

Part V

Implications for state-based Religion Studies courses in Australian schools

State government reviews of education in the 1970s paved the way for the development of accredited Religion Studies courses that were in place in most States by the mid-1990s. While in their origins, nature and purposes these courses were different from denominational religious education in independent schools, they were taken up almost exclusively by the religious schools, especially Catholic schools. Part V explores the relationships between these two forms of religious education. It includes a historical review of developments in the United Kingdom, because this is needed to provide a framework within which Australian programs can be located and evaluated.

Chapter 21

Pedagogical background to the development of Religion Studies courses in Australia

The purpose of the chapter is to provide historical perspective on the approaches followed in state-based Religion Studies courses in Australian schools. This background is needed for evaluating the content selection and pedagogical principles in these courses, and for proposing how they might best contribute to young people's education in meaning, identity and spirituality.

While practically all religion studies in Australia are taught in religious schools, it is important to understand that the origins, nature and purposes of the programs are essentially based within public education.

21.1 Two formats for studying religion in Australian public schools

In most Australian States there has long been provision for two forms of religious education in public schools: we refer to them here as *denominational religious education* and *general religion studies*.¹ The most commonly practised format is *denominational religious education* where classes are conducted weekly (or less frequently) by representatives of various religions for children from that faith tradition whose parents endorse their attendance. Variations include: interdenominational classes; full-time chaplains responsible for pastoral care and interdenominational religion classes in some Victorian and Western Australian schools; and periodic seminars for secondary students. The purposes of this form of religious education are the same as those considered in Part IV for religious schools: the handing on of a particular religious faith tradition. Hence there is no need to elaborate on it here. A

systematic account of denominational religious education in public schools is available in an earlier publication.²

Technically, *general religion studies* (or simply Religion Studies) is where State departmental teachers (and not denominational representatives) teach religion as part of the ordinary curriculum. The context requires that the purposes of the study are based on the contribution that studying religion makes to the general educational process, and not on the intention to hand on a particular religious faith tradition or to develop young people's religious faith.

According to purposes and context, these arrangements create two distinct forms of religious education. While it is important to acknowledge the differences in purpose, the adequacy and usefulness of the distinctions break down when it comes to the level of classroom teaching and learning. An analysis of the greater complexity in practice is needed so that both the real differences and relationships become more evident. For example, denominational religious education makes a useful contribution to pupils' general education, and Religion Studies contributes to their knowledge of their own religious tradition. Historically, those involved in the different contexts have tended to give more weight to the differences than to the commonalities. However, a significant opportunity for exploring the overlap between the two occurred when fully accredited senior school Religion Studies programs were introduced in most States in the early 1990s, and the majority of students who took these subjects were from religious schools, especially Catholic schools; state school enrolments were so few as to be insignificant. The implication: for religious schools, the purposes and practices in Religion Studies seemed to contribute to, or be consistent with, denominational aims for religious education. While there is a substantial Australian literature on school Religion Studies, not a lot of attention has been given specifically to relationships with denominational religious education.³

For the purposes of comparison, we will stay with the term 'Religion Studies' to contrast this format with denominational religious education, even though the usage is cumbersome.⁴ We are not proposing that the terminology be used universally, because there is no international agreement about such use – for example, in British county schools the standard term is 'religious education'. Words are needed to differentiate contexts and formats; but at the same time, questions can be raised about this terminology because it tends to make presumptions about differences in nature and purposes that can be contested.

21.2 The development of Religion Studies courses in Australian schools

The real impetus for the development of contemporary Australian Religion Studies came from a series of State Government reviews of religious education in public schools in the 1970s. It is well documented in the book *Religious Education in Australian schools* (Rossiter 1981). During this period, the educational justification and theoretical basis for the courses were developed; both were heavily dependent on the experience and literature of religious education in British state (county) schools – so much so that an analysis of British developments is essential for interpreting what happened in Australia. For this reason, we will summarise the evolution of Religion Studies in the United Kingdom as the framework within which the contemporary Australian programs can be located and evaluated.

While there were some State departmental curriculum development projects in Religion Studies in various Australian states in the 1970s, these gradually wound down and were eventually discontinued. The reason was not because of lack of quality in the projects, which were almost exclusively concerned with teaching at primary and junior secondary levels, but because the curriculum context in government schools was not favourable for sustaining religion as a subject.⁵ Hence there was no role for specialist Religion Studies teachers.

While there were few further developments in the 1980s, real progress was made in the early 1990s with the introduction of Religion Studies syllabuses at senior school level (Years 11–12); they became available in all states but not the territories.⁶ There was a strong uptake by religious schools. They usually committed substantial resources to the teaching of religion and the adoption of the new courses meant that religion became a fully accredited subject for the Year 12 final certification, as well as for university entrance scores.

As noted above, the substantive, formative literature for Australian Religion Studies was written in the 1970s, complemented by syllabus development in the 1990s and early 2000s. In our opinion, the bulk of the theory underpinning contemporary Australian courses – principally in normative state documents and to a lesser extent in the writing of theorists – remains 1970s vintage, focused mainly on a phenomenological approach and descriptive content from world religions (very British-looking courses with some distinctive Australian content). Following the lead from the extensive UK resource bank was valuable, but it also included making the same mistakes as the British, usually a decade or so later. The Australian literature has provided a solid theoretical basis for Religion Studies, but it has not yet taken into account the significant theoretical and practical developments that have emerged in the United Kingdom (and in continental Europe) over the last twenty-five years.⁷ Three exceptions to the trend are evident in the work of theorists Lovat and Hill and the Queensland Religious Education Curriculum Project (RECP; see note 3). Lovat proposed that a critical, evaluative dimension be added to the dominant phenomenological approach; Hill proposed a broader evaluative pedagogy, a content less oriented to the world religions and with special attention given to the ethics of teaching. The Queensland Project proposed a more integrative student-centred approach drawing significantly on the work of Michael Grimmitt and the British Westhill Project (see **21.4.6**).

In Australian religious education, most of the theory has been concerned with the denominational context, which is evident in the extensive supporting literature.⁸ Much less has been written specifically about state-based Religion Studies by comparison with the volume of writings in the United Kingdom where there is a large religion teaching force in public schools, and where there are extensive supporting resources: teacher education programs, many university academics concerned with school Religion Studies, a number of substantial research and development projects, teacher associations, conferences and periodicals. The most prominent recent Australian writings on Religion Studies have been a range of student texts supporting the Years 11–12 programs.⁹

In what follows we will trace the historical development of the theory for school Religion Studies as it evolved in the United Kingdom. We will highlight issues that need to be taken into account in reviewing the purposes, content selection and pedagogy in the Australian courses. While not an exhaustive analysis, it will provide

some panoramic perspective, an indication of the geography of British Religion Studies. Some links with Australian developments will also be noted, together with reference to issues raised earlier in Part V.

21.3 Historical background to the theory for school Religion Studies in the UK: The quest for an educational identity

There are a number of good accounts of the historical development of Religion Studies in British state schools.¹⁰ Our purpose here is to pinpoint key changes in the passage from an overtly Christian orientation in 1944 when the Education Act made religion a compulsory subject, through to the present. The *quest for an educational identity* is a useful theme for interpreting developments because it has been the driving force of change – to establish Religion Studies as an integral part of general education and to divest it of a denominational identity. It affected both content and pedagogy. In the process of differentiation, what Religion Studies is *not* often appeared to be as important as what it *is*, and this tended to create problems by defining Religion Studies *over and against* denominational religious education. The dichotomy it created limited the exchanges between professional educators in the two interest groups. And it meant that attention to relationships between the two would be minimal. (It is not unlike a similar division that existed between university *Religion Studies* and more traditional Christian *Theology* and *Scripture*.) Most European countries have not followed the same path as the British, but there are interesting contrasts and similarities.¹¹

In the United Kingdom, the responsibility for Religion Studies in the state schools lies with the Local Education Authorities and regular departmental teachers – and not with church representatives. Religion is an integral part of the curriculum, even if it does not enjoy the same status as the subjects that form the National Curriculum. The teacher's role is not to develop students' personal faith, but to give them a general religious education about the role of religion in society. Once the exclusive preserve of the churches, religious education (Religion Studies) acquired an independent *educational* identity and rationale. In tracing the process, we draw attention to three key issues:

1. how political and educational factors shaped a new identity for Religion Studies;
2. how relationships with denominational religious education have been obscured;
3. how phenomenology became a principal method for content selection and pedagogy, and how the over-emphasis on a descriptive approach limited the scope and educational value of the study – in particular, by not paying enough attention to young people's spiritual-moral development.

These same issues were prominent in Australian developments.

Although the idea of universal compulsory schooling dates from the time of the Reformation, the actual practice in Western countries is little more than a century old. Because the Christian churches had a long tradition in conducting schools, it was to be expected that they would also see public schools as having a role in young people's religious education. Thus the tradition was established: initially, religious education in the state school was a *church* concern; its aims were to hand on the Christian faith and to nourish the spirituality of young people within the context of the church.

In the United Kingdom, and other countries where the state was not unfavourable to a particular religion (or denominations), a church-oriented religious education was allowed to continue in the new state school systems. Either it was under church

auspices and taught by church representatives, or the state school teachers taught a church-approved curriculum. This accounted for the situations in countries like the United Kingdom before the 1960s, Scandinavia, (West) Germany, Italy, Australia and Canada. (There are parallels for synagogue and mosque religious education in Israel and Muslim countries respectively.) In the United States, the strong constitutional separation between church and state effectively stifled any study of religion in the public school curriculum.

21.4 Phases of UK development 1944–2000s: From agreed Christian syllabuses to multi-faith

21.4.1 Christian religious education syllabuses (1940s and 1950s)

When the 1944 Butler Education Act made religion the one compulsory subject in the school curriculum, it formalised the teaching of Agreed Syllabuses in the county schools; they were explicitly Christian in content and orientation, concentrating on the Bible and core Christian teachings.

21.4.2 Student-centred, experiential life themes (1960s–)

In the 1960s, there were changes in emphasis with the use of ‘life themes’, which were thought to be a more appropriate way of introducing children to biblical concepts. The research of Ronald Goldman was a catalyst for making religious education more child-centred.¹² He popularised the idea of ‘readiness for religion’. These developments paralleled the growing educational interest in experiential and discovery learning. (There was a similar development in Catholic religious education, where the focus on life experience was informed by the theological view of continuing revelation through human experience.¹³)

21.4.3 Existential, issue-oriented, experiential (1960s–)

Another influence in favour of ‘life relevant’ religious education during the 1960s was the work of Harold Loukes. He took a special interest in what he called ‘teenage religion’. He proposed that Religion Studies should include a study of personal and social issues.¹⁴ Loukes’ concern for taking into account the distinctive spirituality of youth is not unlike the argument presented for a more issue-oriented religious education in Chapters 16 and 17.

While the Goldman and Loukes influences moved Religion Studies in the direction of student-centredness and life-relevance, the overall Christian aims remained the same – to promote the understanding of, and initiation into, the Christian tradition. A more educational identity was still to emerge. Also of note was the aim for Religion Studies to ‘foster the development of religious concepts’. This aim could be retained in any new educational identity or rationale because it was not as denominationally specific as ‘developing faith’. Perhaps too it reflected the prominence of ‘developing rational skills’ in the educational thinking of that time.

In the history of British Religion Studies, Loukes’ contribution often seems undervalued. While there were difficulties with his proposals, his ideas about a ‘relevant’ education remain pertinent today; from this perspective, it is interesting to consider why his ideas were not more enduring and influential. Perhaps it was not a fault in his thinking, but the way in which his approach was implemented – in other

words, problems with methodology and the status of the subject. There was too much unstructured discussion, it was too low-key, and it probably did not give students adequate, up-to-date information on the issues. It was a good recipe for discussions that amounted to little more than recycling uninformed opinions. This is not an unfamiliar experience for Catholic and other denominational religion teachers who unsuccessfully tried a discussion-oriented, problem-centred pedagogy. Trying to make Religion Studies ‘relevant’ just by discussing questions that may be pertinent to the life experience of students is likely to be counterproductive, especially if the subject is not rated highly by students, and if the study methods are not as challenging and demanding as are presumed to be normal for other subjects. A greater range of teaching and learning methods and content resources were needed to make an issue-based approach not only relevant, but a credible academic study that could be respected by students.

The problem, as some of Loukes’ contemporaries saw it, is illustrated in the following comment made on a 1979 British radio program.

The days of strict Bible teaching have gone in all but a few denominational schools, to be replaced by the study of ‘life-stances’ (Marxism etc.) and snippets of comparative Religions. In the sixties they invented ‘life-themes’ for primary schools and ‘problem-centred discussion’ for secondaries. We heard a believable spoof of a primary class project on sheep ... ‘We’re doing sheep, children, because they are mentioned in the Bible. No, Alistair, we are not going to do a project on boils.’

They didn’t need a secondary school spoof. Instead they had a young RE teacher, gloomily teaching a syllabus that started with astrology and werewolves (‘Things in their own experience’) and probably ended with those lessons described by one pupil as being ‘discussions of drugs, sex, violence and world poverty’. The Bible has been replaced by a 4,000-book resource centre and teachers are so anxious about offending anyone, or imposing anything, that the pupils are learning less and less about more and more.¹⁵

While making its point in a colourful way, and while showing that any approach will appear ridiculous if exaggerated, this comment does not do justice to the issue-oriented approach as proposed by Loukes. Choosing bizarre content is not an appropriate way of making Religion Studies relevant. Issues that are considered to be personally and socially relevant need to be studied seriously and informatively, with a student research orientation; also, as noted in Chapter 16, this is the most appropriate classroom climate for healthy personal interactions about social issues.

21.4.4 Secular, educational identity: phenomenology, world religions, multi-faith (late 1960s–)

By the mid-1960s, changes in the religious composition of the community and changes in educational thinking led to a review of the role for Religion Studies in county schools. As a result, a multi-faith study of world religions gradually became the dominant approach. There were three aspects to the development of a more *secular, educational identity* for the subject:

1 *Rationale*: A non-religious rationale was needed so that Religion Studies would not have denominational, faith-oriented aims. It came to be *justified on educational grounds*.

2 *Method*: *Phenomenology* (an objective, impartial, descriptive study of religions that was prominent in universities) became the principal method. It involved classifying religious phenomena and it was non-evaluative. Phenomenology was regarded as a more appropriate (less denominational) ‘parent discipline’ for school Religion Studies than the traditional Christian disciplines.

3 *Content*: Content was drawn from *world religions* rather than from traditional denominational sources (the Bible and Christian practice) or life-themes.

1 Rationale

The philosophy of Paul Hirst helped provide an educational rationale for the place of religion in the curriculum.¹⁶ The idea of a liberal education was central to the thinking of Hirst and co-author Richard Peters; it stressed *initiation* into the academic disciplines and concept formation. Hirst proposed that religion was one of the forms of knowledge and experience into which education should help initiate students.

Consequently, an education that neglected this dimension was to that extent defective.

In addition, questions were raised about the role of the state school in Religion Studies. It seemed inappropriate that state schools might formally promote the Christian faith; but it was argued that schools should provide a general education in religion. It would help students learn about the various religions represented in the culture. Also, recognition of the multicultural, multi-faith nature of British society made it seem incongruent for school Religion Studies to be concerned just with Christianity.

2 Method: Phenomenology

The phenomenological method recommended for Religion Studies drew heavily on the work of Ninian Smart, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster and author of several popular books on world religions. Smart proposed that to get an integral picture of a religion the study would need to cover all of six basic aspects or dimensions. Underpinning this approach was a basic principle of phenomenology that students would temporarily put aside their own commitments and study the content impartially, trying to see how believers thought and felt about their religion. They could then move from the description of phenomena to comparisons and contrasts of common features in religions, and further to a conceptual grasp of the analytical categories.¹⁷

A big advantage in phenomenology was that it seemed to be a ‘neutral’ and relatively non-controversial method. And it could easily be applied to world religions.

In a later book,¹⁸ Smart expanded his categories to seven dimensions: practical and ritual; experiential and emotional; narrative or mythic; doctrinal and philosophical; ethical and legal; social and institutional; and *material*. The seventh dimension was added to include buildings, works of art and other creations such as icons. Natural phenomena such as the Ganges and Uluru (sacred sites) would be included in this category.

While Smart’s dimensional scheme for analysing religions emphasised an integral study of a religion as a living entity, its application to school Religion Studies tended towards compartmentalism. At times, studying the analytical dimensions became

more prominent than using the dimensions to get insight into a religion as a whole. Teaching the ‘dimensions of religion’ rather than teaching ‘religion’ as such was a politically correct way of showing that Religion Studies was not biased in favour of religion.¹⁹ The need to be different from denominational religious education affected content selection and pedagogy. An impression was given that content from two or more religions was needed before the study became ‘educational’ – and in student resources, that a roughly equal number of pages was required for each religion. Studying one tradition was regarded as ‘un-educational’ or ‘biased’ (despite the long tradition of academic study of theology). While the value of drawing on material from different religions is not in question, having a *range* greater than one does not of itself make the approach educational; neither does the study of one tradition necessarily make the pedagogy biased or confessional.

The phrase ‘teaching *about* religion’ was used as a shorthand for this descriptive approach. The phrase also implied a relatively neutral role, not concerned with teaching pupils how to *be* religious, which was seen as a denominational activity. Being ‘objective’, ‘impartial’ and ‘impersonal’ seemed to dispel any suggestion that Religion Studies might be evangelising.

While concentrating on the analytical dimensions of religion is appropriate for Religion Studies at university, where students can appreciate the intellectual subtlety and abstraction in such an analysis, questions can be raised about how appropriate it is to organise the school religion curriculum exclusively around such a system. On the other hand, the dimensions could serve as a useful checklist that content covers key aspects of religions. What is needed is balance. Excessive attention to the classification of religious phenomena could compromise the nature and the integrity of the religions being studied; in addition, it could provide a successful recipe for student boredom.

The phenomenological approach needed to be tempered with student-centredness in both content and pedagogy. Grimmitt concluded that ‘the level of understanding of which pupils may be capable means that the study of religion may rarely move beyond the descriptive level; this raises a query about the value of choosing and structuring content solely by reference to phenomenological principles.’²⁰ Other scholars pointed out that a phenomenological religion curriculum compromised the ‘meaning construction’ and ‘relationship’ aspects of student learning. ‘The predominantly descriptive character of phenomenological inquiry, when translated into the context of religious education, has tended to accentuate the importance of knowing the subject of study rather than the reflexive character of engagement.’²¹

In turn, Australian Religion Studies would reflect the same problem. For example, the purposes of the new Victorian (1990) course stated:

A phenomenological approach to the study of religious traditions has been adopted in the [Victorian] *Religion and Society* Study Design. This is intended to encourage open, critical and dispassionate study of religions throughout each unit in the Study Design. The approach taken to Religion should not be confused with religious education or Religious Instruction. These are two quite different methodologies, both requiring a confessional approach to the study of one religion only.²²

A non-evaluative description of religions was proposed, but it was contradicted by the requirement that the study be ‘critical’. Then followed a further contradiction –

that it should be ‘dispassionate’. The cliché definition of denominational religious education as ‘confessional’ tended to dismiss it as not being educational. Such thinking effectively closed down the discussion of relationships with denominational religious education at the very point where the debate needed to be opened and extended (see Chapter 22). In any type of school, the study of religion should be impartial, open and critical – including both descriptive and evaluative elements. It should not be ‘dispassionate’, if this means being artificially neutral or minimising attention to personal, emotive and controversial issues.

Lovat has given an account of how phenomenology might be used in Australian school Religion Studies.²³ Moore and Habel, in their book *When religion goes to school: Typology of religion for the classroom* (1982),²⁴ developed typology as an extension of the phenomenological method for Australian Religion Studies; it focused on ‘types’ or groups of similar religious phenomena across world religions, with a more extensive list of types than Smart’s seven dimensions (for example sacred spaces, sacred objects, sacred persons, writings, rituals, sacrifices). The attention they gave to religious types within the ‘home tradition’ of students helped make the approach more attractive to denominational religious education. Typology was concerned with classification of religious phenomena and it leaned towards a dualistic sacred/secular perspective on religions; it was like a taxonomy of religions. Lovat acknowledged the excessive descriptive/non-evaluative characteristics of phenomenology and typology and he sought to develop a more critical, evaluative dimension by borrowing from Groome’s Shared Praxis model. However, while phenomenology and typology came to dominate Australian Religion Studies curricula, Lovat’s proposal was not taken up.

3 Content: the Study of World Religions

Given the rationale and method described above, it was natural for world religions to become the content for the new Religion Studies in the United Kingdom. This was evident in the iconic Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of 1975.²⁵ From the 1970s onwards, world religions became the most prominent content (and in Australian Religion Studies courses, the same pattern was followed).

21.4.5 M Grimmitt, 1973: Balancing descriptive and student-centred approaches

In the 1970s, a complex mixture of the above approaches was evident in British schools; but the descriptive study of world religions was the most common. In his popular book *What Can I do in RE* (1973), Michael Grimmitt called for balance between descriptive and student-centred and evaluative approaches.²⁶ He proposed a dual approach: first the *dimensional*, which covered phenomenological material organised according to Smart’s dimensions; and second, the *existential*, which dealt with spiritual issues in contemporary life, especially the way in which dilemmas about human life figured in the search for meaning. Grimmitt’s proposals had a strong influence on curriculum development and teaching. It implied that Religion Studies was not left with a choice between alternatives – phenomenology and a student-centred approach. A balanced mixture of the two became more widely accepted. However, while Grimmitt’s ideas were attractive to teachers, the content of official syllabuses remained predominantly descriptive and based on world religions; and again, Australian Religion Studies followed suit.

21.4.6 Focus on students' personal and spiritual development (Grimmitt 1978–); Enhancing student learning through constructivist theory and pedagogy (Grimmitt 1994–)

Grimmitt's thinking developed beyond the conception set out in his 1973 book. In his lectures in Australia in 1978 and in subsequent publications,²⁷ his dual approach (dimensional and existential) was superseded by a more unitive one, emphasising the role of the study of religion in fostering the spiritual self-awareness of students. It gave more attention to relevance and to evaluation. A systematic critique of the overuse of phenomenology was prominent in his thinking.²⁸ Central to his approach was the notion of students *learning from* religion: that is, the study of religion was more than just *learning about* religion. It helped students learn about their own personal development, and it fostered their own individual meaning and identity, helping them to 'evaluate their understanding of religion in personal terms and evaluate their understanding of self in religious terms'.²⁹ It meant using the study of religion to explore what it meant to be human. Grimmitt considered that the study of religions should

promote awareness and understanding of the nature and purpose of the religious or spiritual quest within different religions, and promote reflection, on the part of the pupil, on the implications that the adoption of a religious view of life would have for his/her own understanding of self and for consequent development as a person ... permitting the possibility of the pupil's discerning a religious or spiritual dimension within his/her own experience of self.³⁰

This meant relating 'adolescent life-worlds' to 'religious life-worlds'.

These ideas were developed from the time of commencement of the Westhill Project in 1977 and were extended into the Religion in the Service of the Child Project in 1991.³¹ Their wide acceptance in the UK was evident in their incorporation into the Government's Model Syllabuses in 1994.

While the questioning of an overdependence on phenomenological method and descriptive content became more widely accepted in British religious education circles, the phenomenological pattern still tended to dominate the content of most courses and student texts. Only gradually did the emphasis on student interests and needs become more prominent.

More recently, Grimmitt proposed the use of constructivist learning theory as an effective way of prompting pupils to enter imaginatively into the religious thinking and experience of believers; it could help them to develop interpretive skills and to reflect critically on their own beliefs and values, enabling them 'to participate consciously and critically in the process of meaning-making as a characteristic activity of being human'.³² It also addressed the social and cultural contexts affecting religious interpretations, and it helped show how religious knowledge could be problematised and deconstructed in ways that were consistent with the 'emancipatory' functions ascribed to critical pedagogy (Chapter 12).

21.4.7 The new Education Act, 1988: Reasserting the place of Christian heritage; and the influence of the outcomes/competencies movement

The year 1988 proved to be a significant one in the history of British school Religion Studies. From about this time four developments began to have a strong influence.

1. The 1988 Education Act – a renewed prominence for Christianity
2. The emergence and universal application of outcomes/competencies-based curriculum
3. Special attention given to the spiritual-moral dimensions of the whole school curriculum
4. A series of influential research and development projects in British school Religion Studies.

In this section, the first three of these developments will be considered.

The new Education Act of 1988, as part of its reform program, revised the 1944 provisions for Religion Studies. Religion remained a compulsory subject even though not in the National Curriculum. When Religion Studies was considered together with the National Curriculum, the combination was called the ‘Basic Curriculum’. The earlier, more general reference to Religion Studies and worship, which allowed flexibility for the evolution of content and method, was replaced by a more specific curriculum statement that indicated both should be concerned mainly with the Christian heritage: ‘Any agreed syllabus ... shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.’³³

This development grew out of concerns about the erosion of Christian heritage and identity in the United Kingdom, and worry about the potentially confusing effects of the study of world religions. It created difficulties particularly in schools where there were large numbers of children from the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths. Generally the argument was carried by conservative religious groups and it resulted in considerable public and academic debate about content and method in Religion Studies.³⁴

At the same time, changes following on from the Education Act gave a new emphasis to the role of schools in promoting the ‘Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development’ of students (as noted in Chapter 14); it referred to the whole curriculum and life of the school, and not just to Religious Education and to Personal/Social Education classes. The nature and role of Religion Studies needed formulation within this context.³⁵

Religion teachers and departmental advisers felt embattled by a conservative ‘religious right’; they were concerned that advances made over the last twenty-five years in developing syllabuses and materials that took into account the multi-faith nature of British society might be compromised. There were other problems too: for example, referring to the Jewish community, which had been in Britain since the 10th century, as one of the ‘represented religions’ was derogatory. Moves to reassert Christianity were regarded by religious educators as a retrograde step, narrowing the base for Religion Studies in county schools.

However, the multi-faith Religion Studies that had become well established in British schools were not changed radically or replaced by Christian content. Some years later, the government developed two Model Syllabuses that were to be taken as guides for the construction of various Local Education Authority syllabuses.³⁶ While intended as models, they eventually had a prescriptive influence as all Authorities brought their syllabuses into line. The major religious groups were invited to advise on the content relevant to their tradition. This tended to reinforce the prominent place of *descriptive content*.

In addition, the Religion Studies syllabuses were structured in terms of outcomes and competencies – as for other subjects – and it further consolidated the dominance of descriptive content. (Questions about the educational value of this style of curriculum were considered in 12.3.4, 13.9 and 16.2.3, particularly as regards spiritual and values outcomes.) Grimmitt considered that the application of outcomes and competencies to Religion Studies caused ‘the traditional language of *learning* and *teaching* [to be] absorbed and lost’;³⁷ it resulted in a ‘domestication’ or ‘captivity’ of Religion Studies because it changed the emphasis even more towards content rather than process. Concern for the *syllabus integrity* of religious traditions seemed to take precedence over the *educative function* of studying religion to resource young people’s spirituality. Not surprisingly, the same pattern is evident in the Australian programs.

Thus, through its legislation, the Model Syllabuses and the outcomes format, government initiatives increased centralisation and uniformity in Religion Studies and reinforced the emphasis on descriptive content; this occurred even though the notion of learning *from* religion was one of the proposed outcomes of the Model Syllabuses. Grimmitt considered that the trend would also have limited the extent to which teachers would draw on different pedagogies such as those considered below.

21.4.8 Pedagogies that emerged from research and development projects from the late 1980s

What marks another significant difference between school Religion Studies in the United Kingdom and Australia is the high level of research and academic infrastructure in the former. Complementing normative documents and extensive teacher professional development programs, there have been a number of substantial research and development projects working at the level of both theory and resources for teachers and students. In Australia, good student texts were commercially produced to cater for the senior school Religion Studies market, but these were not as extensive in scope, theory or methodology as the outputs from the research based projects in the UK. These projects offered practitioners a range of rationales, approaches and resources for their work in implementing local area syllabuses. For our summary purposes, the most helpful introductory access to these projects is provided by Grimmitt’s *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case studies in the research and development of good pedagogic practice in RE* (2000). With the construct pedagogy as the theme, the leaders of nine projects explained how their approaches fostered student learning through the study of religion. While it is difficult to estimate how influential the projects have been, they contribute significantly to the educational discourse of British Religion Studies by providing a considerable range of pedagogical options that attempt to address key issues in cultural context, curriculum orientation, content selection, young people’s spiritual-moral development and student learning. In turn, the wide spectrum of approaches provides a comprehensive perspective from which to review the present situation and possible future developments in Australia.

In his book, Grimmitt proposed eight distinct contemporary approaches to Religion Studies in the United Kingdom, and the nine research and development projects are located within seven of these categories. Grimmitt’s analysis is illustrated in Table 21.1. In addition we have added two categories at the bottom of the table that pick up on other approaches and issues that are more prominent in continental Europe; there is

some overlap with the British categories, but these additions make the spectrum more comprehensive.

Table 21.1 Summary of major contemporary approaches to school Religion Studies in the UK (Grimmitt 2000), and current emphases in continental Europe

Major contemporary approaches to school Religion Studies in the UK	Particular examples of the major approaches, including the nine ongoing research and development projects (The nine projects described in Grimmitt's book are listed in italics; other examples already noted above are designated by section number.)
1. Liberal Christian theological, experiential, implicit models	21.4.2: Goldman, Life themes. 21.4.3: Loukes, issue/problem-centred.
2. Phenomenological, undogmatic, explicit model	21.4.4: Phenomenological. The Chichester Project 1982 – A world religions approach to teaching Christianity.
3. Integrative experiential and phenomenological models	21.4.5: Grimmitt, combination of existential and dimensional. The Religious Experience and Education Project, 1990– .
4. Human development, instrumental, learning about and learning from models	21.4.6: Grimmitt, personal development orientation and learning from religion. The Westhill Project, 1977 – personal development and learning from religion. Religion in the service of the child project, 1991– .
5. Ethnographic, interpretive, multi-faith model	The Warwick Religious Education Project, 1993– .
6. Revelation-centred, Christianity-oriented, concept-cracking model	The Stapleford Project, Christian theology-centred, 1993– .
7. Religious literacy-centred, critical realist and critical pedagogy model	The Spiritual Education Project, 1997– .
8. Constructivist models of learning and teaching	The Children and Worldviews Project, 1994– . The Constructivist Pedagogies of RE Project, 2000– .
Additional approaches more prominent in school Religion Studies in continental Europe	Key characteristics of these approaches and relationships with the eight categories proposed by Grimmitt describing contemporary approaches in the UK
9. Contextual approach (The contextual and hermeneutic approaches are concerned with similar issues and are not always clearly differentiated)	Acknowledges postmodern interpretation of knowledge as contextual and relative; emphasis on varying cultural contexts; focuses on the development of <i>religious competence</i> – that is, student construction of identity and meaning; tends to use religious traditions instrumentally for student learning.
10. Hermeneutic approach	Special emphasis on the hermeneutic (interpretive) function of the study; acknowledges the different role of religion

	in pluralist, multi-faith, secularised cultures; focus on students' identity development.
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Below we will comment briefly on approaches not already covered in the earlier listing from **21.4.1** to **21.4.7**, highlighting key principles in the projects, each of which has its own distinctive and usually extensive literature. The analysis will help identify pedagogical issues raised by the projects, while not attempting any systematic evaluation.

The Warwick Religious Education Project

Ethnographic study of world religions emphasising the development of the capacity to interpret meaning

The project, directed by Professor Robert Jackson,³⁸ acknowledged the importance of local context for religious groups which were not always well described by the stereotypical picture of a world religion as a belief system. It focused on the way individuals constructed their own personal interpretation of the interaction between local group and total faith tradition, also taking into account the way in which the student's own spirituality figured in the learning process. Jackson called his method an 'interpretive approach'. He used an ethnographic enquiry which figured prominently in the student materials. Implications for pupils' personal development (learning *from* religion) were sought, helping them in their negotiation of personal meaning and identity.

Thus the interpretive approach broadened the basis for the phenomenological study of world religions through its contextual emphasis and its student-centredness, while it retained a strong interest in religious plurality. It was more evaluative and less descriptive than the world Religion Studies of the 1970s.

The Stapleford Project

Emphasis on a Christian theological basis for concept development

The project, directed by Dr Trevor Cooling,³⁹ set out to develop student resources that provided a more theologically based study of Christianity – one component within the study of world religions. While acknowledging student-centredness and the need to foster spiritual development whether or not young people were religious adherents, the approach focused on conceptual development related to the major ideas and themes in Christian theology, particularly those related to the Bible – it was termed 'concept cracking'. By contrast with projects that concentrated on student negotiation of personal and contextual meaning, the Stapleford project structured content around the key concepts of Christianity, considering that this was more appropriate than using religion instrumentally for idiosyncratic student learning. The approach set out to probe the 'meaning' of Christian ideas and hence was not intended to be purely descriptive – ideas rather than just information. It presumed that the teachers first needed to become familiar with Christian meanings before they could lead pupils in a profitable exploration of these meanings.

The project tried to redress the current overemphasis of descriptive content and provide for a more systematic study of Christianity, and it sought personal relevance for the pupils.

The Spiritual Education Project

Critical evaluative pedagogy stressing the development of religious literacy

Directed by Dr Andrew Wright,⁴⁰ this project was not specifically concerned with the development of student resource materials like the other projects. It was based on a critical evaluation of contemporary approaches with the intention of developing a reconstructed theory that was more critical and evaluative.⁴¹ Wright's critique of contemporary liberal Religion Studies considered that it was more concerned with students' subjective experience and feelings than with religious truth and reality – and it implied a type of relativistic theology that all religions were much the same apart from varied cultural expressions. His proposed study of religions gave special attention to religious truth claims and the building up of 'religious literacy' – that is, a competent knowledge and understanding of religions that included awareness of distinctiveness and conflicting claims. Spirituality was a key construct for Wright. He considered that it needed to be more than inner experience and subjectivity, defining it as 'the developing relationship of the individual within community and tradition, to that which is – or is perceived to be – of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth'.⁴² His theory looked at ways in which students' spirituality might be addressed across the whole curriculum and in school structures and organisation; the subject Religion Studies was a key element in this wider strategy.⁴³

Wright's view of Religion Studies regarded it more as a rational, philosophical enquiry than was evident in other approaches that were experiential and expressive in orientation. Opposing the postmodern, constructivist view of knowledge emphasised in other approaches as too relativistic and subjective, his case was based on a critical realist epistemology. This implied a critical pedagogy, but the extent to which he would identify with the range of principles in critical pedagogy listed in Chapter 12 is not clear. There remain subjective difficulties in Wright's notion of 'realistic religious truth', although he does note that it means 'a model of language in which words function in a critically realistic manner to engage with external reality'.⁴⁴

The Children and World Views Project

A narrative, student-centred, personal approach

The Children and Worldviews Project gave special attention to the questions about meaning and identity that children bring to their education. It suggested an approach to Religion Studies that 'listens' to the narratives of children and responsively helps them negotiate their own personal meanings, drawing to varying degrees on religious and other traditions. It acknowledged that many children come with little sense of connection with religion, having a relatively secular worldview; hence the very notion of a religious tradition is problematic for them and this questions the relevance of traditional religious content such as description of belief systems. An inquiring process is regarded as more important than religious content. Such an approach is in tune with the postmodernist trend to discount absolute religious claims, and draws on religious traditions in so far as they can contribute to young people's construction of quanta of meaning that help them interpret and make sense of their experience. Knowledge is presumed to be socially constructed, relative, subjective and relational. For this project, fostering children's own personal meaning supersedes the study of belief systems.⁴⁵

Without doubt, the sensitivity to children's perspectives and questions that this approach calls for is a highly desirable quality for teachers to develop. Also valuable is its intention to support children's personal construction of meaning and identity.

But it is very psychological and interactive. It is the sort of teaching/learning that a parent or guardian might want to engage in with their children but it may be problematic to plan for too much interaction of this type in the a class of twenty-five youngsters. While the emphasis on process rather than formal religious content gives the approach more opportunity to be ‘content-relevant’ and to avoid excessive descriptive material, it may have gone too far in apparently dismissing the value of some study of religious traditions in their own right – and not just as instrumental sources of raw material for young people’s personal construction of meaning.

General comment about the UK research and development projects

While there is variety in the theory underpinning these projects, and while there is debate and even some conflict about their appropriateness, some generalisations may give a perspective on evaluation of school Religion Studies in Australia. The projects exhibit a range of innovations and developments that could usefully be taken into account in planning a future for Australian Religion Studies.

Relevance

All of the projects were concerned in some way or another with making the study of religion more *relevant* for pupils. Methodologically, this involved helping pupils find and explore links or bridges between their experience and the content. The Children’s Worldviews project also pursued relevance through content selection, proposing topics directly related to children’s needs and interests. The quest for relevance in Religion Studies can be related back to the discussion in Chapter 17. It is an area where denominational and state-based courses share common concerns.

What constitutes appropriate religious content

Efforts to improve relevance raise questions about what constitutes authentic content in Religion Studies, because personal and social issues are not regarded by some educators as proper ‘religious’ content; these questions tap into debates about the contemporary nature and function of religion. The place for contemporary issues vis-à-vis traditional religious content remains an ongoing problem, with the point of balance being crucial (see pertinent sections in Chapters 16–18). For the Stapleford project, at one end of the spectrum, learning was to be structured around the key theological ideas in a religion (for example in Christianity); while at the other end, the Children’s Worldviews Project structured learning so strongly around pupils’ personal construction of meaning that, by implication, religious traditions served like random and instrumental sources of content in the service of a personal search for contextual meaning. A different position again was taken by the Spiritual Education Project, which stood by the more abstract philosophical notion of the pursuit of religious truth claims (as applicable in all religions) as a basis for structuring content. It took a more ‘realist’ philosophical position epistemologically, compared with the postmodern view in the Children’s Worldviews Project.

Search for meaning and identity

Contrasting with the more traditional objective of knowledge and understanding of religion, the operational concern in a number of the projects was enhancing young people’s capacity to construct or negotiate their own personal meaning and identity (and worldview). The relative emphasis on this process varied; all the projects sought to contribute in this direction, but some made it such a central concern that the religious traditions seemed to take a back seat in the pedagogy.

While the progression of students' meaning and identity remains an important objective, we consider that in some cases a process that was too adult-oriented was being projected onto children – as if they were being expected to take on the role of constructing a comprehensive personal meaning system at too young an age. This projection may be justified by arguments about student-centredness and ideas about the emergence (or even the 'liberation') of young people's spirituality; but it still seems not down to earth enough for children. They need simple, basic information about community meanings as an initial baseline for the personal spirituality they will eventually form; and these meanings need to mesh with the questions about life that the children are asking. But too much descriptive material would be counterproductive. A balance is needed between basic information and an introduction to critical evaluation suited to their capacities that can set them on the track towards becoming more autonomous in managing their own spirituality.

The personal meaning-making functions that educators themselves have learned to value as adults, and which have changed their relationships with religion, should not automatically be transferred to children as if they were equally responsible, sharing the same *adult* perspective on the construction of meaning. Giving pupils educational access to traditional religious meanings is a basic step in resourcing their spirituality.

The notion of developing personal identity is common in the projects. However, just what personal identity means remains somewhat vague (cf. our concern to clarify the relationship between personal and cultural identities in Chapters 5–7).

The latter part of Chapter 6 examined British and European research and writings concerned with the role of education and religious education in promoting young people's identity development. For the references see note 32 in that chapter.

Promoting students' spiritual and moral development

Whether or not pupils were affiliated with any faith tradition, the study of religion should contribute to their spiritual and moral development. This principle in all of the projects acknowledged the extensive secularisation in Western society but considered that an educated individual needed a basic familiarity with the religious pluralism of their culture. Also important was the aim to help pupils learn how to identify and evaluate contemporary spiritual and moral issues (17.8). Another key aspect of personal development was the focus on meaning and identity already noted.

Interpretation/hermeneutics

All of the projects stressed that interpretation of the meaning of religion was more important than descriptive knowledge; thus skill development in interpretation was a prominent aim. The projects that leaned more strongly towards a constructivist epistemology not only saw the hermeneutic process as central to Religion Studies, but sought to engage pupils in questions about the nature and reliability of religious knowledge as it related to personal meaning and identity.

Religious plurality and cultural context

Jackson's work in particular (the Warwick Project) gave special attention to religious plurality. He highlighted the variations in religions according to local cultural context, as well as the interaction between individuals and community religious groups in the construction of personal identity. Intercultural communication and interreligious dialogue thus become desirable objectives.

Religious literacy

Wright considered that ‘only when pupils learn to engage in informed conversation about their beliefs, and the beliefs of others, can authentic religious literacy emerge’.⁴⁶ While this definition stressed interreligious dialogue, it shared with other notions of religious literacy a basic understanding of the key ideas and themes in religions together with competence in religious language. Such thinking reasserted the importance of studying religious traditions in their own right, and not just as a source of raw material for pupils’ idiosyncratic meaning systems. Hence the idea is likely to appeal to denominational religious education authorities, who are usually concerned about the integrity of tradition in religious content. The notion of ‘critical’ religious literacy also has potential links with critical pedagogy.⁴⁷

Critical pedagogy

Some of the projects set out to help pupils become more critically aware of ideologies and the exercise of power in the community, and of how this occurs in religions. There were parallels with the concerns of critical pedagogy (12.4.1).

21.4.9 Relationship with trends in continental European religious education: Contextual religious education and religious education as a hermeneutic process

In this section we comment on two approaches in contemporary religious education in continental Europe that aim to enhance the spectrum of approaches already developed and to point towards other literatures relevant to the issues raised in the chapter (cf. items 9 and 10 in Table 21.1). These approaches overlap with aspects of the nine British research and development projects, even though both the contextual and hermeneutic approaches have been applied to denominational contexts. While some European countries have Religion Studies as in the UK, others have denominational religious education taught by departmental teachers or visiting church representatives.

Contextual religious education

The term ‘contextual religious education’ has in recent years been used loosely to describe the work of a collection of mainly European (and some British) educators who set out to formulate an approach to religious education that addressed the situation of cultural postmodernity.⁴⁸ The *key underlying assumptions* of the approach were:

***Religion in culture* [numbered lists not styled]**

1. Responding to the challenges of cultural and religious pluralism, particularly as experienced in Europe;
2. Acknowledging widespread secularisation from the traditional religious perspectives in European history;
3. Acknowledging that spiritual plurality includes secularised religious as well as non-religious spiritualities;
4. Addressing questions raised by relativism and globalism;
5. Presuming that religion as a lived reality is a more appropriate focus of religious education than traditional religious belief systems.

Human development

1. Presuming a holistic view of human development that includes *religious competence*: the capacity to construct one’s own personal meaning and identity, drawing on spiritual and religious traditions;

2. A focus on students' *life-worlds* as a local, personal context for the individual; this may compensate for problems created by relativism and globalism;
3. The notion of *spiritual/religious/cultural identity* presumes a relational understanding of the development of the self; it involves personal reflection (and personal narrative) in an ongoing relationship with others (community, the natural world, and acceptance or rejection of some form of transcendent reality); and it may compensate for problems arising from excessive attention to individualism, self-centredness and subjectivity.

Changes in emphasis compared with earlier approaches to religion and religious education

1. A move away from the descriptive emphasis of the earlier phenomenological approach, as well as from the strong focus on one tradition within denominational religious education.
2. The intention to be 'transformative' in order to promote personal change in pupils and not just to be concerned with transmission of knowledge; the encouragement of holistic and transactional reflection on everyday life;
3. Working with problematic notions of personal knowledge as evident in cultural postmodernity.

Core processes in religious education presume that religious contextuality, spiritual/religious competence and spiritual/religious/cultural identity are the core concerns of religious education

1. *Religious/spiritual contextuality:*
 - Exploring religious and spiritual *practice* rather than belief systems as such;
 - Exploring the religious and the spiritual in its plurality within *local contexts* (rather than studying whole belief systems like world religions);
 - Exploring *life-worlds* (religious, spiritual, non-religious) of people to help enhance the students' life-worlds; interested in pupils' experience as a reference point;
 - Studying the interface between the diversity of religions and culture at the local level; may enhance intercultural and interreligious dialogue.
2. *Spiritual and religious competence:*
 - Enhancing the individuals' religious literacy (familiarity with cultural expressions of religion and spirituality) and their capacity to negotiate their own personal meanings interactively.
3. *Spiritual/religious/cultural identity:*
 - Enhancing the development of a personal identity that may include spiritual, religious and cultural components;
 - Presuming that teachers take account of students' personal responsibility for processes in their own spiritual development; for example, students should be able to deal with their own spirituality and religiosity, their life-world and life-history in a responsible way, while learning to appreciate the spiritual or religious views of others.

Some questions about contextual religious education that need further consideration

- As with all approaches to religious education that have a strong psychological and sociological focus, as well as being student-centred, a balance is needed with respect to the treatment of religious traditions. The extremes to be avoided would be focusing too much on either religious traditions or students' experience and interests.

- We have already noted above a concern about potential difficulties arising from too high an expectation that children and young people can easily construct their own personal meaning system.
- The psychological/sociological and ethnographic emphases may tend to eclipse the value in historical, theological, scriptural and philosophical pedagogies.
- The focus on pupils' life-world is a short step from 'lifestyle'. All approaches to religious education need to acknowledge the problematic nature of the construct spirituality, which includes personal, communal and cultural dimensions as well as the transcendent and the religious; without a critical evaluative approach to spirituality, there is a danger that the concerns will be only about feel-good and consumerist aspects (Chapter 8). Religious education needs to do more than help pupils reconsider their lifestyle in the light of other options.
- There is a need for more attention to contemporary issues (Chapter 16).

Religious education as a hermeneutic process

In 2004, the European educators Lombaerts and Pollefeyt published the handbook-like volume *Hermeneutics and religious education*, which gave a comprehensive picture of relationships between the two. They considered that hermeneutics, '[t]he art of interpreting the traces of communication is a specifically human quality. It is the alphabet of the human search for understanding the self, the interaction among people, the meaning of life and for establishing the truth'⁴⁹ (see the brief summary in section 2.10.14 highlighting the relationship between hermeneutics and meaning).

Initially, hermeneutics was concerned with the interpretation of biblical texts within a framework that assumed that the true and ultimate meaning of life was embedded in Christianity. But the social and intellectual context changed so much during the passage through the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, modernity and on to postmodernity that hermeneutics became detached from this normative theological basis and diversified; it even addressed the situation where the notion of universally valid statements about human meaning was rejected and religious meta-narratives were no longer accepted as comprehensive belief systems, thereby raising fundamental questions about truth as an interpretation, as subjective, contextual and contingent. It was as if the signposts for direction in human life were set adrift; whereas initially religious interpretation focused on seeking contemporary relevance from an unchanging, revelatory deposit of truth, more recently it has also been concerned with finding quanta of meaning that can be applied existentially to a particular context. It meant that the contributions of religion to both community identity and personal identity were changing significantly.

Lombaerts and Pollefeyt referred to this change as follows:

The worldwide political consolidation, economic globalisation, the democratisation of society and education, open communication and intercultural contact, scientific and technological innovations lead to a different kind of self-consciousness as a new basis for personal autonomy. The simultaneous diversity and plurality among people illustrates the extent of opportunities that the open society offers for positioning oneself distinctly towards the assumed and established social, cultural, religious and ethical traditions.⁵⁰

Hermeneutics is concerned with the process of repositioning individuals and communities with respect to the puzzling contemporary social situation.

Inevitably, the developments in hermeneutics had significant implications for religious education, both where it was concerned with the handing on of a particular religious tradition and in Religion Studies.

The first implication is where the different forms of hermeneutics and the issues they raise need consideration within the theory and practice of religious education. The second implication has to do with religious education as a hermeneutic process itself, because of its essential concern with the quest for meaning, purpose and truth – the task of interpretation is an inescapable and always active element of religious education.

Our purpose here is to signpost the importance of developments in hermeneutics for religious education rather than try to document all of the issues; nevertheless, many of the topics considered in Part II, as well as key aspects of the British research and development projects examined earlier, have a strong hermeneutic component.

21.5 Conclusion: Towards a review of Australian school Religion Studies programs

The task of this chapter has been to set the stage for a review of Australian school Religion Studies courses by providing a background picture of principles and issues that have emerged in their historical development. To give a more comprehensive perspective we focused on patterns in the United Kingdom that have been the principal models for Australian Religion Studies; we did not have the space to undertake a systematic critique of the British developments. As well as its relevance for Australian Religion Studies, the analysis also makes it easier to see comparisons and links with the earlier discussion of denominational religious education in Part IV.

We will conclude with brief comments about what we think are the areas within the Australian Religion Studies courses that need further development, even though a thorough evaluation is beyond our scope here. The problems that need to be addressed parallel those that occur in church school religious education.

In Chapter 16 we argued that the content in both denominational religious education and state-based Religion Studies courses in Australia was too ‘tame’ – tame because it was dominated by descriptive or factual content without enough attention to contemporary issues which young people see as the real areas of spirituality and morality today. The Religion Studies courses have extensive content on world religions, but the main problem is ‘too much boring content’. In other words, a more problem-posing, critical, evaluative dimension is called for – and it needs the ‘right fuel’ content of relevant issues. It is needed particularly at senior school level (while it could be applied differentially across the school years according to the age and maturity of pupils). This is not to say that the Religion Studies curriculum should consist exclusively of issues and problems, which would be a distortion at the other end of the spectrum. What is required is a better balance between issue-oriented and more traditional content, as explained in Chapters 16 and 17, and a more problem-posing way of approaching traditional content. Such an approach would not guarantee relevance for the students, but it would be a positive step in this direction.

This proposal would help address the problem in Religion Studies we refer to as ‘phenomenological overkill’ – a problem identified in developments in the UK which was mirrored in Australian courses. Grimmitt referred to the problem in the late

1970s, noting that it caused just as much student boredom and uninterest as did the teaching of large masses of biblical material in the 1950s and 1960s.

[W]ith the adoption of what is sometimes mistakenly and misleadingly called ‘an objective approach’ to the study of religion, religious education has become content-centred. The heavy concentration of Biblical content characteristic of Agreed Syllabuses in pre-Goldman times have often been replaced by equally heavy concentrations of content drawn from the world’s religions.⁵¹

Grimmitt claimed that an over-emphasis on phenomenology as a method has resulted in making school Religion Studies too antiseptic – too restricted to descriptive processes and data and to a study of topics that are often irrelevant to the interests and educational needs of students (even though these topics may be of interest to tertiary scholars of religion). He labelled the problem as phenomenology’s ‘domestication of religions’.

Australian Religion Studies bought into the same problem strongly – all of the Year 11–12 courses (listed in note 6) show that phenomenology and typology have dominated content selection. While other approaches to study (such as sociological, historical, feminist) are recommended for use in some programs, this does not appear feasible given the extent of descriptive content. All of the programs include religious ethics, and this does present opportunities for a study of issues; but even here, there are traces of Smart’s phenomenological categories ‘ethical and legal’. The Victorian program Religion and Society uses heading such as ‘search for meaning’ and ‘identity’, but under these titles the breakdown of content gives off a strong flavour of typology. The content of the Tasmanian programs, called Religion and Philosophy, allow for a large proportion of issues; in one course, three of its five topics were Contemporary issues in religion and philosophy, Christian perspectives on religious issues, and Ways of knowing. These are the most problem-posing of the Australian programs, in keeping with their objective that ‘Students will develop their own reasoned and critical responses to various religious, philosophical, ethical and social issues’.

When considering denominational religious education in Chapters 16 and 17, it was reported that young people perceived excessive descriptive religious content as useless paraphernalia.⁵² That argument is equally pertinent to Religion Studies. The lead taken by the Tasmanian programs could well be applied in other States. For example, it seems more appropriate for the clientele of Religion Studies to engage in a study of issues like ‘relationships between psychology and religion’ and ‘problems related to scriptural/historical studies insights into the historical Jesus and to political, religious and artistic portrayals’. Such topics in the Tasmanian courses could well replace less relevant ones (for Australian students) in other state programs (such as Shinto, Taoism).

At this point we take leave of the review of Australian Religion Studies programs as a research task that remains to be undertaken, and instead, we will in the next chapter address the question of relationships between these courses and denominational religious education. This task will try to clarify the links between the two and show how the discussions in Parts IV and V of the book are related.

Notes

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- 1 The meaning of basic terms remains a problem in religious education, especially when contrasting denominational and secular contexts. Educators will use terms like ‘religious studies’, ‘religion studies’ or ‘religion education’ as opposed to ‘religious education’, to make distinctions. While we have chosen to use the phrases ‘religion studies’ and ‘denominational religious education’ for convenience, we draw attention to the inevitable difficulties associated with the use of contrasting terms because presumed distinctions and differences may not always be accurate or may not operate at the level of practice.
 - 2 Although dating from 1981, this publication still gives one of the best available accounts of denominational religious education in public schools: GM Rossiter 1981, *Religious Education in Australian Schools*, Chapters 2 and 5.
 - 3 The relationships between denominational religious education and state-based religion studies courses were addressed briefly in Rossiter 1981, Chapters 1–4. **Examples of books and articles concerned with Australian Religion Studies in schools are listed in the Bibliography.** Most of these publications were also concerned with enhancing denominational religious education. But little was included that addressed relationships between the two at any depth; a significant relationship was usually presumed but seldom articulated. **[OK MADE A BRIEF CHANGE TO THE PARA ABOVE IN YELLOW I’ve put this long list in the bibliography, but I do think it’s superfluous: it’s so long that I’d have to take too many books out of the general listing. I think you should consider simply not having such a list on this subject. The highlighted sentence will then need to be rewritten.]**
 - 4 We wish to call into question the divisions and to explore the relationships between church and state school religious education. But, at least initially, we have gone along with the different terms ‘religion studies’ and ‘denominational religious education’ as one available format to enable us to talk about the two without confusion. We do not want to engage in debate about which terms are the most appropriate; we consider it valuable to retain terms like religious education which can apply to any context, because of its currency as a general umbrella term, and because of its usage for state school religious education in the United Kingdom.
 - 5 An account of these Religion Studies curriculum development projects is given in Rossiter 1981, Chapters 1, 2 and 5.
 - 6 Below is a list of contemporary syllabuses at Years 11–12 level. **[I’ve shortened this list somewhat. I think we have to leave it as separate paras I WOULD PUT THE ABBREVIATION IN SSABSA AS PEOPLE GET VERY FAMILIAR WITH THESE ACRONYMS]**

New South Wales: Board of Studies NSW 2004, *Studies of Religion, Stage 6*.

Queensland: Queensland Board of Secondary School Studies 2001, *Study of Religion Senior Syllabus*.

South Australia: Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) 2004, *Studies of Religion Curriculum Statement*.

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- Tasmania:** Tasmanian Qualifications Authority, 2004a, *Religion and Philosophy 2, 3 4, Senior Secondary* (Tasmanian Certificate of Education; Tasmanian Qualifications Authority, 2004b, *Religion and Philosophy 2, 3 4, Senior Secondary, Syllabus Supplement* (Tasmanian Certificate of Education; Tasmanian Qualifications Authority 2005, *Religion and Philosophy 5C, Senior Secondary* (Tasmanian Certificate of Education; Tasmanian Qualifications Authority, 2005, *Religion and Philosophy 5C, Senior Secondary, Syllabus Supplement* (Tasmanian Certificate of Education.
- Victoria:** Board of Studies Victoria 1999a (2005), *Religion and Society Study Design*; Board of Studies Victoria 1999b (2005), *Texts and traditions Study Design Y 11-12*.
- Western Australia:** Curriculum Council of Western Australian 2004, *Beliefs and Values Year 11, 2004–2005 D689*; Curriculum Council of Western Australian, 2004, *Beliefs and Values Year 12, 2004–2005 E689*. Churches Commission on Education Western Australia, 1986, *Beliefs and Values Manual*, Churches Commission on Education, Perth.
- 7 *Religious education in Australian schools* (Rossiter 1981) gave a detailed account of the documents resulting from the state government reviews of religious education in public schools in the 1970s. Complementing these normative documents was a core of writing by Australian theorists about school religion studies since that time; these are listed in **the Bibliography under Religion Studies**. **[This will need to be changed HAVE CHANGED THIS NOW TO BIBLIOGRAPHY REFERENCE]**
- 8 An extensive literature concerned with denominational religious education in Australia is evident in the journals *Journal of Religious Education*, *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, *Journal of Christian Education*, as well as in teachers' books, professional development programs and student texts.
- 9 M Beck et al. 1997, *Exploring religion*; M & R Crotty et al. 2003, *Finding a way: The religious worlds of today* (2nd edn); K Engebretson & R Elliott 2001, *Chaos or clarity: Encountering ethics* (3rd edn); T Lovat et al. 2006, *Studies of religion*; T Lovat & J McGrath 1999, *New studies in religion*; P Mudge et al. 1993, *Living religion: Studies of religion for senior students*; P Rule & K Engebretson 1990, *My story, our stories: Religion and identity in Australia*; M Ryan & P Goldburg 2001, *Recognising religion: A study of religion for senior secondary students*.
- 10 We have found the accounts given by Grimmitt to be the most helpful interpretations of the history of religion studies in British schools. His most recent work (2000) used the construct 'pedagogy' for contrasting a number of research and development projects. See MH Grimmitt 1983a, *Religious education and humanisation: A consideration of the contribution of religious education to personal development and its implications for curriculum decision-making*; MH Grimmitt 1986, Contemporary issues in religious education in England; MH Grimmitt 1987, *Religious education and human development: The relationship between studying religions and personal social and moral education*; MH Grimmitt (ed.) 2000, *Pedagogies of religious education: Case studies in the research and development of good pedagogic*

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- practice in RE*. See also LP Barnes 2003, *World religions in British religious education: Critical reflections and positive conclusions*; D Bates 1994, *Christianity, culture and other religions: The origins of the study of world religions in the English tradition*.
- 11 While religious education in European countries has not been unconcerned about an educational rationale and identity, it is of interest to speculate why a pattern similar to the British one did not emerge. The political and educational contexts were different – often with denominational religious education in the public schools.
 - 12 RJ Goldman 1965, *Readiness for religion*. For an evaluation, see MH Grimmitt 1983b, *World religions and personal development*. In GM Castles and GM Rossiter (eds) *Curriculum theory and religious education*.
 - 13 See Rossiter 1981, Chapter 6; and Chapter 16 of this book.
 - 14 H Loukes 1961, *Teenage Religion*; 1965, *New ground in Christian education*; 1973, *Teenage morality*.
 - 15 From a 1979 radio broadcast by Val Arnol-Foster, quoted in J Sealey 1985, *Religious education: Philosophical perspectives*, p. 57 – quoted in S Eversden 1994, *Integrating systemic and school-based priorities into a curriculum model for secondary religious studies*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Murdoch WA. In her account of the historical development of religious education in British schools, Eversden gave special attention to the contribution of Harold Loukes. He proposed an issue/problems-based religion studies that related to the perceived needs of youth in the construction of their spirituality.
 - 16 PH Hirst & RS Peters 1970, *The logic of education*; PH Hirst 1974, *Knowledge and the curriculum*.
 - 17 Phenomenological typology – the study of *types* of religious phenomena – is another analytic system that has been used. See for example, B Moore & N Habel 1980, *When religion goes to school: Typology of religion for the classroom*.
 - 18 N Smart, 1989, *The world's religions: Old traditions and modern transformations*.
 - 19 This problem was evident in the rationale and student materials developed in the South Australian Religious Education Project in the late 1970s. The idea of teaching the ‘dimensions of religion’ rather than ‘religion’ was proposed as a way of disclaiming possible denominational bias. Cf. Rossiter 1981, Chapter 2.
 - 20 Grimmitt 1983b, p. 22.
 - 21 C & J Erricker 2000, *The children and worldviews project: A narrative pedagogy of religious education*. In Grimmitt 2000, p. 192.
 - 22 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board 1990, *Religion and society: Course development support material*, p. 1.
 - 23 Lovat 2001, 2002.

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- 24 Moore & Habel 1979.
- 25 Birmingham Education Committee 1975, *Agreed syllabus of religious instruction*.
- 26 Grimmitt 1973, *What Can I do in RE?*
- 27 Grimmitt 1983a, 1983b, 1987.
- 28 Grimmitt 1987. Also MH Grimmitt 1991, Theoretical and practical perspectives on the use of religious phenomena in schools to further the spiritual development of primary and secondary pupils.
- 29 Grimmitt 1987, p. 213; 2000, p. 15.
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