

Spirit in the 'Expanding Circle'¹

Why learn about religion in Australia in the 21st Century?

Can Comparative Religion Knowledge enable Cultural Diversity Capability?



Artwork by Ri Fraser and Cathy Byrne

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¹ With acknowledgement to Peter Singer's humanist ethical theory (Singer, 1981)

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Most importantly, I thank my family for loving and inspiring me through this process.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education.

Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

I also declare that I am familiar with the rules of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics and the University relating to the submission of this thesis.

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Abstract

The place of religion in society is under scrutiny. Increasing local and global religiously marked conflict calls for deeper enquiry into its causes and possible solutions. Inter-religious ignorance may be contributing to rising intolerance. Philosopher Peter Singer (1981, 2004) claimed that interactions with an increasing variety of cultures will require humanity to develop a more tolerant approach to those once considered outsiders.

This thesis proposes that comparative religion education may contribute to a possible remedy. The study combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the relationship between comparative religion knowledge and cultural diversity capability. It argues that comparative religion education may assist in the development of inclusive attitudes towards religious and cultural difference and thus make a positive contribution to social cohesion and democratic citizenship. It includes a survey of Australian Year 11 students enrolled in the comparative *Study of Religion* course. The results are not conclusive but may be interpreted as showing some support for the hypothesis. The study raises important questions regarding the nature of religion education in Australia and highlights opportunities for further research.

A note on the researcher:

I am a student of religion with an interest in its sociological implications, particularly regarding religion education. My aim is to contribute to the discussion of religion's place in Australian society and focus attention on policy development and implementation in that regard. I hope that this study offers some insight into the issues in contemporary Australian religion education which may be useful for future studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Declaration.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Chapter 1: Does religion knowledge enable cultural capability?	5
<i>Religion tolerance and awareness in Australia’s plural society</i>	5
<i>Thesis Outline</i>	6
<i>Comparative Religion Knowledge enables Cultural Diversity Capability</i>	6
<i>Research Question</i>	7
<i>Key Concept Definitions</i>	8
<i>Key Concept Discussion: linking knowledge and attitudes with pedagogy</i>	11
<i>Concept relationships and education theory</i>	17
Chapter 2: The link between CRK and CDC: an exploration	23
<i>Past studies into the CRK-CDC link at the school level</i>	23
<i>Religion education responses to plurality: the CRK-CDC emphases</i>	25
<i>Can religion education contribute to democratic citizenship?</i>	31
<i>Australia’s Christian privilege</i>	32
Chapter 3: Religion education’s context: social mood, polemics & potential	35
<i>Plurality and its rejection</i>	35
<i>Australia’s changing mood on multiculturalism</i>	36
<i>‘Secular’ verses ‘religious’: an outdated, misrepresenting polemic</i>	39
<i>Australia’s religion education discourse</i>	40
<i>The secular myth: church-state separation</i>	41
<i>The religionist approach: increasingly evangelical?</i>	43
<i>Lack of teacher training: another obstacle to linking CRK and CDC</i>	44
<i>Some international comparisons</i>	45
Chapter 4: Research Survey	50
<i>Method</i>	50
<i>Limitations and strategies</i>	51
<i>Student Survey Sample</i>	53
<i>Student Survey Development</i>	54
<i>Survey Review and Testing</i>	56
<i>Student Discussion Observation</i>	57
<i>Teacher Survey</i>	58
<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	58
<i>Data Analysis: Pre Test qualitative differences between schools</i>	58
<i>Pre-Test Student Discussion Observations</i>	61
<i>Quantitative Data Analysis</i>	63
<i>Section 1. Major Findings</i>	64
<i>Section 2. Additional factors in the CRK-CDC relationship</i>	68
<i>Section 3. Demographic effects on CDC and CRK scores</i>	70
<i>Post-Test Student Discussion Observations</i>	72
Chapter 5: Conclusion	74
Appendices	84

Chapter 1.

Does religion knowledge enable cultural capability?

The terrain of the 21st Century, locally and globally, is religiously and culturally diverse. For individuals to navigate this environment, some openness towards difference may be required. Cresswell & Hobson (1990:25) claimed that ‘through the exercise of tolerance, in its most positive sense, people learn something of the ways of others’. This study explores the possibility of this statement in reverse: through learning the religious ways of others, is there the potential for greater social tolerance?

Religion tolerance and awareness in Australia’s plural society

Australia is a culturally and religiously plural society (Bouma, 1995). However, intolerant and religiously discriminating sentiment has re-emerged in Australia’s debate on multiculturalism and migration (Schech & Haggis, 2001). In response to local and international incidents that demonstrated an ‘increasing threat of extremist violence’, the Council of Australian Governments and the Department of Education, Science and Training commissioned a study to contribute to a National Action Plan on social cohesion, harmony and security. The report, *Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education*, (Erebus, 2006:1) noted that ‘public opinion about multiculturalism in general, and specific religious and cultural groups in particular, have polarised’, illustrating the ‘fragility’ of intercultural relations. This echoed an earlier report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians*, (HREOC, 2004) which found that most Muslims surveyed had increasingly been the target of racism, discrimination, unfair suspicion, threats and violence.

Despite increasing diversity, there is widespread ignorance about different religions (Rymarz, 2007; Prothero, 2007). As part of its Living in Harmony initiative, the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs undertook a study into *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*. This study identified ignorance as an obstacle to social cohesion. It reported that a majority of public school students were religiously illiterate and

that the level of knowledge of Australia's faith adherents about other faiths was 'questionable and often negative' (Cahill, Bouma, Delal, & Leahy, 2004:100).

In addition, there are increased incidents of religious prejudice (HREOC, 2001, 2007; Dreher, 2006; Poynting & Noble, 2004) and an underestimation of the effects of religious and cultural discrimination at schools (Cook, 2006). Levett (2007) and Aly (2006) also note a rising mistrust of religious representation in the media. This situation signals the importance of addressing Jackson's (2004:4) question: 'should there be some form of education in religions in schools, and if so, what should be its aims and methods?' This thesis applies Jackson's question to the Australian context and is outlined below.

Thesis Outline

Chapter One reviews the emerging social issues regarding religion in a plural society and explore a possible remedy by linking the key concepts of Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability; Chapter Two contains a literature review of this concept link; Chapter Three explores some of the social context factors that may influence this link and Chapter Four details a research survey into this link in Australian High Schools. Chapter Five contains a brief concluding discussion.

This chapter includes: a snapshot of Australia's emerging problem of intolerance and ignorance of religions; my hypothesis linking knowledge of religions to cultural diversity capability; an outline of a research survey to be explored in detail in Chapter Four; definitions and an exploration of the key concepts of Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability and a review of the theory and research underpinning the hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS:

Comparative Religion Knowledge enables Cultural Diversity Capability

A young Australian asks: 'Why should I study religions in the 21st Century?' This thesis proposes an answer: 'Because learning about diverse religions, their concepts, philosophies and ethics, may develop competencies such as the ability to value and respect difference'. In

this age of globalised, hyper-mobile, cyberised, multicultural plurality, in which citizenship, religious and cultural identity boundaries are being challenged, researchers (Wood, Landry & Bloomfield, 2006; and Butcher & Thomas, 2006) have shown that intercultural competency is increasingly important. The ability to manage complexity was also recognised by Sydney's St. James Ethics Centre (2007) as a key leadership quality in times of rapid change. Ellyard (2007:20) pointed out that: 'one million Australians are living permanently overseas' and that 'to be successful, these expatriates need to navigate the global village with a deep knowledge of other cultures'. He noted that 'a critical understanding of religions ensures cultural capability'.

I concur with Ellyard and propose that the comparative study of world religions may have a positive effect on the development of inclusive attitudes associated with respect for cultural diversity. This thesis explores the complex relationship between two concepts: Comparative Religion Knowledge (CRK) and Cultural Diversity Capability (CDC) and acknowledges that the relationship may be indirect. While the study of religion may increase cultural awareness, the ability to apply such knowledge in a meaningful way (the development of religion literacy) is an essential intermediate step. This step provides the philosophical foundation required to build Cultural Diversity Capability. This thesis explores the tri-fold relationship between informational knowledge of religion, understanding of religion (literacy) and how this knowledge is expressed in attitudes to cultural difference.

Research Question

Can Comparative Religion Knowledge enable Cultural Diversity Capability?

Knowledge-of and attitude-about a subject have a complex relationship. In an effort to gain insight into this relationship, this study includes a survey which combines quantitative and qualitative processes to determine whether Comparative Religion Knowledge has an effect on Cultural Diversity Capability. The survey methodology is explained in Chapter Four. This section details the research aim and objectives.

Aim: To examine the relationship between high school students' knowledge of world religions through Year 11 *Studies of Religion* (SOR) courses in New South Wales government and Queensland non-government schools and their attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity. The survey investigates the attitudes of a selective sample of 73 students from five schools to ascertain if a measurable improvement in comparative knowledge of world religions is accompanied by an increase in the ability to understand, respect, empathise with and actively honour cultural difference.

Objectives:

1. To develop and test research instruments for the investigation of Comparative Religion Knowledge (CRK) and Cultural Diversity Capability (CDC).
2. To investigate whether a measurable increase in students' CRK is accompanied by an increase in their CDC.
3. To observe and analyse qualitative differences that may influence the relationship between CRK and CDC.
4. To provide preliminary benchmarking data of CRK and CDC for possible future investigation into the impact of *Studies of Religion* (SOR) on young Australians.

A note on the literature review: This thesis crosses multiple disciplines. The literature review focuses on the growing field of religion education but also draws on ideas from values and citizenship education and how these areas might be connected. In looking at high school student's attitude development and school programs to alleviate prejudice, it enters other areas of academic discourse in sociology and psychology. This broad, interdisciplinary review is needed to explore the hypothesis that the study of religions may have a potential impact on attitudes and values related to social tolerance. The concepts of Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability draw on a variety of components across these different fields. For this reason, it is important to define these key concepts.

Key Concept Definitions

Comparative Religion Knowledge (CRK): is the informational knowledge of world religions as phenomena - as theological, historical, social, political, cultural, ethical,

psychological, philosophical concepts. To know the significant figures, symbols and meanings, ritualistic expressions, cosmology and world view perspectives; and contemporary implications of several religions is to have comparative religion knowledge. Importantly, Comparative Religion Knowledge includes an understanding of sectarian variance within a single tradition so that stereotypes are not taken as necessarily representative.

Cultural Diversity Capability (CDC): is the ability to understand, empathise with and honour cultural difference. The opposite of prejudice, it contains Fitzgerald's (2000) idea of 'cultural competency', defined as the ability to identify and challenge one's own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs. Cultural Diversity Capability is a complex measure of interrelated ideological, psychological and ethical factors. A conglomerate of notions of liberalness, CDC is a component of social capital - defined by Cahill et al. (2004:9) as the 'processes that facilitate individual and social well being'. Cultural Diversity Capability builds social capital through 'acceptance of the other' (9). It comprises active tolerance, empathy and humanism.

Cultural Diversity Capability incorporates active tolerance

Cresswell & Hobson (1990:25) defined tolerance as 'the extent to which diverse ideas and expressions may be accommodated, consistent with legal practices and prescribed patterns of acceptable behaviour'. They also noted that tolerance had both active and passive elements. Passive tolerance implies forbearance of something that is disliked, a 'willingness to endure' (Oxford, 2004). Generated by a lack of alternatives or simple apathy, passive tolerance accompanies thinking such as: 'I don't want those people in my neighbourhood, but I can't stop them doing what they do'.

Active tolerance has a very different quality. It carries the recognition of human equality in relation to religious freedom and an implied obligation to defend such freedoms for self and others. This type of tolerance is more than a live and let live forbearance. Instead, active tolerance avoids an us-and-them dichotomy by recognising the unity of all individuals' rights to religious belief and practice. Active tolerance accompanies reciprocal thinking such as: 'I don't want to live as they do, but my right to express faith or spirituality is dependent on their

rights also being protected'. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (United Nations, 1948) such equity should not be compromised provided it does not impinge on the rights, safety and humanity of others. This perspective relies on empathy.

Cultural Diversity Capability incorporates empathy

Empathy is a recognised component of cultural competence (Opper, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2000) and a tool of intercultural communication (Casmir, 1999; Moon, 1996; Dace & McPhail, 1998). Levinas (1972, 1999) argued that it is relationships with and empathy for others who are different that defines identity potential. Such relationships, he said, require an appreciation of both the dignity and the difference of the 'other' which engenders a responsibility to both understand and embrace diversity. Empathy is essential for building confidence with difference, but also for recognising our essential similarity - our humanity.

Cultural Diversity Capability incorporates humanism

Humanism emphasises the importance of humanity as a whole over any of its subgroups (Progressive Humanism, 2007). Philosopher Peter Singer described a humanist as one who gives their first allegiance to the world community and holds equal concern for all:

If I have seen that... I am just one person among the many in my society, and my interests are no more important, from the point of view of the whole, than the similar interests of others within my society, I am ready to see that, from a still larger point of view, my society is just one among other societies, and the interests of members of my society are no more important, from that larger perspective, than the similar interests of members of other societies... Taking the impartial element in ethical reasoning to its logical conclusion means, first, accepting that we ought to have equal concern for all human beings (Singer, 1981:51).

Singer described this outward extension of moral concern as an expanding circle, which includes 'first a class, then a nation, then a coalition of nations, then all humanity' (1981:xiii, citing Lecky). He pointed out that the major religious traditions encourage such equal consideration of interests. The quotation above could be re-read replacing the word 'society' with 'religion'. Unlike some humanist organisations, Singer (1995:226) did not yoke humanism to atheism. Instead, he claimed that the humanist rides an 'escalator of reason', continually aiming to achieve a more and more universal perspective. I argue likewise, that

Cultural Diversity Capability does not require a particular theology. Neither is CDC lumbered with a laissez-faire relativism. To be Cultural-Diversity-Capable does not require tolerance of *any* religious view or cultural practice.

Cultural Diversity Capability requires: discerning and compassionate recognition of the equality of the other with ourselves. This recognition creates a space for dialogue which enables the development of confidence to manage complexity in a world where difference is commonplace.

Key Concept Discussion: linking knowledge and attitudes with pedagogy

This section explores some issues regarding the key concepts of Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. It highlights the importance of pedagogy in making the link between the two concepts and notes the differences between approaches to religion education in Australia. It examines the aims and method of the *Study of Religion* course in New South Wales and Queensland and notes the broadening of focus of this course from theological study to incorporate contemporary sociological perspectives. This highlights the importance of a shift in the focus of research into religion and prejudice, and into the connections between religion education and values education.

How pedagogy can link Comparative Religion Knowledge & Cultural Diversity Capability

The learning of any subject at school is affected by multiple and inter-related factors. Harton & Latane (1997) noted a variety of socialising influences in adolescent attitude development. These include: family perspectives and economic situation; peer group opinions; media exposure and an individual's psychological characteristics. Pedagogy also has a role in student attitude development (Jackson, 2004). In turn, style of pedagogy may be influenced by: school ideology; teacher training and perspective and the school's access to wealth and resources. Pedagogical differences may also limit or support the connection between knowledge and attitudes. According to Jackson (2004), the strength of the connection between religion education and social attitudes to diversity - between CRK and CDC - will be

tempered by the perception of such a link at the national, departmental, school and individual educator level. Comparative Religion Knowledge is clearly not the only factor in determining a student's Cultural Diversity Capability.

However, some researchers have claimed that linking knowledge and attitudes conceptually within a pedagogical style may affect levels of achievement. For example, research into the processes that lead to positive contact between conflict groups (Yablon, 2007), highlighted the importance of the cognitive realm. In addition, Woodruff (1999) noted the importance of linking ethical and cognitive development in a learning environment both for the total well-being of the child and to maximise teaching outcomes. Supporting this claim, there is 'growing evidence to suggest a strong link' between affective and values-based outcomes and academic achievement (Schindler, Jones, Taylor & Cadenas, 2004). Research by Schindler et al. (2003) found that the choice between teaching for informational knowledge as opposed to teaching for meaning making and affective growth may be a false choice and that the best results come from the combination of the two.

In regards to religion education, the additional factor of the teacher's or student's commitment to a particular religion may also play a role. Jackson and O'Grady (2007) made it clear that the way in which religion is taught will influence its effect as a tool for attitude change. According to Chater (2006), the approach taken by the teacher to engage the students in the critical enquiry of their own cultural assumptions is paramount. In this light, Singer's expanding circle is a useful tool for envisioning the role that comparative religion studies might play in limiting extremism and developing local and global citizenship. He noted that:

We have more views of ourselves from other social points of view. This poses a challenge to interpretations of religions that are purely static. From the outsider's point of view, the customs of my own society appear as one among a number of different possible systems, they lose their sense of natural rightness and inevitability (1981:98).

This outsider's perspective engenders a pluralist appreciation of the many religions in 21st Century society. The next section will explore how this perspective is applied to *Studies of Religion* pedagogy.

How *Studies of Religion* link CRK and CDC: course aims and method

The *Study of Religion* (SOR) course aims to engage students in discussion about religious and cultural difference and uses pedagogical techniques that aim to uncover and question exclusivist attitudes. In this way, Comparative Religion Education may enable the development of Cultural Diversity Capability. For example, the New South Wales Board of Studies SOR syllabus (2005) stated that one purpose of the course was to build a student's understanding of, appreciation of and respect for different religious expressions and experiences. The syllabus acknowledged that each religious tradition had 'its own integrity and contribute(d) to a well-ordered society' (2005:6). Importantly, the syllabus claimed that by undertaking the course, students could: 'prepare for full and active participation as citizens' and develop the 'capacity to work together with others'. SOR is not just about learning facts.

Similarly, the Queensland Studies Authority SOR syllabus (2001:2) noted that 'world views are acquired' and that 'it is possible to become more skilled in identifying the system that others are applying to make sense of their reality'. The course fosters dialogue between perspectives. It claimed that:

The study of a range of religions and the understanding of alternative ways of viewing reality can make a valuable contribution to cross-cultural harmony and mutual enrichment ... Ignorance of the integrity of the world view of others can lead to prejudice... a commitment to certain beliefs, attitudes and values need not preclude a respect for and a sensitive appreciation of the beliefs, attitudes and values of others (2-4).

Both syllabuses emphasised the importance of the students' critical analysis of their own religious and cultural assumptions. They acknowledged that 'an appreciation of society is enhanced by an understanding of religion... (and that) ethical and socially responsible behaviours are brought about through empathy for and acceptance of religious diversity' (Queensland Studies Authority, 2001:8).

Both the NSW and Queensland SOR courses use the phenomenological method which, according to Jackson & O'Grady (2007), involves two important concepts:

- i) phenomenological agnosticism - temporarily suspending judgement on religious truth claims, beliefs and practices; and

- ii) structured empathy - attending carefully and sympathetically to the beliefs of others and considering whether or not these have similarities or differences with one's own.

This method was introduced into comparative religion education by Ninian Smart (1968), a pioneer in the field of secular religion studies.

From these explanations of aims and method, it appears that a central purpose of the *Studies of Religion* course is to increase a student's ability to understand, empathise with and honour cultural difference, that is, to increase their Cultural Diversity Capability. Not all religion education in Australia takes this pluralist approach. In addition, there may be pedagogical differences between individual schools and classrooms. For this reason, it is important to examine the styles of pedagogy commonly used in religion education and where the SOR course generally fits within that schema.

Indoctrinatory formation is not the same as comparative education

In New South Wales and Queensland there are two approaches to the study of religion:

- i) **formation** – aimed at creating theological acceptance and identity formation in a single tradition, it is described by Cahill et al. (2004:102) as 'formational', by Lovat (2002:vi) as 'enfaithing', and by Rossiter (2001:1) as 'confessional'. Flew (cited in Thiessen, 1984:27) noted that this approach generally included 'the effort to teach the truth of specific doctrines' and thus described it as 'indoctrination'. Public schools generally know it as 'scripture'.
- ii) **education** – aimed at developing interpretive knowledge about religion as a rich field of human experience that encompasses both theological and sociological perspectives. Haynes (1999:3) highlights the key focus of this approach as (*italics in original*):

Academic, not devotional... striving for awareness of religions, not acceptance of one religion... study about a diversity of religious views, not the promotion of any particular view... aims to inform students about beliefs, not to conform students to a certain belief.

To understand the impact of the provision of comparative religion education, it is important to differentiate between these approaches. In Australia, formational (indoctrinatory-style) instruction is referred to as 'RE' (religion education) in faith schools, and 'SRE' (special

religion education) in public schools. These terms were used in state legislation which established a right of access privilege for non-teacher-trained church representatives to deliver non-compulsory formational instruction in public schools for one class per week.

Senior students at public and private schools may also elect a state-accredited comparative religions course. This course is aimed at developing knowledge about a variety of religions rather than faith in a particular one. The term 'Study of Religion' (SOR) is used both specifically as the title of this course and also generically to describe a secular approach to learning about religions. Australian terminology differs from British and European systems in which 'religion education' is used to denote this secular approach.

Confusion between the two approaches contributes to misunderstanding as to the nature, role and potential of secular comparative religion education. Various religion education professionals have attempted to clarify the terms and appropriate places for the different approaches (de Souza, Engebretson, Durka, Jackson & McGrady, 2006). However confusion remains and broad-based comparative religion education is yet to be widely accepted in Australia. This confusion contributes to a polemical debate between secularists and religionists regarding religion's place in contemporary education. This polemic will be explored in Chapter Three.

Current Study of Religion: more sociology less theology

The Queensland SOR syllabus defined religion as a socio-cultural phenomenon that expressed the human quest for meaning and purpose. The NSW SOR syllabus noted that a religious world view was characterised by the recognition of divine power dwelling either beyond or within the human. It noted two views of religion (NSW Board of Studies, 2005:15):

- i) a transcendent, extrinsic view - a vertical relationship between humanity and an external, divine, ultimate reality which focuses on theology and doctrine;
- ii) an immanent, intrinsic view - a horizontal relationship between individuals and their social communities in which divine power dwells within each human being.

This sociological aspect is a significant and recent development. Consideration of the immanent vision of religion as a personal quest in a social context was not explicitly part of

the previous NSW (1999) syllabus. However, current syllabus rationales for both states outline a sociological focus. This development is important in light of research into religion and prejudice which has historically focused on the transcendent, extrinsic view but which is now being challenged.

Religion, religiosity, prejudice and values

Tajfel & Turner's (1986) social identity theory looked at the motivating factors behind inter-group discrimination. It predicted that people maintained and enhanced their self-esteem by downward comparisons with outsiders. This research built on earlier work by Allport (1954) which focused on the conditions required to minimise such prejudice. Allport found that belief in a unique and transcendent source of religious truth contributed to in-group preference and generated prejudice against members of other religions. This link between religious commitment and a predisposition to prejudice is also supported by Malone (1994), Bentley & Hughes (1998) and Evans & Kelly (2004). However, these studies generally measured religious commitment, or 'religiosity', as a frequency of religious service attendance, giving an institutionalised, exclusivist perspective, often associated with the transcendent view.

My hypothesis linking the *Study of Religion* course to a potential *decrease* in prejudice runs counter to the above studies. It takes the view of other research (May, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990) which points to an inclusive perspective that might be found within religions generally. This view is linked to an imminent understanding of religion and an intrinsic view of religiosity. Koenig, Parkerson & Meador (1997) described the three dimensions of religiosity as: organisational; non-organisational or intrinsic. The intrinsic dimension accommodates the notion of spirituality whereby an individual may be highly religious or spiritual but not attend a particular or conventional place of worship. My study assumes that CDC requires this more inclusive view and relies on such an intrinsic notion of religiosity due to its fundamental principle of human equity.

In addition my study draws on theories that identify ethics and morality as independent from a transcendent source. Silberman, (2005) and Hunsberger & Jackson, (2005) challenged the established body of research into religion and prejudice in concluding that multiple

mechanisms operate and that the idea of intrinsic religiosity counters the prejudicial tendency. Schwartz & Huisman (1995) and Duck & Hunsberger, (1999) examined the relationship between values and religiosity and found that religious commitment was positively related to conservatism and negatively related to openness to change. Other studies have found that a small increase in awareness of and limited interaction with the religiously other may result in increased prejudice because stereotypes can be reinforced (Aboud & Levy, 2000).

In this regard, Allport outlined four conditions required for attitude change programs involving out-group interactions to be successful. These conditions, expanded on by Oskamp (2000), include: providing opportunities for friendship and individual contact; ensuring equal status of insider and outsider groups; cooperation interdependence - where mixed groups of insiders and outsiders rely on each other to achieve a common goal; and having clear support from authorities for the program. The ability of teachers to meet these requirements for the *Study of Religion* course may depend on the school's financial and ideological support for the subject – pedagogy in practice. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four. The following section will focus on pedagogy in theory, how CRK and CDC may be linked conceptually.

Concept relationships and education theory

The link between knowledge and attitudes was made over a hundred years ago by Scripture's *Thinking, Feeling, Doing* (1895) three-circle diagram (see Figure 1). This simplified psychology may have inspired Bloom's (1956) description of the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of education which were further analysed by Habermas (1972). According to Ewert (1991), Habermas' theory indicated a link between knowledge and ideology. This section summarises Bloom's educational theory as it may be applied to the study of religion and the development of Cultural Diversity Capability. It also explores Lovat's application of Habermas' model to comparative religion pedagogy and examines some limitations and justifications for connecting CRK to CDC.

Bloom's overlapping domains

The *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Bloom, 1956) placed 'learned attitude' in a cyclic and interdependent arena where knowledge, skills and attitude both develop and depend on each other. This conceptual pedagogy is still used in educational planning today. The SOR syllabuses identified 'knowledge' as chunks of information, 'skills' as measurable outcomes and 'attitude development' as an educational goal. Bloom's domains (Figure 1) echoed Scripture's original diagram, a useful model to review the interrelationship of Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability, with Religion Literacy understood as the application of skill. Through critically engaging with different religions, an individual's ability to understand, apply and make judgements about religious concepts might spiral upwards and outwards, increasing CDC as their CRK and religion literacy increases.

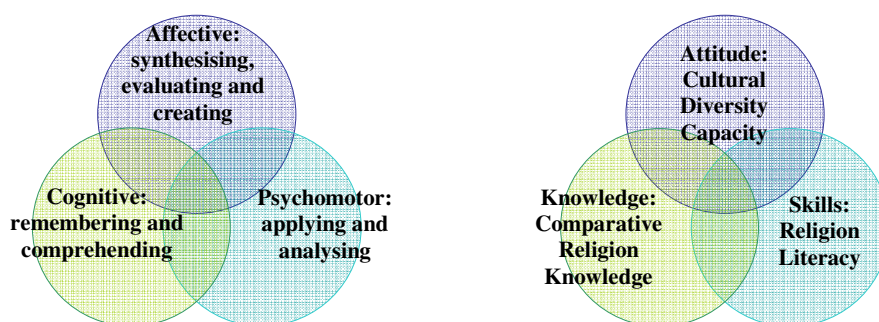


Figure 1. A simplified version of Bloom's domains, echoing Scripture's representation of thinking, feeling, and doing (left) and the concept relationships between Comparative Religion Knowledge, Religion Literacy and Cultural Diversity Capability (right).

Habermas' three ways of knowing

Habermas advocated assuming the standpoint of the other and stressed the importance of people with different views engaging in dialogue in an effort to learn their way out of narrow perspectives. Lovat (1989) described Bloom's model as similar to Habermas' critical theory of education which pointed to 'three ways of knowing' (Figure 2). Lovat (1989) described Habermas' tri-fold approach as the development of faculty - from raw knowledge of facts, through the skill of interpretation and ultimately to an incorporated, critical gnosis. Habermas (cited in Lovat:1989:33) viewed this critical gnosis as the foundation of an individual's

attitudes, describing his approach to education as ‘praxis - combining theory and practice with a view to (attitudinal) change’.

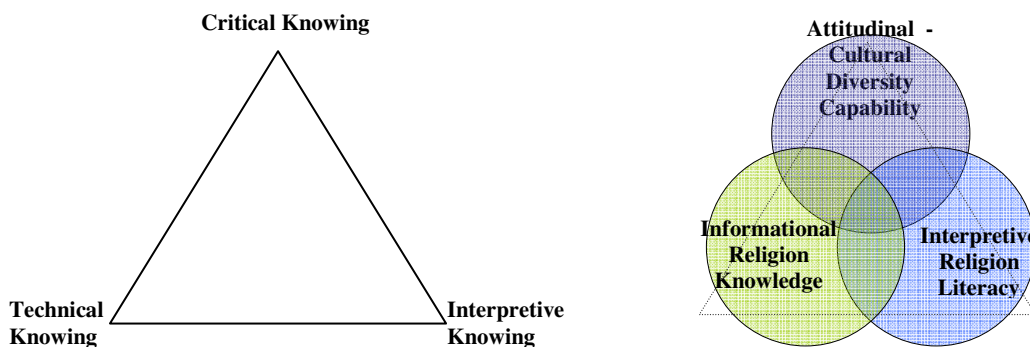


Figure 2. Lovat’s (1989:30) depiction of Habermas’ ‘ways of knowing’ model (left) and the overlay of the three domains of Comparative Religion Knowledge, Religion Literacy and Cultural Diversity Capability (right).

Lovat’s application of Habermas to religion pedagogy

Lovat (1989) explained Habermas’ theory as a series of steps, building capability to different expressions of religion knowledge. He described the first step, towards technical information, as wanting to know the rules and laws governing a particular concept. He noted that this may lead to *empirical* knowing. In comparative religion study for example, the learner may be required to define the Hindu term *bhakti* (devotion). Here the learner memorises the dry facts of the religion subject and thus develops Comparative Religion Knowledge but she remains outside the experience of the religion concepts themselves.

According to Lovat, this research may lead to an interest in the inner workings of the religious tradition, where the learner wants to understand the links between ideas. To do so requires a comparison with her own already understood concepts. This may develop an *interpretive* knowing which places the learner and her experience in relationship with the religion subject. This is where CRK becomes the foundation for the analysis of concepts, where facts and figures are the starting point to deeper understanding. To take the example further, to analyse how a *bhakti* expresses devotion, a learner might reflect upon his *own* experiences of love and loyalty or his feeling for something he holds to be sacred. He might explore how a Hindu devotee considers divinity, drawing parallels with mystics in other traditions. In addition,

classmates or teaching resources may offer insight into the varied ways devotion is expressed. This inter-tradition comparison and application is a skill requiring religious literacy.

Habermas' final step is the 'quest for emancipation' (Lovat, 1989:32), in which learners seek to form their own opinions on religious matters. Here, facts and figures are evaluated in the process of attitude creation. Knowledge is thus integrated with the learner who, in the example, might question the validity of devotion as a path to understanding. Lovat noted that the learner must evaluate concepts in a more philosophical way and in a variety of circumstances to develop this critical capability. The learner may view her own experience in light of others and perhaps gain a deeper insight into the complexity of the terms she researched empirically as well as into her own attitude about adherents of a different tradition. For example by asking: 'How do I feel offering devotional prayer? Do symbolic devotional acts change the way I approach life? Might my motivation for such acts be similar to motivation in a different religion?'

This critical realm is where the religious literacy dependent on Comparative Religion Knowledge (CRK) becomes the foundation for the attitudes that underpin Cultural Diversity Capability (CDC). This intermediate step involves: remembering and understanding different religious ideas, principles and concepts; discriminating between and analysing those concepts across different traditions and making a judgment as to their applicability to one's own world views. Such analysis ensures that the intent, affective results and potential for personal or community growth are the end-focus of the religion study, rather than simply knowledge of the external religious practices of different cultures.

Lovat noted that the so-called truths of any religion cannot be controlled by vested interests if the learner has already formed their own knowledge. Using Habermas' realm of critical knowing, Lovat claimed the learner would want to ensure that knowledge is of value and question what is studied. Of this realm he said: 'No evidence is accepted lightly, nothing is taken for granted, no authority is beyond being accountable' (1989:33). This type of applied questioning develops the confidence required for Cultural Diversity Capability, but it does not guarantee it. The next section will briefly explore the debate about linking CRK and CDC.

Concept connection – limitations, possibilities, research and debates

Knowledge and attitudes can exist independently. Awareness of a culture or religion is not causally linked to increased understanding of, or empathy with that culture or its people.

Jackson noted: ‘There will always be extremely well educated racists’ (2007a:np). Similarly, highly tolerant people may know little about different religions. However, it is equally valid to note that religious conflict and ignorance of religious plurality has been and still is a contributing factor to social tension in the world (Ali, 2003; Trinitapoli, 2007).

When religion education is viewed sociologically as an opportunity to broaden attitudes to cultural difference, the links between CRK and CDC become clearer. According to Weisse (2007:9) there is a ‘positive correlation between (comparative) religious education and democratic conduct’. He claimed that a lack of faith-neutral religion education created a tendency to use religion as a political tool. This was also argued by Hobson & Edwards (in Jozsa, 2007:69) who, in examining religion education in France, claimed that due to France’s strongly secular focus and lack of comparative religion education, its inability to manage its relationship with its Muslim population was heightened.

However, the question of whether religion education can be a foundation for peace building (and thus for social cohesion and cultural diversity capability) is the subject of national and international debate. There is disagreement about whether religion, an historic justification for war, can act as a ‘pillar for civility’ (Weisse, 2007:9). The ‘yes’ case is put by: May (2003), Diez de Velasco, (2007); Miedema, (2006), Bassett, et al. (2002), Selcuk (2006) and Jackson (2004, 2007) who support the argument that religion education offers a bridge to peace education, provided it is not part of an ‘illusory search for homogenised consensus’ (Baratte, 2006:245). The ‘no’ case is often put by those arguing that morality and religion are not yoked, such as Onfray (2007), Dawkins (2006), Harris (2006) and Hitchens (2007). Weisse pointed out that the debate requires more research into inter-religious education and its potential impact on attitude and values development.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the central question of the thesis: *Can the comparative study of religions increase cultural diversity capability?* It defined and discussed the two key concepts: Comparative Religion Knowledge (CRK) and Cultural Diversity Capability (CDC) which, my hypothesis argues have a positively linked relationship. Acknowledging socialisation components, key educational theories and pedagogical techniques that link these concepts were examined and a distinction made between formational and educational approaches to religion. A review of research linking the concepts found conflicting evidence for the nature of the relationship between religion and prejudice especially in light of the emerging sociological view of religion and the emerging spiritual view of religiosity. This highlights a gap in the knowledge about the relationship of CRK and CDC and supports my motivation for the survey. Chapter Two will examine research that specifically links CRK and CDC in the school context and explore some analyses of religion education's responses to plurality which emphasise CRK and CDC differently.

Chapter 2.

The link between CRK and CDC: an exploration

Robert Jackson, editor of the *British Journal of Religious Education* considered the provision of pluralist religious education to be an urgent issue to ensure humanity is equipped to deal with religious-based conflicts and relationships (2004). He noted a paucity of research into comparative religion education and its effects, acknowledging that (personal communication, 2007) ‘little empirical work has been done’ on the relationship between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. He suggested that this relationship seems dependent on the type of pedagogy used.

Jackson outlined issues in diversity and pedagogy in his book *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality* (2004). As mentioned in Chapter One, he believed that the strength of the CRK-CDC link depended on sociological as well as pedagogical factors. The social contexts for religion education will be explored in Chapter Three. This chapter examines Jackson’s analysis of religion education responses to plurality in light of their pedagogical potential for perceiving a connection between CRK and CDC. It uses an historical outline of these responses in an Australian context and notes a Christian focus in Australian religion education which may make research into the CRK-CDC link more difficult. The chapter will begin with a review of three studies, from the United States and Australia that specifically explore the relationship between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability in the school environment.

Past studies into the CRK-CDC link at the school level

American public schools

Lester & Roberts’ (2006:ii) study of Year 9 students undertaking a world religions course in Modesto, California delivered measurable results on the effect of learning about religion in a public school setting. According to this study, ‘taking the world religions course increases

student support for the rights of others'. The study's foreword includes this comment from the US National Education Association on the necessity of religion education in public schools:

Knowledge of the world's religions is essential for comprehending much of history, literature, art and contemporary events. Moreover, learning about religions promotes religious freedom and creates understanding across religious differences (ii).

The Modesto study reiterates findings from an earlier Florida State University study with second grade children (Austin, 1976). This study focussed on measuring changes in empathy and tolerance by testing curriculum which exposed children to concepts of religious and ethnic diversity. It found that children with an increased religious awareness demonstrated an increased tolerance to religious diversity, independent of their faith commitment.

However, the Modesto researchers acknowledged the gap between the understanding of the importance of comparative religion education and its actual implementation:

In the trenches, many teachers, administrators and parents remain wary of in-depth study of world religions in the public classroom... questions abound: What would the impact be on students? How would it be received in our community? Can we do this without triggering a fight? (Lester & Roberts, 2006:i)

This reticence to introduce comparative religion education, despite general agreement about its cultural relevance, results from confusion over its legitimacy as a school subject. This confusion is also part of the Australian context.

Australian private schools

Malone's (1994) study of students in faith-based NSW high schools measured the attitudinal effects of the newly introduced *Studies of Religion* course. She noted that: 'the majority of religion syllabuses set out values and attitude outcomes and assume a direct relationship between formal study of religion and changes in attitudes' (Malone, 1995:1). However she found 'no existing research into the relationship between formal studies of religion and the development of particular religious attitudes' (1).

Malone's study, conducted at religiously affiliated schools, examined student attitudes to religious traditions and the broader area of prejudice. Notably, the results of her study were in

opposition to my study's assumptions. In fact, she found that after one year of participating in the *Studies of Religion* course, students showed a higher level of prejudice with an increased knowledge and awareness of other traditions. She concluded that there are many factors involved in prejudice and that 'although ignorance is a contributing factor, simply learning about a religion is not sufficient to change attitudes' (Malone, 1995:7).

Malone cited a 1994 Flinders University School of Education Social Justice Report, *Teaching for Resistance* which highlighted the need for direct experience in the process of attitude change. This approach, termed 'shared praxis' (Groome, 1991:148) has gained ground in religion education with faith representatives participating in classroom activity. Malone (1995:7) found that during personal interaction with a perceived outsider, an open addressing of complex religious issues brought about a positive, 'small but significant change' in attitude.

In Australia, the question of how much is learned about religion often relies on limited empirical measures such as counting references to religion in texts of other disciplines (Bouma, 2006; Vitz 1986). It is difficult to find religion research that looks specifically at attitudinal outcomes. The Modesto researchers noted that 'a more direct way of measuring what students are learning about religion from textbooks and the curriculum is to survey students themselves' (Lester & Roberts, 2006:18). My research will cover ground similar to Malone's in seeking to discover a connection between the study of religion and Cultural Diversity Capability. Significantly, my study will include both public and private school respondents and take a different approach to the measurement of some concepts. Perhaps things have changed in the past 13 years.

Religion education responses to plurality: the CRK-CDC emphases

In a presentation to the Australian Association for Research in Education, *Religious Education in a Religiously Pluralist Society*, Crotty & Wurst (1998:2) claimed that 'we are only beginning vaguely and uncomfortably to come to terms with religious difference and we have hardly thought of its implications for religious educational design'. Crotty & Wurst outlined three positions on a spectrum regarding the religious other: Exclusivist; Inclusivist

and Pluralist. Each position contains a perspective on the existence, nature of and strength of the link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. This spectrum also serves as an effective delineation of three distinct periods in the development of religion education in Australia from 1880 to the present. This section reviews Crotty and Wurst's three positions as an historical snapshot of Australia's changing approach to religion education. It incorporates Jackson's analysis of these positions, highlighting differences in the emphasis on the CRK-CDC link within each one.

Exclusivist: 1880~1966

In New South Wales, the 1880 Public Instruction Act ensured that 'a portion of each day... be set apart when the children... may be instructed by the clergyman or other religious teacher' (New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, 1912:2). Queensland's 1910 referendum similarly ensured time for religious instruction (Crittenden, 2006). Such provisions emphasised Christian catechetical goals and reflected the idea that only Christianity is true. Engebretson (2006:651) noted that this was an unchallenged viewpoint until the 1970s and that 'discourses about religious education were generally theological and ecclesial (and) conducted by and within Christian traditions'. This position does not accommodate Comparative Religion Knowledge.

A similarly exclusivist approach was taken within the Catholic school network, intended to be 'the primary socialising influence in making children into Catholics' (Rossiter, 2007:np). The late 19th and early 20th century Catholic system stressed uniformity and presumed the Church had clearly defined enemies: Protestantism and the philosophy of the European Enlightenment (Lovat, 1989). Jackson claimed (2004:13) that the exclusivist response denies plurality's impact on social and personal identity and 'romanticises the privileged ethnic majority as the heritage of the (imagined) national group'. Jackson also noted that this response generally supports religion only in faith schools because it allows particular groups to preserve their religious identities and may reduce discrimination. However, concerns about religious segregation include the claim that 'students are unprepared for life in an increasingly mixed society' (Orfield & Gordon 2001, cited in Jackson, 2004:46).

Inclusivist: 1967~2000

Crotty and Wursts' *inclusivism* acknowledged different religious systems but held that one may be 'more true' than another. This patronising approach gained ground in the 1970s, partly due to the 1965 Vatican II Councils' Declarations on Religious Freedom and the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. Crotty and Wurst (1998:np) noted that 'in these two documents, the official Catholic Church moved from gross exclusivism to inclusivism'. The declarations marked what Lovat (1989:8) described as 'the official end of the siege mentality'. Lovat claimed this new openness within the Catholic Church resulted in developments in Australia's (largely Catholic) religious education sector that accommodated inter-faith dialogue. Several inclusivist religion education theories (Groome, 1977) and texts (Grimmit, 1973; Habel & Moore, 1982) were published soon after the Vatican II declarations.

This more open view of religious diversity developed in an environment of bi-partisan support for multiculturalism, with successive governments developing policy and institutionalising multicultural affairs. Also during this period, most states undertook a review of the 1880 Instruction Act. The reviews largely agreed that there was value in learning about the diverse religions present in Australian society (Lovat, 2002:33). During the 1980s, most states developed senior school religion courses intended to 'be equivalent in intellectual rigor and standing to other curriculum areas' (Ryan, 1997:106), to cover religion in 'an objective but sympathetic way... and to develop greater understanding and tolerance of religious groups in the increasingly religiously diverse Australian community' (Engebretson, 2006:658). The possibility of a connection between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability began to emerge.

By the 1990s, all Australian states had introduced elective comparative religion studies in senior high school. However, even by the end of the century, 'these courses did not end up being implemented in anything more than a handful of state schools across the country' (Rossiter, 2001:1). Strangely, Queensland *still* has no state school undertaking its accredited course. The reasons for this lack of implementation will be briefly explored in Chapter Three, however the issue appears worthy of further research.

Jackson's inclusivist responses: relativist and rationalist

This more open view on religious diversity has generally focussed on either CRK or CDC, not necessarily on the impact of one on the other or the possible link between them. Jackson noted two inclusivist approaches which he described as 'relativist' and 'rationalist' and which illustrate this point.

The postmodern relativist stance: rejects the imposition of religious narratives and removes the distinction between religion education and other forms of values-based study. The focus is on child-centred spirituality and Cultural Diversity Capability, not Comparative Religion Knowledge. It aims to help pupils develop values by focussing on their own experience. This stance often de-legitimises curricula that rely on content from historical traditions. Jackson noted that taking a relativist position into the classroom was 'impractical and lacking critical judgement' (2004:65) since it removed the opportunity to critique the tradition and emphasised the individual outside of the social context. He argued that religious education should favour pedagogies that give voice to children 'thus promoting differentiated citizenship' but that this did not require the deconstruction of all religious tradition (47).

The neomodern rational stance: promotes religious and philosophical literacy and is suspicious of personal experience. It is focused on Comparative Religion Knowledge, not Cultural Diversity Capability. He said the stance includes the idea that religions are discrete systems and that educators must deal with their negative aspects in the classroom. Jackson questions the adequacy of the concept of religions as fixed systems since this idea gives:

Little attention to contested representations within traditions... the fuzzy edges of real life are trimmed off and the personal syntheses and multiple allegiances... are interpreted as deviations from doctrinally pristine religious narratives (2004:81).

Jackson critiques the de-emphasis of experience as an educational tool since it dismisses the 'highly emotional and affective way in which children often learn best' (79). Both the relativist and rationalist responses focus on either CRK or CDC, not on their potential relationship or possible synergies. Jackson claimed that for links between religion education and social attitudes to be established, researchers must see beyond both modern and post modern paradigms.

Pluralist: 2000~the problematic present

In defining 'pluralist' Crotty & Wurst used a postmodern, relativist view, in which religion is valid for the person or society holding its belief. In this view all religions are equally, albeit relatively, valid and functionally similar. It is important to note the difference between plurality and pluralism. Plurality is the existence of many. Pluralism is its positive evaluation – the idea that many is beneficial (Skeie, 2006). Pluralism is not relativism. Relativism denies differences. Pluralism acknowledges value in difference (Eck, 2001). I would argue that Crotty & Wurst's definition trivialises all religions and limits the idea of pluralism which supports exploration of different religions without relativising an individual's commitment to a particular tradition. CRK and CDC both depend on a recognition and active acknowledgement of difference. Reiterating Jackson, I believe that for the link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability to emerge, religion education discourse may need to dissociate pluralism from relativism.

Chapter One explained the pluralist nature of the *Studies of Religion* syllabuses in NSW and Queensland. However, commitment to this type of teaching varies between states and classrooms. Paradoxically, outside the private sector, there is little pluralist religion teaching. Anecdotally, the subject gets less departmental and school support than other subjects, even though in the mid 1980s, SOR was the 'fastest growing subject in the HSC' (Lovat 2002:84). Rymarz (2006:22) points out that while the value of teaching religion in public schools gained momentum in the 1970s, 'there has been little real government effort' to encourage it. The *Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education* report mentioned earlier acknowledged a clear mandate for government schools 'to actively promote intercultural and interfaith understanding' (Erebus, 2006:vii). However the report noted the need for additional catalysts other than policy directives and found that there is little opportunity for the implementation of programs in interfaith and intercultural dialogue (xi). Currently both public and private education systems include a range of approaches but the comparative *Studies of Religion* (SOR) course is seen as a new and little supported option (Rossiter, 2001).

Jackson's pluralist responses: interpretive and secularist

Jackson analysed two pluralist responses for religion education in the 21st Century. His own 'interpretive' pedagogy (1997) combines the key aims of the rationalist's 'learning about religions' and the relativist's concept of a socially and individually applied religious ethic, which he refers to as 'learning from' religions. This interpretive response assumes a strong connection between CRK and CDC. It includes the key concepts of *representation* (how religions are portrayed to others), *interpretation* (how concepts from another religion are grasped) and *reflexivity* (how students experience the material studied). Students are encouraged to participate in religious and philosophical debates 'through a reflexive study of source materials in relation to personal concerns' via syllabuses that target attitudinal outcomes (Jackson, 2004:2). This response also stresses the danger of stereotypic representation and recognises the need to draw on the child's own concepts and existentially relevant experience. Echoing Lovat's interpretation of Habermas (Chapter One), Jackson (2004:88) emphasised involving the learner in 'comparing currently understood concepts with those of others. The students' own perspective is an essential part of the learning'.

Jackson described the second pluralist response for religion education in the 21st Century as 'secularist²', in which religions are viewed as irrelevant and replaced with citizenship education. In this view CRK and CDC are unhooked. One argument coupled with this thinking is that religion education should be superseded by citizenship and values education which focus on the structures, processes and ideologies of western democracy. Jackson noted that this conflation of potentially separate curricula runs the risk of a superficial treatment of intercultural issues, particularly a stereotypic representation of religions, or complete avoidance of the subject of religion altogether. He pointed out that such an approach was criticised in the 1980s because it ignored differences, had an exclusivist flavour and aimed at assimilated views of social values. Instead he argued (2007) that religion education contributes to intercultural citizenship because it helps children to debate issues relevant to a plural democratic society and that citizenship and values education are not replacements for religion education but complementary areas of study.

² I disagree with the use of this label and will define secularist differently in the following chapter.

Can religion education contribute to democratic citizenship?

There is little focus on this possibility in Australia. The 2005 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe declared that: education is essential to combat ignorance, stereotyping and incomprehension of religions; that understanding of religions is an integral part of understanding the history of humanity and its civilisations; and that schools should teach all major religions... to fight fanaticism and develop the critical democratic faculties of future citizens (Council of Europe, 2005). The Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2006) noted that developing familiarity is an important step to reducing prejudice and that education has a significant role to play in building opportunities for dialogue in a democracy. Research in Britain reveals that religion education has a significant contribution to make to citizenship and values education in 21st century societies. (O'Grady, 2003; Jackson, 2004).

Education: where religion, values and citizenship might be complementary

Instead of replacing religion education with citizenship education, various scholars (Miedema, 2006; Haynes, 2007; Nord, 2001, 2007; de Souza et al., 2006) have supported Jackson by pointing to the synergies between the two fields. Williams (2007a:98) noted that the historical-critical method of religious scholarship contributed to citizenship education by placing religion 'into a space of collective examination'. He echoed Singer when he claimed:

Learning to speak of one's religion as though it was someone else's' deprives it of the ability to appear as an all-encompassing symbolic structure for all society – but one orientation among many... This affirms a student's personal autonomy and capacity to freely examine religious matters... (which) helps the democratic ethos to penetrate into the world of religions. In particular it gives students the tools to resist the fundamentalisms and... all authoritarian impositions of orthodoxy (99).

Grelle (2006:471) linked religious and citizenship education by emphasising rights and responsibilities. He claimed that 'teaching about diverse religious and secular worldviews ... helped students understand their rights to religious liberty or freedom of conscience as well as their responsibility to protect those same rights for their fellow citizens'. The NSW Premier, Morris Iemma launched his government's *Rights and Responsibilities* policy by stating that 'schools are the place, above everywhere else, where our future is rehearsed. Schools are the engine rooms of multiculturalism and integration' (Erebus, 2006:107). If racist assumptions

can be challenged in schools, and if CRK is held to be linked to CDC, then religious, citizenship, human rights and peace education all have the potential to address forms of racism that focus on religion and culture.

Scholars also focus on the connection between religion and citizenship education based on their function of identity formation. Jackson & O'Grady (2007) note that religion education helps young people to gain a sense of their own values development and their role as citizens and said these two aims should be seen as overlapping. Avest, Bakker, Bertram-Troost, & Miedema (2007: 217) claimed that schools 'should be obliged to foster a religious (or worldview) dimension to citizenship, thereby bringing about mutual respect and understanding for difference to stimulate the development of a personal, philosophical identity'. If religion education assists in the construction of a unique sense of self in relation to others, then the impact of the religious domain on the political and cultural areas of society are more readily understood, and the links between CRK and CDC may begin to emerge.

One reason for the lack of focus in this area in Australia is the social swing back towards an exclusive approach to religion which limits the potential for the CRK-CDC link. Social trends will be explored in the Chapter Three. The next section will examine Australia's Christian privilege which may influence these trends.

Australia's Christian privilege

In Australia, the debate is tending back towards exclusivism which, as has been noted by Jackson and Crotty & Wurst, tends to devalue Comparative Religion Knowledge and de-emphasise its possible contribution to Cultural Diversity Capability. Crotty (1996:np) noted that in general curricula, 'religion is even excised ... in areas, such as history or social science, where it is actually difficult to do so'. He claimed that the official public stance on religious pluralism was at odds with the ideology of those who attend public schools. I would argue instead that the official public stance is not really pluralist. In fact, special access rights allow religious groups to bring an exclusivist, mostly Christian emphasis directly into public high schools. This formational, indoctrinatory-style instruction is provided by non teacher-

trained representatives of religious groups. Of the 90 approved groups in NSW, 89 percent are Christian (Education New South Wales, 2007).

In an apparent move towards pluralism, the 2006 Queensland Education Act opened up this access to non-traditional and non-religious groups such as Buddhists and humanists. While appearing to be denominationally impartial, applicants are vetted by the Queensland Scripture Union, a bible-focused, evangelical Christian organisation. The Act, like that of NSW and Victoria, contains 'bias by default' (Fergusen, 2007), providing for Christian Bible lessons to be available in the absence of specified instruction. At the same time the program was made an opt-in choice, 'downgrading traditional religious education, which may mean it is seen as not important' (Crittenden, 2006:np). In addition, if a group is under-supported it will not have representation in a given year, marginalizing smaller groups. Such a return to exclusivism limits the opportunity for research into the relationship between CRK and CDC.

A legacy of the 1880s

The Christian privilege may be partly due to the legacy of the Instruction Acts of the 1880s which ambiguously noted that secular education included general religious teaching. Lovat (2002:85) noted that, this would have meant non-denominational Christian teaching and was 'remarkably ecumenical for its day'. He claimed that this provided 'justification for a broad based and comparative Religious Studies component to form part of the public curriculum' and outlined why this did not eventuate. In the mid 1960s, NSW educators attempted to foster in pupils 'tolerance of, and goodwill towards, people of races and religions ... other than their own'. A syllabus was developed that included the goal: 'by sixth grade, children should have an awareness of the beliefs and moral values taught by the great religions of the world'. An alliance of the Christian churches and the 'very secular forces dominant in public education at the time' ensured that such pluralist sentiment was 'roundly rejected'. Although the Act stated that schools were to be 'free, secular and compulsory' (NSW, 1912), for a long time many of those running the system were evangelical Christians. The ambiguity remains.

These days public schools run weekly (mostly Christian) scripture classes. Rather than offer alternative courses in ethics or philosophy for those who opt-out, some schools have their

non-religion students pick up papers in the playground, in which case the choice appears to be: Christianity or punishment (Edwards, 2007). Another example of the Christian focus can be seen in the online NSW Board of Studies SOR sample questions quiz (2007). The curriculum purports to be interdenominational. However, the questions are significantly focused on Christian history in Australia, with an occasional aboriginal spirituality question. The traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism collectively make up less than three percent of the questions. Neither did the NSW 2006 HSC exam have any short questions on any tradition outside of Christianity or Aboriginal Spirituality.

The Christian focus may hinder support for comparative religion education and the pedagogies that encourage cultural diversity capability. The legislative bias allows religionists to continue to proselytise and secularists to maintain that there is no religion in public schools. Such polarised discourse may be one reason that comparative religion education and its possible relationship to social cohesion is not high on the Australian agenda. This and other deterrents to the implementation of comparative religion education will be explored in Chapter Three.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed research into the links between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. It examined a variety of religion education responses to plurality and their differences in pedagogical emphasis on the relationship between CRK and CDC. Using an Australian historical snapshot of religion education development, it explored Jackson's analysis of these responses. The Christian privilege in Australian religion education highlighted that Australia may be a difficult environment in which to explore possible connections between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. Chapter Three will review nuances of the national debate regarding religion's place in education noting sociological factors which may help or hinder the possibility of a connection between CRK and CDC. It will also make some international comparisons.

Chapter 3.

Religion education's context: social mood, polemics & potential

Attitude development is part of a complex socialisation process affected by multiple interdependent variables. The importance of this process for teenagers has been emphasised by Reed et al., (1986) and Saarni (1985) who claimed that teens often espouse the attitudes of people they look up to and who found significant correspondence between parent and teen attitudes around core values. Supporting this idea, a more recent National Youth Survey (Mission Australia, 2006) reported that young people turn first to their parents when making difficult decisions and named their parents as the people they most admire. In addition, research into child attitudes has claimed that 'child ideologies retain culturally specific values and ideas' (Hoffman, 2003).

Australian sixteen-year olds are likely to be exposed to parental, local, national and global debates regarding the possible threats posed by the religious other. In light of this, the importance of national mood - reflected in family discussion, in the media, in pedagogy and in school assignments, is an important socializing factor and should not be underestimated in the consideration of the link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability.

This Chapter will review Australia's changing mood on multiculturalism and the context this provides for religion education. It will explore the polemical nature of the debate about religion's role in Australian education which de-emphasises the potential of the link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability and makes research into this link more difficult. It will also compare Australia with comparable western nations which view comparative religion education as a potential tool for building democratic citizenship.

Plurality and its rejection

Australia is home to multiple cultures and religions. The 2006 census shows that 24 percent of Australians were born overseas and that migrants represent 51 percent of the nation's yearly

population increase (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). In some urban areas, the long dominant Christian population has been measured at less than 35 percent, with rapid growth occurring in the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim populations. In addition, a general move away from organised religions has been measured in younger Australians, with 31 percent claiming atheist views (Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007). Our expanding circle of family and friends are unlikely to be genetically, culturally or religiously homogeneous. Rather, individuals and communities incorporate multiple, hybrid and dynamic identities, no longer a simple reflection of ethnicity. This plurality has not led to an embrace of pluralism.

Singer (1981:113) claimed that the principle of human equity in the west, 'while defended generally on rational grounds, is still a long way from acceptance'. In recent times, the presence of difference has produced public anxiety and strategies of separation. Jackson & O'Grady (2007) go so far as to say that western multiculturalism has lost its appeal and been shelved as a policy. In Australia, this rejection has been seen to manifest as an 'increase in cultural racism' (Maddox, 1997). Given that 'cultural precepts underpin education policies' (Smith, 2007) I would suggest this rejection may also be contributing to a lack of support for comparative religion studies.

Australia's changing mood on multiculturalism

Australia's mood regarding multiculturalism has changed in the last decade. According to the *Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education* report (Erebus, 2006:vi), 'Australians commonly perceive our nation as a successful multicultural society'. Bouma (2006:192) claimed that social policies are lagging behind public discourse and are 'yet to catch up' with religious and cultural 'plurality and its rising acceptance'. He believed that multicultural diversity is 'increasingly viewed as a positive value for society' and painted an optimistic picture of its acceptance. However, the winding up of the National Multicultural Advisory Council in 2000 and the rise of monocultural conservative nationalism (Maddox, 2005) challenges such optimism. A 2005 News Limited poll showed the number of people opposed to multiculturalism increased from 16 percent in 1997 to 25 percent in 2005 (The Australian, 2005). In addition, Monash University research into *Managing the Impact of*

Global Crisis Events on Community Relations in Multicultural Australia (cited in Halafoff, 2006:9) noted that 'Australia is currently experiencing a rise of migrantophobia, xenophobia and racism'. Even the word itself is being expunged. In 2007, the Federal government renamed its 'Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs' the 'Department of Immigration and Citizenship'.

Other examples of the rejection of multiculturalism include: harsher, more isolating treatment of refugees and increased visa and citizenship requirements for migrants; the 2006 rejection of Sudanese refugees in a country town and the 2007 closed door policy for African migrants; ambiguous comments by Prime Minister Howard in 2006 regarding Muslims as extremists; the 2007 Australia Day aggressive flag waving at youth concerts and its banning; the stance Pauline Hanson 2007 senate campaign calling for a 'ban Muslim migrants' (Cratchley, 2007) and reduced funding and student numbers for cultural, language and general Asian studies (Jain, 2007).

Forrest & Dunn (2006) claimed that vestiges of the 'diversity celebrating' and largely pluralist aims of earlier governments can be found in the rhetoric of current policy documents but that the focus is no longer on honouring difference. For example in his 2006 Australia Day address, the Prime Minister outlined his expectation of migrants to 'learn about *our* history and heritage ... celebration of diversity must not be at the expense of the... values, traditions and accomplishments of the *old* Australia' (Howard, 2006). Instead, there is a renewed push for integration, 'living in harmony' and defining single sets of values and beliefs. For school children, the ethnic food festivals and intercultural projects have been replaced with participation in ANZAC Day, a National Flag Day and singing the national anthem. Such focus ignores historical contributions to the nation made by Australian Aboriginal and Islander, Afghani and South-East Asian Muslim, Buddhist Chinese, Hindu and Sikh peoples. Translated into pedagogy, this assimilationist perspective removes the possibility for both Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability.

Values education: problems and potential

In high school education, this perspective appears in the packaging and politics surrounding the *National Framework for Australian Values*, developed by the Department of Education, Science & Training, (DEST, 2005). The following section will examine the problems and potential of the framework in so far as it may help or hinder the CRK-CDC link.

The Australian Values Framework identified nine values that echo the components of Cultural Diversity Capability and include: respecting the rights of others, tolerance of diversity and protecting a 'fair go' for all. However, Halafoff noted that the discourse surrounding the values has incorrectly linked them with 'a resurgence of a narrow nationalism and intolerance for cultural and religious diversity' (2006:2). Such a message, delivered directly into schools, may limit the possibility for both Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability, let alone their potential link.

Focusing on shared western values separates those values from their multicultural and often multi-religious realms. Halafoff claimed that such separation has led to 'a misconception that Australian Values are in conflict with culturally diverse and multi-faith Australia' (2006:2). Likewise, Bouma (2006:183) stressed that: 'Values are grounded in communities and in the theologies or philosophies maintained by (them)'. Such a comment supports connecting values education to religion and other social education programs and recognises the possibility of a link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability.

One of the framework's goals is for students to develop: 'the capacity to exercise judgement in matters of morality and ethics and the capacity to make sense of their world' (DEST, 2005:2). Such capacity may require exposure to and engagement with more than one religious or cultural system – a key component of the *Study of Religion* (SOR) course. If there is a connection between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability, then the SOR course may contribute, along with other social studies courses, to the goals of values education. However, acknowledging such a connection may require a repositioning of the framework in current discourse to emphasise its pluralist vision of Australian values. It may also require a deeper analysis of a divisive polemic in religion education which limits the

potential of the link between CRK and CDC. The following section will explore the impact of this polemic, between religionists and secularists, on religion education in Australia.

'Secular' verses 'religious': an outdated, misrepresenting polemic

Social discourse influences the attitudes of policy makers, teachers and children. A central idea in current discourse is that religion does not belong in a secular society, removing comparative religion education and its potential effects from the social agenda. Berlinerblau (2005:3) claimed that the 'secular' versus 'religious' dichotomy oversimplified and misrepresented a complex issue. The term 'secular' is not opposed to the sacred. It was used in the 18th century to differentiate secluded monks from clergy with worldly duties (Keane, 2002:30). Derived from the Latin *saeculum*, Berlinerblau claimed it refers to 'living in the world' or 'being of the age' (2005:2). This meaning highlights the implied responsibility of social policy to adapt to the multicultural composition of the 21st Century. A 'secular' education requires an acknowledgement of religious plurality as well as religion's vast cultural, social, spiritual, ethical, political and historical impact on humanity.

The 2006 Victorian Education Reform Bill wrongly defined 'secular' as 'outside of religion' and defended the lack of comparative religion studies in public schools as being appropriate to a secular society (Parliament of Victoria, 2006:5). This argument to 'keep religion out of schools' was a legitimate stand against the bigoted preaching of the 1950s but religion education, pedagogy, research and the spiritual understanding of young people have all moved on (de Souza et al., 2006; Jackson, 2004). Such an argument limits the possibility of the connection between CRK and CDC because it removes opportunities for discourse about religion in the public realm. The Reform Bill also assumes Australia is a secular society. Internally contradictory, the same Bill insists on providing special access for formational, indoctrinatory-style religious instruction. The bias in this Bill, disguised as secularist, is inherently religious and shows how a faux secular argument is used to ensure religious advantages. This misrepresentation of the meaning of secularism may need to be addressed, in policy, pedagogy and public discourse for the possible relationship between CRK and CDC to become apparent.

The distinction between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ was emphasised by Berger’s (1967) secularisation theory which said that religion was becoming irrelevant. In light of the 21st century’s strengthening of religiosity, secularisation and plurality, Berger (1997) retreated from the theory and stressed the importance of democratic nations engaging with religious ideas in the ‘open discourse of the culture’ (Berger, 2005:np). Indeed ‘open discourse’ may be a requirement for the establishment of religion education’s contribution to social cohesion – the link between CRK and CDC. Habermas, once a proponent of Berger’s theory, now sees the bridging of religion and secular society as an important issue. In his article *Religion in the Public Sphere* (2005), he noted that not only must believers tolerate other traditions and philosophies but secularists must also appreciate religious conviction.

The lack of a moderate voice promoting comparative religion as a legitimate field of study has led to an apparent lack of alternatives to the secularist and religionist views. For educators and policy makers this polarised view undermines the possibility of a connection between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability and limits the opportunity for research in the area. By demonstrating a link between CRK and CDC, this study emphasises the need for middle ground discourse which may bridge the secular and religious viewpoints and encourage such a link to emerge.

Australia’s religion education discourse

In Australia, there is little discourse on religion education, much less that promotes a non-polemical position. According to Lovat (2005), the secularisation challenge has left many Australians with the view that any religion in public institutions is problematic. He acknowledged (2002:vi) ‘confusion among educators’ regarding comparative courses: ‘in public education circles they are sometimes characterised as an unwelcome intrusion by religious forces while, in religion circles they have sometimes been attributed to an unwelcome intrusion by the forces of the state’. Lovat said Australia is ‘yet to come to terms with its position on religion education and oscillates between ambiguous, at times exclusive viewpoints’ (vi).

These viewpoints can be illustrated by a recent exchange in a major Australian newspaper. Monash University sociology professor Gary Bouma, who holds a UNESCO chair in inter-religious relations, initiated the exchange by stating that ‘the secularist stance of universities (was) no longer appropriate because religion played an important role in public life (and that) secularism is itself an ideology inimical to religions’ (Horin, 2007:8). Bouma has elsewhere described ‘anti-religious secularists (as) the gatekeepers of education policy and teaching in most Australian institutions’ (Bouma, 2007:np). His position was echoed by Professor Neil Ormerod, director of the Australian Catholic University Institute of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education who described the reactionary letters as ‘predictably hysterical’ (2007:4). Letters published in response to Bouma claimed that the study of religions at universities should be ‘unwaveringly opposed’ because it would ‘lower academic standards (and) promote illiteracy’ and that religious adherents are ‘victims of irrational belief systems’, deserving pity (Sydney Morning Herald, Letters, September 6, 2007). The following section will explore each side of the polemic in more detail.

The secular myth: church-state separation

The secularist argument is that Australia must maintain a separation between church and state. I argue that the church and the state have long held hands in the playgrounds of Australian schools and that current legislation ensures this relationship will continue. The Australian Constitution declared that ‘the Commonwealth shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free practice of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust’ (Bouma, 2006:177). This impartiality attempted to provide equality of opportunity regardless of religion. Out of context, this would indicate a secular state. However the Constitution’s preamble, ‘humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God’ (and its proposed 1999 referendum alternative, ‘With Hope in God’) clearly acknowledged the deity in Australian governance (Maddox, 1999). Australia’s constitution does not separate church and state and the context for Australia’s position on religion in education is ambiguous.

Exemplifying this ambiguity, the current Federal government has supported: religious group delivery of commonwealth employment, pregnancy counselling and other health services; the appointment of an arch bishop as Governor General; consulting church officials on policy; and establishing and vetting chaplaincy programs in public schools. The largest item in the 2007 federal education budget was the funding of faith based private schools - at more than twice that of public schools (Gittens, 2007). Such funding was challenged in the 1980s in the Australian High Court as contradicting the non-establishment clause of the Constitution. The challenge was rejected, five judges to one (Wallace, 2005).

One social commentator claimed this decision ‘prevented a... culture of debate about the interaction of religions and the state from emerging’ (Wallace, 2005:1). While the United States regularly debates church-state separation, Australian discussion on the matter rarely gains attention. Wallace noted that the concept is ‘almost totally absent from Australian academic and political discourse’. Maddox (1999) said such discussion is likely to be ridiculed as god-bothering hypocrisy. Certainly the contradictory government positions are confusing. In 2003 Governor General Michael Jeffrey suggested that schools should teach religion in an effort to lift the nation’s ethical standards (The Age, 2003). However a Newpoll commissioned by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU, 2006) showed that a majority of Australians (when told there is *no* law separating religious groups and governments) would support legislated separation to keep religion out of schools.

This ‘secular’ confusion illustrates that the social cohesion value of comparative religion education is not present in the Australian psyche. There is no perception of a connection between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. As Jackson noted in Chapter Two, this lack of perception of the link limits its possibilities. The secular position often reacts to the increasingly evangelical approach taken by the religionists in their attempt to regain control of the educational sphere, further reducing the possibilities for such a connection to be discussed or researched.

The religionist approach: increasingly evangelical?

New evangelisation, a millennial theme of Pope John Paul II (2001:np), urged Catholic leaders to ‘strengthen the identity of Catholic schools’ by restoring a ‘a sense of sin’ (Moylan, 2002:10). In his address to the Australian Catholic Education Conference, Cardinal George Pell claimed that the increasingly prominent sin of ‘not believing that only one religion is true’ can be blamed on ‘comparative religion courses..., (which have taken) young Catholics ‘beyond tolerance and ecumenism and towards muddle’ (Catholic News, 2006:np). Cardinal Pell’s evangelical strategies include having Catholic School Principals submit their ‘intellect and will’ to church doctrine ‘on questions of faith and morals’ and for the religion education curriculum to be rewritten (Morris, 2007a:1). His reminder that ‘the one true God acts through his Church, the Catholic Church and the other Christian churches and communities’ (Pell, 2007:np) shows that Catholic religion education has little room for a study of Hindu philosophy or Buddhist environmental ethics. Such exclusivism discourages Comparative Religion Knowledge and hinders research into its link with Cultural Diversity Capability.

Faced with diminishing numbers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007) Australian Anglicans are also taking the evangelical route. Archbishop Peter Jensen recently proposed reviving the 19th Century tradition of bible distribution, aiming to get a bible to ‘every family in Sydney’ to enable their souls to be ‘saved’ (Morris, 2007b:3). This renewed evangelism enters public schools. For example, Morris (2007c:11) notes that Catholic Education’s ‘first priority (of) family evangelisation’ affects its approach to the delivery of indoctrinatory-style SRE in public schools. A 2007 conference presentation by a representative of the Catholic Confraternity of Christian Doctrine stated that the public education system could make good use of the analogy of Luke’s Gospel: ‘our catechists can go out and be fishermen,... we can systematically engage young people in state schools’ (Cleary, 2007:np). This evangelism is not limited to the child. The President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Philip Wilson, saw education as a missionary tool for lapsed churchgoers: ‘school the child and you can re-involve the parent’ (Morris, 2007c:11). This example illustrates the indoctrinatory function of right-of-entry legislation and highlights the approach as an obstacle to establishing a link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability.

The indoctrinatory approach, sometimes a public school's only experience with religion education, makes it harder for comparative studies like *Studies of Religion* to gain a foothold and has been questioned by educators, parents and academics. Dr Noel Preston (2006:np), adjunct professor in the Griffith University Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance claimed that 'the right of entry ... for Religious Education is a messy, sometimes counter-productive way of teaching such a curriculum'. The question arises, since faith schools receive government funding already, how is it that public school time and resources in a supposedly secular state are spent on a clearly proselytising function? Rossiter's (2001:np) answer: 'There has been a hesitancy to oppose 'right of entry' for fear of offending the churches'. A secular Australia may be a worthy goal. Currently it is a myth.

Sciari & Newel (2007:np) questioned the value of proselytising. They argued that the exclusivist model is no longer appropriate for the times and that 'If future Special Religious Education curriculum documents are to have any relevance in the 21st century, they must be... open to the religious truths, values and similarities found in other traditions'. Catholic Education now embodies a spectrum of ideologies. Its institutions are involved in the development of religion education pedagogy and research. Law (2007:13) noted however that while some faith schools 'dare to educate rather than indoctrinate, many institutions show a return to uncritical acceptance of moral and religious belief... and, while officially liberal, (some) are busy applying psychological brainwashing techniques'. It appears that the extreme ends of the polemic reduce the acceptance of comparative religion education and the acknowledgement of a possible link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. Another obstacle to linking CRK and CDC is the lack of teacher training in comparative religion education in Australia.

Lack of teacher training: another obstacle to linking CRK and CDC

As highlighted earlier, Jackson emphasised the role of the teacher and their own perspective on the potential for the *Study of Religion* to act as a tool for the development of Cultural Diversity Capability. The *Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion* report noted an absence of professional development standards, funding and resources for values and

intercultural education and ‘limited priority’ for interfaith programs (Erebus, 2006:108). Rossiter (2001:np) also highlighted professional development as an obstacle, noting that limited training budgets mean there is ‘no career path for a government school teacher who might be interested in teaching religion’. One teacher interviewed in my survey, claimed that training in religion studies is ‘inadequate in the extreme’. Rymarz (2006) also pointed out that a teacher cannot specialise in Religion as they can in History or Science. He noted that within faith schools, most teachers are untrained in the specific subject of religion but are expected to teach ‘not only their own tradition, but other cultural traditions’ (2006:153). The assumption, that religion is a matter of faith, not education, carries into the public sector. When translated into professional practice, de Souza (cited in Rymarz, 2006:153) acknowledged that this assumption ‘may produce less than desirable results’.

In Summary: As a nation, Australia does not express a clear position on religion in education. There is little analysis of the arguments that link comparative religion education to social cohesion, or CRK to CDC. This situation is compounded by the polarised nature of the discussion, which is also confused by some long-standing misrepresentation of terms and a lack of teacher training. For this situation to move beyond the status quo, for CRK and CDC to be allowed to have an association, religion education’s *raison d’être* in Australia may need to be reassessed. Policy-makers may need to look elsewhere for an adaptable approach.

Some international comparisons

The challenge to provide educational strategies that recognise religious, philosophical and cultural diversity is being managed differently in western democracies. Australia’s uptake of comparative religion education lags behind other nations (Rossiter, 2001). In Britain, it is a compulsory subject up to the age of 16. In Australia, few schools offer it as an elective and only in senior school. The following section briefly reviews how Britain, France and the United States are discussing and implementing secular comparative religion education.

The British Church-State develops pluralist religion education

The Church of England still has significant input into school curriculum design and delivery and maintains a Christian focus reflecting the population’s Christian majority. However,

growing cultural and religious diversity in the 1960s, along with Ninian Smart's efforts to teach different traditions, led to the 1975 development of the *Birmingham Agreed Syllabus*. This focused on the critical understanding of religions in the context of secular ideologies, including humanism and communism (Buchanan, 2005). This multi-faith approach to religion education in British state schools has been a 'persistent point of reference to the definition of religious education in multicultural societies worldwide' (McGrady, 2006:854). British leadership in this field was recognised by Lovat (2002) who noted that this leadership is maintained through academic and political commitment to research and development.

In 1988 the British Education Reform Act made world religions education compulsory for all children in state schools until the age of 16. This Act noted that religion education must be 'balanced and broadly based, promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils... and specifically prohibited indoctrinatory teaching' (Jackson & O'Grady, 2007:184). Oxford University's professor of religious education, Terence Copley, espoused this compulsory education, saying: 'There is no legal, moral or educational right to exclude (religion education) from children's school experience... If it is education not indoctrination, there should be no right of withdrawal' (Neumark, 2007:1).

Religion education in Britain is growing. Oxford University has re-opened its religion education unit after a 27-year hiatus and now offers a religion education post-graduate certificate. In 2006, applications for places increased by 17 percent (Ofsted, 2007:23). Since the 1990s, many British universities and colleges have run specialist religion education teacher training courses.

Britain also plays a leading role in some Europe-wide research initiatives looking at the relationship of religion education to broader programs of values, civics and peace education. The British Office for Standards in Education report into religion education claimed that religion education 'contributes powerfully to pupils' personal development, their intellectual progress and their understanding of important aspects of community cohesion' (Ofsted, 2007:25). In Britain there are clear public statements linking religion education with the challenges of plurality. The relationships between religion education, citizenship and values

education are being explored and evaluated with disciplined pedagogies developing alongside debate. Even the French might acknowledge British leadership in this field.

Laic France explores pluralist religion education

As a nation, the French claim to have ‘invented a common public space where religion is excluded’ (Grenet, 2007:2) and to represent a ‘unique model of strict separation of state and church’ (Schreiner, 2006:864). This *laicite* is often translated as ‘secularism’ and throughout the 20th century, French politics reduced the importance of religious institutions by promoting non-religious ideologies such as secular humanism. Educators remained suspicious of any religious activity outside of the private sphere (Williame, 2007a:89).

During the 1990s this laic stance was challenged, ‘with some going so far as to propose the introduction of a dedicated subject of religious-historical education’ (Williame, 2007a:92). After the New York trade tower attacks, the French Education Minister acknowledged a need for school students to ‘acquire an understanding of the world’ (93) and commissioned a study into the teaching of religious facts. The report by philosopher Regis Debray (2002) proposed a shift from a ‘laicite of ignorance - in which religion does not concern us, to a laicite of understanding - where understanding becomes our duty’ (Williame, 2007a:93).

In a message sent to a national education seminar, the then French President, Jacques Chirac stressed the importance of knowledge for mutual respect. He said:

‘To strengthen understanding of religions, to improve the teaching on religious and related matters at our schools and universities, to follow the manifestations of faith in history, in arts, and in each culture, all these will reinforce the spirit of tolerance in our young fellow citizens and give them the basis to respect each other more fully’ (Williame, 2007a:100).

French *laicite* is now outwardly engaged and recognises that ‘religions are too important a social factor to allow them to be monopolised by clergy’ (Williame, 2007a:95). France has since established a European Institute for the Study of Religion and introduced compulsory units on philosophy and religion for *all* trainee teachers. Reactions from both militant laicals and religious conservatives have been downplayed and outweighed by the argument that religion education contributes to social cohesion and effective citizenship.

Ambiguous America debates pluralist religion education

America (like France) provides a constitutional basis for what Thomas Jefferson called the 'wall of separation between Church and State' (Schreiner, 2006:865). The public education movement of the 20th Century gradually characterised religious teaching in public schools as illegal (Miedema, 2006:968). First Amendment clauses covering 'no establishment' and 'free exercise' have been interpreted by the US Supreme Court to imply that no religious education is allowed in US public schools (Schreiner, 2006). Public prayer and bible readings are outlawed and most states are prohibited from financing religious schools.

Renewed debate has questioned this strict exclusion (Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003). The 2000 American Assembly (2000:5) acknowledged that religious ignorance is a key contributing factor to social division and that 'age-appropriate study about religion should be a part of all public and private elementary, secondary and university education'. More recent debate over faith-based welfare and the teaching of Christian-based intelligent design in science classes (Baker & Slevin, 2005) highlights the ambiguity present in the US which leads to both confusion and intensified discussion.

Such confusion was acknowledged by the US Department of Education (1995:1) in a *Statement of Current Law on Religion in Public Schools* which noted that some saw the law as 'so murky that school officials cannot know what is legally permissible'. In his essay arguing for a new model for religion education, Haynes (2000:8) noted that:

Educators are unclear and confused about the place of religion in schools... districts have few or no policies concerning religion... school administrators are reluctant to address the underlying problems... and this avoidance is precisely what causes conflicts and lawsuits - whether because religion is being ignored or because it is being improperly promoted.

Haynes discussed the confusion of the religionist-secularist polemic and defended the educator 'caught in the crossfire of critics from the right and the left' (8). He noted that as a result of fear of controversy 'many educators and textbook publishers have avoided religion as much as possible' (8). Haynes regarded both ends of this polemical spectrum as being 'unjust, and, in some cases, unconstitutional'. He argued that the lack of religion education is

creating an illiterate, culturally bereft generation, ill-equipped to counter the move towards religious fundamentalism.

Discussion and debate on the issue in the US is constant, with local and state examples held up for national media scrutiny. In America, as in many modern democracies, religious plurality is an important social issue, especially given the challenge of its 'melting pot' national identity. Trinitapoli (2007) claimed that it is the exclusivist approaches to religious truth claims that give rise to the 'problem of pluralism'. I would argue, alongside Haynes, that it is a *lack* of pluralism, a lack of comfort and confidence with difference and a resultant lack of dialogue between the vocal polemicists that leaves religion little room to re-establish itself on an educational foundation. As in Australia, the problem is not pluralism but polemics.

Chapter Summary

Social trends provide the context for religion education and children's attitudes to cultural diversity. This context influences the possibilities for the establishment of and research into the link between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. The rejection of plurality and multiculturalism was explored and the impact of this rejection on Australia's values education program was considered. While Australia avoids polemical discourse about religion education, some other nations view comparative religion education as a potential tool for building democratic citizenship. The link between CRK and CDC may appear differently dependent on time and place. Chapter Four will detail a research survey that examines this link in several high schools in Australia.

Chapter 4.

Research Survey

This study involves a survey of Year 11 *Studies of Religion* students to examine the relationship between their knowledge of world religions and their attitudes towards religious and cultural diversity. The survey aims to discover the relationship between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. This chapter details: the survey methodology, qualitative factors that influenced the quantitative analysis and the strategies applied to make both the data and the descriptions meaningful. It highlights some limitations of the research design and discusses the findings in relation to the literature review.

Method

Quantitative research is usually linked to the modernist idea that objective facts may be measured. Its positivist methods aim to determine ‘what’ is happening and are deductive and definitive. Qualitative research is associated with the postmodernist idea that knowledge is created through experience. Its open-ended methods explore ‘why’ something might be happening and are inductive and inconclusive. Casebeer & Verhoef (1997:1) noted that rather than defending a particular paradigm, it is ‘more instructive to see qualitative and quantitative methods as part of a continuum of research techniques, all of which are appropriate’.

Guba & Lincoln (1989) acknowledged that even within a single paradigm, there are multiple combinations of methods and approaches to analysis. Tashakkori and Teddlie (cited in Niglas 2004:18) claimed that ‘mixed methods designs will be the dominant methodological tools in social and behavioural sciences during the 21st century’. This type of evaluation is occurring within education. An analysis of studies published in the *British Educational Research Journal* found that more than one third combined qualitative and quantitative methods (Niglas, 2004).

Davie (2007:112) stressed the importance of interdisciplinary research and complementary methodologies. She noted that:

There are times when a sociologist of religion must go with a hunch, searching for innovative sources of data to support an idea that is difficult to substantiate... (and that)

the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enable the researcher to build up as complete a picture as possible.

Given the complex, interdisciplinary nature of my topic, this research combines:

- i. a quantitative before-and-after **student survey**
- ii. a qualitative, before-and-after semi-structured student **discussion observation** and
- iii. a qualitative **teacher interview and school demographics survey** - comprised of multiple semi-structured interviews, two in-class observations and a paper survey.

The observations provided a contextual picture of Year 11 *Studies of Religion* in four Australian classrooms. The quantitative data tells a story that sits within this qualitative context. This methodological combination takes a generally positivist approach but also allows for the influence of qualitative factors and issues that emerged during the survey process. It is an attempt to look at both ‘what’ and ‘why’ in an exploration of the relationship between CRK and CDC. It allows flexibility in the process of gathering information about the students, their schools and teachers – all of which may influence levels of Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability and the link between the two.

Limitations and strategies

With a view to future studies, this survey should be considered a pilot. The scope of this survey was limited due to the time constraints and requirements of the school environment. It has several design inadequacies that need to be highlighted. Due to the specialisation of the SOR subject and the fact that few schools offer it, a selective sampling method was used. This and the small sample size limits quantitative analysis of the data and the ability to generalise findings. There is also: a large gender bias; a limited period of exposure to the *Studies of Religion* course; and the risk of developing and using new instruments, specifically for the purpose of measuring Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. I have attempted to address these limitations by referring to well-established sources to develop and adapt instruments; by consulting social science experts and statisticians to ensure the validity of my approach to the data, and by undertaking a broad, interdisciplinary literature review to guide my thinking. Other survey design limitations and my strategies to address

them will be identified throughout this chapter. One such issue is the potential difference between schools in relation to the content covered during the testing period.

Testing Period

The before-and-after student survey is designed to measure both CRK and CDC at two points in the 2007 school year (May and September). The Year 11 *Studies of Religion* (SOR) course functions as the critical action component. The four month testing period covers most of two semesters. Longer studies would be required to assess the potential impact of longer exposure to the SOR course.

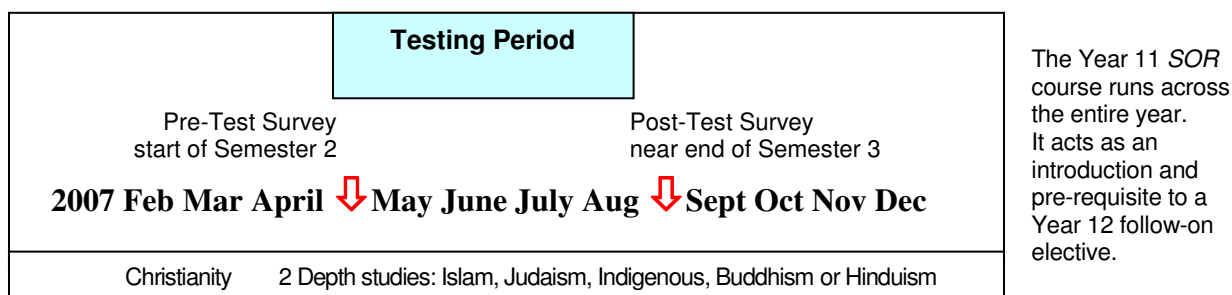


Figure 3. Testing period and topics.

Course content comparison

To compare students in different schools across two states, it is important to review whether the content of the material studied in the testing period offers the same potential for exposure to religious otherness to all students. Each school manages its curriculum and timetable differently. Some schools cover Australian Aboriginal and Christian history in depth in semester one and then offer only two other traditions. Other schools cover a wider range of traditions in less depth and in a different order. However, during the testing period, all students in both NSW and Queensland are required to undertake in-depth studies in at least two of the following: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and tribal/indigenous religions including Australian Aboriginal spirituality.

During the first semester of the course (from February to April), religion as a theological and social concept is covered, along with one religion in detail. All of the surveyed schools chose Christianity. The testing period (May to September), covering semester two and most of

semester three, exposes the students to at least two additional world religions. Surveyed schools use the same principal text books: *Living Religion* (2nd ed), Morrisey et al., 2001; and *Finding a Way* (2nd ed), Crotty et al., 2003.

Prior to the pre-test most of the students had not undertaken any study of a religion, though most had experience of Christian formational instruction in either the private or public school settings. Ninety-four percent of the pre-test survey respondents described themselves as either 'Christian' or having 'no religion'. Within the context of the SOR course, students' exposure to the religiously other definitely took place in the testing period. As noted in Chapter One, the efficacy of what is studied depends on how it is studied. This pedagogical aspect of the study is difficult to compare across schools since it may depend on differences between the ideologies and levels of training of individual teachers as well as their commitment to a particular religion and their own perspective of the relationship between CRK and CDC. In addition, the pre-disposition of the students who enrol in religion studies as well as socio-economic factors cannot be ignored. This issue highlighted the need for a qualitative component in the research.

Student Survey Sample

The **experimental group** is a selective sample of 73 Year 11 students undertaking the *Studies of Religion* course in NSW and Queensland. These schools were chosen on the recommendation of a Queensland University religion education specialist and due to the interest and availability of an SOR teacher to assist in the survey process. In NSW, both schools surveyed were state coeducational schools. Since there are no public schools delivering SOR in Queensland, the study draws on students in independent and faith-based girl's schools delivering the state accredited Queensland Studies Authority course.

A **control group** of 44 Year 11 students, not taking the religion course, in three of the same schools (one NSW public school and two Queensland faith schools) were surveyed to compare change in Cultural Diversity Capability with the SOR students. These students were drawn from a range of non-religion classes including economics, business studies and history.

The choice of control class subjects, co-ordinated by the religion teacher, was limited due to timetable constraints. Comparative Religion Knowledge of the control group was not assessed. It would be preferable in future studies to draw control students from non-arts subjects and to also measure their Comparative Religion Knowledge.

The pre-test survey originally included 123 respondents. Nine cases were removed due to one of the following reasons: absence for the post-test, discovery that a control student was also in a different religion class or conflicting pre and post test demographic data.

Student Survey Development

Each student survey comprised a Religion Quiz (Appendices A1 - May and A2 - September) and a Diversity Questionnaire (Appendix B). The complete survey was designed to be completed in less than 20 minutes in a single religion or control group class.

Religion Quiz Development

A draft Religion Quiz was constructed with reference to the following:

- i. New South Wales Board of Studies *Studies of Religion* Stage 6 Syllabus April, 2005;
- ii. New South Wales Higher School Certificate Examination, 2006;
- iii. New South Wales Board of Studies online testing website,
www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au;
- iv. Queensland Studies Authority *Study of Religion* Senior Syllabus, 2001.
- v. Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Certificate of Education, Religion and Society Exam, 2006.

The 10-question quiz aimed to assess students' Comparative Religion Knowledge by asking both informational and conceptual religion questions in multiple traditions. It included questions on theology, scriptures, Australian Aboriginal and Christian history and world religion figures, beliefs and symbols. CRK was assessed with a score out of 10. This empirical measure of informational knowledge does not allow for differences in levels of religion literacy which would require more reflexive questioning and more sophisticated analysis. However, this somewhat crude instrument provides comparable benchmark figures that may be useful for follow-up studies.

Cultural Diversity Capability Scale Development

Three steps were taken in the CDC scale development. The first was a review of literature on cultural capacity, social tolerance and democratic citizenship to find an adaptable attitudes measurement instrument. A social cohesion index for Australia is being developed and tested by Monash University but is yet to be formalised. Scales to measure racial and cultural tolerance have been used in several fields however none of these instruments were appropriate for direct use in the Australian secondary classroom. Consequently, this study involved the design of a scale to measure the Cultural Diversity Capability of 15 to 17 year olds undertaking the secular *Study of Religion* course.

Step two was the development of a draft Diversity Questionnaire designed to measure the degree of Cultural Diversity Capability of Year 11 students. The questionnaire was constructed with reference to: Malone's (1994) attitude study; the Modesto study (Lester & Roberts, 2006); a range of prejudice and discrimination studies (Oskamp, 2000); Simon Baron-Cohen's (2003a, 2003b and Wakabayashi & Baron-Cohen et al., 2006) Systemising Empathy Quotient and the following frameworks:

- i. The first three articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948)
- ii. The Brussels Declaration on Dignity, Equality and Freedom (European Parliament, 2006)
- iii. The UNESCO Peace Keys (UNESCO, 2000) with particular reference to the key for the rediscovery of solidarity which aims to: 'Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others'
- iv. The Australian National Framework for Values Education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005)

The CDC scale: comprises 31 questions linking eight broad areas of Cultural Diversity Capability: in this study, CDC is measured using the following variables: perceived relationship between religion and values; commitment to ethical principals; active tolerance of diversity; tendency to stereotype or act with prejudice; confidence with uncertainty; understanding of religion as a comparable cultural phenomena; level of empathy and degree

of commitment to human rights. While this is a broad range of issues, their interconnectedness – as discussed in Chapter One - makes a defensible argument for looking at them in relationship. CDC was scored as a mean on a 5-point Likert scale allowing the following responses: strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree or strongly disagree. The third step in the CDC scale development was its review and testing.

Survey Review and Testing

The draft Religion Quiz was reviewed by religion teachers and values education specialists for: appropriateness of language, degree of difficulty of concepts; applicability of the quiz content to the curriculum planned for the testing period and estimated time to complete. Four of the Religion Quiz questions were repeated from the Pre-Test (May) survey in the Post Test (September) survey. The draft Diversity Questionnaire was reviewed by social science and culture studies academics and an experienced social researcher to ensure clarity of purpose. The CDC scale was tested to determine its reliability and was found to have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8029. This means that the scale provides a reliable measure of a unified underlying principal - Cultural Diversity Capability.

The complete survey, including both the Religion Quiz and the Diversity Questionnaire, was pilot-tested on 22 final year students in a University of Queensland Diploma of Education religion teaching class. These older students have elected religion as a specialty subject and will be teaching the SOR course in schools. The pilot survey was useful in fine-tuning question clarity and to compare summary data with a different age group.

Situational Differences in survey distribution

All pre test surveys (except the distance education school) were distributed and collected on the scheduled day when I was present in the classroom. Post test survey distribution varied between schools. The Catholic school had a change of teacher mid year and the second survey for that school was distributed in a non-classroom (library) setting where students were less focused on the survey. Three Sydney (IWS) students and three Brisbane Suburbs (UGBS) students were absent for the post test but completed the surveys in the same week, which were

then posted by the teacher. All contact with the regional NSW distance education students was via email, fax and postal arrangements through their teacher. To enable data tracking, students marked the surveys with an identifying code made up of their initials and birth date.

Student Discussion Observation

Pre Test Discussion: For the pre test, the teacher facilitated an in-class discussion once the survey was complete. The informal 10-15 minute discussion was structured differently by each teacher, some incorporating it into curriculum lessons. This semi-structured activity elicited expressions of attitudes towards religious difference as a response to a concrete example of confronting and managing cultural diversity. This provided additional insight into student attitudes. Each teacher chose one or more of the following and asked the students how they felt and what they might do in this situation:

1. The Council has received a development application for the building of a mosque on the vacant block in the same street as this school;
2. A group of refugees from the Sudan has applied for permanent citizenship and their application includes establishing a transition accommodation house in our town;
3. The Hindu Council of Australia has had their application approved to establish an independent Hindu school in our town;
4. Is there a particular group that poses a threat to the Australian way of life?
(This discussion option was chosen by the teacher of the Sydney class with the justification that most students encounter religious diversity in their daily lives.)

Some classes discussed only one of the scenarios. Notably different was the enthusiastic approach taken by the teacher of the Independent Brisbane City Girls' school. She broke the class into small groups to discuss all of the first three of the listed situations and provided discussion guide prompt sheets.

Post Test Discussion: After the post test survey was complete, I asked students about their perceptions of the value of the *Studies of Religion* course and whether they felt it had contributed to any change in their own attitudes and assumptions. As mentioned, many of the students had taken formational 'RE' or 'SRE' classes (in both the public and private schools).

They were also asked how SOR compares to such formational classes and if SOR should be extended into junior grades or made compulsory.

Teacher Survey

A qualitative draft **Teacher Survey** (Appendix C) was developed and reviewed by practising teachers and education specialists. The final version was distributed to SOR teachers participating in this study. This survey was designed to gather school demographics, to ascertain teachers' perceptions of community support for the SOR course and to document their educational approaches. In addition, I interviewed participating teacher's and observed them in class at both pre and post test times and several phone and email conversations took place with teacher during the four months of the testing period.

Ethical Considerations

As part of planning and securing ethical permission, school kits containing information briefs and consent letters were sent to all schools. These kits noted that the anonymity and confidentiality of students would be respected since no participant would be identified via the research instruments. Informed consent was obtained from parents, teachers and students, with participants informed of the voluntary nature of the survey. I obtained a Blue Card³ to ensure the legislated child safety precautions of external agents entering schools. Approval to conduct the research was given by the University of Queensland Human Ethics Committee (Appendix D) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (Appendix E).

Data Analysis: Pre Test qualitative differences between schools

While conducting the pre-test survey, qualitative differences between the schools, teachers' approaches and student behaviours and expressed opinions were observed. These differences, described below in the present tense, may influence the potential of the SOR course to effect student's attitudes. For confidentiality reasons, the schools are (re)named using denominational and geographical indicators. Many of the students indicated an English, Irish

³ Possession of a Blue Card is a legal requirement to work in voluntary or paid employment with children. It is a positive notification from the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People.

or white Australian ethnic heritage. For the purpose of this study, I use the term 'Anglo-Celtic' for this majority group.

Independent Girls Brisbane City (IGBC)

Past the white picket fence and stone church near its entry, IGBC's air-conditioned foyer contains glass-cased trophies and objects d'art. The school promotes individual achievement rather than any religious ideology. Its very high computer-to-student and office-to-teacher ratios reflect the \$12,970 annual fee. The teacher: female; young; enthusiastic; 'somewhat religious'; well prepared for classes and tertiary trained in religion education, believes the SOR course 'can engage critical thinking'. SOR student numbers increased in 2007 though the school does not promote the subject. Her students are blasé and not academically focused. Many elect it as a 'bludge'. 66 percent are of Anglo-Celtic and 52 percent are Christian.

Catholic Girls Brisbane Inner Suburbs (CGBIS)

Sitting on an inner suburban bus route, CGBIS is clean and quiet - for a school. Its buildings seem tightly packed. The school charter emphasises strict discipline and social engagement. Student access to computers is reasonable, matching the \$4800 annual fee. The teacher: male, over 55, 'very religious' and not tertiary trained in world religions, sees 'value in intellectual understanding of faith'. The school promotes the SOR subject but numbers were steady for 2007. He has an office and computer. The students, very disciplined, perceive SOR as highly academic. 73 percent are Anglo-Celtic and 80 percent Christian.

Uniting Girls Brisbane Outer Suburban (UGBOS)

The drive to UGBOS is semi rural, making the school seem like a community unto itself. It has a strong Christian charter and encourages social engagement. High \$9000 annual fees give students high levels of access to computers and other resources. The teacher: male, over 60, grandfatherly, tertiary trained in world religions and 'very religious' is enthusiastic about the potential of SOR to 'develop critical research skills'. Numbers for the school-promoted subject of SOR increased by 70 percent in 2007. His teaching room office has a computer.

Reflecting the school atmosphere and teacher relationship, the students are friendly and perceive SOR as mildly academic. They are 73 percent Anglo-Celtic and 63 percent Christian.

Public Co-ed Sydney Inner-West (IWS)

IWS is dark brick. The poorly lit administration office is lined with DIY shelving, stacked with school trophies. Korean boys play handball in the cement inner courtyard. On the wall behind them is the Australian Values poster. Low fees of \$110 provide a low level of access to computers and four teachers share an office and a single, 'frequently broken' computer. The teacher: male; over 50; 'not at all religious', not tertiary trained in world religions, feels a lack of school and departmental support for the subject although student numbers increased in 2007. He is enthusiastic about the 'potential of SOR to engage students in ethical issues'. His students (mostly boys): perceive the subject as moderately academic and have friends of different religions. 50 percent speak a language other than English and this school had the highest non-Australian born students. 28 percent are Anglo-Celtic and 59 percent Christian.

Public Co-ed Regional NSW Distance Ed (RD)

The RD school is in a region of medium socio-economic ranking according to the 2001 ABS Socio-Economic Index (ABS, 2001). The school website contains a values statement that claims a respect for diversity. Very low \$95 fees provide very limited access to resources. Several teachers share a single office and one computer and students access computers in either the library or one of three classrooms shared across the school. Despite no school promotion of SOR, only offered via distance education, numbers doubled in 2007. The teacher: female; over 50; 'very religious'; and tertiary trained in Christian religion education sometimes relies on administrative support to remotely communicate with the students. She is enthusiastic subject's potential to teach students about the 'reality of the multicultural world'. The students have very little experience of ethnic diversity. They are 84 percent Anglo-Celtic and 59 percent Christian.

Pre-Test Student Discussion Observations

All experimental religion students (except those in the distance education school) participated in informal discussions. Initially semi-structured, the discussion was also free-flowing and covered a variety of issues. There was a notable difference between the pre and post surveys in students' expressed attitudes to religious and cultural difference and also to the relevance of the SOR course in their lives. Most students were indifferent to the value and relevance of the SOR course at the pre test stage with many claiming their subject selection was based on the fact that SOR gets a free period. All pre test discussions displayed the full range of opinion that was reflected in the surveys. However, there appeared to be notable differences between the attitudes of the Brisbane private girls' school students and the Sydney public co-educational school students. The following observations provide the context for the collection of empirical data.

Brisbane Girls Schools: IGBC, CGBIS & UGBOS

The ethnic and religious mix of the Brisbane schools was largely homogeneous: mostly Anglo, Christian, born in Australia and with limited non-english speaking backgrounds. These students have a low exposure to people of non-Christian faiths. Very few have friends in or experience of non-Christian cultures or sub groups. Their expressions about different religions focused strongly on 'them and us' differences. Emotional responses were largely based on: fear for the security of themselves and their community; fear of a possible enforced or too-tolerant pluralism; anger at racial and cultural tension and frustration at their own and their parents' perceived lack of knowledge about the religiously other. For example:

People are accused of racism because they don't know other cultures. I don't know how to not be a racist because I don't know anything about them;

Everyone around me is white and Christian - how am I supposed to know anything about Muslims?

I wouldn't have a problem with a mosque being built here, but my mum would be a total freak. No way.

Some students showed enthusiasm for the principle of freedom of religious expression and for the opportunity to make friends of a different religion or culture. Some also expressed a sense of missed opportunity to learn about others due to having lived in a culturally exclusive world. This desire for interaction was particularly noted in the discussion regarding Hinduism, where the opportunity for positive co-existence was preferred over a separate Hindu school.

The slight majority of comments in the private girls' schools were negative towards Muslims. Often this negativity was linked to race rather than religion. In the case of the Sudanese housing discussion, race featured as the significant factor with little or no awareness of a potential religious difference. The way some Brisbane students reflected the representation of Islam seemed unified and simplistic. For example, the following selection of comments came from each of the Brisbane private girls schools:

*I don't know anything about what Arabs do. With all that stuff on TV... it's scary;
It's Muslims doing all the violence. They might harm girls passing by;
They judge you as being immoral if you don't have a veil on.*

However some students in the Brisbane schools acknowledged a 'wide scope for interpretation of Islam - positive and negative' and that 'stereotypes are the problem - terrorism doesn't represent Muslims'. Some also showed the capacity for reversing roles when considering the building of a mosque near their own school. Their comments included:

*How do they feel if a church is built in their country?
We don't have a right to have a reaction to (the mosque), no-one approved the church,
we just built it.*

One Catholic girl noted that: 'We aren't even ok with different Christian denominations - how long will it take for us to get a grip of a whole different religion?'

Sydney co-educational public school students: IWS

In contrast, most of the Sydney students knew people of non-Christian faiths, had friends who were not Christian and 50 percent were of non-english speaking background. Some of their statements regarding the freedom of expression of religion appeared to carry personal conviction. Their discussion seemed more focused on current events and the management of

similar issues (such as abortion, sexuality and environmental ethics) across traditions.

Responses were generally more insightful regarding Australia's diversity and the complexity of its religions and fears were more specifically expressed. For example:

Every religion has its fundamentalists and some fundamentalists aren't religious – they're political;

I wouldn't want to have sharia law.

Representation appeared to be more complex and individualised by Sydney students with a clear distinction made between religion and race shown by the following: 'I can tell the difference between Muslim Lebbo's and Christian Lebbo's by the way they act and dress'.

The first responses to the question 'Is any group a threat to the Australian way of life?' were:

Christians are a threat - they make people believe stuff they don't want to;

The first terrorists were Jewish, blowing up the Brits in the 1940s, then the Irish.

Rather than focusing fear or anger at a particular religious group, students articulated non-religion specific factors as a threat. For example, the following ironic statement: 'Any religion who wants to impose itself by violent means should be strung up'. When discussing the wearing of the Muslim veil, one Sydney student clearly favoured tolerance, saying that: 'If it doesn't affect you, why care about what someone else is wearing?'

Quantitative Data Analysis

Student survey responses were entered into a software package (SPSS v14) for analysis.

Comparative Religion Knowledge was given a single score out of 10 using the Religion Quiz.

Cultural Diversity Capability was given a mean score on the Likert scale of 1 to 5. Questions

were coded according to the alignment of the question statement. My original focus was on

the combined all-schools quantitative data for CRK and CDC. However, in the course of

analysing the CRK-CDC relationship, an anomaly emerged. It appeared that while some

schools indicated a positive relationship between CRK and CDC, other schools indicated nil

or even negative correlations. The combined dataset obscured the variance between schools.

Consequently, an additional method of CDC measurement was designed wherein each of the

31 questions were marked 2, 1, 0, -1 or -2 according to the question alignment, giving CDC a possible score of 62. The caveat for including this extra method is that sample sizes are not large enough for statistical significance. However, this measurement enabled a closer look at the CRK-CDC relationship within different schools.

Section 1. Major Findings

Comparative Religion Knowledge: As would be expected from completing a section of course curriculum, all schools showed a significant improvement from pre test to post test levels of Comparative Religion Knowledge. Combined mean CRK scores improved from 3.48 to 6.62 out of 10. Importantly, this improvement varied between schools. For example, Independent Brisbane City Girls showed an increase in CRK of 133 percent while the Catholic Brisbane City Girls, the highest scoring on the pre test, improved CRK scores by 40 percent. Differences may be due to prior knowledge.

Cultural Diversity Capability: The pre and post test CDC comparison, while not conclusive, showed some support for my hypothesis linking the *Studies of Religion* program to an effect on students' attitudes to diversity. As noted, socio-economic, gender, religiosity, diversity exposure, positive contact opportunities and pedagogical factors may also influence the degree of this effect and the nature of the relationship between CRK and CDC.

CDC Starting Point: To measure change in one group compared to another, it is important to establish their initial similarity. The CDC mean for the non-religion control versus the religion experimental students showed no significant difference between the groups at the pre-test stage, indicating an appropriate sample for the study. Levene's Independent Samples T-Test (Table 1) revealed a p value of 0.0941. Significance requires a p value of less than 0.05.

Table 1: Experimental and Control Group Pre-Test CDC comparisons

Student Group	N	CDC Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre-test experimental group (Studies of Religion students)	73	3.8340	.34791	.04072
Pre-test control group (non SOR students)	43	3.6934	.47319	.07216
		p=0.09 ... no significant difference		

CDC Finishing Point: The same CDC mean measure, comparing control and experimental groups at the post test stage showed a significant difference between the groups. Levene’s Independent Samples T-Test (Table 2) revealed a significant p value of 0.0401.

Table 2: Experimental and Control Group Post-Test CDC comparisons

Student Group	N	CDC Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Post-test experimental group (Studies of Religion students)	73	3.9125	.38196	.04470
Post-test control group (non SOR students)	43	3.7200	.52744	.08043
		p=0.0401 ... ✓ significant difference		

CDC Odd Point: Curiously, while there is a difference between the pre test and post test CDC means for the SOR students, it is not statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3: Experimental Group Pre and Post-Test CDC comparisons

Student Group	N	CDC Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre-test experimental group (Studies of Religion students)	73	3.8340	.34791	.04072
Post-test experimental group (Studies of Religion students)	73	3.9125	.38196	.04470
		p=0.1962 ... no significant difference		

Figure 4 may better illustrate this odd point. It shows that the CDC differences between the groups changed significantly from pre-test to post test. However, the differences between the time points for both experimental and control groups were not significant.

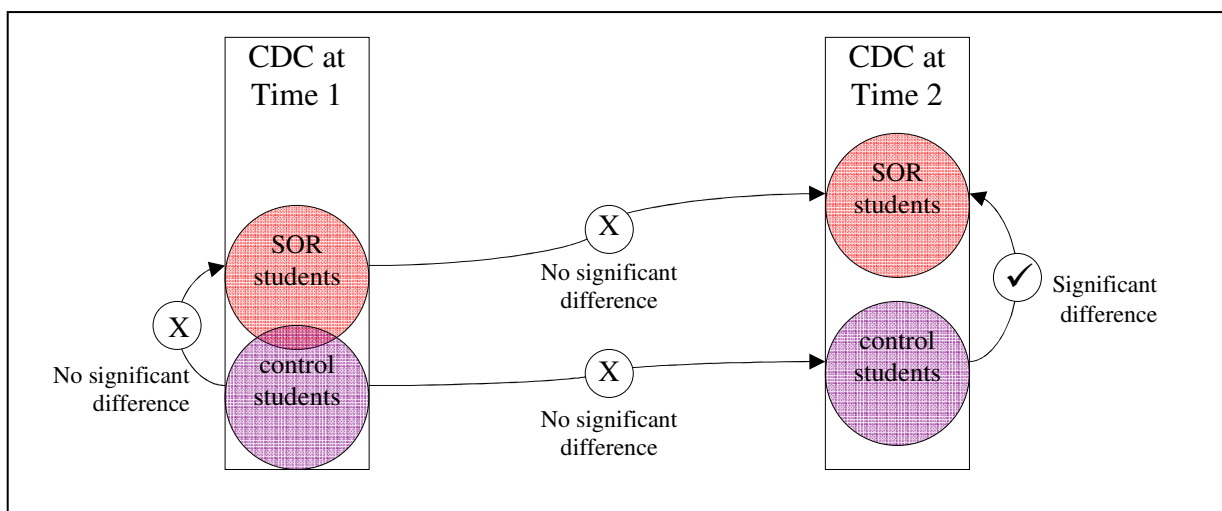


Figure 4: CDC mean comparisons for pre and post tests for both experimental and control groups.

This anomaly and lack of statistical significance may be a function of the small sample size. However it does not provide a view of the differences in CDC changes between the schools.

Change in CDC of SOR students: differences in CRK-CDC relationship between schools

The schools showed different relationships between CRK and CDC, perhaps supporting Jackson and O’Grady’s (2007) claim that religion education’s potential as an attitudinal change tool is dependent on pedagogy. As mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, socio-economic and other qualitative factors as well as social mood may also influence this relationship. Three of the schools showed a positive change in religion students’ CDC mean scores. One showed no change and one showed a negative result. To explore these differences in more detail, it is appropriate to review the results from the additional Cultural Diversity Capability measure. As mentioned, this measure used a percentage of a possible CDC score out of 62. Combined total averages improved from 42.5 percent at pre-test stage to 46.6 percent at post test stage.

The following figures (Table 4) are presented with the caveat that sample sizes are too small for statistical relevance but that the insights gained by analysis of qualitative differences between the schools may be useful.

Table 4: Pre and Post-Test CRK and CDC (possible score) percentage increase comparisons

School	CRK increase %	CDC (possible score) increase %
Independent Girls Brisbane City (IGBC)	133	29.75
Catholic Girls Brisbane Inner Suburbs (CGBIS)	40	15.70
Uniting Girls Brisbane Outer Suburban (UGBOS)	66	3.48
Public Co-ed Sydney Inner-West (IWS)	100	0.00
Public Co-ed Regional NSW Distance Ed (RD)	75	-15.88

Table 5 shows inter-school differences in the CRK-CDC relationship. Additional details are contained in a Summary Results Table 6 (see Appendix F). The differences, possibly related to qualitative differences observed at the school, may be summarised as follows:

IGBC: had the lowest pre-test CDC scores which may have resulted in the highest relative increase. IGBC showed a strong relationship, more than doubling its CRK and increasing average CDC by nearly 30 percent. With the greatest positive CRK-CDC relationship, this school differed in several ways including: greatest access to wealth and resources; teacher’s enthusiasm for the potential of the subject to effect attitudinal change; teacher’s willingness to adapt course content to the ethnic make up of the class; lack of a defining religious or secular

values ideology; the lowest percentage of students who claimed 'Christian' as their religion and the lowest percentage of students who labelled themselves 'very religious'. In addition, the teacher, trained in world religions, considered herself only 'somewhat religious', possibly removing bias in pedagogical approach.

CGBIS: Most of the Catholic school students had taken other RE courses and had prior religion knowledge. They had the highest pre-test CRK scores and high CDC scores which may explain their smaller relative increases on the post test. In addition, their teacher changed mid year and the post test was delivered in less than ideal circumstances, possibly explaining the smaller improvement on both the knowledge and attitude components.

UGBOS: Reflecting their friendly and socially engaged school atmosphere and the positive teacher relationship, students at UGBOS had among the highest CDC scores in the pre-test, giving little room for CDC improvement in the post test in which they maintained high scores.

IWS: doubled its CRK but showed no change in CDC. Considering the high ethnic diversity of the school and surrounding region, and the already high level of exposure to people of different faiths (most students had friends of different religions), the lack of change in Cultural Diversity Capability is not surprising. In addition, the gender skew in this group may have influenced the lack of change in CDC.

RD: increased CRK but showed a negative CDC result. Given the very small sample size, it is difficult to draw any conclusion, especially since this school showed the highest CDC figures. The pedagogy of distance education, in which the teacher's guidance is partly removed from the learning process, may be one reason for this backward shift. However, this school's teacher also noted a very low level of interaction between students and members of non-Christian faiths due to the fact that it is a regional school in a largely Anglo, Christian area. This lack of diversity in the region and the higher level of religiosity of the students and teacher may also have had an impact. Aboud and Levy (in Oskamp, 2000:272) highlight the importance of positive contact with out-group members for attitude change programs to be successful.

Issues of class and ethnicity, region, diversity exposure, gender, religiosity and pedagogy all appear to provide influencing factors on the CRK-CDC relationship. Summary demographics may be found in Table 7 (See Appendix F). The following sections will explore these factors in more detail.

Section 2. Additional factors in the CRK-CDC relationship

Increased knowledge and increased prejudice: Not only did CRK and CDC scores change from pre to post test but the relationship between the two concepts also changed. These results echo (Malone’s 1994) findings up to a point, indicating that stereotypes may be reinforced in a course that emphasises difference. In line with Malone’s (1994) research, it could be argued that the study of world religions may increase prejudice in students of lower academic focus. However, this negative relationship may be reversed in higher academic achievers.

The post test showed a clearer upward trend in CDC with increased CRK (See Figure 5). However both pre and post tests showed a drop in CDC once a certain level of CRK was obtained, supporting the adage that ‘a little knowledge is a dangerous thing’.

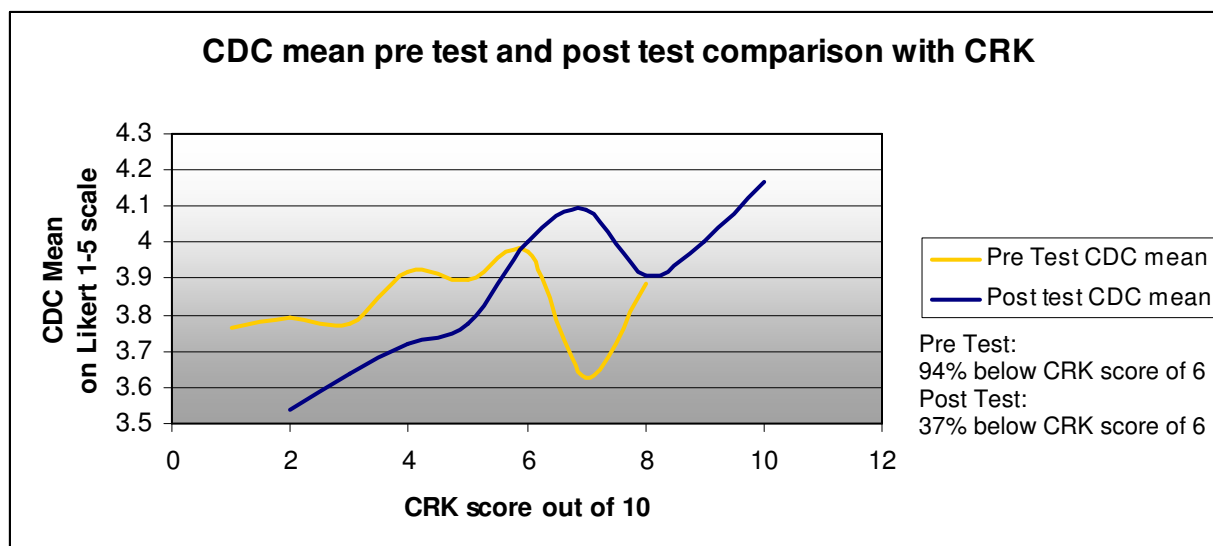


Figure 5: CDC mean pre test and post test comparison with CRK

None of the schools surveyed provide all of Allport’s (1954) conditional requirements of positive contact (outlined in Chapter One). Most teachers surveyed noted a lack of support for the SOR course, limited access to experts of different religious traditions and little opportunity for visits to external places of worship to meet faith members. This lack of

potential for dialogue and interaction was particularly noted for Hinduism and Aboriginal Spirituality. Most SOR students spend only one day of the year on excursion visits to mosques, synagogues or temples, and have only one assignment where they must research and attend a service of a religion, which can include Christian denominations. While the Sydney students have regular contact with religious others in their classrooms and communities, the most positive response for out-group contact occurred in the Independent Brisbane Girls City school who went on a mosque excursion in the days prior to the post test survey. The high level of resources at this school may increase such opportunities for positive contact.

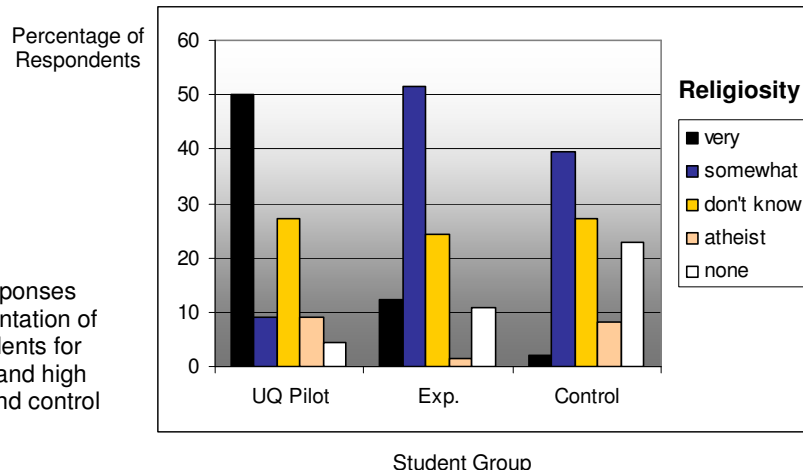
Religion, Religiosity and CDC: Religion response options were coded as ‘Christian’, ‘other’ or ‘none’. Combined experimental and control groups showed respondents were: Christian – 62 percent; no religion – 33 percent and ‘other’ religion – 5 percent (made up of 2 Muslims, 2 Buddhists and a ‘devil worshipper’). Significant differences were found in the pre test CDC means between each group but these differences became insignificant at the post test stage.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of religiosity with a question phrased as follows: ‘I am: very religious/spiritual; somewhat religious/spiritual; agnostic (don’t know); confirmed atheist (don’t believe in a God) or ‘not at all religious or spiritual’. A distinction between ‘atheist’ and ‘not religious or spiritual’ accommodated the philosophical perceptions of Buddhism and other world views that are considered religious/spiritual, but not deist. CDC mean scores did not vary greatly across religiosity options or between the pre and post test stage. However, average CRK did change from the pre test to post test when using religiosity as a variable. In the pre test, those who claimed to be ‘very religious/spiritual’ also scored the highest on the religion quiz. However, in the post test, the highest religion quiz scores were achieved by atheists and those claiming no religion. The religiosity of the control group did not change from pre to post test. However, the religiosity of the experimental group showed a decrease from 12.3 percent to 5.5 percent of those students claiming the ‘very religious/spiritual’ label.

Religiosity of the teacher: may have a bearing on whether SOR can be an effective program for the development of diversity capability. The University Pilot Group (training to be

religion teachers) had higher religiosity and declared Christianity levels than both the High School Experimental and Control Groups (see Figure 6). University students preparing to teach SOR in high schools may be more religious than current high school students which may prove challenging in the future.

Figure 6: Pre Test religiosity responses as a graphical representation of percentage of respondents for university pilot group, and high school experimental and control groups.



Section 3. Demographic effects on CDC and CRK scores

Due to the fact that attitudes develop in an extremely complex social milieu, and that there were differences in the CRK-CDC relationship between schools, it is necessary to look beyond CRK as a variable. CDC mean scores for pre and post tests were evaluated against the following variables: gender; birth-country; ethnicity; perception of the value of religion study to society and primary source of information about different religions. Findings for CDC mean score differences included: a significant gender difference and a lack of birth country or ethnicity impact. Results for these variables are outlined below. For summary demographics see Appendix F.

Gender Difference: A significant difference in CDC mean was found between girls and boys. This gender difference increased between the pre test ($p=0.041$) and post test ($p=0.038$).

Table 5: Gender and CDC Mean Pre and Post Test Comparisons

Gender	N	Pre-Test CDC Mean	Post-Test CDC Mean
male	22	3.5776	3.5861
female	94	3.8297	3.8976

Birth Country and Ethnicity: Birth country was defined as either ‘Australia’ or ‘other’, with 89 percent born here. Ethnicity percentages were: Anglo-Celtic – 60; European – 22; Asian – 9.5; Aboriginal/Pacific Islander – 3.5; Middle Eastern – 3; and other – 2 percent. Due to the potential for higher exposure to different cultures, it was expected that students born outside Australia would display a higher CDC. Birth Country showed a difference for CDC in both pre and post tests but these were not significant. However, this insignificance may have been due to the small number of those born outside Australia in the sample or the high proportion of this number being also from an Anglo-Christian heritage. NESB and ethnic background variables showed similar insignificance.

Perception of value of religion diversity: All students were asked to give one response to the following: Having people of different religions living closely in society is: ‘dangerous, since conflict is inevitable’; ‘harmful for those of faith’; ‘interesting but not particularly useful’ or ‘beneficial for understanding between people’. Most students thought that living with religious diversity was ‘beneficial’ to society, though the perception of this value was higher in the experimental group and increased from 67 percent at pre-test stage to 77 percent at post test stage. Not surprisingly, those choosing the ‘beneficial’ description of value had a higher CDC mean than those who chose ‘dangerous’ but the difference was not significant.

Primary source of religion information: At the pre-test stage, respondents listed their sources of information about different religions. Both the experimental and control groups listed ‘school’ as their primary source and ‘media’ as the second. Family and friends rated third. This indicates that both formal and informal learning in the school environment makes a significant contribution to the ability of young Australians to engage in discourse about religion and religious diversity. There were no significant differences found for CRK or CDC dependent on students’ information sources, however a larger study may reveal more connection in this area.

Post-Test Student Discussion Observations

The relevance and power of SOR

The pre-test attitude of indifference to the SOR course and its relevance changed to a much more positive appraisal at the post test time in all four discussion schools. Most students felt that the course had challenged their attitudes to religious and cultural difference and made them 'more understanding' and 'more tolerant'. Comments from each school include:

It wasn't just a bludge but really opened my eyes to stuff;

SOR helped me to understand how the media creates bias and confusion;

I used to say 'I don't get it' and just ignore something or bag it, but now I'm more curious instead of judging;

SOR has taught lots of skills that maths and science doesn't - like understanding how to research and being able to interview people and write up a report. I think it's a useful subject.

The difference between education and indoctrination

When asked about the differences between the comparative *Study of Religion* course and formational RE and SRE classes, students were generally dismissive of the comparison. The following comments are indicative:

SRE doesn't use real life experiences;

SRE is only useful for finding god – but that only lasts during the class;

Other religions should be allowed in scripture classes;

SOR actually makes you remember things. It's so different to SRE because we actually learn stuff;

SOR is not just about faith;

SOR doesn't shove it down your throat.

Making SOR compulsory

When asked whether SOR should be made compulsory or introduced into junior grades, students had mixed responses. Most of the private girls' schools students thought SOR should be a compulsory subject for senior school and also introduced as an elective at an earlier age. The Sydney public school students were very definite about keeping SOR an elective subject, but thought that it should be more strongly promoted.

How to make SOR better

Religion students were asked how learning about different religions could be better. 45 percent of responses focused on the desire for experience of the religion's context. Responses included: *Learning about different religions would be better if ...*

We could really try the feel of that religion;
We could experience the living religion for a day, what it's like to be part of the community
We could learn about real people – not just dry facts;
We could meditate more;
We covered all aspects of the religions rather than being bombarded with positive information and ignoring other dimensions.

The change in attitude that such experiences can generate is illustrated by one comment after a class visit to a local mosque where a Muslim community leader spoke.

He was so calm and he made jokes about Hungry Jacks and it was quiet and peaceful. I never expected.... I never thought they would, um.. be like that.

Another distinct response category was the desire for instruction from teachers of different traditions. 19 percent of responses called for access to tradition-expert instructors with many identifying the potential for bias with only one teacher.

In Summary

While the findings of this survey suggest a possible connection between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability, other factors were also present that confound this relationship. The survey indicates that the CRK-CDC connection is dependent on multiple variables. I have briefly explored the potential influence of: class; ethnicity; region; diversity exposure; gender; religiosity and pedagogy as factors on the CRK-CDC relationship.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Tolerance relies on many individual and social factors. While comparative religion education *may* enhance social cohesion, the relationship between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability is complex. Findings in my study indicate some effect of the *Study of Religion* course on Year 11 students' abilities to actively honour religious and cultural diversity. However this study also reinforces Jackson's argument that pedagogy plays an important role along with socio-economic and other demographic factors. Results from the small, selective sample used in this study do not provide a picture for the nation but may be useful as a guide in future research.

Such research might consider other issues in comparative religion education which may influence the relationship between CRK and CDC. This study raised some of these issues by questioning: Australia's social mood in relation to cultural diversity; the Australian understanding of church-state separation; special access rights for religious (particularly Christian) groups; levels of teacher training for formational and educational religion courses; and levels of religiosity of current and future teachers.

Australia's cultural and religious diversity provides a challenge to policy makers. The nation lags behind other western democracies in clearly articulating a position on religion education, preferring the development of values and citizenship programs which promote uniformity over diversity. As one student pointed out, 'Year 11 and 12 are like practice for stepping into the world... we'll need to be more understanding about different people and SOR helps that'. Such a pluralist vision assumes a function for religion education beyond purely cognitive learning. It assumes a connection between Comparative Religion Knowledge and Cultural Diversity Capability. While the development of interfaith and intercultural understanding is recognised as 'one of the foundations of social cohesion' (Erebus, 2006:2), the role of a broad-based study of religion in schools is yet to be effectively evaluated in Australia.

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Appendices

- A1 – Religion Quiz (May)
- A2 – Religion Quiz (September)
- B – Diversity Questionnaire (May and September)
- C – Teacher Survey
- D – Approval notice University of Queensland Human Ethics Committee
- E – Approval notice New South Wales Department of Education
- F – Summary Results and Summary Pre-Test Demographics

A1 – Religion Quiz (May)

A2 – Religion Quiz (September)

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Summary Results for CRK and CDC changes

TABLE 6: N= 117 (73 Experiment + 44 Control students)

BEFORE PreTest	Exp N=	CRK totals	CRK av		CDC totals	CDC av/62	CDC av%		Con N=	CDC av/62
IGBC	20	57	3		447	22.35	36		15	383
CGBIS	19	90	5		490	25.79	41.6			
UGBOS	11	31	3		344	31.27	50.4		17	454
IWS	17	51	3		393	23.12	37.3		12	180
RD	6	25	4		252	42.00	67.7			
117	73	254			1926				44	1017
TOTAL av %		34.8			42.5					37.3
AFTER PostTest	Exp N=	CRK totals	CRK av	CRK incr. %	CDC	CDC av/62	CDC av%	CDC incr. %	Con N=	CDC av/62
IGBC	20	148	7	133	580	29.00	47	29.75	15	409
CGBIS	19	135	7	40	567	29.84	48	15.70		
UGBOS	11	60	5	66	356	32.36	52.2	3.48	17	428
IWS	17	96	6	100	393	23.12	37.3	0.00	12	176
RD	6	44	7	75	212	35.33	57	-15.88		
117	73	483			2108				44	1013
TOTAL av %		66.2			46.6					37.1

Pre-Test Summary Demographics

TABLE 7: N= 145 (123 High School + 22 University Pilot students)

School	Exp. N=	Cont N=	Gender Female %	Ethnic Anglo %	Birth Country Aust. born %	NESB Speak only English %	Religion Christian %	Religiosity 'very' %	Value of religion diversity 'beneficial' %*
IGBC	20	15	100	66	86	94	52	2.8	58
CGBIS	19	0	100	73	95	90	80	15.8	79
UGBOS	11	17	100	73	93	100	63	3.3	67
IWS	17	12	28	28	85	50	59	9.4	60
RD	6	0	83	84	100	100	59	33	100
TOT/Av	73	44	82	65	91	87	61	12.86	73
UQ pilot	22	0	64	68	82	91	64	50	92

Experimental-Control Comparison Demographics N=123

Group	N=	Gender Female %	Ethnicity Anglo %	Birth Country Aust. born %	NESB Speak only English %	Religion Christian %	Religiosity 'very' %	Value of religion diversity 'beneficial' %*	Comments
Exp	73	84	53.3	89.3	81.3	70	12.3	67	SOR is an elective subject. It is not surprising that a significantly higher pre-disposition to religiosity and a higher value perception of religion diversity exists in the Experimental Group.
Cont	44	77	66.7	89.6	89.6	46	2.3	60	