19). To facilitate using the method in a British HE setting with Muslim and Christian students, a number of steps were taken to enable scriptural reasoning to be applied in this particular context.

Firstly, it was necessary to have 'in house' discussion and reasoning in preparation for the 'in tent' dialogue discussion. Having been devised by academic professionals, scriptural reasoning often jumps this first step as those involved usually have enough familiarity with their own texts to engage in dialogue immediately. Dealing with undergraduate learners, the assumption of this knowledge was not possible. Thus, in the pilot, the Christians met together with an academic as a discrete group prior to the dialogue, and the Muslims did the same. This was a useful revision to the normal practice of scriptural reasoning. During the pilot, there were, for example, questions about the exact Greek word used for 'hate' in the Luke passage, and about the use of

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thinking from within to take place, utilizing learning from earlier study of traditions (such as biblical studies or systematics). For this reason, the engagement in scriptural reasoning for students with no faith might best be reserved for Level 6, as is the case at Chester.

[31] This twin foci is born out of two major centres in the department—the Centre for Christian Ministry and the Centre for Applied Muslim Youth and Community Studies.

[32] The empirical information that follows arises from this pilot and the interviews. These were recorded and then transcribed.

the first person plural when God speaks in the Qur'an. Such questions require someone more 'expert' to help to guide the conversation. As a result, the time was divided between separate 'in house' discussion of the text, and a full dialogue following that discussion. Students were instructed, however, to follow an interrogative approach to their own texts in their in house discussions: they were asked to think about what *questions* they would like to bring in order to open the text up to study and dialogue, rather than to close it down with any closed, singular exegesis. At the end of this in house discussion, they were asked to assign ten minutes to reading the text from the other faith, and to cite some questions that they would like to ask. Each group assigned a *rapporteur* to bring the discussions to the inter-faith table.

Secondly, there was the need for a short introduction of the texts by one participant to the other group. Because of the lack of familiarity that Christians had with the Qur'an and Muslims had with the New Testament (indeed, all participants admitted to never having read the other faith's scripture), it was thought advisable to have a short two to five minute report of the 'in house' discussions that had taken place from the *rapporteur*. This provided a useful way into dialogue and discussion. From this, there were certain issues pointed towards that were considered as potentially helpful to discuss around the texts. In these, a brief summary of the text and where it fit into the larger section of scripture was given. This was followed by a summary of the sort of questions that were asked by in house participants. The Christian *rapporteur*, for example, pointed to some of the questions that they had posed about the New Testament text as follows:

> Is it possible to lose something if you never really understood you had it? If you follow Christ blindly without understanding what He's asking you to do, understanding the purpose in what you're giving up, are you really understanding anything? Are you losing anything, or are you just going along going, 'I'm a Christian'?

To aid further the preparation for dialogue, a number of students in the interviews that followed the pilot suggested that if this were a method used as part of a course, it would be useful to have exegetical preparation, or directed reading of commentaries or scholarship. Academic participants in scriptural reasoning often refer to their 'internal libraries'—the scholarship they have to hand in the discussion of texts.

Part of the purpose of study for undergraduates and postgraduates is to acquire these 'libraries', and the suggestion of academic preparation was a useful one that will certainly take place in a full course.

Thirdly, there was a need for strong pedagogical leadership to correct and interrogate in order both to facilitate the dialogue and to keep focus. This differs from certain other forms of inter-faith engagement in which there is usually reticence at the idea of there being an 'expert'. However, as a pedagogical activity, the co-ordinator was needed both to keep the pace of the discussion flowing and to answer technical questions. For example, the co-ordinator on a number of occasions during the pilot commented, 'we should try to move on'; and there were questions about terms such as 'ecclesiology' and about translation issues and historical contexts. Participants also needed to be helped by the co-ordinator to recognize when they were adding interpretation to the text and when they were giving factual statement. Furthermore, breaking down the text into manageable chunks was an important part of the work of the co-ordinator, to assist the students' capacity to deal with the full unit of text. The guidance of a group leader (in the instance of the pilot, a doctoral student, though this could easily be a lecturer) was helpful for dealing with the complexities and sensitivities in the group discussion.

Fourthly, since the focus was the faith-based youth work professional, following the engagement, there was a need to relate the discussion to practice based approaches and to young people. A number of participants commented on the benefits of applying the texts. Participant G stated, for example: 'I think it's good because it relates to youth work as well which I quite liked about it'. The students thought that discussing issues to do with the way in which the faiths discussed relations between generations was a really beneficial thing to do: they saw that there were direct consequences to the advice they might give to young people as reflective practitioners. They also realized that some of the issues that young people from the different faiths might face would be comparably similar. Furthermore, they recognized that in settings in which there were young people from different faiths, the method of scriptural reasoning might be a good one with which to facilitate inter-religious / inter-community discussion around these (and other) themes.

Sixthly, there was the recognition that for an academic course

theoretical reflection is required upon the practice which has been engaged. Syllabuses in the US which have followed a scriptural reasoning approach have also recognized the need for this. Courses in the University of Virginia have added this theoretical element by looking at international relations, and in the University of Toronto, philosophy, theology and hermeneutics have been used. Given Chester's particular focus, the theoretical components will be applied theology and conflict mediation.

The above themes seek to demonstrate how a method of engagement which avoids some of the potential pit-falls of inter-faith dialogue might be utilized in the British HE setting in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of Muslim and Christian students together, and their capacity to learn a practice based model of inter-faith engagement. The pilot not only allowed opportunity to explore some of these themes, but offered the potential to reflect upon issues that the students raised and to think further about the possible developments of any such course.

Benefits of scriptural reasoning for inter-faith pedagogy

There are considerable benefits to this kind of approach to inter-faith pedagogy. A number of these have been alluded to in response to some of the problems outlined above. However, it is worth indicating them at this juncture.

Usefully, this method provides a non-essentialist approach to learning about other faiths. The discussions were able to illustrate the variety of approaches to the faiths that the different members of the communities held. For example, during the pilot, participants F and G spoke of—arising from the discussion of carrying Christ's cross—various traditions within Islam about Jesus' death. Participant E at one point wanted to make it known clearly that he had not heard of one of these traditions. This potential for variety and the recognition of relationship seems to respond to Samman's desire for a non-essentialist mode of teaching Islam (and could equally be applied to Christianity):

> While essentialists teach students to think in binaries, teach your students to think in relational terms. Teach them that societies, far from having separate histories, are intertwined and that we must acquire a contrapuntal imagination to capture such a reality. Instead of teaching them Western Civilisation and Islamic Civilisation, one being our history while the other is their history, teach them to think of civilisations as transformative, reflexive, and fluid entities.[33]

The potential for discussion and for various opinions to be expressed by the different participants allows students to recognize that there are different instantiations of any religion, and that individuals will all relate differently to their faith.

Related to this, scriptural reasoning allows for a truly learner based, and peer-to-peer learning, approach to pedagogy. Students begin with the texts and are able to discuss and ask questions themselves about what arises from the texts. There was in all of the discussion during the pilot a certain need for 'ground clearing' and clarification prompted by the students themselves. Numerous initial questions surrounded very basic themes. There was also the clear opportunity to learn by questioning, demonstrated in the discussions. Christians reading the Qur'an were confronted with a number of issues that they wished to ask their Muslim peers to answer. 'Who is Luqmann? I don't know' (Participant A). 'Does God, the Spirit as we know, lay on Luqman granting him the wisdom [in a way] that it wouldn't on others?' (Participant C). 'Again it might just be me not knowing the text at all, but it says "we granted this wisdom", but that might just be a basic…' (Participant A). In this, it was also necessary to have a co-ordinator to encourage participants to ask what might have seemed obvious questions, and to ask for explanation of terms, such as '*tawhid*', that not all participants would understand. But crucially, students were able to learn from each other, and to learn as they were prompted by the texts to ask questions.

The approach of scriptural reasoning also allows for both an insider and an outsider approach simultaneously. Muslim and Christian students are simultaneously both insiders to their own tradition and outsiders to the other faith, learning more about their own faith (in light of

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[33] Samman, K., 'Towards a Non-Essentialist Pedagogy of 'Islam', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 8/3, p. 170.

the other) as well as the faith different to their own. For the Christian participants, for example, the need to discuss the texts with Muslim participants led the students to open up to new questions and new perspectives in terms of having to think carefully about what questions might be asked of their own text by other participants. Participant A stated, for example: 'what does carrying your cross mean?' Participant C overtly admitted to the difference that reading texts with members of other faith communities brought to the reading of their own sacred scripture: for example, 'I probably looked at it completely out of context with the rest of it, and I almost looked at it, as in, is it a rhetorical question?'

Furthermore, this dual aspect to learning also led to a strong recognition of the place of perspective. Indeed, discussing the Qur'anic texts, the Christian participants clearly recognized both the unavoidability of perspective, and thus the need for awareness of perspective during discussions. Participant C stated:

> Can I quickly say something before we start? … As we do have an understanding of Abraham, even if it's a Christian understanding of Abraham … I don't know how to do it, but I think it's important to recognize that we will have a perception one way when we read the Abrahamic text, well they're both Abrahamic, but the one specifically about Abraham's life, I think it's important to think about this almost with a separation from our own. … At least at first so that we can be … I can't think of the word…. Fully open with it, fully accepting what it's saying, otherwise we'll come at it from our own understandings …

Within this respect and noting of perspective, there were some surprising moments. One of the most notable of these in the pilot for Christian students was the Muslim discomfort with the idea of Jesus telling anyone that they had to hate. The Muslims were wanting to offer a higher Christology than the Christians. Participant E's comments were very enlightening about the differences between the traditions:

> I think the word 'hate' here is slightly hard, harsh, for Jesus—may God be pleased with Him—to say, because He's always known, in our traditions, as a man of mercy, a man of greatness. He's a man who would say if someone slaps you on one side of the face, turn your face so that he may slap you on the other.

Having discussed the verse more, however, the participants were able to come to a greater level of understanding around a shared figure for both traditions. Participant B described the verse in the following terms: 'maybe it was … drilling home the point that God might ask you to do something that is really, really, really hard, and you've got to be prepared to do that'. This led to the Participant F (a Muslim) being able to affirm:

> I've been listening to the particular about the word 'hate'—… I've just realized that this whole thing, in the passage, maybe the best way I can understand and relate from the Islamic viewpoint—and it might make sense, I'm not saying it will, but it might make sense in terms of this word being used here, and it doesn't seem appropriate here. But there's a narration of the messenger, and there's a few narrations, or there's a lot of narrations where the companions they would go to the messenger and in a discussion they would ask him something, you know, he would ask them, you know, one of the methods of teaching

This indicates the potential scriptural reasoning has to allow students to understand from the perspective of the other, and to understand that perspective from one's own.

The potential for comparative study was also facilitated through the study of the texts. When the Christians read the Qur'an, there was the constant comparison to the Bible. Participant A's statement was indicative of several moments during the dialogue: 'The first thing that struck me is that one of the 10 commandments [says] do not honour anyone above God, it's sort of like that is a similarity: do not ascribe your divine powers to anything beside God.' And similarly: 'Again [it's close to] that parallel, with the "honour your father and your mother"—"be grateful towards me and towards your parents but remember with me all journeys end." So that's sort of like two of the commandments in one there…' (Participant A). This was not, however, at the exclusion of recognition of difference: 'I think that's the big difference between the two texts really, the Christian text focuses a lot on us, on what we need to do, [whereas] a lot of this text is saying God is unfathomable, it's focusing a lot more on God' (Participant A).

None of this discussion took place on the basis of a relativizing or liberal agenda, moreover. It arose from deep respect of the sacred-

ness of the scriptures of each tradition and it was conducted on the basis of a recognition of the particularity of each tradition, and the realization of the place of faith in the lives of students training to be religious professionals. Empathy, respect and particularity were all displayed. This, therefore, enabled there to be no betrayal of exclusivity, and resultantly the opportunity for those for whom inter-faith dialogue is difficult (that is those who most passionately believe in their scriptures and their exclusive truth claims) to participate. This afforded, furthermore, the opportunity for application of the texts and discussion of them in relation to young people and issues surrounding working with young people. By modelling a method of inter-faith engagement, students were also provided with practical tools for their own work within communities and with their people at a time when many divisions within communities arise around issues of religious identity.

Conclusion

In concluding this article, it is worth noting the responses of students in semi-structured interviews to the methodology employed. The benefits of utlilizing the text were noted by all of the participants. Participant A stated: 'I think to learn about other religions and faiths you have to go back to the primary text and without that it would have been virtually impossible to sort of learn about Islam without looking at what their text says about their religion…' And Participant B stated: 'I would have been completely lost if I didn't have the texts…'. One participant articulated several benefits to using texts:

> because of the meaning of the texts to different people here, it [scripture] can help, it bridges a gap in some ways because it's something to focus on – if everyone focuses on the same thing relationship can happen around that focus, so you can talk with people you may not usually talk to. Also, because of what it is, it can help you reflect on what you believe and why you believe it and it breaks some of the barriers you place on your own head before you even meet people (Participant C)

Participant D noted the potential that the texts have for stimulating dialogue, and for identifying commonalities between the texts and

faiths:

> it's a catalyst for the dialogue—anybody can just sit down and talk about things but when you start talking more about the differences then the scriptures, the divine texts, like I said they have a lot of commonalities and if we should work on the commonalities because really we know what the differences are, and they're very few and far between but they're no cause for friction … (Participant D)

Another participant was vocal about the surprise s/he had about how easy it had been to stimulate discussion of the texts: 'The thing that stood out was how easy it was for us to actually discuss the texts' (Participant F). Given the centrality of scripture, and the endless depths of its interpretation, for the Abrahamic traditions, this is hardly surprising.

In the coming years, it is hoped that at Chester we might develop this inter-faith approach to pedagogy based on textual study of each other's texts, designing a course which involves small group work around selected texts from the Qur'an and the Bible on themes relating to ministry and youth work. The course will contain theoretical reflection on theology and on conflict mediation, as well as deep academic hermeneutical engagement with texts. In this way, we hope to begin to take some exciting steps towards overcoming some of the many complexities involved in teaching religious exclusivists together.

Curriculum Matters:

Assessing a Method of Ministry for Chaplaincy in a 'New' University

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Introduction

In November 2008 a book was launched called *Living and Learning: The Story of Chaplaincy on the Chelmsford Campus of Anglia Ruskin University*.[1] It had been written by four members of the Chaplaincy team, reflecting on the first twenty five years of a new Chaplaincy's life at one of the United Kingdom's 'new' post 1992 universities, and by happy coincidence the production of the book was published during the 150th anniversary year of the university, which can trace its origins back to 1858 and the foundation of the Cambridge

School of Art by John Ruskin.[2]

The impetus for the book though did not come because of the felt need to mark a significant historical occasion. It came from the fact that some years previously three of its authors, the full time Chaplain, an academic liaison librarian and a senior lecturer in the Built Environment, through two dissertations for MA's in Pastoral Theology and a Doctoral thesis respectively, were engaged on an academic, theological assessment of what it meant, from their different professional standpoints, to be members of a Chaplaincy serving a Higher Education institution. When the time came to present a coherent synthesis of all this thinking and writing, *Living and Learning* was born and we were joined in its production by a fourth participant in the Chaplaincy team, a member of the Academic Secretariat. Primarily the writing of this book was an academic exercise written by academic staff who themselves happened also to be members of the Chaplaincy team, who were seeking to present to the university a credible, relevant and respected piece of work that would have cross-curricula appeal and speak to students and staff, for whom the academic process is the lifeblood of the institution, about the mission and ministry of Chaplaincy and the impact of faith and belief on the university campus.

Why should being seen to have academic credibility and relevance be such an important enterprise for Chaplaincy at Anglia Ruskin University though? It feels like there is something of an uncomfortable parallel here with the sentiment sometimes heard from politicians and others that the church should keep its nose out of the affairs of state and stick to what its good at! Why should Chaplaincy concern itself with the endeavour of trying to access and exploit the secular curriculum for spiritual 'gain' rather than practice what many would regard as its core tasks of pursuing the pastoral care of the students and staff and concerning itself with the proclamation of the Christian Faith? What follows here is an attempt to suggest an answer to that question.

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[1] Moody, Ivor, Garfield, Diana, Powell, Michael & Shilling, Roger, *Living and Learning: The Story of Chaplaincy on the Chelmsford Campus of Anglia Ruskin University* (Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University, 2008). The book can also be viewed on line at: **http://web.apu.ac.uk/chaplaincy/chelmsford/book.phtml**.

[2] For a recent comprehensive history of the origins and development of Anglia Ruskin University see Kirby, Anthony, *1858 – 2008, A Celebratory History* (Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University, 2008).

Context

There are two primary reasons why the characteristics and shape of Chaplaincy's ministry at Anglia Ruskin has been so influenced by what is taught, and why, on campus. First, because the Chaplaincy was born and grew from within the institution, rather than being invited in from the outside, and those who were in the first instance responsible for providing some kind of Chaplaincy support were academic staff, offering help initially to colleagues as locally as on the same corridor of the same building, and to students of a particular subject or faculty. So from the outset those members of staff were grappling with complex and often thorny connections between what they taught and what they believed; and one of their greatest legacies to Chaplaincy at Anglia Ruskin, even as it has grown and expanded now to accommodate a full time Chaplain on campus, has been to continue to be a part of the team and to continue the exploration of relationships between faith and the secular academy, a characteristic which goes to the heart of any understanding of Chaplaincy's work here. One of the authors of *Living and Learning*, the Rev'd Dr Michael Powell, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Science and Technology specialising in the Built Environment, writes that theologians claim for the Bible:

> A value and authority about God's nature and God's relationship with everything knowable to, and do-able by, human beings throughout all time and all space. Similarly, [what] those who reflect on built environments choose to do by way of design, construction, change, occupation, conservation and demolition or destruction….is one of the most visible and tangible ways in which we express ourselves. The compelling academic task for me was to engage with the question of how deep connections can be made and deep relationships discerned between these two facets of life and fields of study'.[3]

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[3] Powell, Michael, 'Built Environment and Biblical Theology: Making Connections, Discerning Relationships' in Moody, Ivor, Garfield, Diana & Powell, Michael, *Look and See What's Really Here* (Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University, 2004), pp. 4-6. This document in its entirety can be viewed at: **http://web.apu.ac.uk/chaplaincy/chelmsford/lookandsee.phtml**

Second, because as a former polytechnic Anglia Ruskin University has maintained a strong vocational ethos which underpins much of its curriculum aims and values, especially on the Chelmsford campus, to prepare its students to expand and enrich the workforce in those local communities which serve, and are served by, the university. So business, law, science and technology, architecture and teacher training all feature prominently, but none more so than students of the Faculty of Health and Social Care, which boasts over a thousand entrants each academic year training in a huge variety of healthcare situations and specialisms. For Chaplaincy there came the realisation that the opportunity to deliver a credible insight into how an understanding of spirituality might contribute positively and holistically to the academic and personal preparation of such students to embark upon their chosen professions was—kind of—'preloaded'. The ongoing struggle of those home grown Chaplaincy team members to try and make sense of the relationship between their spiritual and professional lives seemed to be projected onto a much larger canvas occupied by many students' experiences of also trying to make sense of a powerful 'calling,' to try and reconcile and understand what is often a difficult relationship between their training to acquire expertise in a particular caring profession and the fact that, in former lives, they had been recipients—or victims—of it.[4]

Also, that despite the solidly secular infrastructure of the institution, one that has no religious foundation or underlying tradition (and which has meant that Chaplaincy is met with a consistent challenge to find ever more inventive ways to conduct pastoral care and present the Christian Faith),[5] some of those professions which look to Anglia Ruskin for fresh supplies of graduates are themselves beginning to re-evaluate the place and importance of spiritual awareness on the part of educators and carers for the clients in their care; a fact which has

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[4] Recently a group of new midwifery students was asked why they had chosen their subject; nearly all of them linked their desire to study midwifery with their own experiences of childbirth, and to have the chance, now, to make some intellectual sense of what for them had been intense and in many cases traumatic experiences.

[5] See Moody, Ivor, 'Building Community through Ritual: An Exploration of the Work of Chaplaincy on the Chelmsford Campus of the Anglia Polytechnic University', *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, vol.2.2, October 2005, pp.115-128.

helped considerably in the viewing of Chaplaincy by the university as a valid contributor to the academic formation of its students.[6] Emma Tomalin points out that 'Religious and cultural literacy [is] a key employability skill', and Chaplaincy here has found a niche in the academic market because, as Tomalin points out, even though

> 'Religious diversity issues cut across all academic disciplines….[due to the] rigid boundaries that exist between academic disciplines tutors do not know how they can build these issues into their courses'.[7]

The net result of all this has been an increasing respect for Chaplaincy's existence on campus, not only because staff feel that some of their pressures and concerns are understood by Chaplaincy at an appropriate level, but because, with the rampant commercialisation of Higher Education as a consumerist enterprise with students now regarded as 'clients' or 'customers'—(I have even heard them referred to as 'units')—Chaplaincy, by engaging with students in their core activity of learning, can be seen to be 'earning' the notice and respect of those who have to pay for their education and increasingly expect, in return, a certain 'value for money'. It is of course a means to an end. The bottom line is not a craving to be liked or admired but a way of building bridges and forging networks between students and staff which will enhance that core ministry task of Chaplaincy to support, care for and hopefully touch at a deep level the lives of those who live and study on

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[6] A few years ago the Faculty of Education asked Chaplaincy to devise and teach a two hour session for primary education students called 'Implicit RE in Secular Storytelling'. It was in response to, and was aimed at, providing resources for students who were unhappy or unfamiliar with handling and promoting religious texts and ideas as a result of the religious education requirements of the 1944 Education Act which required all schools (other than Independent schools) to provide 'religious instruction', and the 1988 Education Reform Act which established a mandatory National Curriculum of ten subjects of which Religious Education was one. It proved to be a fascinating and productive event, which used a variety of different media (including music, storytelling and video, with material as diverse as Winnie the Pooh and Toy Story!) to examine how ordinary, secular texts and postmodern 'soundbites' might prove useful and adaptable resource materials for communicating RE lesson and worship ideas.

[7] Tomalin, Emma, 'Supporting Cultural and Religious Diversity', *Discourse*, vol.4, no. 1, Autumn 2004, pp.77-82.

campus.

Why Spirituality?

In attempting to define the nature and character of teaching religious concepts and values within the secular curriculum, perhaps a more apposite question would be, 'why not theology'? The answer is shaped and defined by the type of institution and its students that has been described briefly above. In stark contrast to a pre-modern world where there was the strongest of associations between the faith and community life of one church and an intellectual discipline that sought to make sense of the world through a biblical world view, the existence of an institution like Anglia Ruskin University is testimony to the postmodern *milieu* where there are not one but many claims to truth, and that in the secular academy containing all faiths and none and driven by powerful scientific, rational and fiscal incentives, religious thought and experience needs to be treated as the ambiguous, disputed and uncertain phenomenon that so many now consider it to be.

What is true of the modern Academy is also true of the mass of students attracted to study there; Francis describes them as

> 'People who have not been schooled and equipped to express their theological insights in the nuanced professional theological vocabulary of the academy, but whose experiences of God and of living in God's world may be no less authentic and no less revelatory of theological truth'.[8]

This description is important for two reasons. It helps to explain the emphasis placed by Chaplaincy on the need to try and understand the concept of spirituality and its role in the curriculum as something which encompasses religion and faith but which is not wholly defined by it (even though it has become a popularist, over-used word and is a term very difficult to define).[9] A word which, if handled sensitively,

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[8] Francis, Leslie, 'Expectations of the Christian Campus: Ordinary Theology, Empirical Theology and Student Voices', in Astley, Jeff, Francis, Leslie, Sullivan, John & Walker, Andrew, (eds), *The Idea of a Christian University* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), pp.147-165.

allows a broadening out of personal, emotional and transcendent concepts far beyond the boundaries and restrictions of any one religion, in an attempt to address a huge need for self-understanding and one's place and significance in the Universe—a need only matched by one that no longer necessarily finds its *raison d'etre* within a particular faith community.

It is also important for the fact that even within this brave new world of huge religious and cultural diversity mixed up in a sea of agnosticism, Francis is not afraid to continue to speak of the role and significance of theology. Even though it may no longer be regarded as 'the queen of the sciences' (was it ever?) and to have been so domesticated and adapted to the higher education secularisation agenda as to be unrecognisable from its historical origins, there is a powerful argument to suggest that theology's vital work continues within the secular higher education institution; not to reinforce the dogmatic declarations of one religious community, nor to support and uphold the religious convictions of personal belief about life, the universe and everything, but to carry out what Ward describes as 'An essential study for any educational institution that claims to impart knowledge and enlarge understanding of human existence'. That is, to try and understand people's 'gods'—what he describes as 'A discussion of the ultimate goals and values of individuals and societies', and 'A careful and critical examination of reasoned claims that there is a transcendent spiritual reality'.[10]

For some years now Chaplaincy has been invited by the Faculty of Health and Social Care to explore with students, usually over a two hour session, the relationships between spirituality and health care. Despite 'tweaking' the content to try and meet the needs of students studying different branches of healthcare—(adult nursing, Accident and Emergency students, midwives etc)—underpinning all the sessions has been a common methodological approach which begins with an exploration of how the concept of spirituality might be described and defined. Students quickly latch onto the concept that any 'definition' of

[9] For a good, recent exploration of this subject, see Coyte, Mary Ellen, Gilbert, Peter & Nicholls, Vicky, *Spirituality, Values and Mental Health: Jewels for the Journey* (London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2007).

[10] Ward, Keith, 'Why Theology should be taught at Secular Universities', *Discourse*, vol. 4, no. 1, Autumn 2004, pp.22-37.

spirituality can encompass not only the religious/transcendent but also the multitude of thoughts, feelings and emotions that give them an understanding of who they are and how they react with the world- in essence what makes them human. For many there is an understanding and an appreciation of the fact that spirituality as a concept encompasses and contains within it all that it is to be 'religious', but that not everything to do with being 'spiritual' necessarily is confined to having a traditional faith. The session then moves on to explore how this concept may be applied both to targeted fictitious scenarios requiring students to discuss and assess the spiritual/religious needs of patient-clients featured in the stories, and then real life situations and applications, including the ministry of healthcare Chaplains.

The direction this work takes, beginning from an examination and an understanding of the self, and then moving out to consider the needs of others and the possibility of an unseen dimension in the care of those who are sick, is deliberate. For some students who approach the session suspicious and hostile to suggestion that religion might have any part to play in their formation as professional carers, it can come as something of a revelation that, if spirituality is as broad and as high and as deep as has been suggested, then they too have the capacity to be 'spiritual'. For many, far from viewing the requirement to discuss spiritual issues as something which has been 'imposed' on them from outside, the curriculum, rather, can provide a secure space to explore faith and beliefs and to declare or deny them from a place of safety within an academic environment.

The rest of this article will briefly explore three reflections arising as a consequence of this work, and assess their importance for an understanding of the nature and character of the higher education curriculum and how it impacts both on Chaplaincy's ministry and the lives of staff and students who experience it.

Stimulating dialogue

Fundamentally the spirituality agenda and debate described here is a process of trying to discover and acquire an appropriate language with which to engage students about faith and belief issues—one that takes full account of all the diverse, postmodern, cultural, societal and reli-

gious pressures and influences that play upon them. Hopefully it reflects the confidence of Egan when he asserts: 'It is possible to explore spiritual themes without getting bogged down in religious language. It is possible to find a language to talk about the spiritual with people who do not share one's spiritual tradition'.[11] This is crucial, because if Chaplaincy is to be seen to have a credible, engaged and authentic ministry on campus, it cannot begin from a position of power asserting the correctness of its own story over any others, but must attempt, through the 'language' of spirituality which links up with the sheer breadth and scope of what's out there, to put itself in a position to undertake a constructive dialogue through a spirit of collaboration and accountability which does not resist challenge and debate, but which 'Makes it clear that it accepts, even within its own terms of reference, that there are ways in which it may be questioned and criticised'.[12]

It is crucial too, because finding new ways of relocating religious thought and debate within the secular curriculum contributes not only to the academic integrity of stimulating a dialogue within that curriculum which, through the establishment of cross curricular links may demonstrate a more holistic approach to education, but also encourages new and innovative ways for Chaplaincy to present its material in a language that might provide an effective response to the challenge of life on a sceptical, critical, postmodern university campus: 'This is no matter of colonising or re-colonising for Christ the liberated, secular curriculum' argues Thatcher; rather 'It is to appeal to a worldview rooted in ancient conviction yet capable of revision and re-affirmation in every age'.[13]

Chaplaincy on the Chelmsford campus of Anglia Ruskin University has used a variety of media to try and stimulate this dialogue, and to do so through a shared 'language' to which all might relate. Once, a Christian Aid stall with leaflets and a video showing some of the charity's work in the developing world was set up outside

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[11] Egan, Kevin, 'A Spiritual Presence on the Frontier', in McGrail, Peter & Sullivan, John, *Dancing on the Edge: Chaplaincy, Church and Higher Education* (Chelmsford: Matthew James Publishing Ltd, 2007), pp.109-124.

[12] Williams, Rowan, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.5.

[13] Thatcher, Adrian, 'The Curriculum of a Christian University', in *The Idea of a Christian University*, pp.169-182.

the refectory, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the university. A local Indian restaurant provided little pots of food and rice which were handed out, and the food offered there, even though it mirrored the sustenance about to be purchased by many over the counter, became a powerful reminder that in fact it was a precious commodity denied to millions that day who would go without.

On another occasion Chaplaincy worked with some second year students and their tutor from the art department of the Faculty of Education. The task was to make a contemporary Stations of the Cross using fourteen of their paintings—a collection of purely secular images depicting various aspects of the human condition. After a careful selection, each linked by a relevant sentence of scripture from one of the Passion Narratives in the Gospels, they were put up in sequence along the wall of a corridor, and what was an ordinary passageway became for some a contemporary, postmodern *via dolorosa*.[14] The impact and significance of both these stories may be found, perhaps, in Gilliat-Ray's assertion that 'Religion is being re-located out of 'traditional' spheres to new contexts where it then takes on new shapes and appears in different guises', and that 'If eclecticism is the dominant hallmark of religious believing and belonging, then so too our teaching methods need to draw from a variety of sources'.[15]

Exciting vocation

There is, residing at the heart of institutions like Anglia Ruskin University, a fundamental educational contradiction. On the one hand it is an institution that prides itself on attracting precisely those kinds of students highlighted earlier whose will to study is driven by a profound sense of the need to find meaning and purpose in their lives; students, many of them mature, who have considerable life experience

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[14] Both these stories feature in a dissertation for an MA in Pastoral Theology with the Cambridge Theological Federation: Moody, Ivor, *'Did not our hearts burn within us?' Uncovering a sacred language for a secular university* (Chelmsford: Anglia Polytechnic University, 2003).

[15] Gilliat-Ray, Sophie, 'Breaking Down the Classroom Walls: Innovative Teaching and Learning Methods in Religious Studies and Theology', *Discourse*, vol. 2, no. 2, Winter 2003, pp.200-210.

behind them, and many for whom education may not have been a happy experience the first time round, attracted to a university whose boast is that it is regional and one that delights in giving people a second chance (or more) to prove to themselves and others that they have tremendous worth and potential.[16] On the other hand Anglia Ruskin is an institution, like many others, so driven by economic forces, government targets, recruitment and retention goals and an incessant adaptation to the demands of the political and economic ethos of the market place, that it is in constant danger of losing that sense of the vocational with which it once may have begun. Percy warns: 'The ontological has given way to the functional: a sense of 'calling' has been subjugated to forces of bureaucracy, capitalism and professionalization'.[17]

It is significant—not to mention ironic—that the very title of the university, changed from Anglia Polytechnic to Anglia Ruskin in 2005, encapsulates this uneasy dynamic that exists between the demands of the secular and the discovery of the spiritual. The university chose the famous Victorian philanthropist, art critic and social prophet John Ruskin for its new identity, exploiting a link which can be traced back to 1858 when Ruskin founded the Cambridge School of Art, but in so doing it has had to acknowledge and wrestle with that same uneasy dynamic that raged within its founder and benefactor.[18] For Ruskin education was the way out from what he saw as the darkness of the Industrial Revolution which not only ravaged the environment and dehumanised and marginalised those who served its vast machinery, bending 'The eye of the soul upon the finger point for ten hours a day until soul, sight, and the whole human creature were at last destroyed',[19] but which was ultimately responsible for turning the

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[16] See Guite, Malcolm, *A New Start* (Cambridge: Anglia Polytechnic University, 2000). This was a Chaplaincy Millennium project which collected the stories of ten students from the Cambridge and Chelmsford campuses to demonstrate how, in different ways, adversity can be overcome to achieve a qualification.

[17] Percy, Martyn, *The Salt of the Earth* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001), p.313.

[18] See *Living and Learning: The Story of Chaplaincy on the Chelmsford Campus of Anglia Ruskin University*, chapter 3, for a full exposition of John Ruskin's life and his influence on, and importance for, the university.

[19] Rosenberg, John, *The Darkening Glass* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963), pp. 97-98.

educative process into a mere production line for the acquisition of facts and skills to feed an ever increasing demand for the generation of wealth. Ruskin's most famous and memorable adage 'There is no wealth but life'[20] was born out of a lifelong frustration that education seemed increasingly to be yoked to an economics of supply and demand, of buying and selling, which robbed it of its true import and power. He invokes a wisdom which he called 'Sight' that took humanity beyond mere 'knowledge' into a deeper understanding of what it was to live in a world full of beauty, complexity and imperfection.

His prophetic vision was that the market place must not be divorced from the rest of human life, and that business, commerce and industry had a moral and spiritual responsibility as well as a materialistic one. For the university that now bears his name the very process of 'exciting vocation' reflects its primary call to recover and pursue that vision and 'To return to a concern with the whole person, by uniting and piecing together what in the contemporary world has become alienated and fragmented'.[21]

The attempts by Chaplaincy to foster dialogue in the curriculum between the apparently secular demands for professional training and practice, and a spiritual interpretation which can impact upon and enrich that learning process, may do much to help restore that crucial balance between education which is defined not just by what students can learn, but also by an understanding of who they are—their significant experiences and relationships, their hopes and fears, their self acknowledged strengths and weaknesses, their values and resentments. Only when these two halves of the educative process are taken together and afforded proper shared status, can proper attention begin to be paid to the people and contexts served by the professions which they are studying and for which they are being trained. Sullivan states:

> Teachers have to develop pedagogical approaches that establish

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[20] This occurs in 'Ad Valorem', the last of four essays written by Ruskin under the title 'Unto This Last', and is quoted in Batchelor, John, *John Ruskin: a life* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000), p. 178.

[21] Walker, Andrew & Wright, Andrew, 'A Christian University Imagined: Recovering Paideia in a Broken World', in The Idea of a Christian University, pp. 58-74.

> links between the academic disciplines and the real lives of
> students….so long as this emphasis on the personal and experien-
> tial dimension is matched by attention to the institutional and intel-
> lectual dimensions….it should not leave students where they
> started from.[22]

Indeed, to describe the recovery of the vocational within higher educa-
tion as the beginning of a journey is significant, because it can lead to
the discovery of that ultimate constituency of any university, above and
beyond any measure of success it may attain in producing academical-
ly equipped graduates- to actually change student's lives, and in so
doing to assist in the formation of people whose primary mission is to
understand more truthfully the meaning of their existence—a process
Bird has described as 'transformativity'.[23]

One of the most interesting and effective strategies that
Chaplaincy has employed to try and foster cross curricular links, both
between different faculties and its own spirituality agenda, is through a
project called 'Mission Croatia'.[24] Begun in 1997, it seeks each year to
take around forty students and ten staff to work in learning disability
centres and a children's home. The work is divided between the
ongoing restoration and redecoration of the centres' buildings, and a
chance for students and staff to work on the wards alongside the
Croatian staff, undertaking some basic nursing care tasks. There are
three characteristics of this work which have helped more than
anything else to establish Chaplaincy's credibility as a valued contrib-
utor to the educational process at Anglia Ruskin University, and to
provide valuable cross curricular links helping to enrich the students'
learning experience:

(i) The project has made a significant contribution to the univer-
sity's necessary preoccupation with providing volunteering opportuni-
ties for students. In an increasingly competitive world where employ-
ers have come to value work experience almost as highly as a good

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[22] Sullivan, John, 'University, Christian Faith and the Church', in *The Idea of a Christian University*, pp. 14-34.

[23] Bird, Darlene, 'Theology and the Outcome-Based Curriculum: The Value of 'Not Knowing'', *Discourse*, vol. 5, no. 2, Spring 2006, pp. 49-56.

[24] Reports about previous expeditions can be found at:
http://web.apu.ac.uk/chaplaincy/chelmsford/missioncroatia2.phtml.

degree, many of the students over the years who have participated in 'Mission Croatia' have reported that their experience in Croatia whilst at university has played an important role in their shortlisting and selection for jobs.

(ii) Students are recruited for the project from across the range of academic disciplines and from all faiths and none. Because of the range of work required, many of the students are able to practice and develop practical skills directly related to their educational studies, and for some their work in Croatia is counted as part of their coursework assessment for their eventual qualification, especially for nursing and social work students—a process Norman describes as that which:

> Takes possession of the transformative capacity of education by providing an account of [students'] own subjective encounter with learning, and the changes it has wrought in them.[25]

(iii) Consequently, for some students, experiencing 'Mission Croatia' has meant precisely that 'transformativity' mentioned above. One student could write:

> I have just returned to Sri Lanka from a fun packed three days with [other 'Mission Croatia' students] in the United Arab Emirates. None of us could quite believe we'd travelled thousands of miles to see each other, but then that's what friendship is all about….it made us all reflect on how 'Mission Croatia' has brought us together and made life long friendships….

Another has commented:

> If it wasn't for 'Mission Croatia' I certainly wouldn't be working abroad for five months. We all agreed that 'Mission Croatia' really has changed our lives.[26]

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[25] Norman, Ralph, 'Theological Foundations of Action Research for Learning and Teaching', *Discourse*, vol. 8, no. 2, Autumn 2008, pp.113-140.

[26] *Living and Learning: The Story of Chaplaincy on the Chelmsford Campus of Anglia Ruskin University*, pp.43 & 41.

Conclusion

Even as I write this I realise that what has been described here merely scratches the surface, and that the possibilities—and the urgency—of addressing the issue of spirituality and the curriculum remains a vast, untapped resource for Chaplaincy and the university here. A good example of this is the preparation of students for careers in social work, where the thorny issue of faith and beliefs in the workplace is a particularly cogent one. Peter Gilbert, Professor of Social Work and Spirituality at Staffordshire University argues that in this caring field especially the task of addressing the issue of spirituality has lagged behind many others, including nursing, psychiatry and occupational therapy, and that there has been a lack of discussion and professional guidance within social work for what he calls the 'forgotten dimension' of spirituality.'[27]

Nevertheless, this article is reflective of a confidence that, by encouraging and assisting with the establishment of cross curricular links between concepts of spirituality and aspects of the secular curriculum, Chaplaincy can assist effectively, both for the institution and the individuals within it, in the process of addressing that deep quest for 'wholeness' which Williams describes as 'What it is that all reality relates to as its source and ground of meaning', and to create the space and the possibility on campus to contemplate 'The freedom to respond to the beautiful and the puzzling and the tragic, to all the things that we do not have the power to manage'.[28]

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[27] Ahmed, Maria, 'Should I pray or should I go?', in *Community Care Magazine*, October 2009, pp.16-17.

[28] From the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lecture at Rikkyo Gaukin University on the occasion of his conferment of an honorary doctorate, Monday 21st September, 2009.

The Use of Text in Theological Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article argues that when students create theological meaning from a text they approach this task from a culturally determined perspective. This perspective is identified and shown to replicate aspects of oral interpretation. The result is that in some instances the output of such cognitive processes are not compatible with what Western educationalists call deep or critical thinking.

Introduction

This article arises out of my experience as a theological educator in northern Nigeria[1]. Reports on education in the United Kingdom often lament that students embarking on a course of study have not developed the necessary reading skills that such a study requires. If this is true of tertiary education in the United Kingdom, then how much truer will it be for students in the developing world who come from a culture that is still in a state of transition from an oral based society to a literate society. While some theological educators would call for theology to be taught in accordance with the methods of oral tradition, those involved in tertiary education know that their students have to engage with the world of education that is defined by the enlightenment concepts of education and the engagement with texts. This engagement is complicated by two further factors.

The first factor is the effect that literacy has on cognitive development (Homer, 2004). Literacy and literature enable new modes of representation and communication, not available to oral societies to develop and thereby foster cognitive development. While Scriber and Cole (1981) attributed this development to explicit training in schools and not to the inevitable effect of literature, Donald (1991,2004) and Olson (1991,1994) have made the point that writing allows for the development of specialized modes of communication and that a unique set of intellectual competencies arises in learning to develop and use these.

The second factor is the relationship between culture and cognition. A student's cognitive approach is itself a 'hybrid' of biology and culture (Donald 1991). Katherine Nelson has shown that cognitive development in children takes place in a social and cultural context. This she termed 'The mediated mind' (1996). Donald and Nelson highlight the role of culture in the development of cognition. Donald stated this clearly when he wrote:

> Symbolic systems and codes, and the basic habits of rational

[1] This is part of a bigger research project. The full report can be obtained in Seed, Richard Edward, The Relationship between Goals of Theological Education and Learning Practices. (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2008).

thought are assimilated from culture. Thus, the developing human mind follows a strategy that is radically different from that of any other species. In order to achieve its mature form, it is dependent on information that is held in something external to genome and brain: culture (2004:255).

The mediating role of cultural context in learning is well recognised and has given rise to anthropological psychology[2] and cross cultural psychology.[3] The differing reliance on memorisation by ethnic groups has been explored by Ballard and Clanchy, (1984) Samuelowicz, (1987) and Volet et al.,(1994)   although not without controversy, (Biggs,1990; Watkins and Reghi, 1991). Cultural predispositions on the Individualist / Collectivist axis have been researched (Ho and Chiu, 1994; Marsella et al.,1985; Triandis et al.,1988; Weisz et al.,1984). In more recent times Michael Brown, et al (2007), has shown that when studying a group's approach to learning or its locus of control orientation culturally specific sensitivity is needed as different Asian ethnic groups vary in the way these affect their cognitive processes.

For teaching practice and the production of learning materials the above considerations mean identifying students' approaches to texts and in the light of this building a teaching method that develops within the students the necessary skills for engaging with texts in such a way as to foster deep learning. This article will seek to understand a little of the relationship between learning approach, depth of cognition and culture. Many of the researchers mentioned above used comparative statistical analysis to derive their conclusions. It was my intention to approach this research through observing and analysing an actual learning event itself. In this I was looking for patterns in the organisational processes of cognition, its relationship to the cognitive depth of

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[2] Anthropological Psychology is a discipline developed at the Danish University of Aarhus. The purpose of this discipline is to identify, describe and explain why the human psyche is especially human. It approaches the human psyche from an historical , cultural and history of life perspective. It is in the latter two perspectives that culturally generated factors play a part in explaining the human psyche. Preben Bertelsen , Anthropological Psychology 2001 Downloaded from **http://www.psy.au.dk/pb/antropsy.htm**.

[3] Cross-cultural psychology is a branch of psychology that looks at how cultural factors influence human behavior. The International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was established in 1972 to promote this as a discipline.

outcome and possible cultural influences in learning approach.

1. The instrument used

A neglected aspect of the pioneering research done by Marton and Säljö (Marton and Säljö, 1976) provided a way forward for this research. Their work found that the qualitative levels of output a student achieves when working with a text were dependent on the processing activity deployed. The processing activity in turn was reflective of how students construed the structure of the text to be:

> In our studies of university students we have found marked inter-individual differences in the types of learning process that students engage in when confronted with learning materials. In fact, we found basically two different levels of processing to be clearly distinguishable. These two different levels of processing, which we shall call *deep-level* and *surface-level* processing, correspond to the different aspects of the learning material on which the learner focuses. In the case of *surface-level* processing the student directs his attention towards learning the text itself (the sign) i.e., he has a reproduction of learning which means that he is more or less forced to keep to rote-learning strategy. In the case of a *deep-level* processing, on the other hand, the student is directed towards the intentional content of the learning material (what is signified) i.e. he is directed towards comprehending what the author wants to say about, for instance, a certain scientific problem or principle (Marton and Säljö, 1976:7-8).

The student understands the structure of a text as a flat, sequential arrangement or a hierarchy of ideas. With a hierarchical approach goes a deep-level processing while a flat approach indicates a surface-level processing.

To obtain the necessary data from students, a text was constructed according to a foreground/background arrangement. This allowed students to approach the text either as a flat or hierarchical construction. By analysing their answers about this text, individual student's approach to that text could be identified and categorised. The text also needed a certain complexity to ascertain the student's level of fidelity to the authors intention.

Two texts were chosen, the first was 950 words and the second was 960 words. Both were written in simple English for a Nigerian audience. The structures of the texts were the same, a prolonged illustration in the form of a story that preceded the author's discussion and development of the idea introduced. The author's discussion was itself multi-structured, consisting of three components. The illustration introduced a problem in society. The author's discussion linked this to an aspect of church life, gave advice on how the problem could be recognised and provided ideas for overcoming the problem in the church. The structure of the text used was:
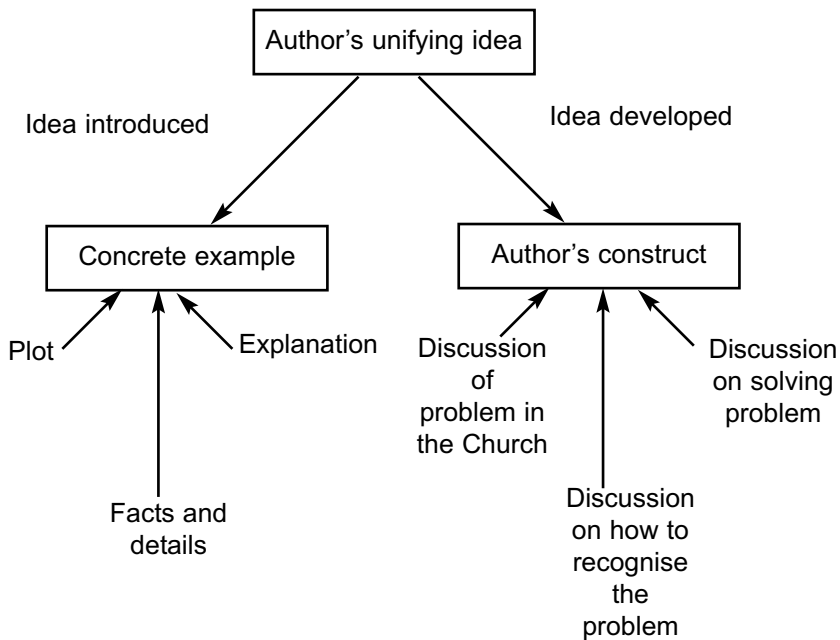
This structure enabled the researcher to present questions to the student, the answers to which can be analysed for the following data.

1. The student's approach to structure of the text.
2. The identification of patterns in the use of the text in constructing understanding.
3. The general quality of the student's cognitive output in constructing understanding from the text.

1.1 The content of the text

Text 1: True learning at theological school is measured by how a student utilises that learning in the daily life of the church.

The central issue is introduced through an illustration of a young man sent to an agricultural school by his father. Despite graduating with high grades, the young man's disdain for manual work means that his understanding of agriculture remains theoretical and of little practical value. Within the church, an exaggerated desire for paper qualifications as an end in themselves must be avoided. There are characteristics of learning approaches of students approaching their education in this way which can be recognised. There are also steps that theological educators can take to move students to connect their studies with their lives as pastors.

Text 2: Unity in the church requires the challenging of the cultural accepted values that lead to discrimination.

The issue central to this text is introduced with a story of a young Chinese girl, Ah Ching, who is murdered to allow her parents to have a second child, hopefully a boy. This story illustrates how cultural values (boys are more valuable than girls) lead to discrimination and injustice. Saint Paul teaches that this has no place in the church. In the church, however, this is a problem—women are not recognised, the priest becomes a special class above the laity, and tribal and ethnic affiliation are the gateway into positions of authority in the church. Suggestions are then made as to how this can be combated:

1. Through the education of laity and theological students.
2. Taking deliberate practical steps to appoint excluded people to positions of authority.
3. To teach in such a way that those cultural values that are dehumanising are exposed.

2. The development of the research methodology

2.1 The pilot project

A pilot project was conducted at St Francis of Assisi Theological College.[4] The purpose of this study was to assess the feasibility of

using the text as an instrument to identify students' approaches to the structure of the text when constructing understanding from it.

The procedure adopted was to give 19 prospective students the text as part of their selection process. They were told that this was part of their selection. They were given the text and told that the following day they would be tested on it. The following day they were given a set of questions to answer from their memory of the text.

It became apparent that the flat approach did not exclude an element of abstraction. Students did not simply recount the details of the text but created understanding but with a low fidelity to the structure of the text. The result was that minor themes in the illustration were given central position and some interpretations had idiosyncratic characteristics. Marton and Säljö's two categories needed to be expanded to incorporate this idiosyncratic aspect. This third aspect did not manifest itself in the main research. This could be because the pilot project used students applying for studies while the full study used students who were well into their first year of study.

Students' perceptions of the text: pilot study

Table 1. Distribution of approaches to the structure of the text in the pilot study

Idiosyncratic	Flat	Hierarchical	Total
12	18	9	39

2.2 The procedure for the research project

A total of 158 students were surveyed. These were students who were available to participate in the research on an opportunist basis. A total of 28 second and third year students participated from St Francis of Assisi Theological College while 68 students drawn from first, second and third years participated from Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN); 14 third year students participated from the Christian

[4] Saint Francis of Assisi is an Anglican theological college in Wusasa, northern Nigeria. At the time of research it offered a Diploma of Theology and had 110 students.

Institute Jos and 48 students from first second and third year participated from the Baptist Theological Seminary Kaduna.

The procedure followed was that the students were given the text to read. Once they had completed reading it they handed the text in and were given a questionnaire to complete. There was no limit on the amount of time that students could take to complete the questions.

Analysis took place in two phases. The first phase separated the students' written answers into two categories according to the way they reflected a flat or hierarchical understanding of the structure of the text. The second phase assessed the general level of outcome according to the Solo Taxonomy (Biggs, 1979: 381–394). Biggs identifies five levels of response to questions about the learning and meaning that a student makes from a finite display of information. These he calls the 'Solo Taxonomy'.

1. The pre-structural level. The response has no logical relationship to the main thrust of the display. It shows an inability to comprehend tautology or idiosyncratic relevance. The response is often based on an irrelevance or a side issue that is not germane to the central idea of the author.

2. The uni-structural level. The response at this level contains one relevant item from the display. This is used to link the structure of the display but misses other items in the display that add depth to or qualify the item selected. The response, while generally true to the author's intention, is nonetheless an oversimplification of the given display.

3. The multi-structural level. This is a fuller response than the uni-structural response and incorporates several relevant items from the display. These are understood by the student as relevant or not, but not integrated or presented as part of a larger picture. Closure is premature and some of the items in the display are ignored.

4. The relational level. The student at this level is able to extract and use most or all of the relevant data. The material is unified by a relating concept within the given context of the display. The response does not go beyond the context of the material.

5. The level of the extended abstract. This has the same characteristics as the relational level but moves beyond it and embraces principle. The context is seen as one instance of a general case. The basic assumptions can be questioned, counter examples and new data given

that are not part of the original. The only major difference is that students are given as much time as they need to read the text.

Two texts had to be used because students at the Baptist Theological Seminary Kaduna had already worked on the first text in their course on study methods.

The first example, Danjmuma, was used in two theological colleges, St Francis of Assisi and the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. A total of 98 students completed this first exercise. The second example was used with students from Christian Institute, Jos and the Baptist Theological Seminary, Kaduna. A total of 52 students were engaged in the second example.

The process of analysis of data followed and the final analysis was as follows:

1. The students were categorised into two groups, 'Flat Perception of Text' and 'Hierarchical Perception of Text'.

2. The written answers the students provided were scored for overall depth according to the Solo scale.[5]

3. The initial categories were further refined and each was subdivided into three according to how the students scored on the Solo scale.

4. These subdivided categories were further analysed to map the different usages made by students of the structure of the text in constructing answers.

3. Data and Analysis of Case Study

3.1 The diversity in flat construal of the structure of the text

There were several variations in the flat approach to text. These were:

Flat sequential: These students saw the text sequentially. They saw the text as 'a, and b and c'. The quote below illustrates this.

> This passage is talking about Danjuma who refused his father to teach him about the farm but later went to school and studied hard

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[5] Biggs' categories were used to evaluate students written answers. The answers were scored according to the level they represented on the Solo taxonomy. These scores ranged from 1-5.

and became a diploma disease holder. On the other hand the passage also talked about the church need for well-qualified leaders, and many well-qualified leaders have several diplomas.

Flat retelling: Very often students would concentrate on some or other details of the text usually from the illustration and recount this. In so doing their account was only partial:

> This passage is about a boy named Danjuma who did not want to go to farm and as a result of that the father decided to send him to farm school, after he's completed with good results, the father thought his son would now use his experience to farm well and better but still his mind was not on farm, rather to be a teacher on high pay.

> This is about a boy, Danjuma, who refused to receive his father's teaching on a farm work and also refused to do the farm work because his father did not give him a diploma. His father later sent him. Academically he did very well but not too good in the practical.

Flat retelling globetrotter[6]: These students, while retelling parts of the text, placed an interpretation on the text that was not drawn directly from that text. In this they 'globe trotted' and derived idiosyncratic meanings of the text:

> The passage is about Danjuma who refused his father's teaching on how to farm and how he was useless to his family, when he was educated and refused to learn how to work on his father's farm. In fact the passage is all about disobedience and laziness.

> The passage is about a farmer and his son who does not want to

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[6] Pask identified two possible problem areas in student's construction of understanding from a text. The first is 'globetrotting', seen in students who are over-ready to generalise from insufficient evidence to form hasty, personal judgments. The second is the 'improviser'. This is the student who fails to make use of valid and important analogies and may not build up for himself any overall map to see how the various elements of the topic interrelate and how the topic fits into the subject area in general. Pask, Gordon, *Styles and Strategies of Learning* (1988).

suffer. Who does not want to use what he learnt. He does not want to be obedient to his father's advice and wants to do whatever he likes to do.

Flat mentioning: The mentioner used as few words as possible and kept the answers to a short sentence. The subject of the answer could refer to an aspect of the illustration, be sequential or be more akin to globetrotting

Danjuma who wants a diploma in Agriculture but did not want to farm.

It's about father and the son and also learning.

A selfish ambition.

3.2 The relationship between the flat and hierarchical perception of a text

The existence and respective numerical strengths of the flat and hierarchical approaches is represented below.

Table 2. The distribution of flat and hierarchical approaches to text over the colleges

College	Flat approach	Hierarchical approach
SFATC	20	8
TCNN	26	42
BTSK	25	23
CI	4	10
Total	75	83

Variations were seen in the numerical relationship between flat and hierarchical approaches across the colleges. The overall picture was

that there was a slight predominance in the number of students approaching a text as a hierarchical structure.

3.3 The relationship between flat and hierarchical approaches to a text and the depth of cognitive outcome

When comparing the average Solo scores of the flat and hierarchical approaches a difference can be seen between the depths of cognitive processing.

Table 3. Comparative depth of processing and approach across schools

College	Flat approach	Hierarchical approach
SFATC	13.1	19.3
TCNN	13.1	17.3
BTSK	14	18.3
CI	14.3	17.4

The general impression gained from these figures is that those students who approached the text as a hierarchy had a slightly higher cognitive output in the depth of their answers than those who used a flat approach.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from a comparison of the results of the two texts used.

Table 4. Depth of cognitive processing across the two examples

	Flat approach	Hierarchical approach
Example 1	13.1	17.7
Example 2	14.1	18

3.4 The relationship between how the text is construed and how the structure of a text is used

The students' written answers were analysed and categorised according to where the material they used to construct their answers was found. Three categories related to the structure of the text. These were:

- The author's unifying idea.
- The author's discussion of the issue.
- The introductory illustration.

Material was also used that could not be related to the structure of the text. This was classified as being 'outside the textual display' and constituted a fourth category.

The respective roles that these four categories played in students' answers is represented in the tables below.

The flat approach to the text drew meaning from the four areas in roughly equal measure. The illustration was given slightly more weight than the other areas. The material drawn from outside the text had the same role as the author's discussion. The author's unifying idea played the least important role.

Table 5. Proportional distribution in Flat Approach.

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
21.7%	24.9%	29.3%	24.1%

The hierarchical approach to the text characteristically concentrated on the author's unifying idea. The second most important area for developing answers was the author's discussion. Outside material was used while the illustration was seldom used to drive answers.

Table 6. Proportional distribution in Hierarchical Approach.

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
41.1%	30.1%	11%	17.8%

There were marked differences in the way the two categories of students used the text. Flat students were more even in their approach to the structure. Their answers were derived from material from all four categories in fairly equal proportions. Hierarchical students concentrated on the author's unifying idea and his discussion. They were twice as likely to resort to the author's intention in answering than their flat counterparts. They were slightly more dependent on the author's discussion. They also made much less use of material found in the illustration. They were more reserved in reverting to material derived from outside the text to construct answers.

The results become more interesting when students' answers are analysed according to their Solo scores. Working with three subgroups, high Solo scores (those in the top third), average Solo scores (those in the middle third) and low Solo scores (those in the bottom third), it can be demonstrated that there was a progressive variation in the way the aspects of the structure of the text were used. This is illustrated in the charts below.

Flat approach to structure – Low Solo Score

Students with a low Solo score showed little use of the author's discussion and idea but relied substantially on the illustration and outside material to create their answers. These two aspects could be considered to represent the student's contextual or personal reference in constructing understanding. Seven out of ten answers fell into this category.

Table 7. Proportional distribution in flat approach-low SOLO.

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
14.1%	14.5%	36.8%	34.6%

Flat approach to structure – Average Solo Score

Students with an average Solo score were even in their use of the structures of the text but showed an increased reliance on the author's discussion and idea. The extent to which the illustration was used was consistent in high and average groups. The student's reliance on her/his own context and personal reference in the construction of understand-

ing was diminished, representing only 5 in every ten questions.

Table 8. Proportional distribution in flat approach – average SOLO

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
22.7%	28.2%	24.6%	24.5%

Flat approach to structure – High Solo Score.

Students with high Solo scores concentrate on the author's unifying idea and discussion and relied much less on the illustration or material drawn from outside the text for creating understanding. The illustration was, however, important and still played a much more important role in the flat category than in the hierarchical category. The reliance on the illustration was a consistent feature of the Flat approach

Table 9. Proportional distribution in flat approach – high SOLO

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
30.5%	35.7%	23.3%	10.5%

Hierarchical approach to structure – Low Solo Score

A similar movement in the way the text is used was seen in those who had perceived the hierarchical nature of the text. This movement was for the student to decreasingly use her/his context in answering questions and interact more with the author. The illustration was given the least attention while the author's main idea received the most.

Table 10. Proportional distribution in hierarchical approach – low SOLO

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
39.3%	21.3%	14.3%	25%

Hierarchical approach to structure – Average Solo

The use of the aspects of the structure of the text continued to develop the patterns already seen. Reliance on the author's unifying idea was slightly increased. There was a decrease in the use of the illustration, a decreasing use of outside material but an increasing use of the author's discussion. The significant change was in the reversal of the attention given to the text as opposed to the student's contextual situation in the construction of understanding. In this group the student used the author's text seven times in ten to derive an answer.

Table 11. Proportional distribution in Hierarchical Approach – Average SOLO

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
42.3%	30.5%	9.5%	17.7%

Hierarchical approach to structure – High Solo

The number of answers that drew from the author's unifying idea showed no great variation or development. The use of the illustration remained static while the author's discussion had a more prominent place than before.

As Solo scores increased the student was increasingly utilising the author's own discussion and development of the issue. Students with low Solo scores made the least use of this aspect. The use of the illustration became decreasingly important and stabilised at about 9% of the answers. Outside material that was used to provide answers to questions constantly decreased as Solo score increased. Those students who had a low Solo score readily resorted to material not presented in the text.

Table 12. Proportional distribution in hierarchical approach – high SOLO

The author's idea	Author's discussion	Illustration	Outside material
41.8%	37.1%	9.2%	11.9%

There were marked differences in the way the two categories of students used the text. Flat students were more even in their approach to the structure. Their answers were derived from material from all four categories in fairly equal proportions. Hierarchical students concentrated on the author's unifying idea and his discussion. They were twice as likely to resort to the author's intention in answering than their flat counterparts. They were slightly more dependent on the author's discussion. They also made much less use of material found in the illustration. They were more reserved in reverting to material derived from outside the text to construct answers.

4. Detailed description of how structure is used by students to create meaning from a text and its influence on the depth of cognitive outcome.

4.1 The flat approach to structure and cognitive depth

4.1.1 The use of the structure of the text by students in this category who have a higher than average Solo score

Students approached the illustration either factually, i.e. recounting the plot, or by abstracting or reading into the plot or detail. When description was used they tended to be fairly full. When the story was abstracted, the central issue illustrated by the story was identified and brought out. The control that the illustration exercised on the student's construction of understanding faded fairly quickly and attention was applied to the author's discussion.

In a minority of cases students developed different ideas based on different aspects of the text. The illustration was interpreted using ideas drawn from outside the display. This meaning from the illustration was not integrated with the meaning of the discussion. These independent ideas were held in parallel being united by the simple use of the conjunction 'and'.

The students' handling of the discussion was never complete. Certain aspects of the discussion were highlighted, one or two issues raised by the author received attention while any issue mentioned in

passing was seldom engaged with. Students in this category were the only ones who tried to memorise aspects of the author's discussion.

A generalised appreciation of the unifying idea was often present but this was not developed and did not show any obvious sign of engagement with the author's discussion.

4.1.2 The use of the structure of the text by students in this category who had an average Solo Score

The significance of the illustration in the construction of understanding was more significant for this category of students than those with a higher learning outcome. They approached the illustration from the perspective of their own context rather from that which arose from the display itself. The unifying idea was discerned from the illustration but the illustration and abstractions from it were more likely to inform the student's discussion on the text. The result was that these student were less inclined to engage with the author's own discussion on the issue and were more ready to use a 'Global strategy' in discussing the text.

The author's discussion was generalised and reduced to a singular formula, which was then repeated with minor modification to answer different questions. Some students reverted to verbatim memorisation of the specific points made by the author. While being familiar with the author's discussion, these students did not use this knowledge to provide expanded answers to questions or to explore the author's ideas.

Most students in this category built multi-layered meanings from the text. The passage was viewed as being in two separate segments with its own meaning. The author's intention or unifying idea was not lost but it was augmented by secondary understandings that could be idiosyncratic in nature.

4.1.3 The use of the structure of the text by students in this category who had a below average Solo

Students in this category concentrated on the illustration and seldom went beyond it to the author's discussion. The illustration itself could be approached in a fragmentary way with only one aspect of the plot or detail being elevated to the level of a unifying idea. The author's unifying concept could be totally lost. The student imposed a new frame of reference on the text. This arose out of the student's own

context and largely bypassed that of the text. When the student did engage with the text, the statements were often very vague and general.

4.1.4 Summary of the flat approach analysed according to cognitive depth

The three subcategories are not themselves discrete categories but rather they possess the same basic characteristics. Where they differ is in the extent to which these characteristics are combined and emphasised.

1. The depth of cognitive outcome ranged widely amongst those who perceived the structure of a text to be flat. The greater the depth of output the more the student concentrated on the author's discussion and showed awareness of the unifying idea. This was always dealt with in an atomised way. As depth of output diminished so too did the student's use of the whole text. The result was increased idiosyncratic understanding and decreasing fidelity to the author's intention.

2. Students approached the illustration and author's discussion in a parallel fashion. The result was that often in the more able students, two or more ideas emerged from the same reading. These were held as separate truths without any attempt to unite them in a common theme.

3. Those students who were under average in their depth of outcome, approached the illustration in an undiscerning fashion and did not distinguish between its important and incidental aspects. Any aspect could be used in the creation of understanding. This resulted in a single idea emerging from the text with any contrary evidence being ignored.

4. Students worked in a consecutive manner. The first part of the text was discussed, then the second. What came first in the display was generally engaged with. However, the later the ideas appeared, the less likely they were to influence the student.

4.2 The hierarchical approach to the structure and text and cognitive depth

4.2.1 The use of the structure of the text by students in this category who had high Solo scores

Students with an above average Solo score concentrated on building understanding from two sources. There were the author's unifying idea and the author's discussion. These two aspects of structure contributed to 79% of the answers given. Students in this category, while often aware of the broader issues of concern by the author, narrowed down their use of the discussion to one particular issue. The role of the illustration was small. It was more easily remembered than the author's discussion and was occasionally used to construct answers. Ideas drawn from outside the context of the text played a discernable but minor role. These, however, were subordinated to the author's unifying idea and were used to extent this into new areas.

4.2.2 The use of the structure of the text by students in this category who had average Solo scores

The author's unifying idea played a significant role in the students' construction of answers. This group differed from those who had above average Solo scores in that they gave the illustration a more prominent role in their constructing of answers. They were likely to rely on the illustration for the author's idea for understanding while reducing their dependence on the author's discussion. Answers were left undeveloped. Their use of ideas from outside the context of the text remained at a similar level as those with a higher Solo score.

4.2.3 The use of the structure of the text by students in this category who had below average Solo scores

Students in the third group used the author's unifying idea to a similar extent as those in the other two groups. The difference lies in the extent to which they used the illustration and the author's discussion. The author's discussion received less attention by these students than by other students approaching the text as a hierarchy. They relied on a generalised restatement of the unifying idea for much of their answers. The

illustration was more important to them than others in the hierarchical group. The single most important difference of this category was the significant use of imported ideas to make understanding of the text. They were the least disciplined of the hierarchical students in their use of the text.

4.2.4 Summary of the hierarchical approach analysed according to cognitive depth

1. Students who construed text as hierarchical showed a consistency in dealing with the text. Their answers were consistently drawn from the author's main idea. The extent of the use of the author's idea was consistent over the three subcategories. Differences emerged in the use of the unifying idea. High Solo students extended it, while those of lower scores relied on repeating a generalised restatement of it.

2. Students with a lower than average Solo score were twice as likely to use material that was outside the display than those who had a high Solo score. This is because to answer questions they were more likely to revert to padding an answer and moving at a tangent to the main idea than those with a high Solo score.

3. The illustration remained significant. It is from here that students first encountered the author's unifying idea. Students with average and low Solo scores could move very rapidly to a conclusion and did not necessarily follow the text through evenly.

5.Some tentative observations

5.1 Depth of cognitive processing follows the perception a student has about the structure of the text

Nigerian theological students fall almost equally in their perception of the structure of the text into two camps: those that perceive the text as a flat construct and those who see it as a hierarchy of ideas. This represents a strong dependence on the situational context of the reader for meaning on the one hand and a more abstract orientation on the other. The contextualising orientation is a characteristic of an oral society.[7]

These approaches do not produce the same quality of cognitive output. The cognitive output of students approaching the text as a hierarchy is greater that those approaching it as a flat construction. These are two different approaches, each with its distinctive features and levels of cognitive output. There are four specific observations.

1. Cognitive depth in understanding a text is inversely proportional to the student's dependence on his context for constructing understanding. The output most consistent with the desire for deep learning[8] is produced by those students who perceive the text as a hierarchy of ideas. The context richness varied between the two groups. Those using a flat approach allowed it to play a bigger part in the construction of understanding than the hierarchical approach. What was significant across both groups was the way in which the level of cognitive activity related to the extent to which the context was used. The greater the cognitive depth the less the sociological context was important in mediating meaning.

2. The relational nature of constructing understanding is in a bipolar relationship to the way the text is perceived and inversely affects cognitive depth. The two poles are the hierarchical construal of a text at one end and the flat construal on the other. There was continuity in the way the illustration was used across both groups. This progression was not parallel in fashion but bipolar. The progression followed the level of cognitive depth. Those using the illustration most were those students construing the text as a flat construct and who showed the lowest cognitive depth. Those using it least were the students who had high cognitive output with an understanding of the text as a hierarchy of ideas. Contextually based understanding is inverse to the depth of cognitive output.

3. Perception of hierarchical ideas is proportional to the depth of cognitive activity. The greater the student's level of cognitive output, the greater the student will recognise the ideas of a text. This mirrors

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[7] Ong, Walter J, 1982, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word,* (London and New York: Methuen,1982). Ong identified the characteristics of oral literature.

[8] Biggs gives a description of deep learning. The deep-active approach reads for meaning and connects the material with past knowledge and experience. The argument of the author is understood and is evaluated according to the way the supporting evidence is used. Entwistle, Noel James. 1981, p. 77.

the way these approaches act in a bipolar way in the creation of relational understanding. However, the greater the cognitive output, the greater the use of abstract ideas for creating understanding.

   4. Construction from understanding from the abstract details of a text increases with the depth of cognitive action. Perception and attention to abstract details in a text runs in a parallel fashion through the two approaches to the text. The students with a flat approach to the text are less inclined to use this aspect of a text than those of the hierarchical approach. Both approaches see students increasingly giving attention to this aspect of a text as the cognitive output increases. In both groups the lower the cognitive output, the lower the attention given to this aspect of a text.

5.2 Students' approaches to the written text show similarities with the characteristics of the interpretation of oral tradition[9]

1. The influence seen in the approach of flat category students.

The flat approach sees the structure of text in a consecutive or serial fashion. There is no differentiation in the value given to different aspects of the text. The approach is, A and then B and then C. This is a noted characteristic of the construction of oral tradition. In terms of logic it allows two or more unrelated points to be derived from the different sections of the text. These can be held together without any attempt to resolve the tension between them. The following characteristics of oral tradition were observed in the flat approach to the structure of the text.

   a. An atomistic approach was taken to the material presented in the text. An aspect of information could be isolated from its context in the text and interpreted independently.

   b. Different ideas derived from the text were dealt with as though they were parallel meanings of the text.

   c. The meaning of the text lay strongly with the reader rather than with the author or the text itself.

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[9] Olson, David R. and Torrance, Nancy have edited two useful books on this topic. *Literacy, Language and Learning*, 1988 and *Literacy and Orality*, 1991.

d. Students did not discriminate between the differing values of the differing parts of structure of a text. They did not distinguish between its important and incidental aspects. Any aspect could be used in the creation of understanding. This resulted in the reader drawing a meaning from the text, while any contrary textual evidence for this was ignored.

e. Students worked in a consecutive manner. The first part of the text was discussed then the second and so on. What came first in the display was generally engaged with. However, the later the ideas appeared, the less likely they were to influence the student.

2. The influence of the cultures of oral tradition on the hierarchical students.

a. In memorisation students relied on a globalised grasp of issues and did not concentrate on detail. The central point was spun out. There was no care given to the niceties of details rather the students were satisfied with a general grasp of the point and from this they spun out answers. This flies in the face of the experience of those teaching in Africa and a common held perception amongst teachers that the students rely on rote for answers. This research did not find any great tendency amongst the students in this direction (it must be remembered that the circumstances and the expectations of the students sitting for exams are different to those of this research).

b.Even with some hierarchical students, the meaning of the text was constructed through the aspects of the text that dealt with relationships. Those students who construed the text in hierarchical terms showed lower cognitive outputs. The author's unifying idea played a significant role in the students' construction of answers. They gave the illustration a more prominent role in their constructing of answers than others in their group. They were likely to rely on the illustration while reducing their dependence on the author's discussion. Answers were left undeveloped. Their use of ideas from outside the context of the text remains at a similar level as those with a higher solo score.

6 Conclusion

Much discussion in theological education has been directed at the institutional level of the theological exercise and has neglected the students' actual processes themselves. The result is much wishful thinking and grand statements about the renewal of theological education. Corresponding attention must given to the alignment of the whole educational process and the culturally mediated learning approach of students.

The identification, within the students surveyed, of the two categories of approaches to understanding text helps to understand the ordering process used by these student to make sense of a literary text. Some aspects of this correspond to characteristics of oral tradition. The student understands the structure of a text as a flat, sequential arrangement or a hierarchy of ideas. The differing organisational patterns have different results in terms of cognitive output for these students. With a hierarchical approach goes a greater fidelity to the author's unifying idea. With a flat approach fidelity decreases to the extent that an idiosyncratic understanding of the text is constructed. Where fidelity is high the concepts presented by the author can be processed to achieve a qualitative level of learning. The learner can be introduced to new ideas outside his existential frame of reference. Where fidelity is low the learning is more an existential experience dependent on the reader's already existing framework of ideas. The reader does not engage with new ideas or concepts. The result is that communication and therefore dialogue, between the writer and the reader breaks down.

This raised important issues for me in the construction of theological education learning material for use in northern Nigeria. Where teaching materials are used they need to be of such a nature that they are sensitive to the possible way that cultural background disposes a student to construct meaning. They also need to recognise the two approaches used by students. They need to engage the student in such a way that he or she develops the skills needed to engage with the text in an ever increasing depth of cognition.

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