REASONS FOR LIVING

Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality.
A handbook.

Marisa Crawford
and Graham Rossiter

Reasons for Living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality

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Preface

Finding meaning in life and achieving some authentic sense of identity are key developmental tasks for adolescents as they progress towards adulthood. While many young people do not readily use the word spirituality, it refers to the way they mesh with the spiritual and moral dimensions to life. The constructs meaning, identity and spirituality have useful credentials for interpreting the psychological development of young people; they can be used for analysing and giving perspective to their thinking, emotions and behaviour as they negotiate the maze of contemporary culture and the psychological perils of adolescence.

The same constructs – meaning, identity and spirituality – are also useful for interpreting and evaluating culture; and they are relevant to educational theory and practice.

Spiritual and moral purposes have been important for school education – for as long as schools have sought to promote the personal development of the young. However, there still remains a fundamental, but natural ambiguity about how to implement spiritual and moral education appropriately. The reason: precisely because personal change processes in beliefs, attitudes, values and moral behaviour are more complex than, and at a different level from, educational change in knowledge, understanding and skills. Links between teaching and the acquisition of values are naturally more complicated and more tenuous than the links between teaching and the common outcomes for education; we can teach adolescents proficiency in mathematics – even quantum physics – but we cannot so easily teach them not to take drugs.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the limitations of school education in bringing about spiritual and moral change in pupils, there remain important opportunities within classroom teaching and learning for progressing their spiritual and moral development. This book is about trying to make sure that the opportunities for doing this well are not neglected. The idea of exploring 'reasons for living' is a short hand for an education that tries to help young people become well informed about, and think through issues related to meaning, identity and spirituality; this, in turn, may help them chart their way through a life world that has become increasingly complex and daunting.

Discussion of expectations for spiritual and moral education in both public and religious schools has always been controversial. It is unlikely that this will change; as noted above, much of the difficulty lies with the natural complexity of links between education and personal change; hence, theory for education of the 'whole' person will always be complex, controversial and somewhat open ended. Nevertheless, persistence with the development of this theory is important for ongoing attempts to make the personal dimension to school education as valuable as it can be for young people.

Ongoing discussion of the spiritual and moral dimensions to education is in the national interest – it should be an educational priority. The Federal and State Governments' initiatives in values education have been an important response to this need. But more remains to be done. In times when most interest in educational outcomes is dominated by concerns about measurable performance and employment oriented competencies, and even national economic productivity, it is important for all Australian school students that the spiritual and moral purposes to their education do not remain nominal, or as rhetoric, where there is little flow through from purposes to practice.

This book tries to address these issues in both theory and practice. It proposes that good use can be made of the constructs meaning, identity and spirituality for conceptualising and implementing a spiritual and moral education in schools – both public and independent. Teaching related to these constructs can contribute to students' personal education in across-the-curriculum studies as well as in values education and in particular subjects like Citizenship, Personal Development, Religion Studies, Philosophy and Ethics. While we consider that the book makes an important contribution to values/moral education, it was beyond our scope to explore relationships with the extensive literature in this area.

Of various constructs that might be used in curriculum planning, the trio of meaning, identity and spirituality, all of which are interrelated, are particularly valuable because of their contemporary educational relevance and their significance in young people's personal development.

The argument in the book presumes that little real progress will be possible in any school program of personal education unless teachers first develop a basic understanding of the content related issues – hence the importance of the second part of the book in providing a 'primer' or introductory typology for educators on the constructs meaning, identity and spirituality, particularly as they relate to the psychological, spiritual and moral development of young people.   While not attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of research on these constructs, this will provide a perspective on meaning, identity and spirituality that will be a good starting point for study by educators.   Hopefully, it will also stimulate further research both sociological and educational.   The intention is to enhance the background that educators bring to their teaching with the hope that this will flow into teaching and learning processes, as well as into their more informal interactions with students.

Complementing what is written in structural developmental psychology about youth personal development (E.g. Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Kegan, Fowler and Oser), the focus here is more on the spiritual and moral development of young people through their negotiation of personal/cultural issues in meaning, identity and spirituality;   hence, it is not a stage theory of development, but (as suggested above) an interpretation of the ways youth negotiate the 'cultural maze' and the 'psychological perils of adolescence'.

Too often discourse about spiritual and moral dimensions to school education in Australia remains context specific – there is not much exchange on these matters between educators in the public and independent sectors;   or, the discussion is skewed towards the question of state financial aid for religious schools.   In this book, we propose implications for three contexts – across-the-curriculum studies in public schools, religious education in independent (especially religious) schools, and state based religion studies courses – within the one volume, precisely to promote a wider educational discussion that could benefit all of the country's schools.   This broad scope has resulted in a volume of handbook like proportions;   but this was considered necessary to be able to say something substantial about the situation and issues in each of the three contexts, while prompting educators to become more aware of what is happening in contexts different from their own.   For example: Religious schools can often put too much store on formal religious education and religious ethos for communicating beliefs, spirituality and values – in other words overrating or 'over-expecting' the school's religious influence. While in public schools, their role in teaching values can never really be denied, although just what the word 'teaching' means when applied to values can be open to conflicting interpretations;   and when debate stalls on this question, it inhibits practice that may be of benefit for the personal development of pupils.   Each of parts 3-5 begins with a chapter that gives historical perspective;   this arrangement may facilitate dialogue by giving the reader some bearings on the pertinent issues in each context that are taken up subsequently.

While the book was written specifically for teachers, it should be useful in university education programs;   hopefully too, it will engage education researchers.   In addition, the second section discusses issues that are of wider community and professional concern.   This material may be helpful for all who are interested in the psychological, spiritual and moral development of youth (E.g. For parents, and for professionals engaged in the care of youth in areas like health services, youth services, and church ministry.)

While dealing with the Australian situation, the book has relevance for education internationally.   It creates possibilities for interesting comparisons with education in other countries.

Marisa Crawford, Graham Rossiter   July 2006

Some endorsements of *Reasons for Living*

This is a landmark publication for Australian education.   More than any previous book, it has provided a helpful conceptualisation of the spiritual and moral dimension to public education.   It makes a substantial and innovative contribution to values education at both theoretical and practical levels.   In addition, it outlines an agenda for future developments in the study of religion in church-related and other religious schools, as well as in state-based religion courses.   *Reasons for living* includes a remarkable mixture of sophisticated philosophy, telling psychological insights and eminently practical pedagogy.   It will be an invaluable resource for professionals engaged in education and the care of youth – truly a book that can enhance the education of all young Australians.

Dr Louise Welbourne, Editor Journal of Religious Education

These insights into young people's personal development are a valuable resource not only for educators but for those working with young people in any of the helping professions.

Hugh Mackay, Mackay Research, Sydney

The authors show how educators can connect with young people and how they can make a positive difference in the lives of their students. In this book, the spiritual and moral dimensions of education move from the margins (honoured in mission statements) to the mainstream (comprehensively addressed through the curriculum). Crawford & Rossiter provide a guide for teachers, one that is detailed and thorough, accessible and clear, and full of practical wisdom gained from a lifetime of experience in many sectors of education.   Their guide equips teachers, in all types of schools, to offer their students an educational journey that is life-enhancing, holistic and transformational.   Although rooted in the Australian context, this systematic treatment of young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality is acutely relevant and applicable in many other countries.

Professor John Sullivan, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Liverpool Hope University, UK.

A valuable handbook on the meaning, identity and spirituality of young people.   The book is ambitious in scope but very well organized in exploring what education is for.   The book is focused on Australian history, issues and educational institutions while having universal implications.

Professor Gabriel Moran, Director of the Program of Philosophy of Education, New York University

Youth of today have an enormously complicated task facing them – to bring some sense of meaning and purpose to the complexity of issues surrounding their lives in a conflicted and morally ambiguous culture.   The search for meaning in life and the need to explore an authentic sense of identity are critical areas for scholarly and professional inquiry and are key, timely concerns of this book.   This book provides that exploration and does so in an expansive and compelling way.

Professor Peter Sheehan AO, Vice Chancellor, Australian Catholic University

As a society, we tend, quite mistakenly, to privilege the material over the spiritual, the objective over the subjective. *Reasons for Living* argues, compellingly and comprehensively, for greater attention to be given to the qualities of meaning, identity and spirituality, especially in young people's lives. It rightly acknowledges there is only so much education can achieve in this area; other sectors must play their part.   The importance of this book reaches beyond education. It should become a key reference for all of us concerned with young people.

Richard Eckersley, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University

Reasons for Living is a timely handbook for all teachers committed to the development of the whole person and so to the spiritual and moral dimensions of education – whether they work in religious schools or the public sector.   This is a valuable resource for teachers and educational leaders who are concerned to assist students in the key developmental tasks of finding meaning and achieving an authentic sense of identity in order to live genuinely happy and fruitful lives.   Each chapter opens up a new perspective on this challenging, but most important enterprise.

Dr Michael Bezzina, Director of Curriculum and Religious Education,
Catholic Education Office, Parramatta.

Reasons for Living will be a welcome addition to the literature charting the search for meaning of young people today.   Although the text comes out of the Australian context it will be of immediate relevance and usefulness to teachers throughout the Western World who are facing common challenges in finding the language and contexts in which to engage in dialogue with contemporary global youth culture in a post-secular age.

Dr Andrew McGrady, Registrar Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin City University, Ireland

It is rare to find in one volume such a rich combination of rigorous research and practical savvy. The authors familiarity with contemporary culture and its impact on adolescence is remarkable.
Professor Gloria Durka, Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education, Fordham University New York

Reasons for Living provides a systematically-constructed foundation for teachers across the curriculum who wish to support the quest of youth to make sense out of their lives and to form a constellation of values by which to live. They demonstrate that it *is* possible to deliver values-related curricula that are fully respectful of the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of schools in multicultural societies.
Lorna Bowman, Professor of Religious Studies & Academic Dean, Brescia University College, Canada.

These are times characterized by a dramatic re-evaluation of the role of the teacher and the school in general but, within that context, an especial re-evaluation of the role of religion, spirituality and morality as features of the schooling experience. *Reasons for Living* is a book for our times.
Professor Terence Lovat, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Arts) The University of Newcastle

Most democratic societies are facing cultural challenges due to galloping social change and value pluralisation. Religious diversity is only one of several reasons why it is urgent that disparate groups be encouraged to work together to renegotiate and make explicit the core values of democratic community life. Not only is social cohesion at stake, but a sickness at the personal level must be addressed. Amidst the confusion of values, individuals are struggling to find personal meaning and identity, even to the point of questioning whether they actually matter to anyone other than themselves. These are the challenges addressed by Crawford and Rossiter.
Emeritus Professor Brian Hill, Murdoch University

Reasons for Living is comprehensive in its scope and compass while being incisive and detailed in its treatment of key issues, concepts and developments in the cognate fields of spiritual, moral and religious education. It is rooted in an informed understanding of the historical development of these fields both globally and in Australia while transcending the particularities of time and space and seeking to be prophetic and visionary about their futures. It is driven by a passionate concern to realise the educational capacity of schools to enhance young people's critically reflective response to the changing demands of their life experiences.
Dr Michael Grimmitt, Faculty of Education, the University of Birmingham

Reasons for Living will be a significant addition to the field of research in Religious Education. It has concisely and provocatively summarised the major influences upon Religious Education. It would be an essential resource for all Religious Education professionals and a basic textbook for all students in the field.
Dr Dan White, Director Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Hobart;
National Catholic Education Commission's Religious Education Committee.

Reasons for Living, by focusing upon the key concepts of meaning, identity and spirituality for young people will help educators parents and youth workers to resist the corrosive efforts of a materialist, hedonistic and 'shop till you drop' contemporary culture.
Professor Gerald Grace, Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education,
Institute of Education, the University of London.

Spirituality, meaning and identity are concepts that are often used in education settings without a lot of clarity of meaning. Crawford and Rossiter ground these concepts in both the research and the lived experience of young people, taking note of the reality of the classroom. The writers provide a way forward for all Australian educators to be effective in engaging young people in values / meaning / identity / reflection. They do not overestimate what schools can achieve in this important area, providing both a reality check and a way forward.
Dr Adrienne Jericho, Executive Director, Lutheran Education Australia

This is a groundbreaking and very valuable book. It gathers under one cover research findings and practical experience from a number of fields e.g. education, psychology, sociology, and religious education, and demonstrates how schools can use such findings to assist young people in their development.
Mr Gary Finlay, Director National Centre for Religious Studies, New Zealand.

Reasons for Living is both important for the concrete development of moral and spiritual education in the Australian school system (both public and private schools), and for the theoretical reflection on this important issue on a national and international level.

Associate Professor Bert Roebben, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies,
Tilburg University, Netherlands

Dedicated teachers of young people sometimes struggle to understand the world of the adolescent. *Reasons for Living* offers teachers and administrators an excellent resource to understand both this life stage and the cultural issues facing youth. It looks at what is at the heart of the human and religious quest, and it explores how Education can be a means in this search, making it relevant in serving young people's needs. *Reasons for Living* looks at what is at the heart of the human and religious quest, particularly among young people, and it explores how Education can be a means in this search, making it relevant in serving young people's needs.

Mrs Anne Baker, Deputy Director Catholic Institute of Education, Johannesburg, South Africa

In a time when warring sides summon differing religions as justification of their violence, proficient teaching of religious issues in public and Church schools is urgently needed.

Rev Ted Witham, Former Executive Director of The Churches' Commission on Education in WA,
and consultant to the Curriculum Council of WA (Religion and Life course).

There has been a great need for a book which addresses, in a comprehensive and contemporary manner, the major issues relating to young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality. It is a most helpful book and deserves to be read widely by professional educators in both Government and Non-Government schools.

Rev Dr Tom Wallace AM, Educational Adviser to the Bishop of Tasmania

More than most of us ever were, today's young people are confronted by uncertainty. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz once described human beings as 'meaning-seeking animals'. Young people are indeed just so, seeking meaning amid uncertainty. Further, it is one thing to find everyday meaning, but there is also ultimate meaning. And in the twenty-first century how should such young people be educated so as to tackle that uncertainty and to find meaning, everyday and ultimate? Importantly, how can a school curriculum promote the spiritual and moral development of students who seek meaning? That is what the Rossiter/Crawford book is about. The end result is a comprehensive and powerful text that should be read not only by those involved in RE but by all those responsible for the development of young people in our society today.

Professor Robert Crotty, Emeritus Professor of Religion and Education,
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Over a long period, they have co-authored a number of books and articles in moral and religious education and have conducted inservice professional development programs for teachers around Australia as well as in New Zealand, the Pacific, Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway and Hong Kong.

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Foreword
By Professor Brian V Hill

When the social institution of compulsory schooling came under strong attack in the 1960s, one of the sharpest criticisms was its alleged domesticating effect on students. They were being treated, it was

said, as entirely malleable creatures, capable of being manipulated to become the labour force for the industrial machine and the avid consumers of its products.

One wonders if we have come very far since then.   Even the commendable desire, fostered by "Outcomes-Based Education", to focus on what each student learns rather than simply on whether the teacher goes through the motions of teaching, is often being implemented in a way which reduces the whole person to a repository of marketable "skills."

At the same time, ironically, an increasing sense of unease in the community about value hiatus in the public domain is giving rise to calls for more effective values education in schools.   But valuing is a whole person response to the reality they inhabit.   At the least, this requires closer attention to how the individual student is personally "getting it all together" – an outcome not readily amenable to the itemising assessment techniques of OBE.   Nor is this task something that can be simply dumped on the school, while other social agencies such as the home and the media devote themselves to satisfying consumerist goals.

An older strategy for achieving the ends of morality and citizenship through schooling was to complement the general curriculum with religious instruction.   Again, other social agencies often saw this as relieving them of responsibility for these things, on the assumption that formal instruction in the dominant faith tradition would naturally flow on into moral conduct.   Not only do we now know better, but a pluralistic society resists a policy which is commonly viewed as partisan indoctrination.   Yet studying a religion did at least highlight the fact that people's values are ultimately justified and motivated by each individual's view of the world and their place in it.   A rose by any other name may smell as sweet, but these are essentially religious concerns.

Marisa Crawford and Graham Rossiter seek out to break this deadlock.   Their strategy is to nominate the concepts of meaning, identity, and spirituality as lynch-pins of personal education.   They show that these concepts not only enable us to re-map the traditional terrains of religious and moral education, but also have implications for many other curriculum areas.   One of the highlights of their analysis, for me, is chapter 15 on media and film, which not only contains insightful contextual analysis, but has some specific implications for classroom teaching.

Professor Rossiter has been a leader in the field of religious education for many years, researching and writing prolifically and being involved in teacher development in many places.   Marisa Crawford has been a highly effective classroom practitioner in Government, Catholic and independent schools, also for many years.   The two have collaborated on several occasions in publications promoting best practice.   In the present handbook, they provide a comprehensive review both of general theory and research, and of the particular situation on the ground in Australia.

And none too soon.   Most democratic societies are facing cultural challenges due to galloping social change and value pluralisation.   Religious diversity is only one of several reasons why it is urgent that disparate groups be encouraged to work together to renegotiate and make explicit the core values of democratic community life.   Not only is social cohesion at stake, but a sickness at the personal level must be addressed.   Amidst the confusion of values, individuals are struggling to find personal meaning and identity, even to the point of questioning whether they actually matter to anyone other than themselves.

These are the challenges addressed by Crawford and Rossiter.   The way to read this book will be first to commit oneself to a reflective reading of the whole, and then to keep the book handy for constant reference in relation to specific needs and topics, particularly using the indexes.   I commend it as a useful tool for research workers, and classroom teachers engaged in what, in the end, is the real business of education.   The book has utility beyond the domain of education.   The analyses in part 2 will be useful for various professionals engaged in the care of youth.

Brian V. Hill
Murdoch University,   May 2006